GEOGRAPHICAL MORTALITY DIFFERENTIALS DETERMINED BY SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY: THE CASE OF HUNGARY

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Description and method of the study

1. Hungary which is a small country in the range of Austria, the Czech Republic and Portugal in terms of territory, has no substantial differences in whether or altitude or any other features of physical environment. Geographical mortality differentials, in fact, map socio-economic mortality differentials.
2. Area mortality differentials have been studied under these circumstances. Two approaches have been applied: a) measures of mortality in the observation units were compared in four periods, since the collapse of the formal political-socio-economic regime, in order to analyse the impact of transition and globalisation on mortality differentials; b) mortality differentials were investigated in four levels of observational units, i.e. demographical-administrative areas: regions, counties, small statistical areas/districts of Budapest and settlements by population size.
3. In these two approaches life expectancy at different ages, standardized mortality rates and ratios have been used as mortality measures. These mortality measures were the dependent variables, whilst GDP per capita and alternatively gross income per capita and proportion of people with tertier educational attainment were the independent variables.

Results

- by and large mortality increases and consequently life expectancy at birth decreases along a west-east axis;
- similarly if the population size of settlements smaller, life expectancy at birth lower;
- there is highly significant correlation between life expectancy at birth on the one side and proportion of people with tertier educational attainment and GDP per capita/gross income per capita respectively on the other side;
- life expectancy at birth has increased in every observational unit over the period between the early 1990s and the first years of the 21st century, however the increase has been larger in the more developed observational units;
- the gap in terms of life expectancy at birth has mainly increased between the more and less developed observational units.

Conclusions

There are relative winners and relative losers in transition and globalisation. The two processes have a synergetic effect. Well educated people with versatile skill have adapted themselves successfully to the circumstances of market economy, they live almost exclusively in larger towns and cities and more in the traditionally better developed western part of the country. Less educated people, usually unskilled ones have become unemployed in many cases; they live mainly in small villages and more in the less

developed, eastern part of the country. Geographical mortality differentials reveal the dichotomy in the country in terms of socio-economic status and life expectancy at birth. In a scrutinized approach actually a clear-cut gradient in different kinds of geographical mortality can be found by socio-economic stratification. Also emigration of better educated people from settlements with a relative lack of modern infrastructure has contributed to this gradient.

Key words: transitional economy, ecological approach, socio-economic mortality differentials.