

## **A Compass and Map for Changes\***

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*Geomoment – Map of the exploration of the 21st century*

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As much as it sounds like a cliché, it can be hardly disputed that we are currently seeing a transformation taking place in the world. Changes are happening faster than ever in the economy, society, technology and the environment. Political fundamentals are being questioned, and global centres of power are shifting. We face several demographic and environmental challenges never seen before. This busy and eventful period is called by the author – somewhat contrary to the time horizon of the actual processes – a geomoment. It might seem misleading at first sight, but if we consider the popular comparison, which is also presented by the author, where the Earth’s 4.5-billion year history is compared to 24 hours, during which humankind appeared in a little shorter time than the last one and half minutes, this name is justified, because at this time horizon changes of a decade seem like just a moment.

With his informative scientific work the author intends to provide a kind of map and compass for getting oriented in the processes of this geomoment in an unusual form. With powerful visual contents, primarily through novel maps and infographics, he describes the processes that determine and shape our world, because – as he himself stresses – getting oriented, exploring and understanding the social, economic, environmental and geopolitical processes are essential for achieving success at the individual, organisational and national levels as well. It is especially important to present these in an accessible, attractive and modern form in a country such as Hungary, where surveys show that the interest of the general population in foreign countries and foreign policy developments is quite negligible on average (*NMHH 2011*). The book satisfies most of these expectations, as its contents and form are both appropriately trendy to capture the attention of the everyday reader, although the structure of the book’s logic and its sometimes very free-flying contents (and editing) make it more difficult to comprehend.

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In the book the author first defines the tool that we need to get oriented, which is nothing but geography itself. Accordingly, for the author geography is not primarily a science or an area of expertise, but rather one of the most efficient means to explore today's world. In the first chapter he explains the significance of geography, and in the second and third chapters he presents an exciting selection of interesting points about geography that provide a good run-up to the subsequent sections.

Urging the rediscovery of geography, the volume is closely related to the presumably global tendency in social sciences, which declares the inevitable appreciation of the geographical approach, even in international relations and policy (e.g. *Kaplan 2012*), in the role of cities in growth (*Glaeser 2014*), or in international trade (*Khanna 2016*). Considering the professional literature in Hungary, this work which goes beyond the framework of geography and regional science can also be associated with the efforts aimed at creating awareness of the spatiality and territoriality of the processes that had not been interpreted geographically earlier, and make this approach an operating logic. From this aspect, in Europe the paradigm of territorial cohesion can be considered a point of connection (see *Péti et al. 2009; Ricz – Salamin 2010*).

Owing to the spread of infocommunication technologies and the deepening of globalisation, in the 1990s several researchers envisaged a process which would render geography and territoriality completely insignificant. However, approximately one decade later spatiality became more important once again, and as a result of the works of Paul Krugman, it even became part of mainstream economics. Several significant thinkers deal with spatiality, and within that with the key role of cities in global socio-economic processes. These researchers have recognised that although in many cases it is possible to use infocommunication technologies to overcome the obstacles imposed by physical space, and the deregulation of world trade has made possible the spread of economic activities globally, there are still powerful spatial processes of concentration occurring in the economy, and the agglomeration effect and the role of cities are becoming more and more important. Actually, transnational companies plan their activities in terms of country groups in respect of sales and product markets, and at the same time, they implement production in sub-national regions, usually at the level of cities and their agglomeration. These companies have also recognised that their competitive advantages are concentrated in space. An appropriate level of concentration can be established only on highlighted points of space, in cities and their agglomeration, in certain regions; therefore, the economic role of these territorial levels has grown even more through the deepening of globalisation, which in turn has also resulted in competition of these territorial levels among each other. In the presentation of these thoughts in Hungary, the works of Imre Lengyel should be highlighted (*Lengyel 2010*).

The decrease in the significance of geographical space is also refuted by researches that emphasise the importance of personal encounters and interactions enabled by geographical proximity, compared to connections created and maintained

electronically, both in general terms and in the context of innovation, productivity and other economic factors (*Glaeser 2014*).

At the same time, spatial features do not only determine the operation of the globalised world economy, as recent geopolitical developments – such as the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia – have also underlined the significance of territoriality and that we cannot disregard the spatial aspects of socio-economic features and geographical location itself.

Therefore, on the one hand, geography and spatiality are factors that shape global socio-economic processes and are also one of the keys of understanding them, since owing to their synthesising, interdisciplinary approach they enable the analysis and understanding of complex multi-dimensional social, economic and environmental processes. This capability and the interdisciplinary approach are especially important for the understanding of the ongoing multi-dimensional and multi-factorial processes.

In the second and third parts and, to a smaller extent, even in the last, fourth chapter of the first part, the author presents these macro-processes and their anticipated future courses by presenting selections from analyses of renowned strategic thinkers (Noah Raford, Parag Khanna, etc.) and organisations, think tanks (Stratfor, World Economic Forum, Economist Intelligence Unit, Roland Berger Institute etc.), without taking a critical approach.

Based on the synthesis of these analyses and visions, the author highlights three key areas that enable the best capturing of the processes of our time and also ensure the success of a particular country, region or city. These are fusions and creativity (part four), knowledge and technology (part five) and the cities themselves as the entities that actually concentrate these factors in space (part six).

Owing to their high population density, cities enable dense social and economic interactions that are the driving forces behind innovation, creativity and the emergence of new thoughts. Cities can ensure a favourable constellation of social, economic and physical environmental conditions, which enables the fast flow of new information, knowledge transfer and the interconnection of their residents by various modalities, through various networks and different platforms (public spaces, transport networks, digital networks).

In accordance with the major aims of the book, in the last section titled “Geomanifesto” the author also formulates proposals and gives advices on how we can be successful in the age of the geomoment at the individual, organisational or even at the country level. These include proposals aimed at improving the life of the individual, as well as elements that fundamentally determine a country strategy. Each of these proposals reflects on one of the processes that currently determine the world and is described in the book. The individual proposals are substantially

distinct, but creativity could be explicitly or implicitly identified in each of them, and this also means the relationship between proposals applying to the individual and higher levels of social/territorial organisation. Our creativity is the key to shaping and transforming our world, which means that we must shape our own lives in such a manner that we can exploit this creativity as best as possible. Creativity and the ability and willingness to innovate are a growth factor that can be demonstrated to exist at each territorial level in today's economy. At the same time, owing to automation – which is expected to fundamentally disrupt the socio-economic conditions of the next and coming decades – these factors can be expected to be appreciated even more. In fact, one of the most efficient ways to defend ourselves against the negative effects of automation (especially on the labour market) and to become resilient to the changes is to use our creativity, networks of relationships and knowledge and our local individuality to create unique products or to provide such services that differentiate us in the crowd at the individual, city, regional and national levels.

To sum up the messages of the author: we need geography to get oriented and to understand the complex processes happening in the world, while in order to achieve success at an individual and higher social/territorial level creativity is required in the changing age of the geomoment.

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