

ARE THERE CULTURAL REGIONS IN HUNGARY?

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ABSTRACT - Drawing up cultural macro-regions in Hungary is hardly possible as not even two of the highly developed mezo-regions are contacting, not speaking about forming a bloc; they rather constitute a mosaic on the country map. Those on medium cultural level make up two groups, while, though the ones with a low standard are mostly found along the Danube as a single bloc, they are isolated by Pest county, statistically grouped in one region with them, with a genuine cultural level far exceeding the low cluster. Consequently, it is only justified to speak about cultural regions in the sense that, on the whole, Dunántúl is on a higher standard than the eastern half of the country.

Keywords: cultural development, education levels, cinema attendance levels, theatre attendance levels, cultural macro-regions

When measuring the cultural development of territorial units, as well as any other subsystems, I based my work on the reports by KSH (Central Statistics Authority). For the purpose of the topic, I found relevant information in the numbers of students studying in the different types of schools of the regions, the numbers of those attending public libraries, museums, theatres and cinemas, as well as in the data concerning education registered and published from the censuses and micro-censuses carried out every five years.

In developmental measuring, it is usually the rate of students studying in secondary schools of the region that is taken into account, but I have the following reservations regarding this practice. In some counties, a considerable part of the 14-18 age group attends the secondary schools of a mezo-region other than those in its domicile. The reason is that if a big city in the neighbouring county or the capital city is located near the county examined, the students living in its vicinity will attend in large numbers the schools of the latter settlement, thus improving the data of the neighbouring mezo-region, and worsening their own. A typical case is Somogy county, where part of the teenagers living on the western edge of the county study in Nagykanizsa in Zala county; another example can be Nógrád, from the western part of which, as well as from the agglomeration of Pest county, the dominant part of secondary school students study in Budapest. The rate of students attending secondary schools, or even higher education institutions, does not really indicate the cultural development of a region. It is worth noting that the use of colleges or universities located in territorial units outside the domicile further distorts the findings. Migration from the region affects, for the most part, the people with competitive qualifications, so the picture shown by the rate of secondary and higher education students in a region often significantly differs from the actual measures of education. However, there are no data related to the latter in the annual reports, except those provided by the micro-censuses conducted every five years, this is what we have to take into account in our analysis as well.

A valuable contribution to measuring cultural development is made by the attendance of cultural institutions. However, the attendance rate of public libraries is not suitable to establish the level of the cultural standard either, as the level of reading depends on other factors as well. For example, in Budapest and Győr-Sopron county, the per capita number of books borrowed is usually lower than in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén or in Hajdú-Bihar, yet we cannot assume a lower level of reading. The explanation is that in regions with higher average incomes, people are more likely to buy

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books, and thus find access to reading. Added to this, it is also the higher frequency of internet use. Due to the above, I have also disregarded statistics of library attendance. On museums, although there are some data available in KSH yearbooks, they have a definitely promotional character and do not reflect the degree of interest really shown by the population of the given region. Therefore, what is left is the theatre and cinema attendance rates, though, as it will be seen, they are not problem free either.

Therefore, I took into consideration the census and micro-census findings when measuring education levels. For a given mezo-region, I added up the figures of those with primary, secondary and higher qualifications and I used this aggregate figure for establishing a rating concerning the counties. I registered the specific ratings of theatre and cinema attendance annually, and made a ten-year summary, similarly to the above. For my findings, see the following table:

Table 1. Average rating of the cultural development of mezo-regions between 1990 and 2009

Territorial unit	Education*				Cinema attendance**		Theatre attendance***		Total							
	90	96	01	06	90-99	00-09	90-99	00-09	90-99	00-09						
1 Bp capital	1.	320	1.	366	1.	10	1.	10	1.	3	1.	3				
2 Baranya cy	5.	243	8.	278	6.	68	4.	45	7.	73	3.	47	4.	18	4.	15
3 Bács-Kiskun cy	18.	218	19.	257	10.	101	10.	102	11.	109	13.	121	13.	39	15.	42
4 Békés cy	16.	221	18.	258	11.	109	14.	136	14.	139	16.	154	15.	41	18.	48
5 Borsod-Abaúj-Z cy	10.	235	13.	270	18.	175	9.	91	12.	117	9.	94	14.	40	10.	31
6 Csongrád cy	3.	246	3.	289	2.	26	2.	22	5.	57	7.	79	3.	10	3.	12
7 Fejér cy	7.	240	5.	281	14.	134	5.	48	8.	75	10.	98	8.	29	5.	20
8 Győr-Moson-S cy	2.	255	2.	293	4.	48	3.	29	2.	26	2.	20	2.	8	2.	7
9 Hajdú-Bihar cy	12.	232	11.	272	7.	79	6.	66	10.	97	12.	112	9.	29	9.	29
10 Heves cy	13.	226	10.	273	9.	100	16.	156	9.	83	11.	107	10.	31	12.	37
11 Jász-N-Sz cy	17.	220	17	261	17.	151	13.	136	13.	127	8.	85	17.	47	13.	38
12 Komárom-E cy	6.	241	7.	280	13.	131	18.	164	18.	177	17.	172	12.	37	14.	42
13 Nógrád cy	19.	216	16.	261	12.	121	17.	162	19.	195	19.	194	19.	50	20.	52
14 Pest cy	9.	235	4.	287	20.	197	20.	200	20.	195	20.	196	18.	49	16.	44
15 Somogy cy	15.	225	15.	261	16.	141	15.	145	6.	64	6.	71	11.	37	11.	36
16 Szabolcs-Sz-B cy	20.	212	20.	254	19.	182	11.	128	16.	147	15.	142	20.	51	17.	46
17 Tolna cy	14.	225	14.	262	15.	139	19.	177	17.	166	18.	175	16.	46	19.	51
18 Vas cy	4.	245	6.	280	5.	54	7.	68	15.	144	14.	130	7.	24	8.	27
19 Veszprém cy	8.	239	9.	276	8.	88	12.	131	3.	41	5.	54	6.	19	7.	26
20 Zala cy	11.	233	12.	271	3.	42	8.	84	4.	48	4.	51	5.	18	6.	24

* Order of accumulated rates of primary, secondary and higher education graduates, based on current censuses and micro-censuses.

** Aggregate territorial rating of annual cinema attendance per 100 inhabitants.

*** Aggregate territorial rating of annual theatre attendance per 100 inhabitants.

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In analysing the average qualification levels of the population on the different mezo-regions, I came to the following conclusion (see Figure 1). In the 1990s, a highly educated macro-region takes shape in north-west-Dunántúl, one with medium qualification levels can be found along the former heavy industrial axis (Veszprém-Borsod), and a macro-region with low education is found to the south-east of the above. Inequalities observed in education levels show an approximate synchronism with the differences in global development between the regions. However, there are two counties that show significant differences not only compared to their general development in the 1990s, but also in the sense that they emerge over their backward environment like an island. These are Baranya (2.) and Csongrád (6.). Their common characteristic is that their county seats house the oldest and largest higher education institutions in the countryside, which primarily increases the education levels of the county's population. In addition, their global development also rated them among the leading counties during the Kádár era. Baranya, as a former centre of heavy industry and agriculture, was the fifth most developed middle-level unit of public administration as late as 1990 (Benkő, 2008:402), while Csongrád, as a centre of the exploitation of hydrocarbons, was topping the list in the 1980, in terms of specific national income, surmounting even the capital city (estimations by János Rechnitzer and Mihály Lados, 1988:46). The two counties were not only 'producing', but, in the past century, they were also keeping large numbers of highly qualified workers.

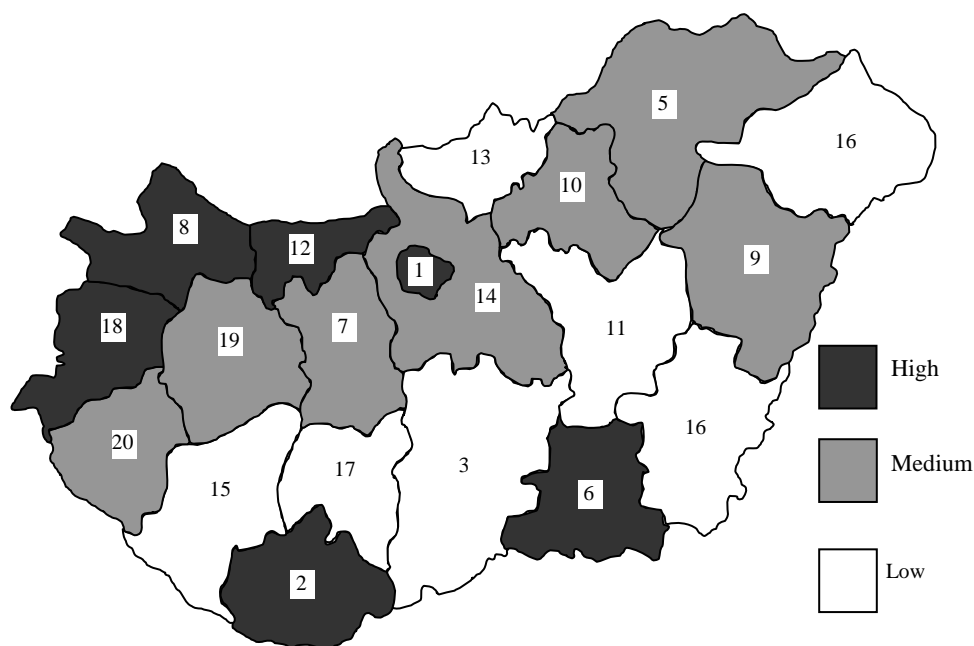


Figure 1. Average education levels of mezo-regions in 1990 and 1995
(Note: For the names of counties by numbers, see Table 1)

Certain changes occurred during the years following the millennium: the region with high levels of qualification became the centre of the country as Fejér (7.) and Pest (14.) counties showed robust dynamics of development in the 1990s (see Figure 2). The specific value production of Fejér county moved ahead from the 13th place in 1985 to the 2nd in 1997, thus becoming the best county. Pest county moved from the 18th place in the rating of mezo-regions to the 6th place by the turn of the millennium. On the contrary, Baranya declined from 7th place in 1975 to 11th by the turn of the millennium, so it was not able to keep a considerable part of its highly qualified labour force, while the average education levels of its population fell into the middle range. On the other hand, Csongrád county was able to keep its 'bronze medal' in the area of education levels, in spite of falling back to 10th place in terms of specific GDP by the turn of the millennium (Table 1). The following two factors

must have played part in the latter achievement: the university and the research institutes of Szeged were significantly expanded and, though on a smaller scale, the city remained the centre of Hungary's crude oil production.

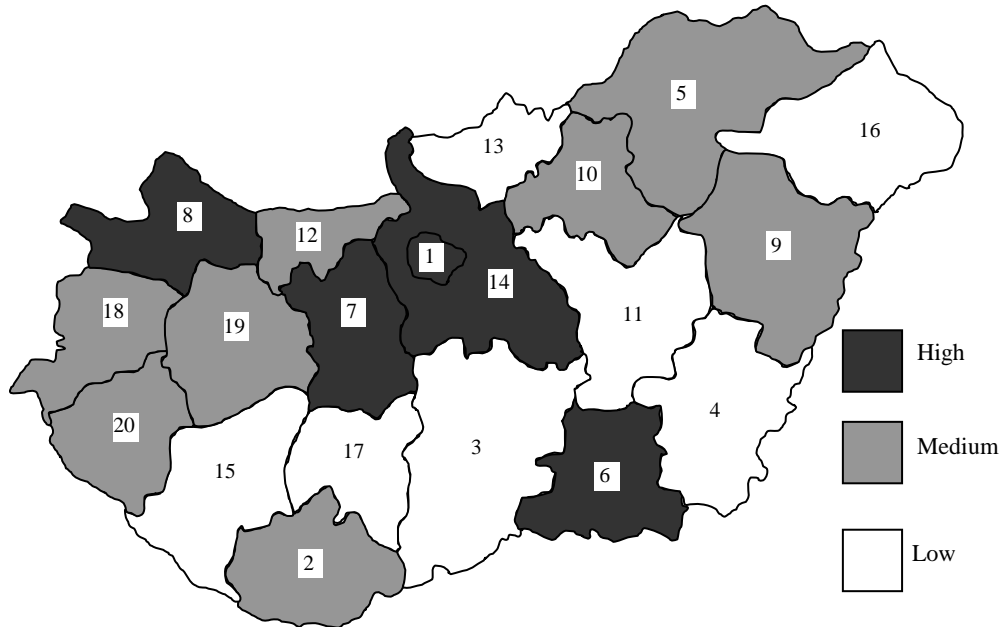


Figure 2. Average education levels of mezo-regions in 2001 and 2006
(Note: For the names of counties by numbers, see Table 1)

The territorial inequalities of cinema attendance over the 1990s show a different picture than the education levels (Figure 3). Here, the advantage of the west-Hungarian region can be seen more clearly, aside from the fact that in the two 'island' counties, Csongrád (6.) and Baranya (2.), the effects of the attractions, also contributing to the high levels of education, can also be felt in this respect. In the western region, it was the dynamic development following the transition, while in the case of the two southern counties, it was the former higher standard of living that played a decisive role in this development. Low cinema attendance rates are characteristic of the counties located along the Somogy-Szabolcs (15-16) depression axis. The only exception from the latter is Pest county, which, despite its dynamic growth, is shown by the statistics to be lagging far behind. Of course, it would be wrong to assume that people in this county do not go to the cinema. What we need to know is that the statistics registers the amount of cinema tickets sold in a region, and not the cinema attendance frequencies of the population of a given region. In other words, the residents of the agglomeration mostly go to the cinema in the capital.

Following the transition, the spatial distribution of specific cinema attendance went through a considerable alteration. The formerly established macro-regions ceased to exist and the arrangement of the counties became more mosaic-like (Figure 4). Counties with the largest cities took the lead or kept their position at the top, among them Győr-Moson-Sopron (8.), Baranya (2.), Csongrád (6.), Hajdú-Bihar (9.) and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (5.). This means all the places where large crowds of young people with purchasing power and the cinemas are concentrated. Changes in the economic situation, as a motivating factor, can only be detected in few regions, e.g. in Fejér (7.) and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (16.) in the positive sense, and in Zala (20.), Nógrád (13.) and Heves (10.) as a negative influence.

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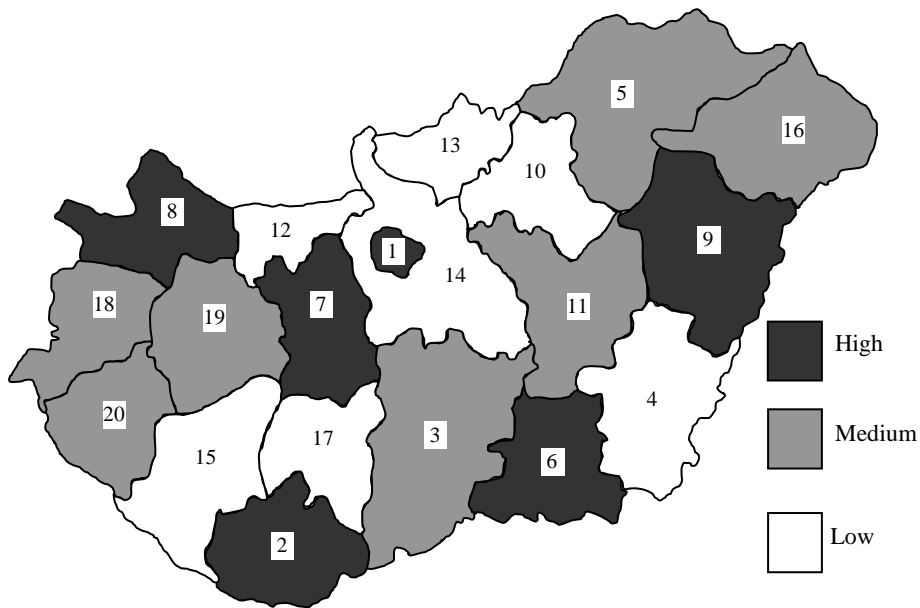


Figure 3. Average cinema attendance levels of mezo-regions between 1990 and 1999
(Note: For the names of counties by numbers, see Table 1)

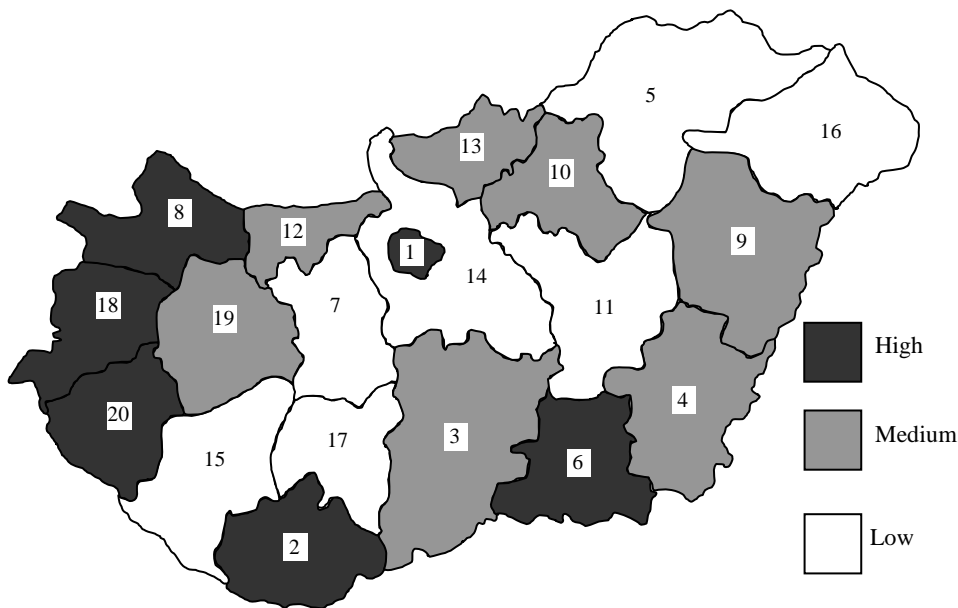


Figure 4. Average cinema attendance levels of mezo-regions between 2000 and 2009
(Note: For the names of counties by numbers, see Table 1)

The regional distribution of specific theatre attendance in the '90s is similar to cinema attendance, i.e. the western part of Dunántúl (except Vas county – 18.) and Csongrád county (6.) stood out in this respect as well (Figure 5). Counties with lower theatrical culture – typically smaller counties – are located sporadically, on the peripheries of the country (Pest county, 14., shows a picture similar to cinema attendance). The frequency of theatre attendance is, of course, also dependent on the local supply, as only half of the counties possess two or more theatres (save open-air and alternative theatres), and the frequency of performances is also very different. Certainly, supply also depends on demand, as behind the rarely used stages there lies the lack of interest.

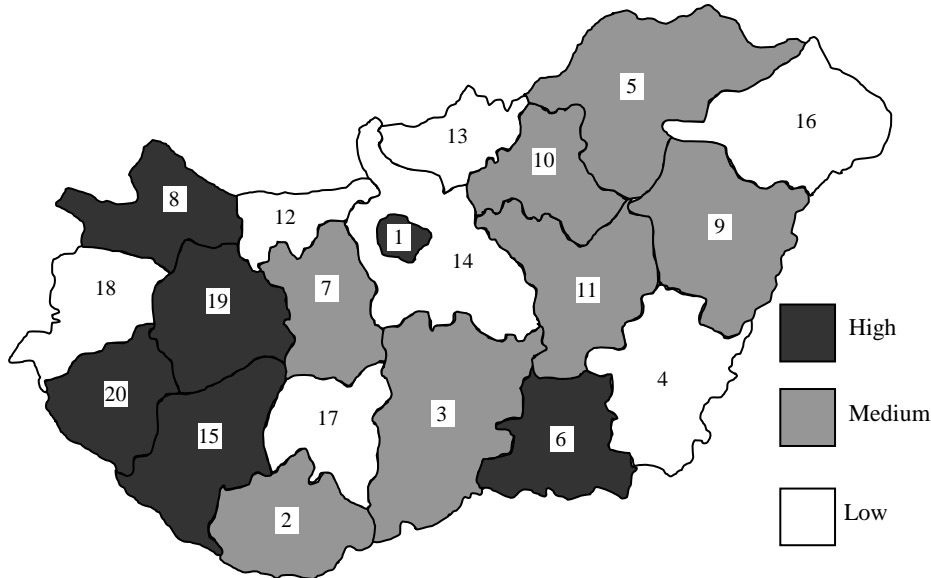


Figure 5. Average theatre attendance levels of mezo-regions between 1990 and 1999
(Note: For the names of counties by numbers, see Table 1)

The regionality of theatrical culture somewhat changed after the turn of the millennium (Figure 6). First of all, a compact south-west Dunántúl macro-region emerged, with high levels of theatre attendance. Behind the process, we can find Csongrád county (6.) switching category, which can be explained by the worsening of earnings in the mezo-region (young people still go to the cinema, but adults can no longer meet theatre ticket prices). The macro-region with medium attendance is made up, with a single exception, by a continual chain of counties along the Tisza. Low attendance levels are represented by a few mezo-regions with peripheral location (Vas 18., Tolna 17., Békés 4. and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg 16.). They include counties falling within the cultural reach of the capital (Komárom-Esztergom, Nógrád, Pest – 12-14), where the frequency of theatre attendance is not as low as we might assume based on the statistics, as part of the population attend the theatres of the capital city.

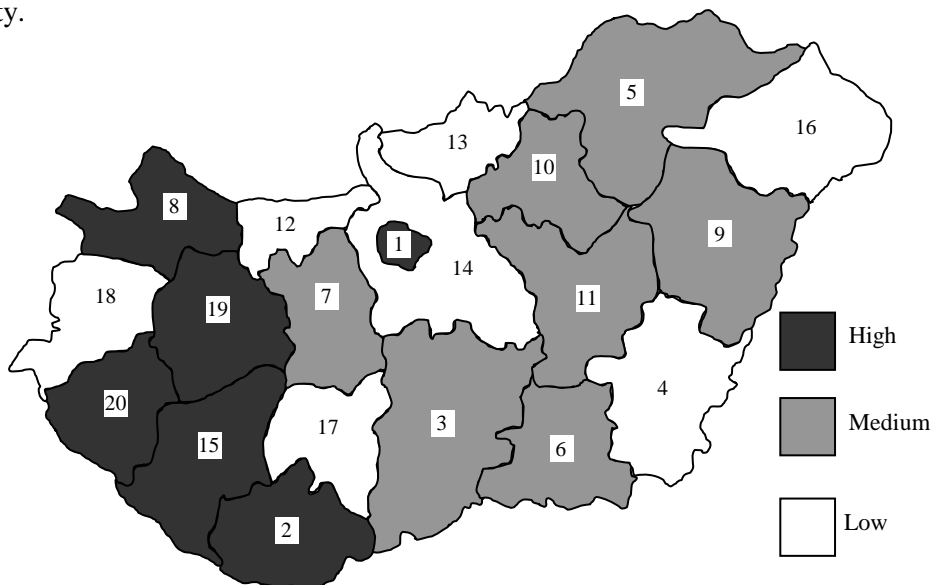


Figure 6. Average theatre attendance levels of mezo-regions between 2000 and 2009
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If we take the average of the three elements of cultural development, we arrive at general education, the regionality of which shows the following picture in the 1990s (Figure 7). High standards are represented, besides the capital, by the regions of west and central Dunántúl, as they occupy the more favourable positions in economic development as well. Baranya (2.) and Csongrád (6.) belong to the medium category according to the latter measure, but, as I have indicated, they possess the largest universities of the countryside, that is why they produce higher cultural standards than their economic development suggests. The above statement concerning the medium category is true of Heves (10.) and Hajdú-Bihar (9.) counties that stand out from the rather low developmental standard and the similarly low cultural standard of the larger part of eastern Hungary.

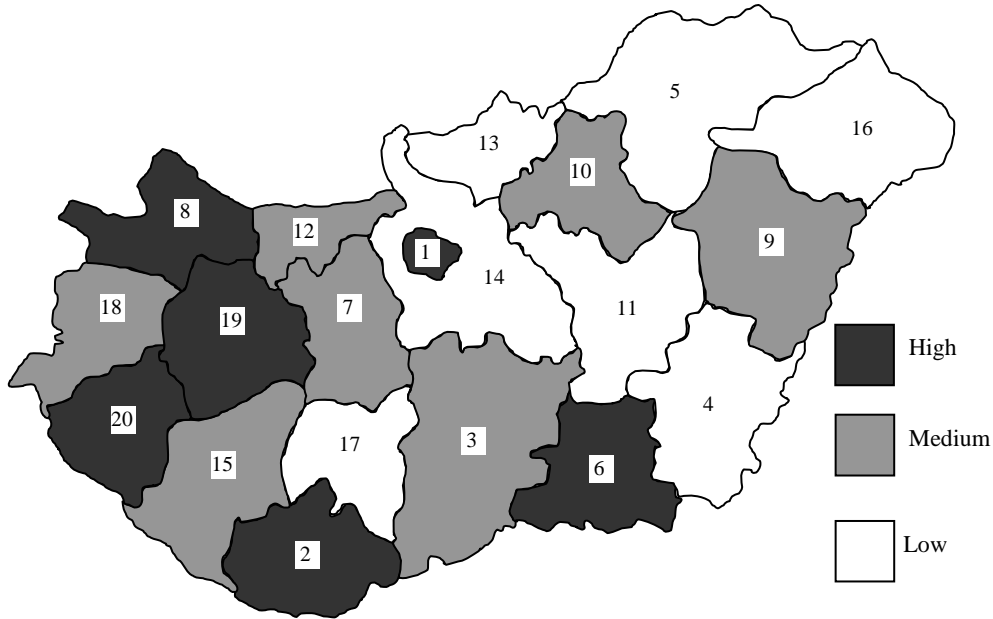


Figure 7. Average cultural development levels of mezo-regions between 1990 and 1999
(Note: For the names of counties by numbers, see Table 1)

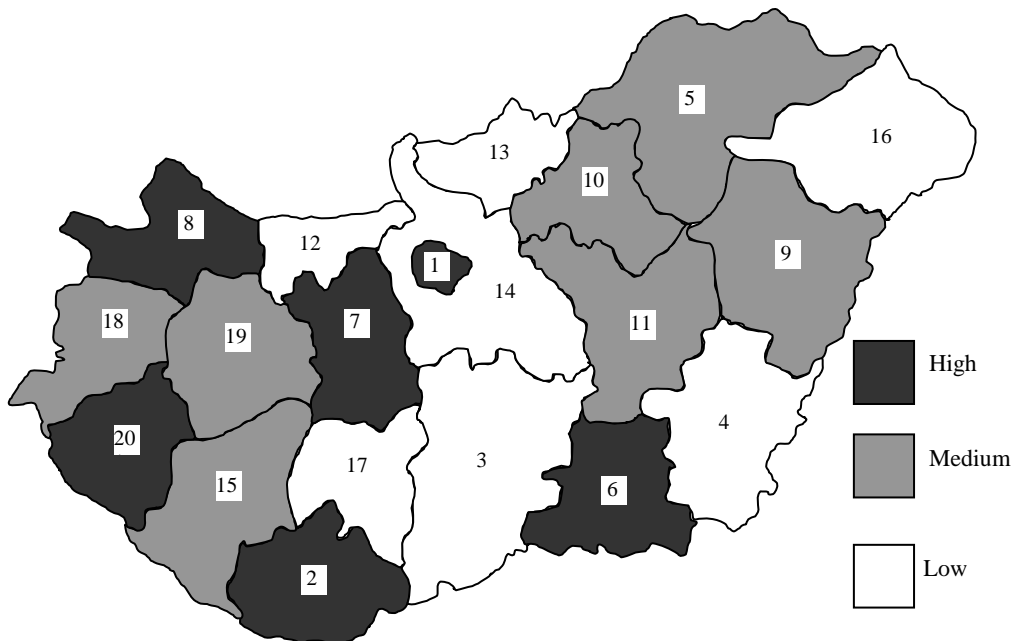


Figure 8. Average cultural development levels of mezo-regions between 2000 and 2009
(Note: For the names of counties by numbers, see Table 1)

In the decade following the millennium, the levels of general education did not change significantly compared to the 1990s (Figure 8). Considerable improvement occurred only in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (5.), Fejér (7.), Pest (14.) and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (16.) counties, where there is notable economic development lying behind the phenomenon, and in Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok (11.) county where economic achievement shows relative worsening. Worsening of cultural levels is observed in Békés (4.) and Tolna (17.) counties, accompanied by similar trends in specific GDP, while in Heves (10.) and Komárom-Esztergom (12.) counties it was accompanied by an increase in producing value. All in all, there has been no significant change compared to the previous decade. In Dunántúl there are only two counties more developed than average, while in the eastern half-country there is only one developed county. Therefore, western Hungary is better off.

It is even less possible to draw up cultural macro-regions compared to the 1990s, as out of the six highly developed mezo-regions, there are not even two neighbouring or overlapping, they make up a mosaic on the country-map. Those representing medium standards constitute two groups, while, in spite of the fact that the counties with low standards are located in one bloc along the Danube, they are separated from each other by Pest county (14.), which, though statistically belonging to this group, possesses cultural standards far exceeding that of the low cluster. So talking about cultural regions is only meaningful in the sense that, overall, Dunántúl is on a higher standard than the eastern half-country. From a quantitative point of view, we can say that before the millennium, the proportion was 21:14, while today it is 20:15, so a slight degree of levelling is possible.

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