PART II

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TRACING THE (HIDDEN) SPATIALITIES OF DIGITAL AGENDAS: THE CASE OF 'DIGITAL HUNGARY'

Abstract. Policies that aim at bringing about a digital transformation (seek to) create the conditions for particular spatial development trajectories. Yet, the understandings, explicit and implicit, of space advanced by digital agendas have remained rather underexposed to date. This paper addresses this gap by developing a Foucauldian-inspired discourse-analytical framework and applies it to the programme of 'Digital Hungary'. It is argued that policies of digitalisation in Hungary only to a minor extent consider the spatial dimension, and their impact potentially undermines the declared aims of spatial development at different scales.

Key words: digitalisation, spatial development, discourse, discourse analysis, Hungary.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, the perception that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have been increasingly transforming economic activities, and social interactions have put digitalisation centre stage in policymaking (OECD, 2015). The proliferating 'digital agendas' at the supranational and national levels see digitalisation, understood broadly as the transformation of all sectors of the economy, government and society based on the large-scale adoption of existing and emerging digital technologies (Randall *et al*., 2018), as a major catalyst of economic and social growth (CEC, 2010; OECD, 2015). In the European Union (EU), the Digital Agenda for Europe set out to define the role that the use of ICT will have

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in achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy (CEC, 2010). By May 2017, twenty Member States had digital strategies or digital agendas in place and four – Austria, Germany, Slovenia and the United Kingdom – began working on such a strategy.

This paper interprets digital agendas as the manifestations of a new development policy discourse that promotes the widespread adoption of digital technologies to address various – social, economic and environmental – policy challenges. By defining what counts as meaningful development objectives, digital agendas create the conditions for a new set of spatial practices that reshape existing socio-spatial orders. For example, by making claims such as 'we can only tackle the challenges presented by new flows of data if we create the full coverage of infrastructural conditions' (Die Bundesregierung, n.d.) or that '[w]ith the development like internet of things, everything will be connected with everything, always and everywhere' (Ministerie van Economische Zaken, 2016, p. 19) digital agendas set, although implicitly, 'the rules of the game' for spatial development. How this happens has remained under-researched, although in the EU context concerns have arisen recently with regard to the 'profound uncertainty as to whether digitalisation will foster further spatial concentration in Europe, or whether it might promote dispersal and poly-centricity, or a mix of both' (ESPON, 2017, p. 5).

This paper agues that in order to address such concerns, the (explicit and implicit) normative understandings of space and spatial development advanced by digital agendas should be more systematically examined. To this end, the paper proposes to rework the Foucauldian-inspired conceptual lens of Richardson and Jensen (2003; see also Jensen and Richardson, 2001, 2004; Richardson, 2006), developed to reveal the (implicit) spatial impacts of EU policies, and demonstrates the insights provided by this framework through a study of the practical and spatial-political workings of the Digital Hungary programme. This programme was launched in 2015 to ensure a more balanced development of the Hungarian ICT sector, and to enable that info-communication tools and services stimulate competitiveness, sustainable economic growth, employment, and equal opportunities in Hungary. The paper argues that the digital agenda in Hungary has reasserted the largely aspatial character of development policies in Hungary and that the possible consequences of its measures are not consistent with the spatial policy objective of creating a more balanced territorial structure as expressed in the National Development and Spatial Development Concept (NDSDC) (Government of Hungary, 2013). Against this background, the paper suggests that more research needs to be undertaken to examine the spatial perspectives implicitly conveyed by digital agendas and how these impact spatial development trajectories at different scales.

2. DISCOURSES OF DIGITALISATION AND THE (RE)PRODUCTION OF SPACES: A FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

In the 1990s, the works of prominent scholars such as Lefebvre (1991), Harvey (1996), and Allen *et al*. (1998), among others, laid down the foundations for an understanding of spaces and places in terms of a dialectical relation between material practices and symbolic meanings. To refer to Allen *et al*. (1998, p. 9), "[s]paces/places are constructed both materially and discursively, and each modality of this construction affects the other". This constructionist perspective has become increasingly applied in research on spatial development and planning. Healey (2004), for example, highlighted how spatial representations in policy documents perform 'institutional work' and contribute to the spatial impact of policies. The present paper draws more specifically on a series of studies revealing the hidden spatial agenda of EU policies (Hajer, 2000; Richardson and Jensen, 2000, 2003; Jensen and Richardson, 2001, 2004; Richardson, 2006). This body of work has offered a useful framework for considering how policies, even those that are not explicitly framed in spatial terms, enable and constrain spatial practices by attributing meanings to spaces. Jensen and Richardson (2004), for example, showed how the trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) programme[1] has restructured European space through the very delivery of a tangible system of infrastructure, even though it did not refer to the EU's forming spatial visions (notably the European Spatial Development Perspective accepted in 1999). More recently, the continued relevance of constructionist perspectives was insightfully demonstrated by Schulz's (2017) account that highlighted how innovation policy discourses contribute to reproducing patterns of peripheralisation in Estonia as they tend to frame peripheral regions as 'redundant' for building a 'knowledge-based society'.

Drawing on the above, this paper focuses on how policy discourses of digitalisation are implicated (even if implicitly) in creating new understandings of spaces and places and of how these should be developed. To this end, the paper proposes a three-dimensional analytical lens inspired by Richardson and Jensen (2003) and examines *representations of (cyber)space*, *practices of digitalisation* and *the politics of scale*. The first dimension refers to ways in which digital agendas represent (cyber)space linguistically. 'Cyberspace' has been defined by some as "a world of electronic information, data, and connections among these data" (Starrs and Anderson, 1997, p. 148). From the discourse-analytical perspective of this paper, however, 'cyberspace' is first and foremost regarded as a (set of) metaphor(s) (Pile, 1994) that helps in the thinking about complex digital networks similarly to everyday material and social spaces (Graham, 1998). Importantly, the metaphors of cyberspace bring

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[1] The TEN-T programme, introduced under the Treaty of Maastricht and further defined by the European Commission in 1996, set the aim to guarantee optimum mobility and coherence between the various modes of transport in the EU.

about a selective 'discursive rewriting' of space (cf. Pickles, discussed by Warf, 2001) by implicitly propagating certain understandings of these networks at the expense of others. Perhaps most notably, cyberspace has been represented as a singular, inherently democratic domain that overcomes distance and to which, in theory, everyone could have access, thus concealing that 'cyberspace' is a social construct implicated in reproducing socio-spatial inequalities on a global scale (Warf, 2001).

Digital agendas are, however, not merely persuasive narratives, but entail the design of new institutions, knowledges, tools of calculation, and infrastructures of socio-spatial intervention. Hence, the second analytical dimension of the *practices of digitalisation* highlights the material dimension of digitalisation and how digitalisation always implies the (re)production of spaces. For example, the launch of the Digital Economy and Society Index by the European Commission in 2014 to monitor the progress of the digital society and economy among member countries, the establishment of a Digital Agenda Steering Committee in Germany (Die Bundesregierung, n.d), or the attempts to rank cities in terms of their 'smartness' (see e.g. Giffinger *et al.*, 2007) can all be seen as examples of tools that are deployed at different scales to make digital spaces thinkable and manageable.

Finally, the analytical dimension of *the politics of scale* is meant to acknowledge the power-laden scalar-institutional dimension of the introduction and use of new technologies, as well as of the evolution and implementation of digitalisation agendas. In other words, its aim is to shed light on how power relations shape the practices of digitalisation and the production of (spatial) knowledge in a 'digital world'. Castells' (1996) well-known conceptualisation of the 'spaces of flows' and 'spaces of places' already emphasised that contrary to popular imagination, the internet does not exist separate from, but is very much shaped by the structures of regulation and power (see also Zook, 2003). In other words, we need to attend to the ways in which ICT-technologies 'become enrolled into complex social and spatial power relations and struggles' (Graham, 1998, p. 176).

3. REFRAMING DEVELOPMENT POLICY: TOWARDS 'DIGITAL HUNGARY'

The antecedents of Hungary's current digital agenda can be traced back to attempts in the mid-1990s to devise policies that would help Hungary enter the 'information society' (IS) (Magyar and Karvalics, 2001). Even though the 'information age' was recognised as offering key opportunities regarding modernisation, Euro-Atlantic integration and the establishment of an open society (idem.), up until the turn of the millennium 'IS' remained a poorly institutionalised policy field without an overarching strategic framework (Pintér, 2004). That began to change

in the run-up to the EU accession. Nonetheless, the lack of societal and political consensus, coupled with a lack of policy commitment resulted in IS development being treated as a low-priority vertical sector (Pintér, 2004), and successive strategies published on the matter failed to create a coherent framework of an IS-based modernisation (Czékmann, 2016).

Pressures to fulfil the *acquis* and the prospect of EU funding have had a strong effect on policy compliance in the field of IS (Czékmann, 2016), and the EU's increasing concern with maximising the social and economic potential of ICT (CEC, 2010) have fuelled efforts to devise a comprehensive national policy approach to digitalisation. The *Digital Renewal Action Plan* of the second Orbán government for the 2010–2014 term set out to offer such an integrated framework of ICT-related interventions for all sectors in line with the EU's Digital Agenda and the *New Széchenyi Plan*, the economic development programme of the Hungarian government launched in 2011 (Ministry of National Development, 2010). Subsequently, the *National Information and Communication Strategy 2014–2020* (NICS) (Government of Hungary, 2014), adopted by the government in 2014, declared the aim to implement the 'Digital Hungary' and described the vision and strategic targets and tools concerning the development of Hungarian information society and the ICT market for the EU's 2014-2020 planning period. To that end, digital infrastructure, digital competences, digital economy, and digital government were identified as the four major pillars and e-inclusion, research, development and innovation, and security as the three horizontal factors. The related *Green Paper* contained the actions to be undertaken to fulfil the Strategy's objectives as well as the resources, responsibilities and deadlines assigned to each action (Ministry of National Development, 2014).

From early 2015 on, the third Orbán government put an increasing emphasis on digitalisation as one of key driving forces of competitiveness, growth and welfare. In March 2015, the *Digital Welfare Programme*[2] (DWP) was introduced with the aim of fostering the competitiveness of the Hungarian ICT-sector and to facilitate sustainable economic growth, job creation and social equality. The Programme extended and updated the NICS and defined concrete objectives and actions in the key areas of the strategy; those were published in 2016 in a series of strategic documents including the Digital Child Protection Strategy, the Digital Education Strategy, the Digital Export Development Strategy, the Digital Start-up Strategy and (in 2017) the Digital Commerce Development Strategy. The EU's Digital Progress Report on Hungary published in May 2017 acknowledged the progress made as the result of the above policy efforts and noted improvements especially with regard to the rate of broadband take-up on

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[2] In some instances, the Programme is referred to as 'Digital Success Strategy'. The present paper translates the middle term of the original Hungarian title (*jólét*) as welfare. It should be noted that *jólét* also signifies 'well-being' as well all 'prosperity'.

fixed networks and digital skills; at the same time, it found that mobile broadband was not accelerating, digital skills and the online provision of public services were below the EU average, and the business sector was not exploiting the opportunities offered by digital technology as much as in other Member States (CEC, 2017).

In a renewed effort to tackle the challenge of digitalisation, in July 2017 the Orbán government launched, following a process of public consultation, the extension of the DWP, 'The Digital Welfare programme 2.0' (DWP 2.0), which contains concrete measures ensuring that 'every citizen and business in Hungary and the Hungarian national economy become winners of digitalisation' (Government of Hungary, 2017b, p. 3). Furthermore, the DWP 2.0 envisaged, among others, drawing up a development concept for improving digital competences, implementing a Digital Labour Programme, formulating Hungary's Digital Agricultural Policy, Digital Health Industry Development Strategy and Digital Sport Strategy, as well as setting up digital public administration training programmes.

4. EXAMINING DISCOURSES OF DIGITAL HUNGARY AND THEIR PRACTICAL-SPATIAL WORKINGS

This section will examine, through the three-dimensional conceptual lens introduced earlier, the understandings of spatiality that have supported the discourse of 'Digital Hungary' and how these are being enacted in a multi-scalar policy field. Surely, these enactments are only beginning to take shape. Nonetheless, the emerging practices of Hungary's digital agenda allow for a preliminary assessment. To this end, extensive desk research tracing and analysing relevant national policy documents, websites, news reports and speeches was conducted, and eleven in-depth semi-structured interviews with key informants from the national and local levels were held between April 2017 and September 2018. A twelfth respondent provided detailed responses by e-mail; also, several interviewees supplied additional insights during follow-up e-mail communication. In line with the assumption of Foucauldian discourse analysis to regard discourse as encompassing aspects of language (use) *and* practice (Sharp and Richardson, 2001), it constituted an important aspect of analysis of how the discourse of Digital Hungary has manifested itself in ways of *doing*. In concrete terms, this meant tracing the very process of devising policy documents, the events at and the channels through which these documents have been released, as well as identifying the actual policy measures through which policy objectives have been expected to become fulfilled. An iterative approach to data collection and analysis was applied. Documents, interview transcripts and research notes were read several times. During the coding

phase, key themes and implicit understandings and claims related to ICT developments and digitalisation and to the expected and/or desired (cyber)spatial implications of those were defined. Subsequently, the themes and claims identified were compared and, in some cases, merged, leading to the final set of categories on which the reported findings are based.

4.1. Representations of (cyber)space

In the official policy discourse of Digital Hungary, cyberspace is primarily seen as an undifferentiated space with potentials and possibilities for everyone; as the NICS notes, '[t]he «digital ecosystem» has developed also in Hungary, connecting millions of users and tens of millions of devices with higher bandwidth networks and increasingly complex electronic services' (Government of Hungary, 2014, p. 4). While emphasising the aspects of 'interconnectivity', the Strategy also acknowledges the state-territorial fragmentation of cyberspace. As Tamás Deutsch, Prime Minister's Commissioner for the Digital Success Programme at that time, argued in an interview, it did make sense to speak of a 'Hungarian internet' especially regarding content, the provision of infrastructure and regulation, because '[t]here are certain tasks that no one else will do, if we don't'.[3] As Deutsch elsewhere noted:

> Digitalisation is […] a very exciting, complex social process and that occurs in the entire world by producing winners and losers. It is a realistic objective that the Hungarian nation will be a winner (Deutsch, 2017).

This competitive international cyber environment was contrasted, although implicitly, with the Hungarian digital ecosystem that was characterised by cooperation based on mutual trust and which every Hungarian partakes in (Deutsch, 2017).

At the same time, the documents studied acknowledge the inequalities that persist regarding participation and are explicit about the spatial character of those inequalities (Government of Hungary, 2010, p. 14). More specifically, ICT-based sectoral and regional programmes are announced to 'make the benefits of the digital ecosystem clear and accessible even to those who miss out due to any reason' (pp. 67–68). While the proposed spatially selective interventions mostly focus on rural (isolated) regions that are lagging behind in terms of internet use, the Green Paper also mentions subsidies for smart cities that target urban areas and aim at involving 'more people' (Ministry for National Development, 2014, p. 117) into the use of ICT-based public services.

Overall, the way in which the digital divide is spoken of in the NICS suggests a rather simplistic understanding of cyberspace as a singular, ontic entity (a person

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[3] See http://bocskor.fidesz-eu.hu/en/public-consultation-on-the-future-of-the-internet-in-hungary/

is either 'inside' or 'outside' of the space created by the internet), and inclusion is assumed to temporally forward people and place on a path of development (see Graham, 2011). The various kinds of barriers to internet use are acknowledged by policy documents, but according to the NICS, those are primarily cognitive, knowledge and motivation barriers and, given the reduction of computer prices and the drastic decline of internet access prices, less and less financially-oriented (Government of Hungary, 2014, p. 39). Leaving aside to what extent the latter is an overstatement, there is insufficient attention paid to how the differences in the ability to access information and communicate online are related to (and constrained by) various other factors, be it social, political, cultural or spatial (cf. Graham, 2011), as well as to how these can be addressed in an integrated way. For example, the Roma, a severely disadvantaged group in Hungary, have often faced discrimination at community access points (see Kiss, 2007). However, the NICS makes only one brief reference to the Roma when it stresses the need to embed e-inclusion efforts into broader social policy programmes (p. 105).

4.2. Practices of digitalisation

Concerning the political rationalities of the discourse of Digital Hungary, competitiveness is a recurring concept in the NICS and other Hungarian policy documents. One of the key rationalities governing Hungary's digital agenda is that of competitiveness at the national, company and individual levels (Government of Hungary, 2016a), which seems in alignment with the EU's policy discourse that regards the development of the Digital Single Market as a key priority for boosting the EU's economy (CEC, 2014, p. 3). The representation of digitalisation as 'one of the most important driving forces of economic competition' (Government of Hungary, 2016c, p. 4) and that of digital transformation as 'inevitable and ever accelerating' (Government of Hungary, 2017b, p. 5) also legitimates the necessity of an overarching governmental programme. Yet, competitiveness is not the sole rationale of digitalisation, as it is stated that

> the Government no longer regards digital developments as a mere area of its development policy: the new approach puts people's welfare in the focus of digital transformation (Government of Hungary, 2016a, p. 6).

No thought is given, however, to the possibly emerging conflicts between competitiveness on the one hand and socio-spatial equity and sustainability objectives on the other. These implicit tensions are mediated (and concealed) by the notion of 'digital welfare' that is presented as the umbrella for the four major pillars of the digital agenda mentioned above (Government of Hungary, 2017b, p. 6).

The simplistic understandings of (cyber)space and the competitiveness-oriented rationality discussed above are variously instituted through the technologies

of government of the Digital Welfare Programme 2.0. that converge on shaping connected and entrepreneurial subjectivities. To ensure that no Hungarian citizen is excluded from participating in the digital world (p. 6) due to a lack of financial means, the government reduced the VAT rate on internet provision from twenty-seven percent to eighteen percent as of the beginning of 2017 and to five percent as of January 2018, the lowest rate at that moment in the EU. In addition to that, the government initiated the creation of a 'digital welfare basic tariff' trademark and major providers now offer non-users a basic broadband package (fixed or mobile) at a ten-to-fifteen percent price discount. Also, the establishment of a network of 1500 'Digital Welfare Programme Points' (DWP Points) was announced. Financed by EU and national funds (eighty-five and fifteen percent respectively), the network's aim is to ensure that Hungary ranks above the EU average in terms of digital literacy and the use of digital tools by 2020 (https://djp.palyazat.kifu. gov.hu/). As such, the DWP Points build on the legacy of existing community internet access points. However, it is unclear whether and how the experiences of operating those access points have been considered.[4] Furthermore, the call for tenders related to the establishment of DWP Points (launched within the Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme) only slightly considers the spatial dimension: according to the point-system of the call, location in a disadvantaged region and in a settlement with a population of less than 5,000 weigh the same as setting up a DWP Point in a public library. The 'Digitalisation for the active elderly' sub-programme operates with similarly 'aspatial' criteria, stipulating the minimum size of groups in fifteen participants – a possibly unreachable threshold in smaller settlements and lagging regions (*HVG*, 2018).

The previously mentioned sub-strategies of the Digital Welfare Programme,[5] the Digital Education Strategy, the Digital Export Development Strategy, the Digital Start-up Strategy, and the Digital Commerce Development Strategy also underwrite the understanding of an undifferentiated cyberspace to which Hungary and Hungarians need to be better connected if they are to remain, or become, economically competitive. Indeed, the very fact that it is the above areas for which a digital strategy has been elaborated suggests a predominantly economic understanding of the supposed merits of digitalisation. The decisions designating those

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[4] In Hungary, telehouses emerged as hybrid (NGO-small business-municipal) organisations (Kovács, 2001) from the mid-1990s, and they were conceived of as multifunctional public spaces offering a variety of technological, organizational and personal services tailored to the needs of local communities (Gáspár, 2016). Later, state-initiated programmes followed, most notably the *eHungary point* programme that aimed at establishing a community access point in every settlement; as a result, by the end of 2005, there were 2,800 eHungary points (Kiss, 2007), mostly operating at municipal premises (e.g. community centres or libraries). However, in the run-up to EU accession, membership conditionality led to an increasing concern with the roll-out of an extensive network of public internet access points, whereby multifunctionality in the above sense became neglected (Gáspár, 2016).

[5] The focus in this paper is on the strategies accepted by the end of March 2017. The Digital Child Protection Strategy is not relevant in this context and is not considered.

fields 'worthy' of a digital strategy have not been transparent. Furthermore, a frequently used technique of representation in these strategies are SWOT analyses and other statistical overviews – also referring to the EU's Digital Agenda Scoreboard – that, under the disguise of neutrality, have helped to discursively construct the problem of Hungary's lagging status in the field of digitalisation. The recurrent evocation of the 'EU average' sits here somewhat uneasily with the remark of the NICS that it is not just 'better positions achieved in international statistics' that count (Government of Hungary, 2014, p. 6).

The above strategies pay also insufficient attention to the ways in which the deployment of ICT and spatially uneven development mutually constitute each other. They tend to propose spatially undifferentiated measures and even if spatial selectivity is present, it is weakly articulated and not fully consistent with spatial policy objectives. The Digital Education Strategy, for example, assumes that the digitalisation of the whole educational system will improve the employability, living standard and social welfare of workers, and will have a positive effect on the entire digital ecosystem (Government of Hungary, 2016a, p. 7). While the document does contain a map of the number of locations with Wi-Fi access in public education institutions (p. 38), and it evokes the principle of equity in its strategic goals, it does not address the question as to how the spatially uneven availability of ICT devices plays a role in maintaining patterns of uneven development more generally, or how uneven development should be addressed. The Digital Export Strategy envisages measures designed to improve the export capacities of SMEs engaged in IT services, the export of governmental digital solutions and the development of the export of digital services through services centres (SSC). As to the last element, the Strategy discusses a way in which the concentration of SSCs in Budapest could be diminished by the attraction of these centres to big regional cities with a university. However, it concludes plainly that 'there is potential for the creation of plenty of SSC jobs' in places where, among others, ICT training is available at university level, where city leaders are highly committed to job-creating investments or where adequate office buildings are or can be made available (Government of Hungary, 2016b, p. 22).

The Digital Start-up Strategy similarly assumes that the digital economy may be an opportunity for growth for the Hungarian national economy and justifies the focus of the national strategy on Budapest by pointing out that

> a substantial start-up ecosystem typically develops in large cities as such metropolises […] where the capital, knowledge and highly skilled young workforce required […] are available in sufficient concentration (Government of Hungary, 2016c, p. 8).

Given the aim of turning Budapest into an important international start-up centre (Government of Hungary, 2017b), the designated location of the Startup Hungary Centre for Methodology and Coordination (which has been established in the meantime), is Budapest. The primary location of the proposed 'special economic

zone', where start-ups[6] specialising in R&D&I are relieved of tax and social security burdens, is also the capital, although it is mentioned that in addition, sub-centres can be set up in the industrial and academic centres.

Finally, the key objective of the Digital Commerce Development Strategy is to strengthen the sector of e-commerce by offering financial, technical and training support to existing online retailers as well as to traditional (offline) retailers to help them to enlarge their market share or to enter the online market and to create an adequate regulatory environment. The only spatial consideration in the document appears in the form of a diagram showing the uneven regional distribution of online shopping (Government of Hungary, 2017a), but the relevance of this is not further elaborated on. The possible negative implications of an increase of online retail for urban spaces, such as the decline of city centres due to the undermined viability of small retailers (see e.g. Madanipour, 2018) are not considered by the Strategy.

4.3. The politics of scale

In EU Member States, the thinking about the information society and the ICT policy field as a domain of intervention more concretely have been strongly shaped – and disciplined – by the EU's policy discourse on ICT (see e.g. Chini, 2008; Goodwin and Spittle, 2002). Central to this discourse has been a primary concern with the single market and the competitiveness of European industry (Goodwin and Spittle, 2002). By extension, the EU's Digital Agenda can be viewed as a multi-scalar discursive regime and governmental technological apparatus that has made the objects, subjects and spaces of digital transformation thinkable and manageable. This is perhaps best illustrated by the Commission's annual Digital Progress Report (EDPR), which monitors progress in digital policies in the Member States.[7]

The programme of Digital Hungary has taken shape as part of this field of government and although Hungary has been a member state for almost fifteen years, the 'export of governmentality' from the EU in the form of normalising, standardising and control mechanisms (Böröcz, 2001) has exerted a stronger influence than in the 'old' Members States, for several reasons. First, as one of the biggest beneficiaries of EU funding,[8] Hungary has had to adhere more to the practices of monitoring and reporting. Also, even though Progress Reports are developed for each Member State, those evaluations, just as the Progress

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[6] The Strategy notes that the definition of a 'digital start-up' is not unproblematic because while the activities of most start-ups are linked to digitalisation, not all start-ups provide digital services. Hence, the Strategy proposes to omit the 'digital' adjective altogether.

[7] See https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/european-digital-progress-report

[8] See http://ec.europa.eu/budget/mycountry/HU/index_en.cfm#cinfo

Reports that monitored their progress as the progress of candidate countries in implementing the *acquis* (see Kovács and Kabacsnik, 2001), have tended to cast Central European Member States as lagging and reinforce their position as inferior political subjects. At the same time and somewhat paradoxically, with digitalisation becoming the new field in which Hungary's aspirations of developing the most competitive self-sustaining economy in the Central-Eastern European region[9] is being played out, the EU's discursive regime and governmental technologies have been willingly embraced by Hungarian politicians and policymakers. This has been evident in statements such as 'Hungary performs ever better in the digital competition, but there are areas where further improvement is needed', made by Tamás Deutsch.[10]

The enactment of the development policy under the banner of 'Digital Hungary' has been shaped by the centralising tendencies that have prevailed as the combined result of the EU's emphasis on funds' absorption and domestic trends of centralisation (see e.g. Grabbe, 2001; Varró and Faragó, 2016). As it has been pointed out by several studies, some positive examples notwithstanding, participative planning and partnership-based policy coordination at/across different scales in Hungarian development policy has been rather a hollow term than actual practice, which can be explained, amongst others, by the time pressures pertaining to EU funding application and management (Bajmócy *et al*., 2016), a traditionally weak culture of cooperation (Matkó, 2016), as well as the reluctance of the central government to decentralise decision-making (Dąbrowski, 2014; Pálné Kovács, 2019). Arguably, those factors have also prevented the participation of stakeholders in devising the Digital Hungary programme. Although, as alluded to earlier, a national consultation ('InternetKon') was launched on internet-related issues in 2015, the framing of questions, the processing of responses and the formulation of conclusions was concealed from public view, and it remained unclear to what extent the opinion of the majority was considered in the legislation. As such, similarly to consultations conducted about other issues by the Fidesz government, InternetKon has 'serve[d] primarily as devices of political marketing and only secondarily as instruments of participatory democracy' (Komáromi, 2015, p. 62). Furthermore, the interviews indicated that some elements of the Digital Hungary programme[11] have not sufficiently taken into account existing local capacities and knowledge; additionally, stakeholders, those from the local level in particular, also often lack the knowledge, capacity and opportunities to effectively shape the course of digitalisation policies.

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[9] See http://www.kormany.hu/hu/miniszterelnokseg/europai-unios-fejlesztesekert-felelos-allamtit-kar/hirek/az-europai-parlament-elismeri-a-kormany-erofesziteseit
[10] See   http://hirek.prim.hu/cikk/2017/10/19/nem_csak_a_nagy_orszagok_lehetnek_sikeresek_a_digitalizacioban
[11] Here, in particular the Digital Welfare Programme Network was mentioned.

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, although the NICS explicitly claimed to align with the objectives of the National Development and Territorial Development Concept, the Strategy – and, by extension, the Digital Hungary programme – is more concerned with preventing a longer-term imbalance of the digital economy (Government of Hungary, 2010, p. 120) than with the actual spatial development implications of digitalisation. This is clear, for example, if one considers the superficial attention paid to the question of Hungary's Budapest-centredness, or the fact that the concerns of the NDSDC with uncoordinated urban expansion and the related loss of functions in city centres (Government of Hungary, 2013, p. 83) seem to have been completely ignored. The discourse of digitalisation appears to be the new terrain in which the EU's competitiveness-oriented development approach, focusing on the efficient use of funding, has productively intersected with the pragmatism and the centralizing tendencies of the Hungarian state, which latter have even intensified in the meantime (cf. Varró and Faragó, 2016). Given the poor inclusion of sub-national stakeholders, community actors and the broader public, the discursive framework of the programme of Digital Hungary has tended to reassert the largely aspatial character of development policies and practices in Hungary.

On a more general level, this paper's aim was to contribute to the knowledge on digitalisation and spatial development concerned with how policies of digitalisation (re)produce patterns of socio-spatial inequality. The paper showed that the discourses of digitalisation and digital transformation should not only be simply examined as a new set of ideas and practices that are 'rolled out' over places, spaces and scales. Instead, one needs to ask how the discourses of digital transformation have also been implicated in the contestation and redefinition of places, and how scalar relations are shaping and are being reshaped in this process. To this end, a Foucauldian-inspired analytical framework was introduced for the analysis of the practical and spatial-political implications of digital agendas. The examination of the symbolic representations of (cyber)space, the practical workings of digital policies, as well as the scalar-institutional power relations shaping the practices of digitalisation, helps to critically evaluate how digitalisation agendas seek to create conditions for new practices and spatialities. In particular, the Foucauldian perspective has been useful in highlighting that knowledge on digitalisation is heavily imbued with power relations and that policies are always political, even if they appear to be simply 'technical' (Sharp and Richardson, 2001). Overall, the main message of this paper is that one needs to recognise the implementation of digital agendas as both the medium and an outcome of ongoing broader struggles about the spaces and scales of development. Related to this, a broader and urgent research task has emerged to systematically examine what kind of hidden normative spatial understandings are being promoted by national digital agendas in the EU and with what effect, and what differential role the EU's Digital Agenda plays in this process. Furthermore,

one needs to examine how the practices of digitalisation and their spatial impact are related to the proclaimed aims of spatial development and governance at different levels. Only thus can we effectively discuss the 'links between digital development and Europe's territorial future' (ESPON, 2017, p. 7).

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