

## **TWENTY YEARS OF THE HUNGARIAN REGIONAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION IN NUMBERS**

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### **Abstract**

This study is a retrospect on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Hungarian Regional Science Association. Our aim is to provide a brief but comprehensive overview of these two decades in the light of quantifiable facts and results. We use document analysis and statistical descriptive methods in order to present a compact picture of the history of the Association's development. The results of our analysis confirm the impression that the Association, after a consistent building process, is characterised by stability, and it offers a wide range of perspectives for professional cooperation between the representatives of regional science.

Keywords: regional science, descriptive analysis, Hungary, science history, scientific associations

### **INTRODUCTION**

Spatial research has been undertaken in Hungary for a long time, but only in the last decades has the system assembled into a unified, ordered, regional science (Faragó, 2010). The development of the discipline and its institutionalisation have been closely linked together in Hungary (Horváth, 2014). “The results of the development of regional science in Western Europe and the USA were summarised in several studies and books (e.g. Isard, 2003). New works were published about the publication forums of regional science and the activities of its international organisations during the past decade. In these works we only find a couple of references to Eastern and Central European spatial research” (Horváth, 2017, 296). “The ample availability of factors (Research units; University master trainings; Doctoral Schools; Journals; Book series; Scientific association and scientific academic coordinating organisation; International regional scientific congress) which contribute to the identity of regional science as an autonomous discipline can be demonstrated in Poland and Hungary” (Horváth, 2017, 305). “Apart from research institutions, scientific associations constitute the other important base of spatial research. Besides researchers engaged in the field, a scientific association

assembles practicing professionals interested in the application of scientific results and intellectuals interested in regional development. These forums for intellectuals function as autonomous institutions or national divisions of international regional science associations. The first group contains the Hungarian and Romanian Regional Science Associations” (Horváth, 2017, 302-303). In 2020, a special issue of the Hungarian journal *Tér és Társadalom* (Space and Society, Vol. 34, Issue 1) was devoted to a synthetic assessment of the achievements, challenges and prospects of Hungarian regional science, although HRSA was not prominently featured in the articles (see Varga, 2020).

The Hungarian Regional Science Association (HRSA) is the professional forum of Hungarian regional science, an independent non-governmental organisation, which brings together professionals involved in regional research, development and governance. The Association was established in February 2002 by a proposal of the Regional Science Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Pécs.<sup>25</sup> With this, the institutionalisation phase of regional science has been completed in Hungary (Lux & Rácz, 2007). HRSA has more than 300 registered members associated with various organizations (research institutes, universities, central, regional and local government bodies, public and private companies, etc.). The Association’s organization follows the regional principle: in all the seven regions of Hungary and in six regions abroad where Hungarian speaking regional specialists are working the regional organizations have already been established (HRSA, 2022). The seven domestic sections cover the entire territory of Hungary, while the seven cross-border sections integrate Hungarian-speaking researchers from the Carpathian Basin. The Association also serves as the Hungarian section of the European Regional Science Association, which is an important indicator of the organisation's international embeddedness.

This article aims to introduce and assess the HRSA’s two decades of operation up until now based on several quantifiable facts and results. We use document analysis, content analysis and statistical descriptive methods to present a compact picture of the history of the Association's development. In the next section we look at the trends in the Association’s membership, management, and the variety of events it organizes, as well as its finances; then, the concluding section assesses its achievements and prospects in advancing Hungarian regional science.

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<sup>25</sup> Headed by the current president: 2002-2011 Prof. Gyula Horváth, 2011-2017 Prof. János Rechnitzer, since 2017 Prof. Zoltán Gál.

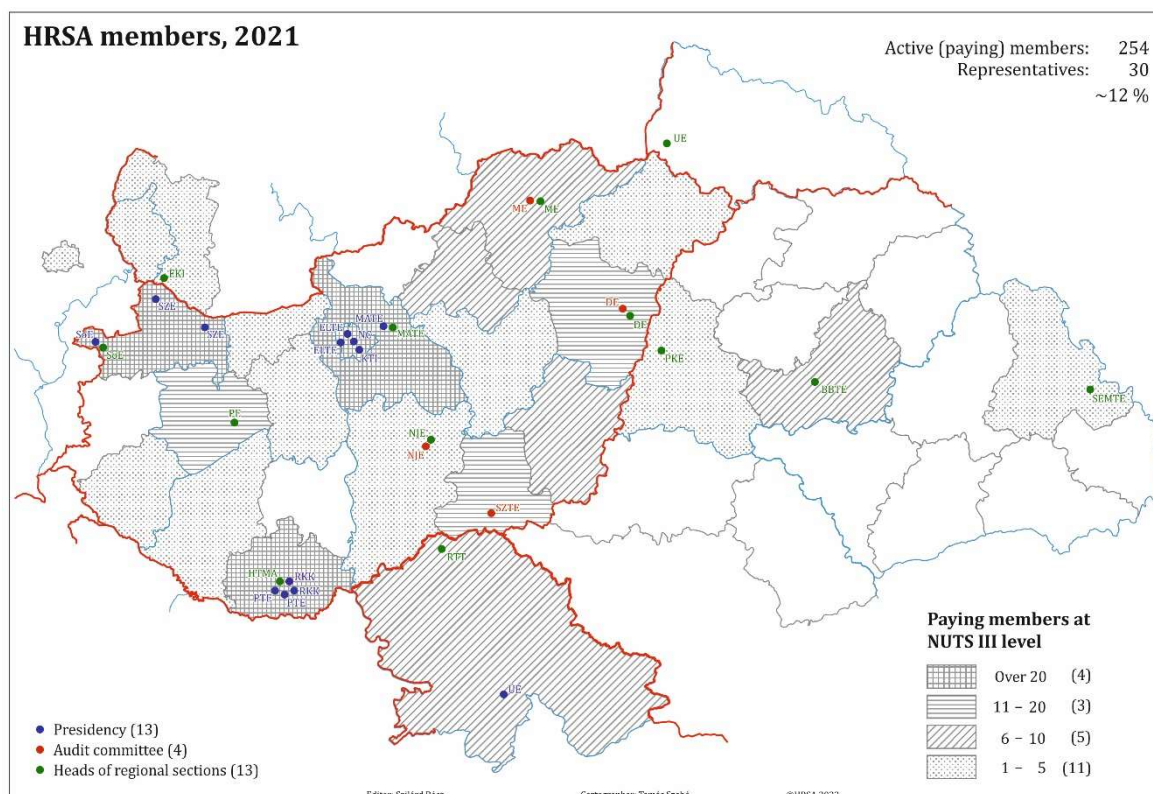
## TWENTY YEARS OF THE HRSA IN RETROSPECT

Despite the changing international and domestic institutional environment, including higher education (Lengyel, 2021), for regional science, the objectives of HRSA have not changed over the last twenty years (Rácz, 2015). The main areas of HRSA's operation are the organisation of scientific and educational events, publishing scientific works, building relationships with national and international partner organisations, as well as monitoring and evaluating shifts in the orientation of territorial policies. Furthermore, a main feature of the Association is the regular provision of news (newsletters, circulars, website). In this section we quantify the results achieved in the different areas of HRSA's operation over the past two decades.

### Membership

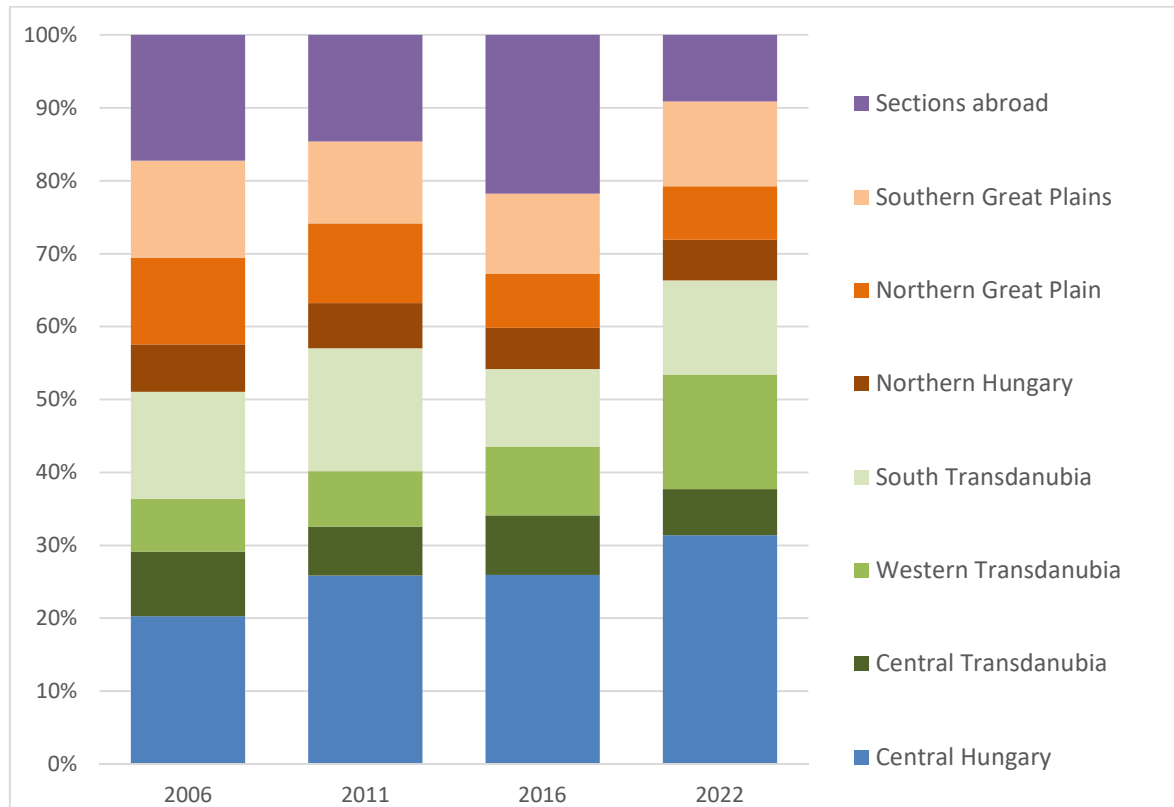
The thirteen regional sections of the HRSA shows various degrees of activity, the largest of them being Central Hungary, Western Transdanubia and South Transdanubia (Fig. 1). The number of members who paid the membership fee increased with more than one hundred persons between 2004 and 2021, which is a 72 percent increase, the largest part of which was experienced in Central Hungary and Western Transdanubia (Fig. 2).

**Figure 1** Map of the active members of the HRSA by sections as of 31 December 2021



Source: HRSA

**Figure 2** Membership of the HRSA by sections, 2006, 2011, 2016, 2022



Note: Number of members paying membership fee as of 31 December 2021

Source: Authors' elaboration based on HRSA data

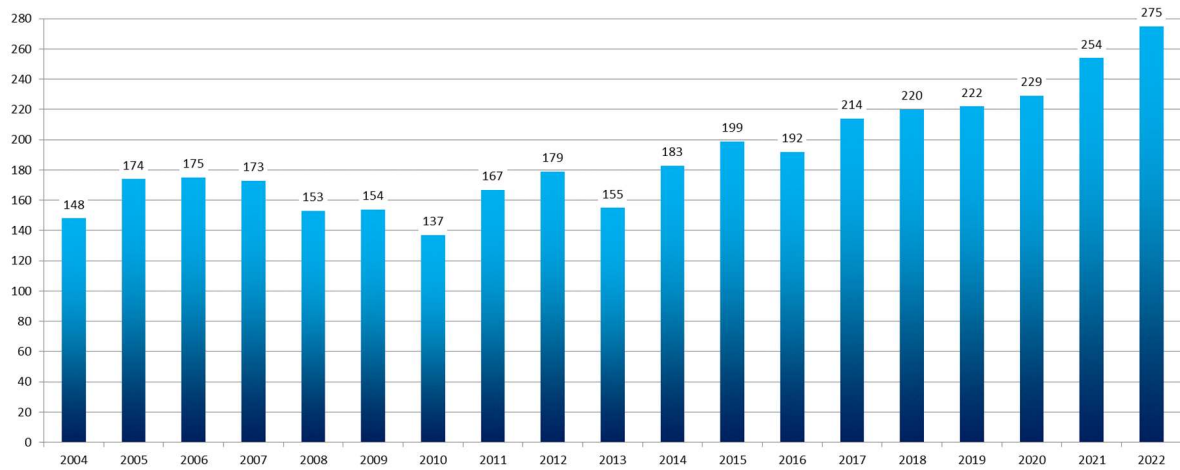
The number of active (regular paying) members exceeds 250, of which 25 represent regional communities beyond the borders. The majority of members' work in research institutes and higher education institutions, while a smaller number work in public administration (local, regional, central) and in companies (state, municipal, private). The wider, registered membership is around 600, of which 100 are cross-border.

The number of HRSA members was large, 350 to 440 persons between 2004 and 2009, but the share of members paying membership fee was relatively low (30 to 40 percent). The members of the Association have been entitled to a complimentary copy of the journal *Space and Society* since 2008, at the same time, a 250 percent increase of the membership fee took effect that year. There has been a revision of membership in 2010, under which only those persons were considered active members who pay their dues. As a result, the period after 2011 is characterised by lower membership but high paying rates. In 2012 an increase in the reduced membership fees (for students and pensioners) took place.

The activity of the sections has shown volatility from time to time (Fig. 3). A part of the sections operated continuously, while other sections operated only occasionally, and there were sections awaiting reorganisation. Similarly, only a part of the membership is active, which has been made clear after the revisions of the membership status in 2010 (for the Hungarian

members) and in 2018 (for the members abroad) that caused a significant drop in the number of the members from abroad.

**Figure 3** Membership of the HRSA (paying members), 2004-2022

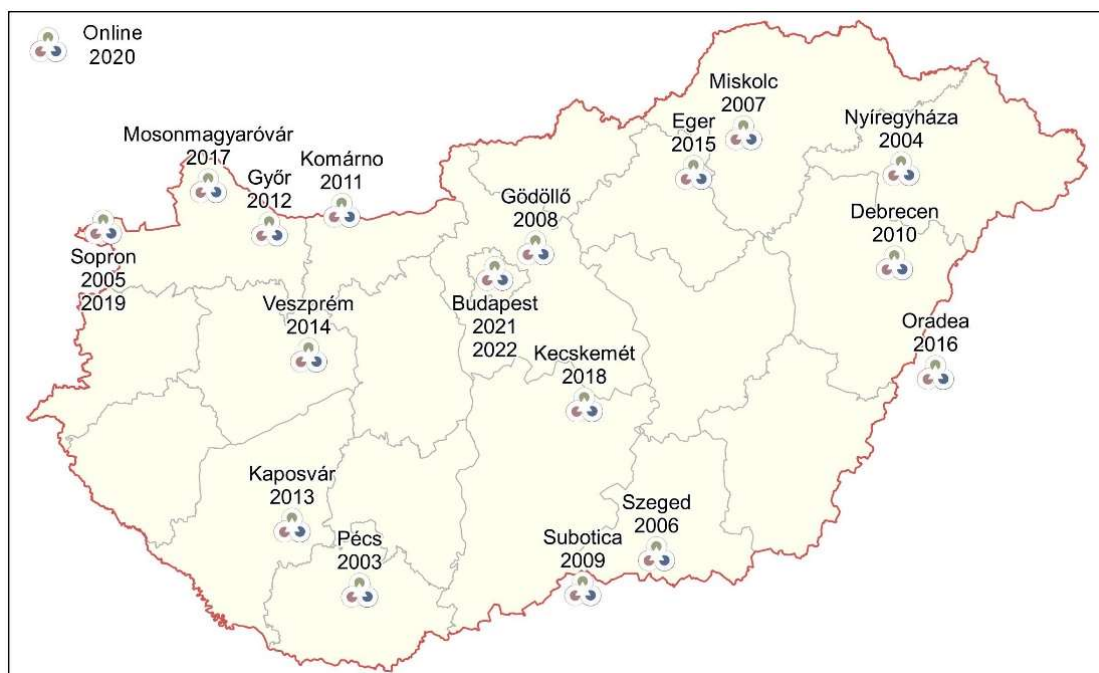


Source: HRSA

## Events

The HRSA is active in organizing regular scientific and educational events, the most important of which are the annual meetings. There have been twenty meetings in 17 different venues since 2003, three of which were in the neighbouring countries (Fig. 4).

**Figure 4** Venues of the HRSA annual meetings, 2003-2022



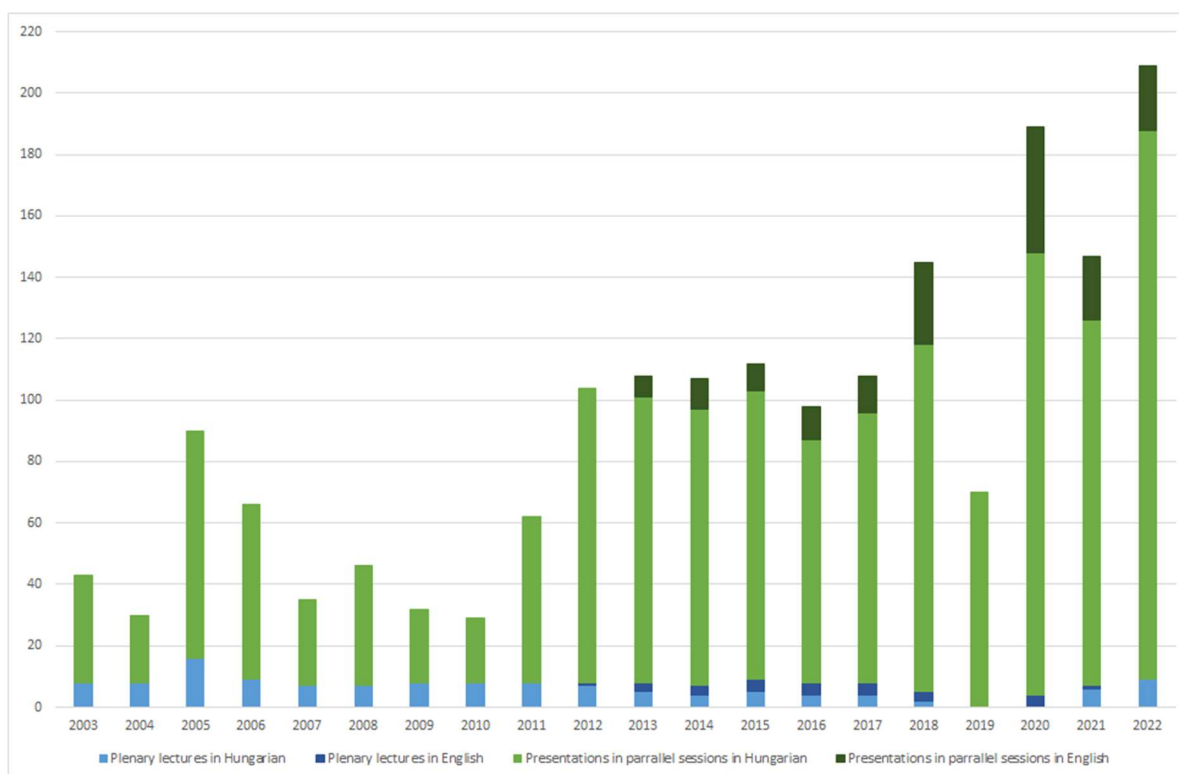
Source: Created by Tamás Szabó based on HRSA data

The first annual meeting outside the Hungarian borders was in Serbia. At the 2009 Subotica conference the aim was to discuss the practice of cross-border cooperation within the Schengen area, the experience of regional development in the autonomous province of Vojvodina and the implications of spatial policy in Serbia (Rácz et al., 2010).

So far, only one conference proceedings have been published in Hungarian, on the 2005 conference (Rácz, 2006). Regional development ministers from Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Vojvodina (Serbia) participated in this conference and issued a joint declaration on the importance of regional scientific cooperation.

An early opening up to international speakers for plenary presentations (from 2012<sup>26</sup>) and the calls for sessions held in English language (from 2013) prove the Association's commitment to international outreach (Tab. 1 and Fig. 5). The international plenary speakers were (in alphabetical order) Prof. Roberto Camagni, Prof. Roberta Capello, Prof. Daniela L. Constantin, Prof. Jouke van Dijk, Dr. Jan Fidrmuc, Prof. Grzegorz Gorzelak, Prof. Tomasz Komornicki, Prof. Eveline van Leeuwen, Prof. Gunther Maier, Prof. Peter Nijkamp, Prof. Petr Pavlínek, Prof. James W. Scott and Prof. Michael Steiner.

**Figure 5** The number of plenary lectures and parallel session presentations at the HRSA annual meetings, 2003-2022



Source: Authors' elaboration based on HRSA data

<sup>26</sup> Kovács & Rácz (2013)

**Table 1** The number of presentations at the HRSA annual meetings, 2003-2022

Year	Venue	Plenary sessions			Roundtable discussion or book launch	Parallel sessions			Participants
		nr.	lectures	of which in English		nr.	of which in English	presentations	
2003	Pécs	1	8	0	0	3	0	35	100
2004	Nyíregyháza	1	7	0	0	3	0	22	125
2005	Sopron	4	16	0	0	6	0	74	150
2006	Szeged	1	9	0	0	5	0	57	160
2007	Miskolc	1	7	0	0	3	0	28	70
2008	Gödöllő	1	7	0	0	6	0	39	120
2009	Szabadka	1	8	0	0	4	0	24	90
2010	Debrecen	1	8	0	0	4	0	21	85
2011	Révkomárom	1	8	0	0	7	1	54	110
2012	Győr	1	8	1	2	11	0	96	150
2013	Kaposvár	2	8	3	0	11	1	100	150
2014	Veszprém	2	7	3	0	12	1	100	160
2015	Eger	3	9	4	0	12	1	103	190
2016	Nagyvárad	2	8	4	1	12	1	90	130
2017	Mosonmagyaróvár	2	8	4	1	12	1	100	150
2018	Kecskemét	2	5	3	1	16	3	140	200
2019	Sopron	Co-organised with the CERS <sup>27</sup> conference				9	0	70	100
2020	Online/hybrid <sup>28</sup>	2	4	4	0	22	4	185	320
2021	Budapest	3	7	1	1	19	2	140	180
2022	Budapest	3	9	0	1	24	3	200	240

Source: Authors' elaboration based on HRSA data

The themes of the conferences covered a wide range of areas of regional science and closely followed the major shifts in emphasis in the international arena (Fig. 6). It can also be seen that the main theme of the conference, the accessibility and timing of the venue are important. In 2008, industry was not so relevant to research in Hungary as indicated by the title of the

<sup>27</sup> The 7th Central European Conference in Regional Science (CERS) was held in Sopron between 9-11 October, 2019. The main organisers of the event were the University of Sopron and the HRSA. Further co-organizers with CERS included the German speaking, Polish and Slovak Sections of ERSa and University of Economics in Bratislava, Technical University of Košice. Plenary speakers included the most illustrious figures of European regional science: Andrés Rodríguez-Pose, Alessandra Faggian, André Torre and Katarzyna Kopczewska. The conference in numbers: 3 days, 4 plenary and 4 session blocks, 190 participants from 20 countries, 160 session presentations, 29 sessions on 14 topics (Rácz & Egyed, 2020).

<sup>28</sup> Due to the coronavirus epidemic, the 18th annual meeting was organized in a hybrid form at different venues (mostly online) between 27–30 October 2020. A total of 185 session presentations were given. The event and sessions were attended by a large audience, 135 people exceptionally free of charge (Egyed & Rácz, 2021).



conference report: Is industry taboo in spatial development? (Bajmócy et al., 2008). Annual meetings abroad were smaller in scale, mainly due to the Schengen border crossing. The conference is typically organised in October (8 times) or November (10 times). However, there has also been one example of September and one of December dates.

**Figure 6** The thematic scope of the annual meetings based on the plenary lecture titles and parallel session titles



Source: Authors' elaboration based on HRSA data, <https://wordart.com/>

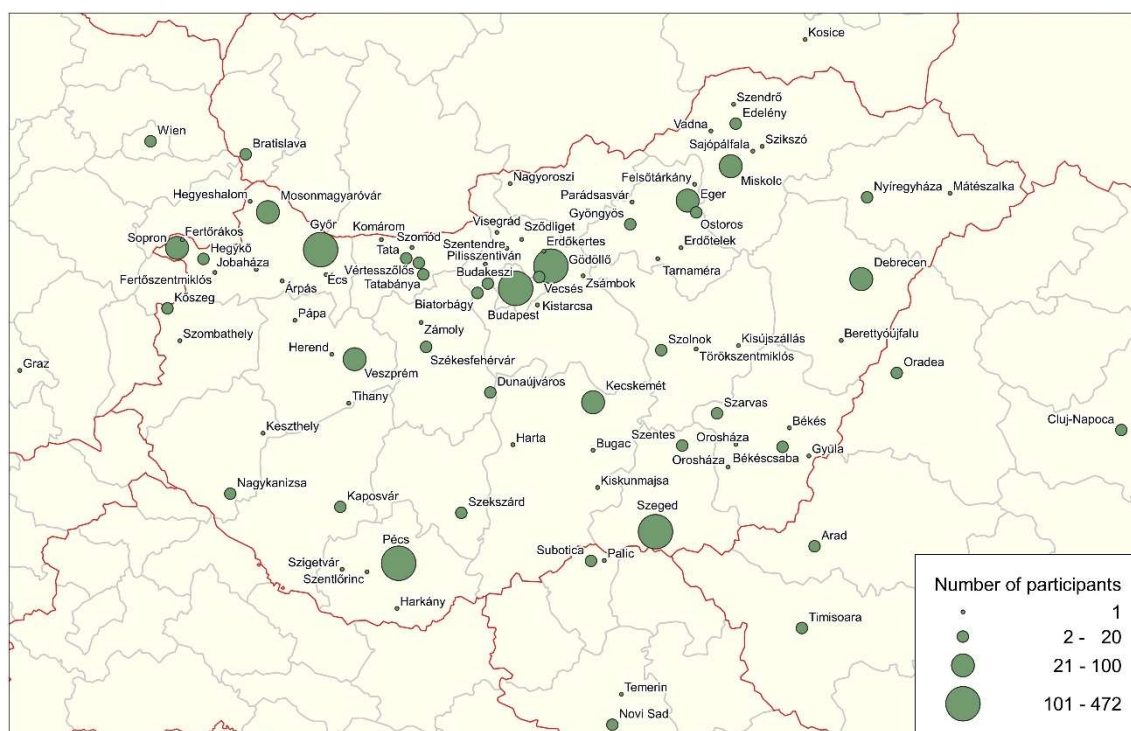
These annual meetings have attracted participants from 108 Hungarian cities over the past 10 years (Fig. 7). It can be seen that Budapest has the highest number of participants (or the highest frequency of participants). This is followed by the regional centres of Pécs, Győr and Szeged.



Gödöllő has had 112 participants in the last 10 years, closely followed by Debrecen and Miskolc. There are also regular speakers from other county seats.

The highest average growth rate in the number of participations was in the case of Budapest (+14.74%) and Győr (+13.35%). There are more and more participants from Sopron, Szeged and Pécs. The average number of participants from these cities increases by about 5% per year.<sup>29</sup> Apparently, most speakers tend to come from the city where the annual meeting is taking place.

**Figure 7** The participants at the HRSA annual meetings, 2012-2022<sup>30</sup>



Source: Created by Tamás Szabó based on HRSA data

In addition to the participants from Hungary, foreign speakers are also represented in growing numbers. Over the past 10 years, the speakers have come from neighbouring countries (Romania, Serbia, Austria, Slovakia). Albeit less commonly, participants from outside Europe also attend the HRSA annual meetings.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> The average growth rate cannot be calculated because the data series is not continuous for the other cities.

<sup>30</sup> The map shows 10 years of cumulative data by billing address, which is usually the sending institution. The database contained missing data.

<sup>31</sup> The database does not include plenary speakers.

**Table 2** Participation of foreign countries at the HRSA annual meetings, 2012-2022

Country	Participants
Romania	47
Serbia	17
Austria	5
Slovakia	5
Netherlands	3
Germany	3
Spain	2
England	1
Egypt	1
Ghana	1
China	1
Poland	1
Italy	1

Source: Authors' elaboration based on HRSA data

There is a high dues payment rate and most of the participants come to the annual meeting from the place where the current president lives (from prosperous doctoral schools with a stable financial background (e.g. Gödöllő, Győr, Szeged, Miskolc, Budapest – ELTE). The relationship with CERS IRS (Pécs) is strong, as it ensures the operation of HRSA at the institutional level. It is one of the institutions sending the most participants to the annual meeting.

The *Regional Science Evenings* lecture series, jointly organized by the Department of Regional Science of the ELTE and the Central Hungarian Section of the HRSA offers useful and informative sessions for those interested in regional science. There have been 58 lectures since 2008, and two more are scheduled for 2022 (Fig. 8).

The *Conference of Young Regionalists* is a biennial event, its 12th edition was in 2021, with its venue always being Győr. The conference aims to provide an opportunity for both young and experienced researchers in the field to present their research results, discuss their proposals and exchange ideas. In recent years, between 70 and 80 lectures have been given by 80-100 participants in 6-12 sections, and many young researchers in the field have made their first scientific debut here.

Between 2006 and 2015 in cooperation with the Faculty of Economics, University of Sopron the HRSA organized 20 semesters of the *Free University on Local Development* as a series of 3-4 events.

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Source: Authors' elaboration based on ELTE data, <https://wordart.com/>

The *Spatial Planners' Day* was first organized in 2009 by the HRSA in Balatonkenese with the participation of 230 people. The aim of the event was to report on the results of the past years of Hungarian spatial development policy, to discuss current issues and to make proposals for the future development of the objectives, instruments and institutions of spatial development policy. A secondary aim of the meeting was to present the results and problems of regional development to a wider public and to build a link between regional policy makers and the and practitioners of regional policy to present the scientific results (Flander et al., 2010). The second episode of the event took place in 2013 in Budapest with 140 participants from the academic sector (27%), government (24%), non-profit organisations (19%), county councils (17%), consultancies and other organisations (13%) (Kovács et al., 2014). The Spatial Planners' Day was held (online) for the third time in 2021 (Horeczki et al., 2022). With five plenary lectures

and 24 presentations in four sessions, as well as a roundtable discussion with six professionals, the participants evaluated the past period of Hungarian territorial policy and territorial development, discussed current issues and made proposals for the future development of the objectives, instruments and institutions of territorial policy.

The Regional Studies Association (RSA) held its annual international conference in Pécs between May 24-26, 2010. Co-organisers of the conference were the HAS Centre for Regional Studies, the Hungarian Regional Science Association and the Faculty of Business and Economics of the University of Pécs. The conference with the title “Regional Responses to Global Shifts” discusses the appropriate instruments, institutions and organisational principles necessary to overcome the international crisis in the regions and the possible directions of settlement system development. The conference is the biggest event in the 25-year history of the RSA. The nearly 600 participants represent 50 countries of the world. A large number of regional science researchers from Eastern and Southeastern Europe were also present (Kiss, 2010).

The 7th Central European Conference in Regional Science (CERS) entitled “Flows of Resources in the Regional Economy in the Age of Digitalisation” was held in Sopron between 9-11 October, 2019. The main organisers of the event were the University of Sopron Alexandre Lamfalussy Faculty of Economics and HRSA. Further co-organizers with CERS included the German speaking, Polish and Slovak Sections of European Regional Science Association (ERSA) and University of Economics in Bratislava, Technical University of Košice. The 2019 CERS was the first to be hosted by a Hungarian institution. The CERS conference is organised every two years in one of the Central European countries for both academics and practitioners, focusing on urban and regional science in the context of the Central European Space. During the three days of the 7th CERS, 190 speakers from 20 different countries presented their state-of-the art research results in the framework of 160 presentations. The scientific programme was organised in 29 sessions around 14 different topics (two sessions – networks; regional development – enjoyed outstanding popularity, attendees were able to exchange ideas in four parallel sessions) (Rácz & Egyed, 2020).

Thanks to the recognition of the European scientific community, ERSA organised its 61st Congress in Pécs this year. The congress, entitled “Disparities in a Digitalising (Post-Covid) world – Networks, Entrepreneurship and Regional Development” was held in person and online from 22 to 26 August 2022. Co-organisers of the conference were the Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, the Hungarian Regional Science Association and the Faculty of Business and

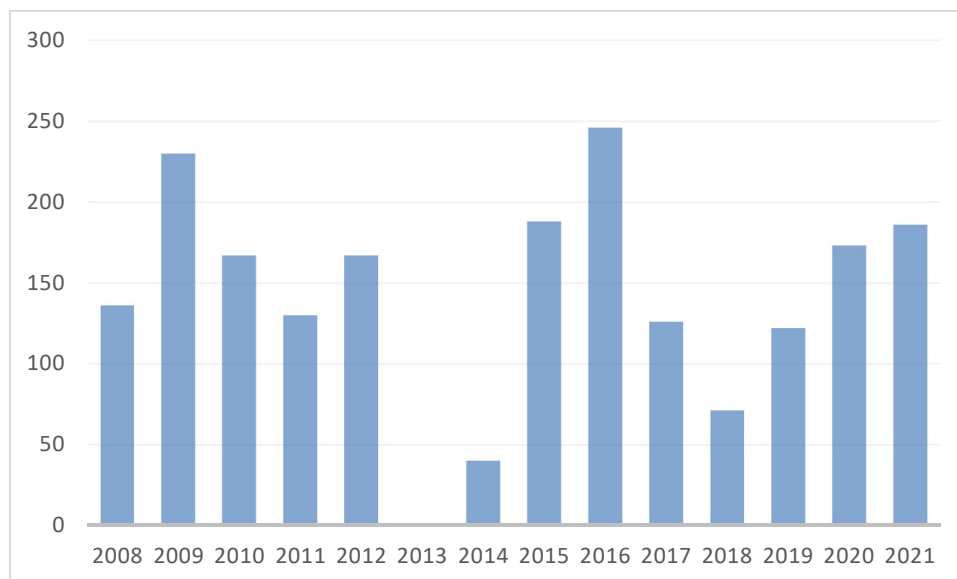


Economics of the University of Pécs. The Congress in numbers: 49 countries, 714 presentations, 39 general and 59 thematic sessions (Egyed et al., 2022).

### Financial position

The financially efficient running of the Association is an important achievement, it is successful in obtaining grants through its tenders, and it has received 1% personal income donations every year. The growing interest in the organization is also reflected in the size of the raised funds from these tax donations. Although average Hungarian incomes have increased, the personal income tax rate has decreased from 36-40% in 2002 to 15% (from 2016), resulting in no significant change in the volume of donations.

**Figure 9** The specific part of the personal income tax on the use of a part of the income taxpayer's transferred under Act CXXVI of 1996, 2008-2021 (thousand HUF)



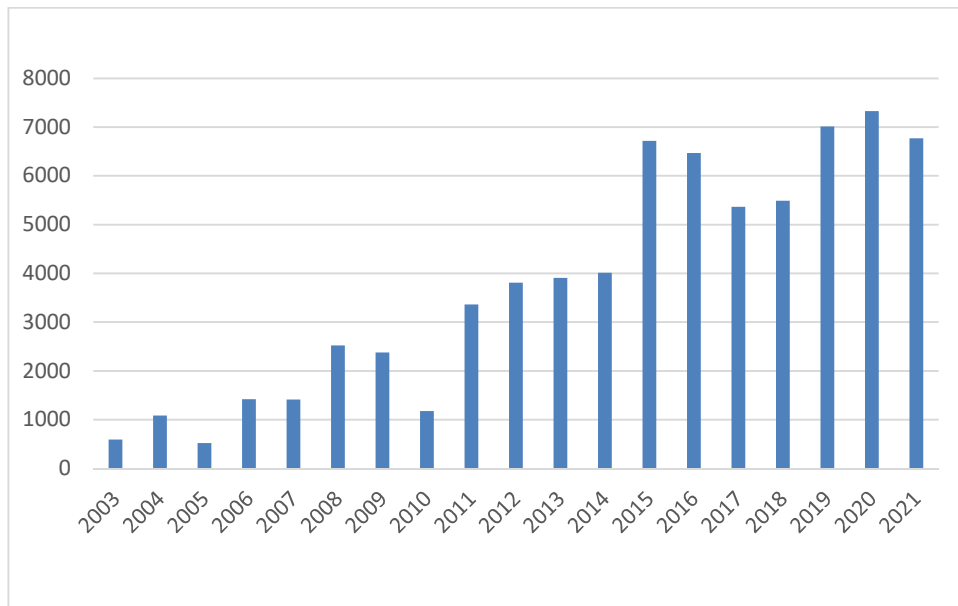
Source: Authors' elaboration based on HRSA data

In what follows a few key financial indicators for the HRSA Foundation are presented. The total assets and the total liabilities and shareholders' equity are characterised by equilibrium and linear growth (Fig. 10).

The shareholders' equity is also growing at a balanced pace, although it is also characterised by hecticness, with a decline in 2010 (Fig. 11). This is due to variations in the type of activity (special purpose or business activity) and is also affected by changes in the tax rate.

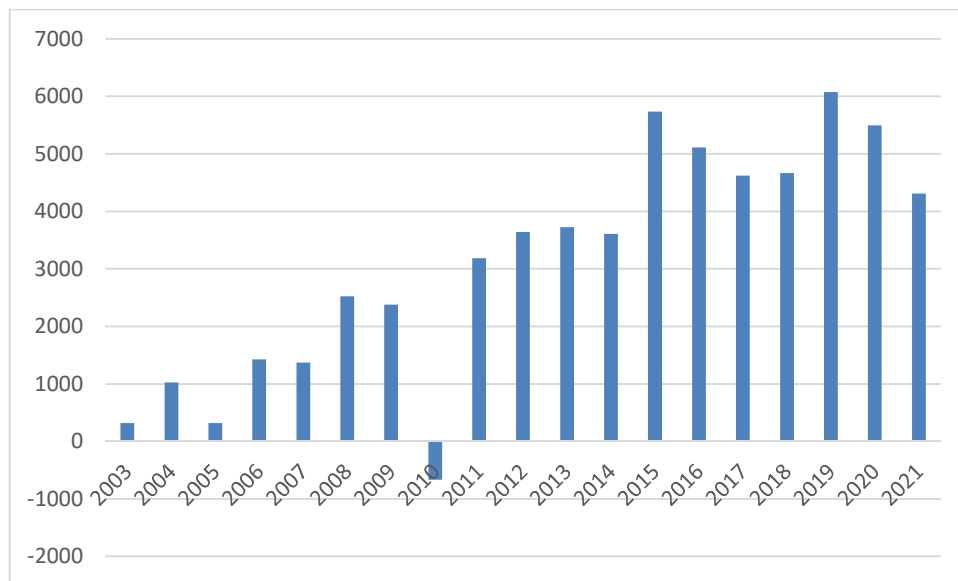


**Figure 10** Total assets, 2013-2021 (thousand HUF)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on HRSA data

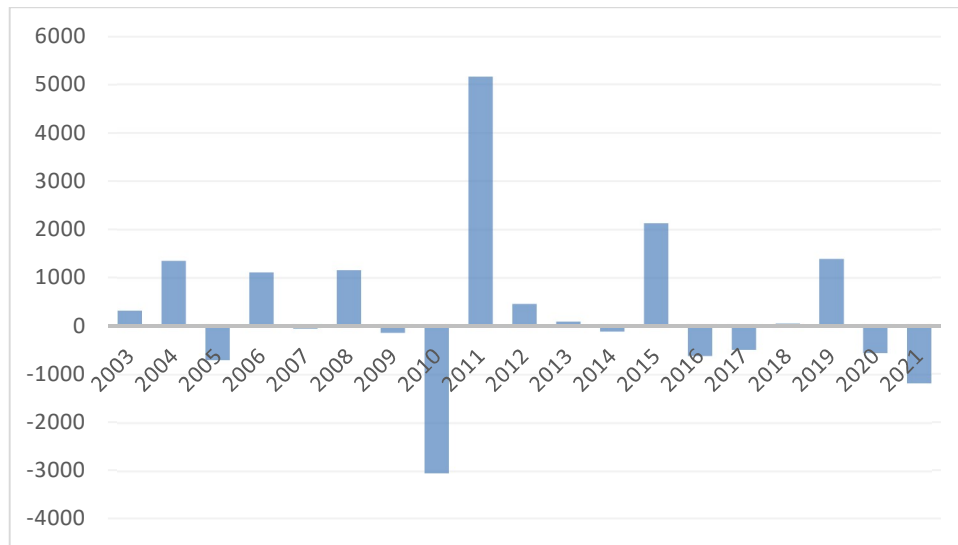
**Figure 11** Shareholders' equity, 2003-2021 (thousand HUF)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on HRSA data

The activities of the Association are primarily of a public benefit nature, with the aim of providing a platform for researchers in regional disciplines. For this reason, it does not seek financial gain. The “profit” recorded in the financial balance sheet is used to organise scientific events and forums. This is illustrated by the fact that it closes the year with a negative “profit” (Fig. 12).

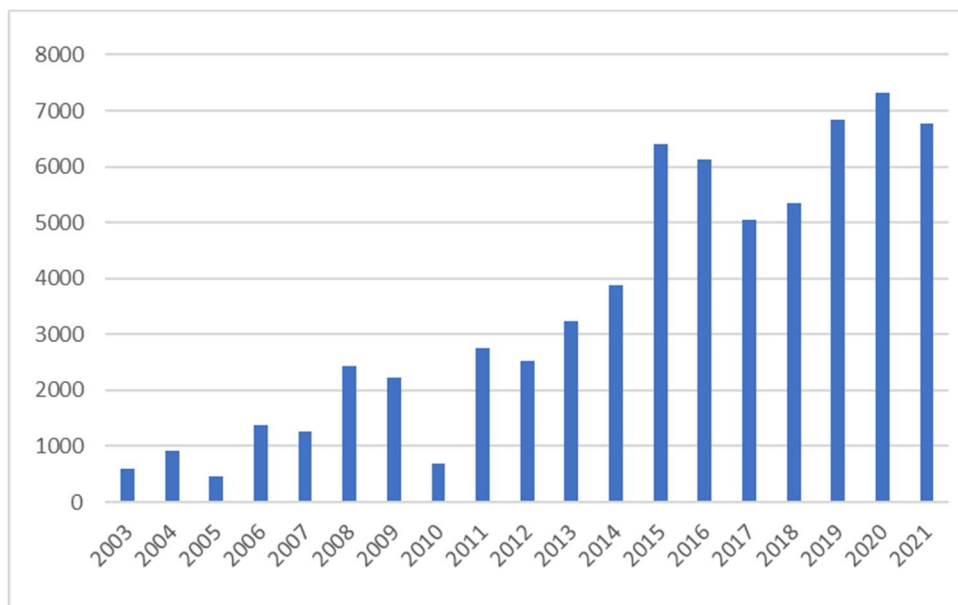
**Figure 12** Current year profit between 2003 and 2021 (thousand HUF)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on HRSA data

The liquid assets also demonstrate the financial stability of the Association. The Association's funds are constantly growing, except in several years, due to the large number of scientific events organised each year, which are covered by the funds. The biggest expense is the organisation of the annual meetings, which requires a large amount of resources.

**Figure 13** Liquid assets between 2003 and 2021 (thousand HUF)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on HRSA data

## Other activities

The Association maintains three prizes: the Pro Regional Science Award has so far been granted to six professionals whose outstanding activities contributed to the development of regional science and the realisation of the objectives of the Association.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the Presidency of HRSA acknowledges young researchers' outstanding scientific results and exemplary professional and community activities by the Excellent Young Regional Scientist Award<sup>33</sup>, which has been awarded to twelve members of the society under the age of 35.<sup>34</sup> The "Certificate of Honor" is granted to the Society's members in recognition of their outstanding scientific achievements and community activities. The award has so far been distributed three times to four members of the Society.<sup>35</sup>

Regular cooperation with national partner organisations is part of the Society's mission. In addition to formal agreements, this includes jointly organised conferences and a thematic special issue of the journal DETUROPE published each year since 2015, which reaches its 8<sup>th</sup> edition in 2022. Issue Nr 2 in 2015 of DETUROPE was of special significance from several aspects. This was the first time that an issue of the journal has a specific topic as its focus. Moreover, this is the first volume which publishes only English-language studies. The thematic issue was also a novelty from the aspect of HRSA since the selected studies presented at its annual meetings are published in an individual issue of a scientific journal. That was a milestone both for DETUROPE and HRSA. It also contributes greatly to the realisation of the common objectives, especially those of internationalisation and supporting regional research (Rácz, 2015). Renowned professors have also published in the thematic issues (Scott, 2021). Due to the large number of presentations in the annual meetings, HRSA offered conference participants more publication opportunities in Hungarian scientific journals (Rácz & Egyed, 2021).

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<sup>32</sup> Prof. Gyula Horváth (2012); Prof. Attila Buday-Sántha (2014); Prof. József Nemes-Nagy (2016); Prof. János Rechnitzer (2018); Prof. Imre Lengyel (2020); Prof. László Faragó (2022).

<sup>33</sup> Established in 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Ákos Jakobi (2009); Miklós Lukovics (2010); Cecília Mezei (2011); Balázs Lengyel (2012); Melinda Hajdu-Smahó (2013); Zoltán Bajmócy (2014); János Péntes (2015); Balázs István Tóth (2016); Zsófia Vas (2017); Katalin Lipták (2018); Zoltán Elekes (2019); Judit Berkes (2020); Balázs Páger (2021); Réka Horeczki (2022).

<sup>35</sup> Béla Baranyi (2016); Attila Korompai (2016); Zoltán Andor Végh (2017); György Kocziszky (2019).

## **CONCLUSION AND LOOKING AHEAD**

HRSA is the professional forum of Hungarian regional science, an independent non-governmental organisation, which brings together professionals involved in regional research, development and governance. In the 20 years since its foundation, HRSA has achieved most of its basic objectives which remained unchanged over this period: to function as a bridge between science, higher education and practice (free university, seminars, meetings, regional science evenings). The Association supports Hungarian regional research, disseminates and uses its results (book launches, book publishing support, complimentary copy of the journal *Space and Society*, continuous news service). It provides support for the establishment of Hungarian regional scientific communities beyond the borders and development of their activities (Cluj-Napoca, Vojvodina, Partium, Szeklerland, Komárno – in the form of regional science workshops, university training in regional policy and participation in regional science courses in Hungary, conferences, book series in regional research, independent regional science association). HRSA takes part in the dissemination of the European ideals of regionalism, decentralisation and modern territorial policy and in shaping the territorial policy of the European Union. It promotes regional science education in higher education, the training of the next generation of regional scientists (doctoral schools, masters courses). It provides recognition and support for young people (awards, support for participation in conferences abroad, summer university, Conference of Young Regionalists, scientific student research associations, colleges for advanced studies). HRSA is active in international embedding (annual international conferences, plenary speakers and sessions at international meetings, membership of international organisations), and it maintains cooperation with NGOs (ongoing cooperation with national, regional and local partner organisations in similar professional fields).

Our retrospective overview suggests that the HRSA has had a successful two decades since its foundation, it is already well into the mature stage of its development, as indicated by the stable and increasing number of its members and sustained interest in the events organized by the Association. In the face of many years of external uncertainties in the domestic regional science arena, HRSA has been able to provide a stability for the academic community.

### **Acknowledgement**

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