

2022 NOTABLE REGIONAL SCIENCE CONFERENCES IN HUNGARY REPORT ON THE 61ST ERSА CONGRESS & 20TH HRSA ANNUAL MEETING

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Cite this article: Egyed, I., Horeczki, R. Rác, S. (2022). 2022 notable regional science conferences in Hungary – Report on the 61st ERSА congress & 20th HRSA annual meeting. *Deturope*, 14(3), 162-170.

61ST ERSА CONGRESS

Two notable scientific events were organized by the Hungarian Regional Science Association in the year 2022 in Hungary. The report presents them in a chronological order. In 2022, Pécs, Hungary was home to the Annual Congress of the European Regional Science Association (ERSА). The ERSА Congress titled “Disparities in a Digitalising (Post-Covid) world – Networks, Entrepreneurship and Regional Development” hosted a large variety of themes in entrepreneurship, socio-economics, regional-urban economics, regional development, and regional policy related topics such as local governance and institutions. A chief ambition of the Congress was to achieve a stronger interdisciplinary dimension, featuring contributions and data from social sciences and entrepreneurship. With approximately 800 participants every year from all continents, ERSА Congresses have become the largest-scale academic conferences in regional science worldwide.

With its prominent history going back to 1982, ERSА is one of the most prestigious scientific societies in regional science and the largest supranational section of the Regional Science Association International (RSAI) at the same time. For the first time in its history, the annual congress of ERSА was held virtually and in-person simultaneously. (Due to the COVID pandemic in the previous year, the congress was held online.) The online part of the 61st ERSА Congress took place on 22-23 August 2022, and the on-site part on 23-26 August 2022 (Páger, 2022).

Hungary had already welcomed three ERSA Congresses, each hosted in Budapest (1968, 1975 and 1985)³⁶. Pécs is the first non-metropolitan venue to have attracted the prestigious scientific event to Hungary after a long period of time. Home to the Annual Conference of the Regional Studies Association in 2010, an event attracting 600 participants, Pécs had sufficient experiences to build on (Kovács, 2010). The city had also acquired valuable experiences in organizing large-scale international scientific events as co-organizer of the 7th Central European Conference in Regional Science held in Sopron in 2019 (Páger & Rácz, 2020).

Pécs had won the bid for hosting the Congress already back in 2018 thanks to the successful cooperation of three organisations, the Hungarian Regional Science Association (HRSA), the Faculty of Business and Economics of the University of Pécs (FBE UP) and the Centre for Economic and Regional Studies (CERS). Attila Varga and Zoltán Gál played a key role in preparing the proposal and presenting it to the ERSA committees. The Local Organising Committee (LOC) federated representatives of the three co-organising institutions, HRSA, FBE UP and CERS. The LOC was co-chaired by Prof. Zoltán Gál (President, HRSA; full-professor, FBE UP) and Prof. László Szerb (full-professor, FBE UP). Members of LOC included Balázs Lengyel (Senior Research Fellow) and Balázs Páger (Secretary of the LOC; Research Fellow) from CERS, Tibor Fehér (Head of IT Group), Gábor Klesch (Management Rapporteur), Ákos Nagy (Assistant Professor), Gábor Rácz (Head of Faculty) and Judit Szentendrei (Director of Marketing Office) from FBE UP, and Szilárd Rácz (Secretary) from HRSA. The LOC was, in cooperation with the ERSA, responsible for organising the on-site conference programmes, preparing the publications and their financing. The online conference was organised by ERSA with the assistance of the LOC.

The hybrid (online and on-site) organisation of the conference was an innovation by ERSA. The idea was to enable online participants to follow live streaming of the highlights of the on-site conference (opening and closing events, plenary sessions, round tables) and to attend parallel sessions held virtually. Registration for the on-site conference allowed participants to take part in both the online and on-site programmes. The live coverage of flagship events was a challenging task for the LOC, and the Univ TV crew of the University of Pécs contributed to its successful realisation.

The plenary speakers of the conference were among the most eminent experts in regional science. The plenary speaker at the online conference was Maria Abreu (University of Cambridge), whose lecture emphasized the importance of a capabilities-based approach to

³⁶ <https://ersa.org/about-us/what-is-ersa/ersa-history/>

regional development. *Michael Storper* (London School of Economics) opened the first day of the on-site conference with his excellent presentation on regional inequalities and their implications. *Simona Iammarino* (London School of Economics) presented regional inequalities from the angle of technological development and firms in her lecture summarizing various researches. The second day of the Congress featured a presentation by Olav Sorenson (UCLA Anderson School of Management), addressing the causes and relevance of the spatial distribution of entrepreneurship and firms. Michaela Trippl (University of Vienna) presented the concept of challenge-based regional innovation systems from the perspective of smart specialisation and place-based socio-economic-ecological challenges. At the closing event of the conference, this year's ERSA Prize laureate Diego Puga (CEMFI, Madrid) gave a presentation on the benefits and costs of metropolises (Unfortunately, the presentation of Frank van Oort was cancelled due to illness).

Overall, three Roundtables were organised in the framework of the on-site and online conferences. The focus of the debate at the online discussion organised by DG Regio was the 8th Cohesion Report published in 2022. The panellists were Julia Bachtrögler-Unger (Austrian Institute of Economic Research), Roberta Capello (Politecnico di Milano), Marcin Dąbrowski (Delft University of Technology), Laura de Dominicis (EC), Philip McCann (Alliance Manchester Business School), and the moderator was Alessandro Rainoldi (JRC). For the on-site conference, the panel discussion entitled “Inequalities in a Connected World” was organised and moderated by Balázs Lengyel (CERS), the panellists included Katarzyna Kopczewska (University of Warsaw), Andrés Rodríguez-Posé (London School of Economics), Annie Tubadji (University of Swansea), and Jouke van Dijk (University of Groningen). The discussants of the Roundtable on the link between entrepreneurial ecosystems and regional development (organised and co-chaired by László Szerb, FBE UP) were Marcus Dejardin (University of Namur), Éva Komlósi (FBE UP), Rolf Sternberg (Leibniz University Hannover) and Aleksandra Tsvetkova (OECD). The recordings of the Roundtables and plenary sessions are available on the ERSA Youtube channel.³⁷

The conference featured a total of 39 general regional science themes³⁸ and 59 thematic sessions³⁹ with parallel presentations. Delegates could follow around 400 on-site and 314 online presentations. ERSA devotes special attention to young researchers, and this year's congress hosted both online and on-site Young Scientists' Sessions. ERSA also announced the EPAINOS

³⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/@ersa-europeanregionalscienc9780/videos>

³⁸ <https://ersa.eventsair.com/ersa2022/general-themes>

³⁹ <https://ersa.eventsair.com/ersa2022/special-session-themes>

Prize for young researchers (under 33 years old), awarded by the jury to Maria Kubara (University of Warsaw) and Niels Kuiper (University of Groningen).

The congress was of particular importance for the quarterly scientific journal “Space and Society” of the Pécs-based CERS Institute for Regional Studies, founded in 1987. Volume 3 of 2022 was published for the conference as the first English-language issue of the journal (Nagy, Lux & Timár, 2022). Each participant received a copy of the journal in their conference package. The conference featured a dedicated programme presenting the journals of RSAI and ERSA, as well as the German, French, Italian, Spanish and Hungarian sections of ERSA. The aim of the programme was to popularize these journals among the attendees, introducing their thematic focus and the publication opportunities.

The overall positive feedback from ERSA management, keynote speakers and delegates testified of the successful organization of the congress. This is particularly gratifying, especially given that the new format of the conference has entailed new responsibilities not only for the LOC but also for our colleagues at ERSA headquarters. The high-level cooperation between the LOC and ERSA (in particular the two staff members of the ERSA office, Maristella Angotzi and Nurul Bariroh) was an essential pre-requisite to successful organisation. Hereby we express our gratitude to the members of the LOC for their professionalism in developing the technical programme and preparing and organising the on-site conference. Overall, we believe that the conference has strengthened the position of Hungarian regional science within the international regional scientific community.

20TH HRSA ANNUAL MEETING

The 20th Annual Meeting and General Assembly of the HRSA took place in Budapest, attended by 240 participants. The event was hosted by the National University of Public Service. The conference included 3 plenary sessions, a Roundtable and 24 thematic sessions (3 in English language), the interested audience could listen to a total of 200 presentations. The thematic focus of the conference was the space – state relationship.

The illustrious venue for the plenary lectures was the Ludovika Main Building St. Ladislaus Chapel, where the opening lectures of Thursday morning were held by Györgyi Nyikos, Professor of the University of Public Service and Gábor Mayer, state secretary for regional development (Prime Minister's Office of Hungary). The three speakers of the first plenary session lay the groundwork for the subsequent sessions of the conference. The presentation of *Zoltán Gál* (professor, president of HRSA) explored the challenges of Hungarian development

and regional policy, with an emphasis on the major crises of the last five years and their resolution. The first part of the lecture discussed the elements and pre-requisites for growth and successful catching-up. The second part outlined the Central and Eastern European (FDI-driven) model of the geo-economic framework conditions for catching up, its exhaustion and limitations, followed by a discussion of the main challenges of Hungarian regional policy and the importance of innovation and (higher) education, and the challenges of the knowledge economy. The second presentation in English language was held by *James W. Scott*, elected honorary member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) this year, highlighting the main lessons of innovative territorial cooperation based on the results of the H2020 RELOCAL project under his leadership. The professor of the University of Eastern Finland discussed the importance of place and place-based development in the context of territorial cooperation, regarded as a key element of European social and territorial cohesion. The thought-provoking presentation of Professor *Zoltán Hajdú*, scientific advisor of CERS Institute for Regional Studies, highlighted the question marks of state-building processes in the 21st century, with a focus on Europe and its peripheral regions. The lecture introduced the spaces of great power and the changes of state borders over the last century. The 19th and 20th centuries were an intense period of state formation and dissolution. The first two decades of the 21st century did not bring about a 'freezing' of state territory and borders, but the emergence of new challenges, not only in the post-Soviet space; independence referendums in Western Europe also led to new state formations under democratic conditions. The presentation was followed by nine parallel sessions in the early afternoon.

For years, HRSA has offered an opportunity for its members to organise sessions in the first circular of the organisation, and *in 2022 the following sessions were organised:*

- Changing Systems of Innovation: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches
- Space and state – Regional, economic and social contexts
- FDI and Economic Dependencies in Central and Eastern Europe
- A changing system of tools in the implementation of EU goals
- Old and new challenges in renewing domestic territorial development
- State – space – history: territorial processes before and after 1920
- State – border – politics
- Western Balkans
- Modern villages – model villages

- Small town squares, small towns in space
- Metropolitan spaces: administrative boundaries, social boundaries
- The coronavirus outbreak and local governments
- Epidemic and crisis in the light of territorial and social effects
- The crisis of welfare states and the regional social problems of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Catching up and competitiveness – the socio-economic impact of state structural organization and communities managing local resources
- Sustainable labor market
- Higher education and research for social justice and environmental sustainability
- Local effects of monastic orders then and now
- Current trends in tourism
- Climate and environment
- Space and technological development
- Creative and cultural economy
- The role of waters in territorial development
- Local dilemmas of industrial development.

The afternoon plenary session focused on the legal narratives of power and space. *Ilona Pálné Kovács*, full member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, outlined the Hungarian situation in her presentation entitled “Power without territory, territory without power”. According to the research professor of CERS Institute for Regional Studies, we are witnessing a „lose-lose” situation, with weak Hungarian local governments and strong state bodies without autonomy (territory without power). The change in the political system has shifted the balance of power between the levels, which was further reinforced by public law reforms. However, the shrinking of local power has not been accompanied by a decline in trust (power without territory). *István Hoffman* presented his theory on fragmented space; reflecting on the changes in the status of local governments and in its legal regulation. The lecture reviewed the changing institutions of regional development policy in Hungary and Europe over the last decade and a half, highlighting the trends towards centralisation and concentration. As noted by the Professor of the Department of Administrative Law, Eötvös Loránd University, crisis periods tend to reinforce centralising tendencies. Moreover, the new economic challenges, in particular the development of infocommunication technologies, have also intensified the centralisation of local government systems. *Tamás Kaiser*, associate professor, Head of Department of

Governance and Public Policy, University of Public Service, in his presentation entitled „the physiognomy of the remodelling of space” discussed the elements of 'rescaling' (paradigms, narratives, experiments) in the context of the development of city regions in England over the last decade, with a special focus on the post-Brexit period. The effects of 'rescaling' can be addressed both from the perspective of continuity (centralised exercise of power, fragmented local government with limited financial room for manoeuvre but a flexible approach allowing tailored solutions) and modernisation (transformations embedded in narratives related to political projects, new spatial categories, coalitions of support, etc.).

The event was concluded in the afternoon with a Roundtable discussion titled “The 20-year-old HRSA”, where Zoltán Gál, President of the HRSA, and Szilárd Rácz, Secretary of the HRSA, conducted a debate with Professors Imre Lengyel and József Nemes-Nagy, both winners of the *Pro Regional Science Award*. The Roundtable reviewed the major milestones of the institutional development of Hungarian regional science, revealing “insider information” to those present about the two-decade-long activities of the Association.

The ceremonial granting of awards took place in the evening. For the sixth time, the Hungarian Regional Science Association distributed its highest award, the *Pro Regional Science Award* based on a decision of the General Assembly following the recommendation of the Board. The members of the Society awarded the prize to Professor László Faragó (former director, research professor emeritus of Institute for Regional Studies, former Vice President of HAS Regional Scientific Committee) to honor his outstanding research, teaching and expert activities in the field of regional science & policy. For the fourteenth time, the HRSA's Presidential Board, enlarged by the heads of regional sessions, awarded the *Outstanding Young Regional Scientist Award* to Réka Horeczki, research fellow, Institute for Regional Studies for her valuable results in regional science.

The *Regional Science Publication of the Year Awards* founded by the HAS Committee on Regional Studies were distributed for the second time this year. The publication honors outstanding publications of the previous two years. In the domestic category, the 2020 prize was awarded to Bálint Koós for his publication entitled “Urban shrinkage and residential segregation in Hungary” (Koós, 2020). The 2021 prize was awarded to Zsuzsanna Zsibók and Balázs Páger for their publication entitled “Long-run economic growth paths in the Hungarian counties” (Zsibók & Páger, 2021). In the international category, the prize was awarded to Gergő Tóth, Sándor Juhász, Zoltán Elekes and Balázs Lengyel (2021) for their study entitled “Repeated collaboration of inventors across European regions”.

The morning of the second day continued with nine further sessions. On Friday, *Gergely Deli*, Rector of the University of Public Service, welcomed the participants of the annual meeting. *József Benedek*, Professor of Babeş-Bolyai University and external member of the HAS, opened the afternoon plenary session. His presentation titled “Democratic territorial development in Transylvania: state-building or identity politics?” provided a detailed assessment of the processes in Romania. The state of spatial development in Transylvania is defined by the post-transition paradigm shift, indicating a move away from the communist (systematizing) concept of spatial planning through the processes of democratization towards an integrated and participatory approach to spatial development. It is within this general field that the main stakeholders of spatial development in Transylvania, i.e. local and county governments, businesses and universities, can be situated. During the closing plenary session, researchers awarded the 2018 and 2021 Distinguished Young Regionalist Awards presented their most recent academic achievements. The presentation of *Katalin Lipták*, Associate Professor of the University of Miskolc, discussed the role of the solidarity economy in labour market integration. The global problem of unemployment and the labour market effects of the COVID-epidemic are increasingly being addressed at regional and local level, with solidarity economy initiatives and social enterprises presenting possible alternatives. The solidarity economy emphasizes social responsibility and the community interest, valorising non-material assets. Hence its treatment as an alternative to capitalist development, a possible new development model. In his co-authored presentation, *Balázs Páger*, postdoctoral researcher at the University of Vienna and research fellow of CERS, examined the role of entrepreneurial ecosystems in the context of regional development, highlighting the relationship between various configurations of the pillars of the entrepreneurial ecosystem and regional development. Drawing on the Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) methodology, he emphasized the role of specific pillars of the entrepreneurial ecosystem that enable regions to achieve a particular development level. He also pointed out how a given level of regional development can be attained through various configurations of the pillars of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

In the late afternoon, participants could join the activities of eight parallel sessions. The Association will organise its 2023 Annual Meeting in Pécs, connected to various jubilee events.

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