

EDITORIAL: Cities, Regions and Borders in Central and Eastern Europe

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the new thematic issue of the international, peer-reviewed journal DETUROPE. This year's compilation is a memorial issue dedicated to the memory of Professor János Rechnitzer, the great scientist of regional studies, Honorary Chairman of the Hungarian Regional Science Association, Professor Emeritus of the University of Győr, Research Professor Emeritus of the CERS Institute for Regional Studies, Member of the Editorial Board of DETUROPE, who passed away on 22 June 2023, at the age of 71.

The title of the thematic issue (Cities, Regions and Borders in Central and Eastern Europe) does not cover the professor's wide-ranging research topics, but it does cover some of the most important ones. There was relatively short time to pay tribute to his work this year. We therefore decided to select some key themes and invited some younger colleagues to submit a paper in the identified topics during the summer. After the usual double-blind (and triple-blind in the case of the editors) proofreading process, only seven original manuscripts have made it to publication. We would like to thank all the authors who submitted high-quality manuscripts and the reviewers, who completed their tasks on time. The organisations – Hungarian Regional Science Association; Institute for Regional Studies; Széchenyi István University – represented by the editors hereby express their gratitude to the Editorial Board of the journal DETUROPE and especially its Editor-in-chief, Dr. Kamil Pícha.

The first paper in the current issue gives a broad overview of the macroregion – the main field of Professor Rechnitzer's research –, prepared by the editors, *Szilárd Rác and Ildikó Egyed*. This kind of introduction provides a comprehensive review of the post-socialist economic and structural transformation processes of the Central and South-Eastern European region. The richly illustrated study provides insights into many aspects (Euro-Atlantic integration, transition, FDI, geoeconomic dependencies, core-periphery relations, economic bordering, urban development, depopulation, growing role of capital cities) of this unique region, its external and internal relations.

The next two papers address the issue of large cities. This has been one of Rechnitzer professor's favourite subjects over the past decade, as evidenced by a series of books published in Hungarian. The paper of *Réka Horeczki, Szilárd Rác, Stefan Bilasco and Ferenc Szilágyi* explores the evolution of urbanisation and metropolitan development in Romania. The study summarises the main features of the urban structure of Romania, with a special focus on metropolitan development, and as a case study presents a specific example of a

regional centre, the gateway cities, as a changing development path. The authors present a positive, optimistic vision for the future of gateway cities. The capital-centricity highlighted in the study is also constrained by the natural geography of Bucharest. It thus offers an opportunity to exploit the locational advantages of western peripheral cities (Arad, Timisoara, Oradea) as well as the autonomous development of remote and partially isolated cities such as Cluj-Napoca. Proximity to borders used to be a weakness, but now it has become an advantage. The study of *Szilárd Rác* places the development of five major cities in Serbia (Belgrade, Novi Sad, Nis, Kragujevac and Subotica) in a spatial and temporal context. Serbia's statehood, state organisation, administrative and spatial features, as well as its geopolitical position and orientation have undergone fundamental changes over the last three decades. The latter have important implications for urban development, which are extensively analysed in the present paper by presenting the major trends of the selected cities. Despite the identification of general trends the cities have pursued highly divergent development trajectories.

The second group of papers examines the local (small towns) and regional (NUTS3) level of Hungary. The paper of *Réka Horeczki, Ernő Molnár and Gábor Pirisi* outlines the main characteristics of population change in small towns in Hungary. The authors examine spatial and functional differences in the population dynamics of small towns. The study presents the spatial distribution of the settlements identified by prosperous suburbs and shrinking cities by illustrating the changes in the population dynamics of the Hungarian small towns population over the last almost twenty years, in the light of the latest census data. The analysis' "big picture" reflects the precarious positions of rural centers facing shrinkage and the tendencies of relative deconcentration boosting the development of small towns in the agglomerations. This dual pattern of population dynamics generates challenges for both groups. *Judit Berkes and Tamás Dusek* – Rechnitzer professor's colleagues at the university and the doctoral school in Győr – analyse the changes in the socio-economic performance of Hungarian regions in the previous decade. Among the deep-rooted regional divisions and inequalities, the two most striking elements that remained unchanged over the past 25 years are the significant gap between the capital and the countryside and the favourable position of the North-West. Overall, there were only minor shifts in the performance of the counties in positive and negative directions, and the regional differences that emerged during the previous decades are very stable. The results clearly show that territorial economic and social disparities are very slowly changing structures, shaped to a large extent by long term economic and social history and cultural habits.

A specific theme – border studies – is the final focus of the thematic issue. Rechnitzer professor's outstanding research in the 1990s included the study of Hungarian-Austrian-Slovak cross-border regional relations and the modelling of the spatial diffusion of knowledge and innovations. The educational indicators are an important basis for spatial researches focusing on regional development. Border regions provide special conditions, this is explored in a long-term analysis of *János Péntzes, István Papp, Norbert Apáti and János Péter Kiss*. Border areas are generally characterized by worse educational attainment values compared to the Hungarian national average, but during the last more than six decades, significant convergence of data could be observed, in which the dominance of large towns is decisive. For this reason, suburbanization significantly impacts the spatial pattern of educational attainment in the border zones. Most parts of the settlements are below the national average, however general conditions are better in the case of the Austrian border section. Nevertheless, the previously assumed continuous development of this border section has not been confirmed by the analysis. The paper by *Tamás Hardi, Márta Nárai and Andrea Uszkai* is written by Rechnitzer professor's colleagues from the West Hungarian Research Institute founded by him in 1986. Cross-border suburbanization has developed in the Slovakian-Hungarian border, with Bratislava residents moving to nearby villages in Hungary. The open border is a prerequisite for their daily life, and they took a risk when they bought a property in another country. The study based on questionnaire survey and interviews examines how the closing of borders during the COVID-19 epidemic affected the lifestyle of Slovak citizens who settled in Hungary and commuted to Bratislava and the new situation of the cross-border area. There are signs that the lockdown has dissolved the previously entirely Bratislava-centric way of life.

As a sort of framing for the writings, the thematic issue concludes with a book review by *Ildikó Egyed* on the last opus of Professor Rechnitzer (*Cities in Central and Eastern Europe*, written in Hungarian, published by Publikon, co-editor: Ádám Páthy). We hope that you will find inspiring articles in this collection of studies.

We wish you a good reading,

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