

Regional Processes of Central and Eastern Europe, 1990–2015 – Report on the 13th Annual Meeting of Hungarian Regional Science Association

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The 13th Annual Meeting of Hungarian Regional Science Association which took place on 19-20th November, 2015, was hosted by Eszterházy Károly College in Eger. The objective of the two-day meeting was to discuss the spatial processes characterising the era between the change of regime and the present with a focus on Central and Eastern European countries. A total number of 190 participants, 100 Hungarian-language and 12 English-language presentations contributed to the realisation of this mission. The Conference – as usual – began with the General Assembly of HRSA, where the major points of the agenda included the modification of Statutes and the re-election of officials. The modification and significant extension of the founding document was effected pursuant to the modified legislation. The content of objectives and functions remained unchanged. Following the termination of the four-year mandate of office holders elected in 2011, the general assembly organised a vote on the identity of the future officers. 55 members out of 284 participated in the vote. János Rechnitzer was re-elected President of the Association, Szilárd RácZ was appointed his Secretary. The new Vice-Presidents include Imre Lengyel, Imre Nagy and Pál Szabó. Members of the Presidency: Attila Fábián, Éva G. Fekete, Zoltán Gál, Viktória Józsa, József Káposzta, Attila Varga and Katalin Mezei (substitute member). The President of the Audit Committee is Tamás Tóth, its members are Sándor Zsolt Kovács and Dániel Kuttor, its Substitute Member is Hajnalka Csáfor. Based on the decision of the General Assembly, nine new and seven re-elected officers are going to participate in the leadership of the Association during the period between 2015 and 2019. The morning programme was concluded by annual (presidential, financial) accounts and reports of regional divisions.

The participants of the Annual Meeting were greeted by Kálmán Liptai, Rector of Eszterházy Károly College, which was followed by the opening speech of János Rechnitzer. The President of HRSA evoked the memory of the late Professor Gyula Horváth, founding President of the Association, who passed away on 23 September, 2015. In line with the

practice implemented since 2012, an English-language plenary session followed. At the beginning of their speech, the three foreign invited lecturers shared some of their memories of Gyula Horváth based on their multi-decennial professional and personal acquaintance.

The first lecturer was *Daniela L. Constantin*, President of the Romanian Regional Science Association, professor at the University of Economics of Bucharest, who, in an exciting presentation entitled, *Keys to Harmonizing EU Places Through Territorial Cohesion: A Spotlight on Services of General Interest* examined the linkages between territorial cohesion, territorial capital and the Services of General Interest (SGI). During the first part of the presentation, the professor reviewed the applied terminology and theoretical bases of territorial cohesion and territorial capital and presented their impacts in the domain of SGI. These include economic (e.g. supply of electricity, gas, postal services, telecommunications), and social (education, health, rented apartments, etc.) services, yet what they share in common is that public authorities must guarantee their supply according to minimum criteria of quality, accessibility, and affordability in each settlement (spatial dimension) and for each citizen (social dimension). The presented SWOT-analysis illustrated the impacts of territorial capital and cohesion on SGI, which produces a sustainable, inclusive growth based on a continuous harmonisation of national and regional objectives.

Tomasz Komornicki, professor of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Scientific Deputy Head of the Institute of Geography and Spatial Organisation of the Polish Academy of Sciences presented a lecture titled „Transport accessibility and the effects of new investments”. Accessibility and availability are the basic requirements of a social development and economic growth. As noted by the lecturer, several methodologies exist in literature for the evaluation of accessibility (measuring infrastructure, distance, potential), amongst which the econometric model of potential based measurement was presented in detail. Summarising Eastern and Central European results, the period post-regime change, especially the emergence of EU funds launched massive changes in the respective countries, railway and road travel times decreased, the interconnection between old and new EU member states and partially between new member states improved. Nonetheless, the interconnections along external EU borders focused mainly on a limited number of crossing points, and the vast majority of railway investments targeted modernisation works, no new railway lines were constructed, the railway network of the Baltic states, Romania and Bulgaria remain isolated as compared with the rest of the EU member countries. The presentation of the professor was concluded by a detailed analysis of Poland. During the 1990s, the Polish transport policy operated with low efficiency, this period can be termed the

anticipatory phase of EU accession. Post-accession, the 2007–2013 Programming Period was characterised by an idealistic practice of planning. The new strategy of 2013, however, contained a reference to the objectives of Territorial and Cohesion Policy, thus road and motorway developments exerted a positive impact on accessibility, the length of travel times.

James W. Scott, professor of the University of Eastern Finland, in his presentation titled „The Geopolitics of European Union 25 years on: Transformations and Continuity” posed the following question: what kind of a political community or geopolitical player does the EU represent? Political and scientific treatises provide heterogeneous answers to this question. According to the positive arguments, the EU constitutes a demilitarised, multilateral center of power in the world, while negative evaluations highlight the west-east division the exploitation and power asymmetries it embodies. Based on ideas representing the middle ground, the administrative organisation of the Union is merely a reproduction of the organisation of the state at a supranational level. Its role as a geopolitical player is also problematic, since realistic, idealistic, liberal elements are all visible in the various roles and manifestations of the European Union and the member states. A significant enlargement of the Community occurred in the examined 25 years, which naturally entailed the transformation of the spatial centers of gravity and policies, while the basic values remained unchanged. In the second part of the presentation, the lecturer discussed major recent and current events, such as the EU-hostile decisions of Hungary; the Ukrainian conflict; EU–Russia relations; the external borders and border policy of the EU.

The presentation entitled „From the double Iron Curtain to the construction of new fences and walls” of *Zoltán Hajdú*, Scientific Advisor of the Institute of Regional Studies of CERS HAS opening the Hungarian language Plenary Session was thematically related to the third English-language presentation. The lecturer began with a presentation of the successive waves of the geographical restructuring of European states in the 20th century, particularly those following the Cold War. These processes were related to the dissolution of the Eastern bloc, Socialist Federations – the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia – were dissolved, however, the birth of the new states followed various tracks. While Czechoslovakia fell apart at the border of two constituent state, in the case of Yugoslavia, the pluriethnic Federation was divided into small pluriethnic states comprised of military fronts, minefields, bloody conflicts and the presence of internationally imposed borders. The revolt of ethnic (minority) regions is still a characteristic of the respective successor states. These processes involved the destruction of various sections and parts of previous borders and border protection objects (walls, fences) and the creation of new ones. In the case of Hungary, the double Iron Curtain

was abolished post-systemic change. The country became a member of NATO, and later on, the EU, and finally, a southern, eastern border country of the Schengen Area, due to which the majority of the state border function as external EU borders (Croatian, Serbian, Romanian, Ukrainian border sections). The lecturer mentioned the global phenomena of the erection of walls and fences of the recent years, in the framework of which 8000 kilometres of border barriers were constructed globally. In Europe, the emergence of new border barriers can be observed in the Baltic states, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Hungary, Austria and Slovenia.

In her presentation, *Éva G. Fekete*, professor of the Faculty of Economics of the University of Miskolc reviewed the frameworks of local developments from the Socialist era to the present. The resources of local development were quite scarce during the period of State Socialism, strong local communities were viewed with hostility. The system became somewhat more benign with the emergence of the contributions to settlement development, the Agglomeration Fund (TEHO). Post-regime change, local governments were reinforced, economies collapsed, the local entrepreneurial base was lacking, which contributed to the emergence of the idea of spatial, micro-regional cooperation. These cooperation became institutionalised later on (1996–2001) due to the changing orientations of spatial development policy. Local governmental development associations, rural development partnerships were established in order to access EU funding. Since 2001, massive state control, an increasingly bureaucratic approach and the merging of associations have been observable in parallel with the exclusion of civil organisations. The positive feature of the period is that EU accession entailed the widening access to financial resources. Post-2011, centralisation became a dominant feature associations were dissolved, while the role of social cooperatives and public employment increased. In overall, it is resources and politics which exert a decisive influence on local development, its sole institutional frames consist of LEADER LAGs, and the currently emerging social cooperatives. Assuming the continuing tendency of development (endogenous, globalised) and centralised governance, several scenarios of the future can be drafted.

Géza Tóth, the leading Advisor of the Central Statistical Office, in his lecture entitled „The current spatial structural processes of East Central Europe”, presented the spatial structural models contained in literature and development plans (Blue Banana, Sunbelt-zone, Central European Boomerang, Pentagon, etc.), after which he discussed spatial structural models applicable to the East Central European space and their relevance. Concerning the volume of GDP in the examined area, it is quite uniform in a European comparison, each region gravitates towards the western core areas, and no center of outstanding economic power exists

in a local comparison either. Based on the analysis of the model of gravity and the Getis-Ord local G statistics it can be declared that no coherent axes can be detected in the area, hindering the verification of the existence of the structural models of the Central European Boomerang, the Cucumber, and the New Banana. The economic centers of the area are the capital cities, Prague and Bratislava are outstanding in various respects.

György Csomós, Professor of the Engineering Faculty of the University of Debrecen, in his presentation titled „The space dominated by world cities, the position of Central European centers of gravity in the global system of economic governance”, provided a historical framework for understanding the conceptual terminology of global cities. In the 1960s, according to the conceptual definition of Peter Hall, only seven global city regions existed, while with the ongoing globalisation of the economy, new global and regional poles emerged, assuming an increasing role in shaping the global economy. The major cities of the examined region were only able to regain their former dominant economic position after the change of regime. The role of East Central European cities further increased with the emergence of international company groups and service centers. During the previous decades, the gateway function of Vienna decreased, the evident winners in the region are Warsaw and to a lesser extent, Prague. The positions of Budapest have gradually decreased in comparison with the initial period; however, several second and third-tier Hungarian cities have become integrated into the international economic system (Győr, Debrecen, Kecskemét, Komárom, Miskolc).

The Hungarian-language Plenary Session was concluded by the paper of *Viktória Józsa*, the manager of Nord Consult Ltd., which provided an analysis of various eras of Hungarian regionalism along criteria such as spatial configuration, legal regulations, policies, the relation between the professional and scientific side. In overall, the construction of the necessary institutions entailed the transfer of competences and shifting focus from the county to the regional level. In the past few years, however, the reverse processes have been observed, with the deconstruction of regional agencies and the reinforcement of the role of counties. The author, as an illustration, presented her comparison of the main topics of various volumes of the journal *Falu Város Régió* and the thematic of HRSA Annual Meetings, and pointed out the existence of various interrelations.

The session was followed by the granting of the *Outstanding Young Regionalist Award*. In 2015, the Association announced on the seventh occasion its call to researchers under the age of 35, and the Award was granted this time by the Presidency of HRSA (extended by the heads of divisions) to János Péntes, assistant lecturer of the Department of Social Geography and Spatial Development of the University of Debrecen, in recognition of his outstanding

results obtained in the area of domestic socio-spatial processes and the investigation of East Hungarian peripheral areas and social groups. Afterwards, a *cooperation agreement* between the fifty-year-old Hungarian Society for Urban Planning and the Hungarian Regional Science Association was signed. The objective of two organisations is to continue their efficient cooperation launched a couple of years ago in a more highly organised, institutionalised manner and with the addition of new elements.

In 2015, the morning of the second day of the Annual meeting, contrary to previous years, began with a plenary presentation, which was delivered by *Jouke van Dijk*, President of the European Regional Science Association (ERSA) entitled, 'Inequalities in Human Capital and Regional Growth in Central and Eastern Europe'. The Professor of the University of Groningen examined various regional development indicators in the case of Europe (GDP, unemployment, competitiveness, etc.), which testify of a significant Western-Eastern European divide. In relation to human capital, a regression analysis performed on micro - regional data demonstrated that individuals with a higher qualification (with a degree) were characterised by a greater mobility in Eastern Europe, which verifies the theories of knowledge or brain drain, however, most students did not leave their region after graduation. The second part of the presentation contained an analysis of external effects related to human capital. As pointed out in the analysis, an extra year of university education might increase wages by 3 to 8 percent, and while production spillovers have no demonstrable impact at the regional scale, they are influential at the level of corporations.

After the plenary presentation, the Annual Meeting continued in twelve thematic (one English-language) sections. A total number of almost a hundred presentations were delivered in the various sections.