

EDITORIAL: Central Europe and the Balkans – urban, regional and border issues

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the thematic issue of the international journal DETUROPE. Our publication provides a selection of papers in connection with the 21st Annual Meeting of the Hungarian Regional Science Association (HRSA).

Our thematic issue gives a brief overview of the urban, regional and border studies focusing on this European macro-region, in the contact zone of Central Europe and the Balkans.

The annual conference of the HRSA occurred in Pécs on 2 and 3 November 2023. The event's main topic was the research on the Carpathian-Balkan region. The Faculty of Business and Economics at the University of Pécs served as a co-organiser of the event. The conference included three plenary sessions, one roundtable session, and 34 parallel sessions. The participants gave altogether 220 presentations in 29 thematic sessions over the two days. One plenary and three parallel sessions were English-speaking ones. The number of participants (270 attendees) proved to be a record.

In some disciplines and research topics, Pécs is a centre in the country, such as regional science, the Carpathian Basin and the Balkans. Therefore, the main theme of the meeting was the Carpath-Balkan region, which represents an important link between the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) and several faculties and departments of the University of Pécs.

The annual meeting also served as a celebration event for several anniversaries. The Hungarian Royal Elisabeth University (the antecedent of the current University of Pécs) started its activities in Pécs 100 years ago. The Transdanubian Research Institute (now HUN-REN CERS IRS Transdanubian Research Department in Pécs), the oldest continuously operating social science research institute in Hungary outside Budapest, celebrated the 80th anniversary of its foundation. The first annual meeting of HRSA was held in Pécs 20 years ago. The first issue of the Balkan Bulletin (published by the University of Pécs) was published 20 years ago. The first book (Szeklerland) of the Regions of the Carpathian Basin Monograph Series (15 volumes, published by the HUN-REN CERS IRS) was published in 2003.

The plenary speakers of the meeting were Andrés Rodríguez-Pose (London School of Economics) and Bolesław Domański (Jagiellonian University), as well as László Faragó (HUN-REN CERS), Réka Horeczki (HUN-REN CERS), Norbert Pap (University of Pécs), János Péntes (University of Debrecen), Szilárd Rácz (HRSA), László Szerb (University of Pécs), Ferenc Szilágyi (Partium Christian University), and Zsófia Vas (University of Szeged).

During the opening ceremony, welcome speeches were given by György Kosztolányi, vice-president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Attila Miseta, the rector of the University of Pécs, respectively.

After the usual double-blind proofreading process, eight original manuscripts have made it to publication in the framework of the present issue. We would like to thank all the authors who submitted high-quality manuscripts and the reviewers, who completed their tasks on time. The Hungarian Regional Science Association 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 group of studies examines the development of Pécs, the Pécs region and the neighbouring Croatian and Serbian regions. These studies were written mainly by Pécs colleagues from the University of Pécs, Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences (Faculty of Sciences), Institute of Education (Faculty of Humanities), Institute of Marketing and Tourism (Faculty of Business and Economics), as well as the academic research institute (HUN-RENCERS IRS) and Logframe Consulting Office (leading regional programming and project development company in South Transdanubia).

The paper of Norbert Pap and Marianna Ács presents the changes in the role of Pécs in higher-level education, and later in higher education, over a vast period of 1000 years, in terms of when and how it impacted and affected the Balkans. Pécs is an important cultural centre in Hungary, which carries in its spiritual and intellectual heritage the aspirations of about a millennium. As one of the regional centres of the southern border region of Central Europe, the city has a southern character, a rich cultural heritage and traditionally in its cultural heritage and functions cultural-educational activities with southern Slavic peoples (Croats, Serbs, Bosniaks) play a role.

Tourism is one of the main foci of Deturope. The second paper by Ádám Gyurkó and Tibor Gonda examines the tourism situation and performance of the Pécs-Villány tourism area between 2018 and 2023. The specificity of this area is due to the importance of cultural and wine tourism, active and eco-tourism and the significance of health tourism. The region has the mild Mediterranean atmosphere of Pécs and the charm of Villány with its wineries, while a wide range of attractions and cultural events can ensure that visitors have a rich and varied experience. According to the research, the destination is dominated by domestic tourism with a low number of foreign visitors and the region is not able to take advantage of its border location, with a significant gap still visible compared to 2019.

The Autonomous Province of Vojvodina is one of the most frequently studied regions in Deturope. The reason is that they have many ties to the region: the founding editor-in-chief, a quarter of the editorial board, a sixth of the authors of articles and the co-publisher (Regional Science Association in Subotica which also functions as the Vojvodina regional section of HRSA) are from Vojvodina. Dávid Moró and Péter Reményi analyse the ethnic diversity changes of Vojvodina in the Post-Yugoslav period. Vojvodina is situated in the southern part of the Pannonian Plain. It has developed into one of Europe's most ethnically diverse regions since the 17th century. The ethnic composition of Vojvodina has changed significantly since the last census conducted during the Yugoslav era. The proportions of ethnic minorities have been reduced, and their spatial distribution has also shifted. In the initial phase of the 30-year period under review, processes of homogenization played a crucial role in shaping the region's ethnic landscape. Over the following two decades, more municipalities underwent changes leading to increased diversity, even as the overall proportions of ethnic minorities continued to decline.

In recent years, border studies has also become a major focus of the thematic issues. The analyses mainly targeted border regions in Central, Eastern and Southeast Europe. The second group of papers deal with this topic, focusing on the theory and practice of cross-border cooperation, the economic and demographic dynamics of border regions. The study of Zoltán Pámer, Petra Buttinger and György Márton examines the evolution of SME development in EU cross-border cooperation through the example of direct funding in the framework of the Hungary-Croatia Interreg programme. This article is closely linked to the first group of studies due to the proximity of Pécs to the Croatian border region. The main finding of the paper is that, due to the logic of the funding scheme, innovation was easier to present in the case of more “materialised” sectors, such as wood processing, manufacturing and machine production, leading to higher success rates than in the case of the service sector where cooperation between partners was less obvious. Even if the majority of projects only promoted market entrance instead of innovation, rural areas have shown a higher success rate, demonstrating a relatively balanced spatial structure.

The next article looks at a larger geographical region, which is the main geographical focus of Deturope: Central Europe. Gábor Lados, Dávid Nagy and Réka Horeczki analyse the main characteristics of economic and population dynamics in border regions in Central Europe. Changes of regimes, and later EU accession have activated and deepened horizontal cross-border interactions within and outside the region, often in order to access EU funds. The study identifies areas with population trends that are unfavourable, on NUTS 3 territorial level. The

macro-region under study has a very diverse administrative structure, with a network of settlements of different sizes and functions, the nodes of which are generally urban settlements with a larger population and a dominant position in the socio-economic-regional division of labour. The study shows that border regions have a very diverse demographic profile, which can differ depending on the type of border. Different dynamics can be observed in the Eastern and Southern regions, which are also the external borders of the European Union, in the border regions of the new Member States that joined the EU in 2004 and the old Member States, as well as in the border regions of the old Member States.

The next paper in this group of studies authored by József Fogarasi (Partium Territorial Research Institute of the Partium Christian University in Oradea which also functions as the Partium regional section of HRSA) provides a review of the literature on cross-border cooperation in Europe. The key findings of the study underscore the multifaceted nature of cross-border cooperation and its pivotal role in European regional policy. While CBC has facilitated significant progress in fostering integration, its effectiveness is often undermined by structural and institutional barriers. The author highlights the need for policies that move beyond funding-driven cooperation to establish genuinely collaborative frameworks grounded in shared regional objectives.

Spatial planning and urban development are important nodes in regional development studies in Deturope. The two final papers are written by the heads of the HRSA's key partners: the president of the Hungarian Society for Urban and Spatial Planning (Budapest), and the head of the Doctoral School of Regional and Economic Sciences at Széchenyi István University (Győr).

The paper of Géza Salamin contributes to the debate on the Europeanisation of spatial planning by attempting to identify the intellectual content of the EU-level orientation towards the transformation of spatial planning systems and practices of Member States. The outcome of the analysis of European spatial planning documents is mostly in line with the abundant and rather theoretical European planning literature on the dynamics of planning. The results suggest that the postmodern approach of planning since the 1990s, the governance transition and the new spaces emerging since the 2000s, as well as the resulting claims about the transformation of planning, are part of an interconnected logical chain, a narrative, so to speak, which is reinforced and sometimes generated by messages from the European Union. Spatial planning, embodied in new forms, is a postmodern approach to the new European paradigm that conveys the EU's spatial planning messages and reflects the challenges of globalisation. Accordingly, the role of planning as a driver of investments and a strategic

framework for resource allocation and investment is enhanced, and planning connects and integrates the public and private sectors. It increasingly creates a spatial dimension for national (sectoral) policies in the context of their spatial alignment and coordination.

The last original scientific paper provides an insight into smart city indicators and the conceptual problems of measuring smart cities. Tamás Dusek focuses on the uncertainties of smart city indicators, which are often used to form composite indicators that moreover form the basis for comparisons of the smartness of cities. The transformation of a multi-indicator system into a one-dimensional metric scale is a highly questionable practice. Composite indicators, despite their popularity, are methodologically and conceptually highly problematic analytical tools for researchers and normative targets for policy makers.

The last paper in the special issue is a conference report by Zsuzsanna Zsibók and Réka Horeczki of the 40th anniversary of the Institute for Regional Studies (originally the Centre for Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences). The IRS is the “birthplace” of the Hungarian Regional Science Association, the Pécs-based research network – more specifically, the Transdanubian Research Department – provides the headquarters (seat) for the HRSA. The anniversary conference was both retrospective and forward-looking, but with a greater emphasis on a strategic approach. The diverse mix of invited guests reflected the openness of the Institute to policy-makers at national and even EU level, as well as to the national and international research community, including those from the Carpathian Basin.

The 10th thematic issue thus reflected on a number of anniversaries, which framed the selected writings.

We hope that you will find inspiring ideas, research results or practical achievements in this collection. We wish you a good reading,

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