

## **EDITORIAL: 20 years in the European Union – catching up, territorial policy and inequalities**

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the thematic issue of the international journal DETUROPE. Our publication provides a selection of papers in connection with the 22nd Annual Meeting of the Hungarian Regional Science Association (HRSA). Our thematic issue gives a brief overview of the regional, urban and border studies focusing on Central and Eastern Europe.

The annual conference of the HRSA was held in Szeged on 17 and 18 October 2024, with 200 participants. The title of the event was: 20 years in the European Union: Catching up, territorial policy and inequalities. The annual meeting celebrated the accession of the first group of Central and Eastern European countries to the EU in 2004. The Faculty of Economics and Business Administration at the University of Szeged served as a co-organiser of the event. The conference included three plenary sessions, one roundtable session, and 24 parallel sessions. One plenary and three parallel sessions were English-speaking ones. The main topics were the EU accession and the major changes that have taken place since then.

Three foreign speaking plenary speakers delivered lectures in English on Thursday morning. Simona Iammarino (University of Cagliari, Department of Economics and Business) presented her research results on a novel topic: critical raw materials and the EU's strategic autonomy. The latter are raw materials the scarcity or overproduction of which can trigger global geopolitical instability. The presentation introduced this emerging field of regional science, overlapping with technological studies, digitalization, geology, mineralogy, geopolitics as well as fieldwork experience. The speaker stressed the importance of exploring potential resource traps, the criticality of resources, the breaking or acquisition of increasingly technology-based monopoly power for the EU in order to tackle technological transitions better. Deep geographical inequalities prevail in the case of raw materials, requiring a closer alignment of macro policies with global objectives (and their location-specific implications), smart specialisation and national cohesion policies, as well as open, inclusive and equitable international relations in the future.

The second speaker, Jiri Blazek (Charles University in Prague, Department of Social Geography and Regional Development) provided novel insights into regional innovation systems, forms of regional governance, and the development of regional industries. Regional innovation systems were presented as the main objectives and driving forces of regional development, whose strengthening through trust, social bonds, and cooperation can enhance

connectivity and innovation in development tools. The third speaker of the session was Valentina Ivanić (Economics Institute, Belgrade & ERSA Serbia), who discussed smart specialisation as a specific approach to regional development, in the case of Serbia and the Balkans. The lecturer emphasised the need to revive all partnerships centered on scientific and technological cooperation between Serbia and Hungary, with a particular focus on regional and territorial development.

The second plenary session was organised around a tribute to Professor Imre Lengyel (former vice president of HRSA), who celebrated his 70th birthday on November 11, 2024. The ceremonial session began with greetings from friends and colleagues, Gábor Szabó, former rector of the University of Szeged, Benedek Nagy, Dean of the Faculty of Engineering and Technology at the University of Szeged, Ilona Pálné Kovács, president of the HRSA, and Zoltán Gál, president of the HAS RTB. Zsófia Vas offered an overview of Imre Lengyel's life path, illustrating the major milestones with photographic documents. In recognition of the professor's scientific achievements and publication performance, Balázs Lengyel presented the „LI70 hypothesis.” This was followed by the presentation of the book titled „Imre Lengyel 70 – A Life in the Service of Science” published in honour of the professor. A lecture by György Vida (SZTE GTK), recipient of the 2023 Outstanding Young Regionalist Award concluded the session, dedicated to the main features of regional development traps and income inequalities in the case of Hungary.

The rest of the evening was devoted to the award ceremony. The highest honour, the Regional Science Award, was granted for the seventh time based on the decision of the general assembly and following the recommendation of the presidency. This year's recipient was Viktória Szirmai (research professor at the Institute of Sociology, HUN-REN TK, editor-in-chief of City.hu Várostudományi Szemle) holder of the Széchenyi Award, for her outstanding contribution to regional science. The award was presented by President Ilona Pálné Kovács, who expressed her joy over granting the prestigious HRSA award to a woman, Viktória Szirmai, embodying the much needed „feminine” people-centered approach and scholarly personality that is required for the openness of regional science to related disciplines and a better understanding of regional disparities within Hungary. This was followed by the granting of two honorary certificates to Balázs Forman (associate professor at Neumann János University) and József Kárpáti (Dean of the NJE Faculty of Economics), co-presidents of the Local Organising Committee (LOC) of the 2024 RSAI World Congress in Kecskemét for their outstanding professional and community activities. The Outstanding Young Regionalist Award was granted to László Czaller, assistant professor at the Department of Economic

Geography and Urban Development at BCE and research fellow at HUN-REN KRTK KTI, in recognition of his valuable contributions to the field of regional science. The session concluded with the allocation of the HAS RTB „Regional Science Publication of the Year” awards.

The programme of the new HRSA presidency, elected at the end of 2023 for a four-year term, included strengthening cooperation with policy-makers. The first public event in this programme was a roundtable discussion on Friday morning with staff from the Ministry of Public Administration and Regional Development on the renewal of Hungary’s National Development and Regional Development Concept, entitled „The Role and Opportunities of Functional Urban Areas in Settlement Network Development”. The panel session featured two introductory presentations. First, Zsolt Czene presented the planning process of the National Development and Spatial Development Concept, highlighting its implications for urban areas. This method basically refines the FUA delimitation of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH) using classic EU spatial typologies (DEGURBA) and methodology (Eurostat Urban Audit) and taking into account the spatial structural specificities in Hungary. Kristóf Orbán presented an alternative approach drawing on existing land use data to delineate urban catchment areas and proposed their integrated management at the regional level. The latter is a bottom-up solution that produces contiguous space, while the former focuses on delimiting larger units (FUAs) to the detriment of smaller units identified on a residual basis, and the combined application of other units of spatial development can lead to significant overlaps. After the presentations, the panel took the form of a workshop discussion allowing guest speakers to present their comments, followed by a lively exchange of ideas reflecting on questions from the audience.

The panel debate was followed by three plenary presentations. Zsolt Szokolai (European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy) discussed the results and challenges of cohesion policy at both European and Hungarian level. The results were supported by the presentation of key figures and successful projects, while development concepts were illustrated with the Draghi report and development strategies sensitive to local needs and potential. Representing Gábor Mayer, State Secretary for Regional Development, Zsuzsanna Farkas (Head of Department, Ministry of Public Administration and Regional Development), presented the ministry’s official position, focusing on the contemporary challenges and perspectives of domestic regional development. The third speaker, Judit Timár (CERS IRS), offered a 20-year overview of social and spatial inequalities drawing on the results of various international and domestic projects.

The participants of the 22nd Annual Meeting gave altogether 155 presentations in 18 thematic sessions over the two days. Three sections were held in English. Six sections ran in multiple time slots. The sections covered the following topics: Innovation ecosystems – Building regional innovation hubs; Anchoring productive capital beyond the core – Small towns and peripheral industrialization in Europe; Challenges in GVC-dependent FDI development path in Central & Eastern Europe: Assessing regional development within global production networks; Smart and sustainable cities; Regional transport challenges and best solutions; State borders, integration and territorial policies – The consequences of European Union enlargement; Territorial inequalities from a historical perspective; Territorial and urban development in the European Union; Different aspects of territorial inequalities; Local governments and the European Union; Pandemic, crisis, inequality – The spatiality of post-COVID phenomena; Rural spatial processes, (dis)engaged villages; Networks and cooperation in social inclusion; Landscape character; Green infrastructure; Regional sustainability; Suburbanization and urban sprawl in recent decades – Social, economic and environmental impacts; Resilience and vulnerability – Socio-economic impacts of crises.

As in previous years, HRSA sought to provide journal publication opportunities for the conference participants. In 2024, ten journals offered place in their 2025 issues. The oldest collaboration in this regard is between HRSA and DETUROPE. 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.


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

Réka Horeczki<sup>1</sup>, Ildikó Egyed<sup>2</sup> and Szilárd Rác<sup>3</sup>

*Editors of the thematic issue*

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