

PREFACE

Centre for Regional Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences has organised the second East-Central European Regional Seminar – ECERS 2008 – in the city of Gyula, near the eastern border of Hungary. This conference was an important milestone of the co-operation between Polish and Hungarian researchers. The aim of the seminar was to support the initiative of Warsaw Regional Forums and expand the XVIth Polish-Hungarian Geographic Seminar. This meeting aimed to highlight different aspects, spatial issues and problems of East-Central European borders, and the complexity of borderlands.

On the first day participants took a short visit to Szarvas, and after that to Békéscsaba, the Department of Great Plain Institute – HAS CRS. On the occasion of the opening session they discussed the role of Békés county and the city of Gyula in crossborder cooperation with local notables and experts.

On the second day, there were twelve presentations about different regional and geographic approaches, which reflected innovative viewpoints. Most of the presenters talked about actual processes and conflicts of new spatial phenomena in EU countries, particularly crossborder opportunities, features of peripheral areas, environmental and social problems. They identified new opportunities of spatial development next to borderlands and talked about the unique potential of marginal areas. Some of the presentations were based on regional research; others were case studies or summaries of different pilot projects.

During the presentations the importance of the environmental, cultural, touristic and transport functions of borders and the long term perspectives of these kind of areas were emphasised. The main conclusion of the conference was that the special geopolitical and geographical positions give advantages for these zones. Everybody agreed that – beyond the recent political paradigm – there is a need to create multifunctional areas concerned with local cohesion, economic and ecological sustainability for these borderlands. This sustainability must be based on cooperation and partnership.

On the third day participants visited the city of Arad and met Romanian experts. They took a short trip to the transformed downtown and visited one of the most prosperous industrial parks of Romania.

The participants were: Marek Degórski, Roman Kulikowski, Marek Wieckowski, Konrad Czapiewski and Marcin Mazur from the Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization, Polish Academy of Sciences; Maria Grozeva, Boris Kolev, Chavdar Mladenov, Boris Kazakov from the Geographical Institute of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences; and Antonín Vaishar, from the Institute of Geonics,

Czech Academy of Sciences, Ostrava. The Hungarian delegation was: Gyula Horváth, István Mezei, Erika Nagy, Gábor Nagy, Imre Nagy, Bálint Csatári, András Donát Kovács from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Centre for Regional Studies.

We hope that it was a really fruitful scientific workshop with useful discussions and colourful excursions close to the Hungarian–Romanian border.

The seminar presented a good occasion for strengthening the collegial partnerships. At the beginning of the first plenary session, we paid a one-minute silence to the memory of our honourable Polish colleague – Professor Andrzej Stasiak.

The studies of the present volume are published with the intention to promote a better understanding of the phenomena and processes of new cross-border relations and their impact on the socio-economic and environmental development of East–Central–European countries.

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