

CHRONICLE

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Report on the international workshop „Regional Socio-Economic Processes in Central and Eastern Europe – 20 Years in Transition and 2 Years in Global Economic Crisis”

Budapest, April 4–5, 2011

The first scientific encounter of geographers from Visegrad countries and their neighbours was organized in Budapest. The idea of the workshop evoked in the host institute, the Geographical Research Institute Hungarian Academy of Sciences, while further financial support was afforded by the International Visegrad Fund and the Department of Social and Economic Geography of the Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. Not only the press but also the politicians paid close attention to the event: in her welcome speech Mrs. Edit SZILÁGYI BÁTORFI, the V4 national coordinator of Hungary emphasized the moral and political importance of this scientific forum for all the Visegrad Group.



Participants of the ReSEP CEE workshop, GRI HAS

The almost fifty invited lecturers arrived from ten different countries and spoke nine vernaculars from post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe. Twenty years after the change of communist regime human geographers could evaluate the recent processes and discuss the possible new directions of cooperation. The purpose of the conference was to refresh the former scientific connections and to build new ones. In a globalising world the eastern neighbour areas of the European Union have been being upgraded. In addition, the Visegrad Four (V4) might form a kind of bridge between East and West. This goal was to be reinforced by the workshop with the main objective of getting a deeper insight in socio-economic processes having taken place in the CEE countries and in the wider surroundings and their interpretation from geographical aspects. According to its general conception the conference was to provide a chance to specialists of the region representing various disciplines of geography to exchange ideas about numerous regional, structural and ethnic problems that had emerged in the last two decades.

The main goal of the workshop, to open the floor to geographers from neighbouring countries, was attained: participants arrived from Austria, Germany, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Belarus, Ukraine, Russian Federation, Romania and Hungary. All the partners (not only colleagues from the V4 countries) supported the idea of preparing a website of the workshop in all the languages of the participants to enhance the multifarious cultural character of the region. As a result of the participants' efforts therefore the general conception and the detailed programme could be read in ten different languages (http://www.mtafki.hu/ReSEP_CEE.html) which highly contributed to the value of this project. Although the official language of the conference was English, a session was also held in Russian to encourage communication among the Russian speakers as well.

Károly Kocsis, director of the GRI HAS opened the two day long conference. The workshop had two plenary sessions, where the representatives of the leading geographical institutions introduced their professional profile and on-going research projects. On behalf of the V4 countries Antonín VAISHAR offered a brief overview from the Geonics, Brno, Grzegorz WĘCŁAWOWICZ from the Geographical Research Institute Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw; Vladimír IRA from the Institute of Geography, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava; and Károly Kocsis the GRI HAS. The second plenary session, chaired by Vladimir KOŁOSSOV, was entitled to the V4 neighbours' geographical institutes. From the western neighbours Peter JORDAN introduced the Institute of Urban and Regional Research from Vienna, while Isolde BRADE talked about the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography, from Leipzig. Regarding the eastern neighbour countries the participants had the opportunity to get acquainted with the following institutions: Belorussian State University Faculty of Geography represented by Ekaterina ANTIPOVA, the Institute of Geography Ukrainian National Academy of Sciences by Grygorii PIDGRUSHNYI and the Institute of Geography of Russian Academy of Sciences by Vladimir KOŁOSSOV.

In the afternoon the first scientific session was the Russian speaking one, chaired by József NEMES-NAGY, about the actual demographic and economic issues in the post-Soviet region. Grygorii PIDGRUSHNYI presented a summary about the actual industrial processes in Ukraine, Liudmila FAKEYEVA highlighted the most important demographic shifts in Belarus in the last twenty years, while Mikalai KABYLINSKI talked about the actual characteristics of labour market in Belarus. Summarizing this session its chairman called the attention of the audience to the divergent development trajectories of these post-soviet countries.

The second session was dedicated to actual socio-geographical processes in the Visegrad Countries, chaired by Vladimír IRA. Viliam LAUKO presented the spatial pattern of higher education in Slovakia in the last twenty years; István TÓZSA gave an overview about the spreading of info-communication technologies in the region; Mikulas HUBA summarized

the recent environmental challenges Slovakia had to face; Janusz GÓRECKI revealed some spatial characteristics of the business sector in Poland.

In the afternoon the foreign participants also were invited to a bus sightseeing tour round Budapest, guided by Zoltán Kovács (GRI HAS).

On the second day seventeen presentations were held in four scientific sessions. The first session focused on rural areas and peripheries chaired by Peter JORDAN. The opening presentation by Thilo LANG offered an in-depth and remarkably systematized overview on the theoretical frame of peripheralization. Antonín VAISHAR presented a case study on a peripheral part of the Czech-Polish border zone. Magdalena DEJ and Robert GUZIK analysed the spatial accessibility of rural areas in Poland. Based on abundant statistical and field work data Magdalena DEJ studied the accessibility of secondary education facilities, while Robert GUZIK evaluated the public transportation system in the Western Carpathians in Poland.

The second session chaired by Isolde BRADE was devoted to the urban areas. Grzegorz WĘCŁAWOWICZ gave a lecture on the effect of economic crisis upon Central and Eastern European urbanization processes. László JENEY offered an overview on the state of CEE countries in the European city competition. Then Kostyantyn MEZENTSEV analyzed the changes in urban regions and urban network in Ukraine. The session was closed with a presentation by Petr KLUSÁČEK about the revitalization processes and challenges of a brown-field area in the Czech Republic.

Grzegorz WĘCŁAWOWICZ opened the fifth session dedicated to the investigation of effects of global economic crisis, although the first exciting presentation by Márton CZIRFUSZ rather aimed at showing how the post-socialist economies have been portrayed in contemporary art. Volodymyr ANDERSON evaluated the clusterization potential in different areas of Ukraine. Olga SHUVALOVA's presentation focused on the energy sector in East Germany. The following papers were dedicated to the spatial effects of the crisis in Hungary and Romania. Hajnalka LŐCSEI focused on the regional effects of the crisis in Hungary, while Egon NAGY put the emphasis on the nationwide trends in the economy of Romania and governmental responses.

The Russian Federation and the European Union was the topic of the last session, chaired by Volodymyr ANDERSON. A lecture by Pál SZABÓ on the spatial structure of the EU, a paper by Andreas WUST about changing border regimes and an exciting presentation by Ferenc GYURIS about changing spatial disparities in Russia closed the workshop.

Active discussions followed each session, especially in connection with the countries or territories that have not been recognized officially by the UN (after the presentation of Anna Shmytkova). These conversations also emphasized the importance of events as this conference to give chance, among others, to harmonize divergent opinions.

The presentations will be available on the website of the conference mentioned above; in addition they will be published in a volume of papers during this summer. The hosts of the workshop hope that this initiative will be organized later as a regular meeting of geographers from V4 and neighbouring countries. The leading geographical institutes of Visegrad Countries consider the compilation of a joint publication: an atlas entitled "Visegrad Countries in Maps".

Coordinators of the ReSEP CEE workshop, GRI HAS

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