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## PREFACE

It is now 25 years since, thanks to the co-operation of the two Academies of Sciences, Polish and Hungarian geographers began to regularly meet to present their research findings and to learn more of one other's countries. The tradition of bilateral seminars on selected topics was instigated in Hungary by the Geographical Research Institute (Budapest) and later continued by the Centre for Regional Studies (Pécs), while Poland is represented by the Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization (Warsaw). On the occasion of this anniversary, it is worth looking back on the years which saw such successful conferences:

- 1 Szymbark, Poland (1973)
- 2 Budapest, Hungary (1975)
- 3 Bozsok, Hungary (1978): *"Rural transformation in Hungary and Poland"*
- 4 Gołdap, Poland (1980): *"Development of rural areas"*
- 5 Pécs, Hungary (1985): *"Environmental control and policy"*
- 6 Stare Pole, Poland (1986): *"Spatial organization and regional development"*
- 7 Kecskemét, Hungary (1990): *"Spatial research and the social-political changes"*
- 8 Zielona Góra, Poland (1992): *"Some new aspects of regional planning in Poland and Hungary"*
- 9 Visegrád, Hungary (1994): *"Macro- and micro-level processes in regional development"*
- 10 Supraśl, Poland (1996): *"Selected problems in transformation of spatial economy in Hungary and Poland"*

The Seminar held in September 1998 was the 11th of its kind. We found a truly beautiful setting for the conference: the holiday home of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in the Mátra Mountains, in Northern Hungary. The three days of intensive sessions, in accordance with the 'genius loci', were followed by wine-tasting in Eger and a one-day study trip to the nearby Bükk Mountains. Our volume contains the papers which were presented in Mátraháza.

It is not only the tradition of mutual understanding and affection between these nations that connect Poland and Hungary, but historical similarities as well. Both countries occupy a special place in Europe: they are caught between East and West. These two parts of the continent differ not only in geographical co-ordinates, but also in their social development. Most of the common characteristics of our countries derive from the fact that since the establishment of their respective kingdoms, they have been affected by "eastern" and "western" elements, too. In other words, Poland as well as Hungary had historical periods when, in a social sense, they belonged to the western zone of Eastern Europe while at other times they were attached to the eastern belt of

Western Europe. Nowadays we have once again arrived at a historical turning-point: owing to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the "Eastern Bloc" there is no forced political membership of the East any longer, and the prospect of joining the European Union in the near future allows us to draw closer to the West. Thus it is the current task of our researchers in all fields to evaluate the present situation within the context of our preparation for this integration. This publication highlights the regional aspects.

Though methodology as well as the scope of the next twelve analyses is rather different, we have attempted to arrange them so as to facilitate comparison of results. The key papers focus on the effects of the 1996 Hungarian Regional Development Act and on the newly-introduced administrative division of Poland. The common problems of transport and migration link the following two studies, both written by Polish researchers. On the topic of the elements which differentiate the Hungarian settlement network, the role of the banking system and the first results of a factorial analysis are presented here. Thanks to our enterprising colleagues, we are subsequently able to provide an introduction to electoral geography in both countries. Polish agriculture is analysed from the perspective of the changing spatial and ownership structures, while Hungarian countryside is represented by studies on second homes and on small region development strategies.

Though English is our common language, translation not always can retain the flavour of the original terms. From among the names of great historical regions, as enclosed within current national boundaries, only those have been translated whose English versions are widely-known. This applies to names such as Transdanubia (*Dunántúl*), Northern Hungary (*Észak-Magyarország*) or the Great Plain (*Alföld*) in Hungary, and Silesia (*Śląsk*), Pomerania (*Pomorze*), Mazuria (*Mazury*) or Mazovia (*Mazowsze*) in Poland. Whereas the others, such as Wielkopolska ('Polonia Maior'), Małopolska ('Polonia Minor') or Kujawy we preferred to write in their original forms. Concerning the administrative units of our days, the 19 Hungarian counties (*megye*) are referred to by their traditional names, while the previous 49 Polish voivodships (*województwo*), the system of which was in force between 1975-1998, were named after their centres. The new administrative division has changed this situation, since each of the 16 new voivodships regained the historical name of the given part of the country. Polish and Hungarian settlements, except for Warsaw and Cracow, are also written in their original forms.

It was my great pleasure to take part in the preparations for the conference, to accompany our Polish guests during their stay in Hungary and to take care of this collection of studies. Together with my colleagues we hope that the diverse nature of our volume will appeal not only to Polish and Hungarian geographers, but also to all those interested in the present situation and the future perspectives of East-Central Europe.

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*Annamária Duró*  
editor