LAUDATION / KÖSZÖNTŐ

Places matter – And so does knowledge about places

A helyek számítanak – és a helyekkel kapcsolatos tudás is

MÁTYÁS SZABÓ

Mátyás SZABÓ: State Secretary for Rural & Territorial Development, Ministry of Rural and Urban Development; Akadémia utca 3., H-1054 Budapest, Hungary; matyas.szabo@vtm.gov.hu

SZABÓ Mátyás: *Vidék és Területfejlesztésért Felelős Államtitkár, Vidék- és Településfejlesztési Minisztérium; 1054 Budapest, Akadémia utca 3.; matyas.szabo@vtm.gov.hu*

It is a privilege to greet the readers and authors of *Tér és Társadalom* on the occasion of this anniversary issue as I used and read TéT quite often.

For decades, the journal has represented something particularly valuable: a meeting point between rigorous academic inquiry and the practical questions of territorial development. This relationship matters. Good territorial policy cannot be designed without understanding how places actually work – their economic structures, social relations, institutional capacities, histories and aspirations.

From a policymaker's perspective, perhaps one of the most important lessons of territori-al research is also one of the simplest: *places are different.* There is no single development model that can be designed at the centre and applied uniformly to every region, town or rural community. Territorial development is not merely the spatial implementation of national policies. It requires us to understand local conditions, recognise local knowledge and capacities, and allow sufficient room for places to shape their own development paths.

This also changes how we should think about policymaking itself. Development is rarely a linear process in which a programme designed today produces predictable results tomorrow. It requires experimentation, participation, continuous feedback and, importantly, the ability to learn from initiatives that do not work as expected. Research has an essential role here: not only in explaining territorial processes, but also in challenging assumptions, identifying unitended consequences and broadening the range of choices available to policymakers.

At the same time, territorial policy ultimately has a very tangible purpose. People should not have to leave their home region simply because access to education, public services, employment, mobility or opportunity is determined by geography. The increasingly important European debate on the *right to stay* captures this ambition well. It does not mean keeping people in place. It means creating the conditions in which staying, leaving and returning can all be genuine choices.

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This is precisely why dialogue between territorial research and public policy remains indispensable. Policymakers need independent research that is willing to question established approaches; researchers benefit from engagement with the constraints, institutions and implementation realities of policy. The value of this relationship lies not in eliminating the distance between the two worlds, but in making that distance productive.

Over its history, *Tér és Társadalom* has made an important contribution to this dialogue in Hungary. By bringing internationally recognised scholars together with leading representatives of Hungarian territorial research, this anniversary issue also creates an opportunity to strengthen the connection between Hungarian debates and the wider international community.

On behalf of the Ministry, I congratulate the editors, authors and the scholarly community around *Tér és Társadalom* on this anniversary. I wish the journal many more years of independent inquiry, intellectual debate and constructive engagement with the future of our regions, cities and rural communities.