EDITORIAL / ELŐSZÓ

Space and Society in Tér és Társadalom: The First 40 Years

Tér és Társadalom a Tér és Társadalomban: Az első 40 év

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KEYWORDS: Tér és Társadalom; academic journals; spatial research

ABSTRACT: On the 40th anniversary of its foundation, this editorial examines the long-term development and challenges of Tér és Társadalom ("Space and Society", TéT). It situates the journal's origins in an intellectual tradition rooted in a multidisciplinary approach, theoretical and methodological plurality, and a focus on the research of complex, spatially embedded social phenomena, with a slight bias towards qualitative and policy studies. It investigates how TéT emerged in the focus point of multiple disciplines concerned with spatial issues, and evolved over four decades. Through the example of four representative issues, the editorial distinguishes between a founding period with a strong emphasis on defining the outlines of the field; an expansionary golden age characterised by a fusion between empirical research and regional policy; an era of institutional uncertainty marked by disciplinary opening and theoretical refocusing; and a period of deepening international integration driven by pressures in modern academic publishing and convergence towards international standards. In contrast with improving journal metrics, the editorial also identifies risks of standardisation associated with selection mechanisms enforcing structural uniformity, while disincentivising exploratory behaviour and viewpoint diversity. This presents the risk of academic publishing's already apparent loss of social relevance, increasing retrenchment, and increased risks of future disruptive effects. The editorial suggests that an open intellectual tradition embracing complex thinking about complex spatial phenomena, rewarding originality, and remaining open to explore unknown territory, should be the guiding star of Tér és Társadalom in securing its place in modern academic publishing.

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KULCSSZAVAK: Tér és Társadalom; tudományos folyóiratok; tértudományok

A*BSZTRAKT: A folyóirat alapításának negyvenedik évfordulóját ünneplő különszám bevezetője a Tér és Társadalom (TéT) hosszú távú fejlődését és aktuális kihívásait vizsgálja. A lapalapítás körülményeire visszatekintve olyan szellemi hagyományokban ragadja meg a lap gyökereit, amelyek a multidiszciplináris megközelítésben, az elméleti és módszertani sokféleségben, valamint a térbe ágyazott összetett jelenségek komplex vizs*gálatában erednek, miközben a lap története során

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a kvalitatív és szakpolitikai közlemények játszottak főszerepet. A szerző a folyóirat sajátos jellegét és értékét a térbeli kérdésekre érzékeny, de több tudományterületről eredő kutatások összetartó evolúciójában látja, amelyek az 1980-as évek második felében már jelentős korábbi eredményekre támaszkodva voltak képesek „szintet ugrani"; egy sokakat összekötő, s később további szervezeti formákat is kitermelő szakmai fórumot teremteni, illetve fenntartani.

A bevezető négy különböző, az adott korszak sajátosságait megtestesítő reprezentatív lapszámon keresztül tárgyalja a folyóirat evolúcióját, és négy, eltérő szerkesztőhöz köthető szakaszra bontja annak történetét. Beazonosít egy alapítási szakaszt, amelyben a tértudományok alapfogalmainak lefektetése és határainak kijelölése kapott jelentős szerepet; egy aranykort, amelyben erősödő társadalmi érdeklődés és intézményi expanzió mellett a lap hídszerepet játszott az elmélet és a szakpolitika között, és mindkét téren formatív szerepet játszott; egy intézményi bizonytalanságokkal övezett újrapozicionálási szakaszt, amely során erősödött a lap multidiszciplináris jellege és elméleti orientációja; majd negyedikként egy olyan időszakot, amelynek a külső elvárások által is diktált nemzetközi integráció vált kulcsmotívumává.

Bár a TéT átalakulása javuló tudománymetriai eredményeket hozott, a bevezető a továbblépés kockázataira, a nemzetközi publikációs rendszerek által elvárt standardizáció árnyoldalaira is felhívja a figyelmet, beleértve a szelekciós mechanizmusok által kikényszerített szerkezeti egysíkúságot, valamint a feltáró kutatások és nézőpontbeli sokszínűség visszaszorulását. Mindez magában hordozza annak veszélyét, hogy a tudományos publikációk – amelyek társadalmi jelentőségvesztése már most is érzékelhető – további térvesztéssel nézhetnek szembe, és ezekre elzárkózással reagálva emelkedik a későbbi diszruptív hatások kockázata. A bevezető erre a problémára jó megoldásokat talál a TéT által hagyományosan képviselt, nyitott intellektuális tradícióban, amely képes komplex válaszokat adni az összetett térbeli és társadalmi problémákra, elismerni és jutalmazni az eredeti gondolatokat, és felvállalni az ismeretlen területek feltárására irányuló kutatások felé mutatott nyitottságot. Ezek az elvek olyan vezércsillagként szolgálhatnak a TéT számára, amelyek a modern publikációs rendszereken belül is elősegítik hosszú távú fennmaradását.

Introduction

A journal's 40th anniversary always calls for celebration as well as reflection. If trees have rings, journals have volumes and issues, of which 40 is a decent number. Survival is not a given; many publications, often quite worthy, just as often considered permanent pillars of a scientific community, do not make it. Others survive as a shell of their former selves, unrecognisable to the long-term reader. In modern academic publishing, which shall be discussed in the last section, there is an odd absence of permanence and/or stable identity. People do not read or write for journals, they read Google Scholar and write for journal metrics.[1] This is allegedly a successful model, so all of us are doing it. Yet where things are interchangeable, individual voices do not matter. This, as it shall be discussed too, shows. So what is peculiar about *Tér és Társadalom* ("Space and Society", usually abbreviated as TéT)? Is there something worth preserving? Are we more than a sum of numbers in the "nice, but couldn't it be better?" bucket? This editorial speaks a little bit about that. As we will find, there is indeed a thematic consistency or constant preoccupation behind the variety of topics and authors found on our pages, present from our inaugural issue, and resurfacing repeatedly all the way to this special anniversary one.

Tér és Társadalom was established in 1987 with a specific mission. György Enyedi, the founder of both the journal and its publisher, the Centre for Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, described this calling in the first issue's introduction: "Our journal is peculiar in the ranks of scientific periodicals: it does not publish the achievements of one single discipline, but scrutinizes a specific problem; the relationship between space and society from the perspectives of *different* disciplines, in a specific way" (Enyedi 1987, 3.). The focus was on understanding how social phenomena unfold in space; and to this end, various means were considered. The complexity of Enyedi's "problem" was understood to be the essence of regional development and space/society interactions. Thus, TéT has been a multidisciplinary forum aiming at theoretical and methodological plurality from its beginnings. In this respect, the journal's editors have opted for some strategic ambiguity in defining its precise focus. Submissions have been screened with a consideration for their relevance to furthering our understanding of spatially embedded social phenomena, while the approaches could undeniably vary. This is a tradition we still cultivate today.

Even at the time of its establishment, TéT was not entirely the beginning of something; rather, the *achievement* of a field of inquiry which had grown in Hungary since the 1960s. The development of modern spatial research coalesced from the need to understand complex, spatially embedded systems; and had roots in planning. A comprehensive study of Kóródi (1959) on the Borsod industrial district was a forerunner to later methodological innovation and empirical studies. Later works include Kőszegi (1961), Bartke (1971), Kóródi and Kőszegfalvi (1971), Bartke, Bora and Illés (1973) from the discipline of regional and urban planning, Beluszky (1967), Beluszky and Sikos T. (1982), Nemes Nagy (1987), and Tóth (1988) from geography, Illés (1975) and Rechnitzer (1984) from economics as well as Szirmai (1988) from sociology and urban studies. This evolution (sometimes co-evolution) coincided with the emergence of modern regional science (Isard 2003), and assimilated the results of western advances as best as local scholars could; difficulties in communication and even accessing research materials notwithstanding. Unlike other national examples where spatial research is tied to a specific discipline (c.f. Horváth 2013, 2017), the field's development in Hungary continued along multidisciplinary lines, and was spatially distributed among multiple schools across the country. Regional science emerged as its own distinct field, but the journal did not become a forum only for regional science (Rechnitzer 2007; Barta 2017). Tér és Társadalom has thus been able to build on a developed, intellectually diverse tradition, which remains reflected in its circle of contributors.

György Enyedi's significance in particular here cannot be overstated: his career extended to the study of agricultural geography and rural studies (Enyedi 1964, 1980; Enyedi, Barta 1981), comparative economic geography in Hungary and Central and Eastern Europe (Enyedi 1976, 1978), and in particular, urban development and urbanisation cycles (Enyedi 1988, 1990; Enyedi, Szirmai 1992).

He connected Hungarian spatial research to the international mainstream, and helped build research networks both in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the wider world. More than his specific research results (which were considerable), it might be his broad perspective and penchant for complex qualitative research which have set the tone for Tér és Társadalom's usual style and approach. This work found followers in his successors, who have carried forward this legacy of cultivating a "broad" discipline.

Tér és Társadalom through the decades: evolution and consistency

It is instructive to consider the journal's thematic changes and cornerstones, which have remained consistent within its publication profile. This editorial can only present a personal view with the hope that it will be a fair one. Thus, I have divided the journal's history into four periods, defined by the tenure of its editors-in-chief. These tenures have not only coincided with changes in publication patterns and fields of interest, but a shifting focus in editorial policy as well.

- Between 1987 and 1988, the journal was edited by József Tóth in Pécs, and then between 1989 and 1993 by Pál Beluszky in Budapest. This era could be called Tér és Társadalom's *founding period,* with a strong emphasis on defining the outlines of the field.
- From 1994 to 2010, the journal was edited by János Rechnitzer and his team in Győr. This was *a golden age of spatial research,* characterised by a fusion between empirical research and regional policy.
- Between 2011 and 2019, the editorial work was undertaken by Györgyi Barta and her team in Budapest. In an era of institutional uncertainty, it was marked by *disciplinary opening and theoretical refocusing.*
- From 2019 to 2022, the journal was edited by Monika Mária Váradi in Budapest, and since 2023, the present editor, Gábor Lux in Pécs; both relying on a geographically distributed editorial team. This period has been characterised by *deepening international integration.*

In this section, these periods will be represented by specific journal issues, which, I believe, best exemplify their era. This is an undeniably arbitrary choice, but such illustrative picks are perhaps more informative in this editorial than a purely scientometric approach. In all cases, research papers and theoretical/policy debates were selected, and other article types and ephemera omitted.

Tér és Társadalom's *founding period* is well represented by its inaugural issue. In these years, the journal's publication profile was heavily marked by papers dealing with the conceptual or foundational issues of spatial development, as well as processes of systematic change in Central and Eastern Europe. The articles in the first issue reflect these preoccupations (Table 1).

Table 1: An issue from the founding period (1987–1993)
Egy lapszám az alapítás éveiből (1987–1993)

Issue	*Author(s)*	*Disciplines / methods*	*Title and topic*
Vol. 1	Faragó (1987)	planning/ theoretical	*On the concept of regional development*
No. 1		synthesis	An introduction to the conceptual foundations and main policy approaches of regional development on the basis of domestic and international theory.
Vol. 1	Bőhm (1987)	public administration /	*Local government and the participation of the population*
No. 1		policy review	A critique of top-down socialist local governance, and a discussion of participatory alternatives.
Vol. 1	Bánlaky (1987)	sociology / theoretical	*Our small towns – in an intermediate position within the settlement network*
No. 1		synthesis	Discusses the position and role of small towns within the Hungarian settlement network, and suggests a categorisation system.
Vol. 1	Erdősi (1987)	geography, history /	*Regional interests and rail transport*
No. 1		empirical & policy review	Analyses the historical evolution of the Hungarian railway network in the context of multi-scalar regional interest articulation influencing transport policy and location decisions.
Vol. 1	Lackó (1987)	regional science /	*Uniform interpretation of regional development*
No. 1		debate	Discusses different international interpretations of regional development and uneven development, offering a critique of Enyedi's four-phase urbanisation theory.
Vol. 1	Beluszky (1987)	geography. public	*After debates on settlement policy – in action – before new investigations*
No. 1		administration / debate	Reviews long-running policy debates on Hungarian settlement development.
Vol. 1	Hajdú (1987)	geography, history,	*Research on gravity centers in the Hungarian geographical science before 1945*
No. 1		public administration / theoretical review	A review on the pre-war antecedents of catchment area and functional urban area research in Hungarian geography.
Vol. 1	Stöhr, Barta	planning / theoretical	*Changing external conditions and a paradigm shift in regional development strategies*
No. 1	(1987)	& policy review	A review of evolving regional policy paradigms across Europe in light of economic and technological change. [Translation]

Source: author's compilation

What seems interesting to a modern editor is how close the papers hew to TéT's contemporary interests: the mixture of theoretical and empirical approaches, or the prevalence of qualitative methodologies leaning towards policy-oriented conclusions prefigure later eras. What seems remarkable too is the tone of writing in many of these pieces; perhaps less academically rigorous and more in tune with the Central European intellectual tradition's focus on social critique, and often steeped in playful irony.

In this period, Tér és Társadalom also served as a vehicle to disseminate state-of-the-art international theories and concepts to a Hungarian audience of academics and practitioners. A translated article already appears in the first issue, and was followed by others of its kind before deeper internationalisation and improving access to international periodicals made this function less relevant. Likewise, TéT started including papers from Hungarian researchers across the borders, serving as a vehicle of knowledge transmission and discussion forum to a wider academic community. Finally, the journal started publishing special issues from 1989. Here, titles include "Society's Conquest of Space" (1989/4, on the spatial implications of participatory democracy), "Everyday Spaces" (1990/1), "Spaces of Contest" (1991/2–3, on contested spaces in politics, nationalism, and local governance), "Regional Policy" (1992/1–2, on the emerging paradigm of regional policy), "Budapest and its Peers" (1992/3–4, on metropolitan centres), and "Women in Space and Society" (1993/1–2, on feminist geography). These issues would often put a specific subject "on the table", and serve to orient academic and policy debates for years.

The period from 1994 to 2010 can more or less be called *the golden age of spatial research* in Hungary. János Rechnitzer's long and successful editorial tenure, helped by Edit Somlyódyné Pfeil, Erika Nagy, and later Tamás Hardi and Márta Nárai, was characterised by a thematic diversity of publications. Some of these papers remain our most highly cited, and occupy 8 spots on the list of the top-15 highly cited papers across Hungary's seven leading journals dealing with spatial issues (Tésits, Hajdú, Sasvári 2027). The golden age was buoyed by a rising tide of interest: from a niche research field, the emerging paradigm of regional policy and administrative reforms became key questions of EU accession, resulting in steady social and policy interest in the results of spatial research in Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore, TéT could retain its embeddedness in theoretical and conceptual matters, while contributing to public policy and the institutional framework of regional development (Rechnitzer 2006, 2007). However, this golden age was already fading in the mid-2000s; whereas spatial issues came to the forefront in Hungary in the 1990s, national concerns took their place afterwards due to an unfolding socio-political crisis. Recentralisation in development policy became the trend from 2006, and administrative reforms were rolled back (see Pálné, Somlyódyné 2026 in this issue).

Table 2: An issue from the golden age of spatial research (1994–2010)
Egy lapszám a területi kutatások aranykorából (1994–2010)

Issue	*Author(s)*	*Disciplines / methods*	*Title and topic*
Vol. 17 No. 1	Nemes Nagy (2003)	regional science / theoretical synthesis	*Duality and paradigms of regional science – in the Hungarian mirror* Examines the theoretical foundations of regional science in the context of four theoretical paradigms in the context of general social theories and social space theory.
Vol. 17 No. 1	Faragó (2003)	regional science / theoretical synthesis	*One kind of reading of the space view and „spatial" planning* Provides a post-positivist critical reading of the concept of space, spatial structures, and the human use of space; offering a view of communal (spatial) planning rooted in the unity of developmental, organisational, sectoral and functional planning.
Vol. 17 No. 1	Dusek (2003)	regional science / methodology	*Comparison of gravity models and gravitation law* Discusses theoretical and methodological advances in gravity modelling and their application in spatial sciences, with a special focus on catchment areas and international trade.
Vol. 17 No. 1	Bartke, Czira, Vidéki, Volter (2003)	regional science / quantitative analysis	*An analysis of spatial equilibrium on the example of three microregions* Surveys the development of three LAU-1 microregions through a spatial equilibrium model.
Vol. 17 No. 1	Nárai (2003)	sociology / empirical study	*Civil organisations in a small town's life* Studies the role of civil society organisations and bottom-up development in local society through a case study.
Vol. 17 No. 1	Konczosné Szombathelyi (2003)	regional studies / empirical study	*Global world, linguistic and cultural effects* Studies global–local linkages through intercultural communication and the embedding processes of an FDI subsidiary.

Issue	*Author(s)*	*Disciplines / methods*	*Title and topic*
Vol. 17 No. 1	Forgács (2003)	planning / policy review	*The European Social Fund and the educational policy of the European Union* A policy analysis of education policy initiatives supported by the ESF, with a policy outlook for post-accession.
Vol. 17 No. 1	Vincze, Mezei (2003)	rural studies / questionnaire, statistical analysis	*The manpower conditions of rural development in Plaiesii de Jos microregion from Romania* Surveys the human development, local linkages and development challenges of a microregion in Romania through a questionnaire and population statistics.
Vol. 17 No. 1	Buday-Sántha (2003)	rural studies / theoretical & policy review	*Complex development of agricultural areas* Discusses structural change in agricultural areas through a shift from agricultural production to a multi-functional role in land use, product diversification, and sustainability.
Vol. 17 No. 1	Novotny (2003)	urban studies / policy review	*Cross-border city networks: A further institutional fashion in European cross-border cooperation?* Discusses the rise of cross-border city networks and evolving institutional forms of cooperation in the wider European context, with a focus on Euroregions and Interreg IIIB.

Source: author's compilation

The issue selected for this era exemplifies the fusion between theory and policy. The issue begins with two influential conceptual papers, Nemes Nagy's (2003) review of the theoretical frameworks and main paradigms of regional science, and their connections to social space theory; and Faragó's (2003) theoretical analysis of the concept of space – forming one of the theoretical debates of the decade. This is followed by two papers with a highly methodological bent; one dealing with general methodology, and another one applying it (the main author, István Bartke, linking the era to the early days of spatial sciences in 1960s planning). Further papers reflect the journal's thematic breadth: the analysis of both smaller-scale and larger spaces make an appearance; spaces from Hungary, Central and Eastern Europe, and the wider European Union are represented; and the mix of disciplines is remarkably broad.

The period between the mid-1990s and 2010 also expanded Tér és Társadalom's geographic scope, representing early-stage internationalisation. While studies on CEE and Western Europe were always found in the journal, they became more prominent in this period. Owing mainly to difficulties in research funding and travel, academics in both Hungary and CEE were "locked into their own spaces" in the flow and production of knowledge in international spatial research, mainly publishing research results on spaces close to them (Lux 2012). These publications themselves were subject to a strong western hegemony found in international journals, driving research interests and selection criteria (Timár 2004a, b). Tér és Társadalom could not resolve these contradictions, but it published an increasing number of comparative studies with a broader spatial focus, addressing issues of CEE regional development, European affairs, and, in a research strand that would gain prominence in the 2010s, global spaces and networks. Owing much to the network-building efforts of Gyula Horváth, head of the Hungarian Regional Science Association between 2003 and 2010, and general director of the Centre for Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences between 1997 and 2012, Hungarian authors from neighbouring countries became increasingly regular authors in the journal. Co-authored papers between Hungarian and foreign authors helped bridge scientific communities too, embedding local research in international academic networks, and serving knowledge exchange in the CEE macro-region.

In 2011, Tér és Társadalom's editorial duties were taken over the Budapest-based team of Györgyi Barta, who worked closely with Márton Czirfusz and Gergely Tagai in navigating the challenges before the journal. The publisher, Centre for Regional Studies, itself underwent deep reorganisation and a period of institutional uncertainty in finding a new position in SSH (Social Sciences and Humanities) research with a reduced policy advisory role, and decreasing interest in regional development in university curricula, and a more pure focus on academic excellence (Varjú 2024). After the golden age, spatial research had to find a new role after an intense period of policymaking and institutional change, which was reflected in the *disciplinary opening and a stronger theoretical focus* in the

journal's publication profile. Barta and her team widened TéT's scope to more strongly involve neighbouring disciplines with an interest in complex spatial issues. Due to Gyula Horváth's organisational work, the Hungarian Regional Science Association itself grew considerably, becoming an effective cross-disciplinary forum in Hungary and abroad, with dividends for our journal. While the 2000s had a heavier emphasis on policy due to practical needs concerning EU accession, the theoretical focus and rigour of the journal was strengthened – although the presence of the quantitative approach declined among the submissions.

Issues from this period reflect this transitory character (Table 3). The one picked as an example features a translated reprint of an influential paper from Journal of Regional Science – as one of its authors, Balázs Lengyel represented a new generation of young Hungarian researchers who could regularly publish in the best journals with the highest-ranked co-authors in spatial research, making this paper a highly symbolic one for Tér és Társadalom. The selection of papers reflect TéT's disciplinary variety, with insights on economic history (a reappraisal of Thünen's foundational work, the Isolated State by Tamás Dusek, 2013), command and control centres in the global urban network, and papers on Hungarian, Polish, and EU regional policy. We find an increasing number of papers with an interest in global-scale spatial issues (of which Csomós 2013 is one), and an increased emphasis on international comparative studies. A new generation of young researchers entering the field also showed an increased interest in the "smaller issues" of social spaces. Mostly relying on the case study approach, these papers highlight the intricacies of urban development while, on a meta level, show the transformation of spatial research from one with predominantly "big-picture" concerns into a more fragmented and more detail-oriented academic discipline.

This period came with continuing international opening. The Hungarian Regional Science Association had a growing international presence, interfaced with the Regional Studies Association (RSA), the European Regional Science Association (ERSA), and the Regional Science Association International (RSAI), co-hosting their annual conferences. These expanding links were reflected in TéT's growing emphasis on comparative international research. Two attempts were made by the editors to be listed in Scopus; although much ground work was done towards this goal, both bids were unsuccessful – these experiences are rather consistent with those of other journals in Central and Eastern Europe, reflecting the difficulties of being accepted in the global academic publishing industry. The failed bids set the journal's agenda for the following years: maintain Tér és Társadalom's prominent place in domestic academic rankings, while increasing its international visibility.

Table 3: An issue from the period of disciplinary opening and theoretical refocusing (2011–2019)
Egy lapszám a diszciplináris nyitás és növekvő elméleti fókusz korából (2011–2019)

Issue	*Author(s)*	*Disciplines / methods*	*Title and topic*
Vol. 28 No. 3	Tranos, Nijkamp, Lengyel (2013)	regional science / quantitative analysis	*The death of distance revisited: cyber-place, physical and relational proximities* Studies the impact of physical distance and relational proximity types on Internet infrastructure through spatial interaction models with panel data specifications in combination with network analysis. [Reprinted in translation with permission from the Journal of Regional Science.]
Vol. 28 No. 3	Dusek (2013)	economics, history / historical review	*Thünen's Isolated state: The original work* A re-appraisal of Thünen's work on location theory in its original form, contrasted with its simplified later interpretations, and offering a systematic reconstruction of its theoretical and empirical aspects.
Vol. 28 No. 3	Pásztor (2013)	geography, border studies / review article	*The effect of regional integrations on the development of borderlands – The American-Mexican and the German-Polish examples* Contrasts two notable case studies as examples of cross-border integration and global flows.
Vol. 28 No. 3	Szabó (2013)	planning / policy review	*Disaster management, spatial planning and regional development* A critical review of spatial aspects in Hungarian disaster management, and suggestions for a policy synthesis.
Vol. 28 No. 3	Csomós (2013)	urban studies / quantitative analysis	*The global command and control centres, 2012* Analsyses the evolution of command and control functions in world cities through a new indicator, the Command and Control Index.
Vol. 28 No. 3	Mezei, Schmidt (2013)	planning / policy review	*Polish regional policy and its institutions* An institutional analysis of Polish regional policy in light of relevant regional disparities and ongoing territorial differentiation.
Vol. 28 No. 3	Fekete (2013)	planning / policy analysis	*Current questions of financing the Danube strategy* Outlines the implementation challenges of the European Danube Strategy within the EU's 2014–2020 financial framework.

Source: author's compilation

Our present period is therefore one of *deepening international integration.* Tér és Társadalom was edited from 2019 to 2022 by Monika Mária Váradi, with the author of this paper serving as deputy editor-in-chief; and from 2023, the author, with Jenő Farkas and later Ernő Molnár as his deputies, but Monika continuing her work in the close advisory capacity as well. These editorial tenures therefore have strong continuity. These years have strengthened TéT's multidisciplinary character, and helped maintain its position as one of the highest-evaluated social science journals in the Hungarian domestic academic rankings. Building on the groundwork of Györgyi Barta and her team, Monika oversaw the journal's internationalisation through the regular publication of English-language papers and special issues. Special issues returned to particular prominence in our journal in a way not dissimilar to its founding period, highlighting crucial aspects of spatial development, e.g. "Spatial Justice", "Changing Peripheralities and Centralities in Central and Eastern Europe", "Governance Challenges in Peripheral Regions", "Regional Development Challenges in Central and Eastern Europe", and "Social Innovation". These efforts were acknowledged through an Impact Factor gained in Clarivate's ESCI rankings for 2022, which has grown from 0.4 to 0.7 by 2026. As editor, I have continued these policies, with an eye for a balance between TéT's domestic mission, and its international recognition. In 2025 and 2026, the editorial advisory board has been strengthened with an increased number of renowned international scholars, while a growing number of English-language papers by international authors have been published in general and special issues.

The issue picked from this period is one of our English special issues, "Changing Peripheralities and Centralities in Central and Eastern Europe". This is an issue on the spatial diversity of the European semi-periphery, "arranged thematically around strategies, relations and practices of powerful groups of actors shaping socio-spatial change", and "highlighting how CEE spaces are shaped by interlinked strategies and practices of institutions, firms and networks of production and political power" (Nagy, Lux, Timár 2022, 5.). It deals with core–periphery relationships within Europe, and CEE's role therein. This is undoubtedly one of the key concerns of our journal, and crops up prominently in the current special issue as well (see You, Rodríguez-Pose 2026; Lenzi, Panzera 2026; Smętkowski 2026; Micek et al. 2026; Nagy et al. 2026). Papers in this 2022 issue deal with the "big picture" of spatial development: subsidiarity and non-technological innovation as alternate solutions for Europe's lagging peripheries (Torre 2022), changing socio-spatial dynamics along CEE borders (Scott 2022), growth pole policies and their consequences for core–periphery relationships in Romania (Benedek, Ursu, Varvari 2022), the long-term sustainability of the FDI-based growth paradigm (Gál, Lux 2022), the role of new Chinese capital investments in transforming Old Industrial Regions (Kuttor 2022), the agency of productive capital in peripheral spaces (Molnár, Saidi, Szabó 2022), the role of symbolic (media) power in delineating centres and peripheries (Sucháček, Urminský 2022), and urban sprawl's interactions with well-integrated spaces and internal

Table 4: An issue from the period of deepening international integration (2019–)
Egy lapszám az elmélyülő nemzetközi integráció időszakából (2019–)

Issue	*Author(s)*	*Disciplines / methods*	*Title and topic*
Vol. 36 No. 3	Torre (2022)	rural studies / policy analysis	*Smart development for peripheral areas. A never-ending story?* Discusses potential policy innovation and success criteria for Europe's peripheral rural areas within the framework of smart development.
Vol. 36 No. 3	Scott (2022)	border studies / theoretical review	*Hungarian Border Research as a reflection of European integration and regional transformation* A critical review of contemporary Hungarian border studies in the context of European integration, cross-border cooperation, and historical memory.
Vol. 36 No. 3	Benedek, Ursu, Varvari (2022)	planning / statistical & policy analysis	*Growth pole policy, spatial transformation and spatial inequalities in the metropolitan areas of Romania* An assessment of growth pole policy and spatial inequalities in Romania through comparative statistical analysis.
Vol. 36 No. 3	Gál, Lux (2022)	regional science / theoretical & policy review	*FDI-based regional development in Central and Eastern Europe: A review and an agenda* A critical overview of FDI-dependent regional development in Central and Eastern Europe, and prospects for policy alternatives to reduce external dependencies.
Vol. 36 No. 3	Kuttor (2022)	economics / policy review, empirical study	*New drivers of industrialization and novel aspects of Hungarian-Chinese bilateral cooperation. Chinese foreign investments in Hungary* Investigates Chinese inwards FDI in Hungarian manufacturing through a policy review and empirical case study.
Vol. 36 No. 3	Molnár, Saidi, Szabó (2022)	geography / empirical study	Strategic coupling on the European periphery: A case study of a small Hungarian town Investigates the phenomenon of FDI-led strategic coupling and upgrading trajectories in peripheral areas through the case study of different Hungarian industries.
Vol. 36 No. 3	Suchaček, Urminský (2022)	economics / empirical study	Regional economies: Reality, and national TV reporting Studies virtual media spaces in Czechia through media representations in economics reporting.
Vol. 36 No. 3	Hardi (2022)	urban studies / statistical analysis	Differences and similarities in the expansion of suburban built-up areas around the different city regions of three Central European countries Comparative analysis of urban sprawl and suburbanisation trends in middle-sized cities in Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania.

Source: author's compilation

peripheries (Hardi 2022). Many of the papers in the special issue are polemic, unafraid to raise questions about spatial development (see Szabó 2026 in this issue), and, I believe, represent the best traditions of our journal in providing complex answers to complex spatial issues.

Onwards from 40 years

In conclusion to this editorial, it is sensible to consider Tér és Társadalom's current challenges, and its future in modern academic publishing. Editing a publication with 40 years of history and an established reputation is quite different from a new one with an exploratory mission. The editor's debt to both past and future generation is both a burden and a blessing; it instils a sense of *responsibility.* As someone whose research work on regional industrial development has been so closely intertwined with notions of path-dependence, institutional contexts, and history's impact on future development paths, I perhaps understand something of what it means to steer a complex system, and how its development should be viewed through the lens of geographic possibilism (Strabo 17 [1977]). When people have – understandably – called my approach to changing the journal too hesitant or careful, they may not have imagined me carrying a fragile and valuable heirloom that belongs to a community, and has only been bestowed on me as a custodian. But I have lived with that notion ever since I accepted my commission.

Table 5: Space and Society at a glance (2018, 2025)
A Tér és Társadalom – áttekintő adatok (2018, 2025)

	2018	*2025*
Articles received	82	76
Articles published	55	39
Acceptance rate	76%	53%
Impact Factor (WoS)	–	0.7
Quartile (WoS, Geography)	–	Q3
Independent Citations (Scopus)	293	1200

Source: author's compilation

In my estimate, Tér és Társadalom finds itself in a hazardous era; hazardous not just to itself, but to academic publishing as a whole. Of course, all eras are difficult, and previous editorial retrospectives (Rechnitzer 2006; Barta 2017; Barta, Váradi 2019) have always spoken of funding uncertainties, changing institutions, and constant pressures. One of these challenges lies in the difficulties of international recognition in the large citation databases, which govern academic acceptability in our time. Here, we have succeeded at being accepted by Clarivate's Web of Science, with a growing Impact Factor, while two

Scopus bids have been rejected, once in 2014, and once in 2018. The inevitable conclusion, very much reflecting the Hungarian psyche, is that the glass is half empty. Our journal metrics have significantly improved since our 2018 Scopus bid (Table 5), but experience from other CEE social science journals, learned through informal discussion, shows there are strong institutional barriers at play here, harkening back to Timár's observations (2004a, b), although perhaps less severely (see Tésits, Hajdú, Sasvári 2027). One concern that has weighed on me and my co-editors is the risk of a "valley of death" effect, whereby a journal can destroy its domestic position and relevance through a badly managed internationalisation effort, without actually achieving its goals – or achieving them at the cost of its specific identity and *raison d'être*. Neither of these should be desirable outcomes.

The broader risks are not specific to our journal, but are connected to the previous point. The academic publishing industry's massive expansion has led to a good deal of standardisation in both form and content. This has led to improved transparency and quality control in some respects – certainly, journals are more comparable and work more transparently than before – but it has also had adverse effects on forms of expression, output originality, and viewpoint diversity. These issues are not immediately apparent in the moment, but become quite visible when we compare and contrast research papers from 20 or 30 years ago to papers now.

Formal standardisation seems like the most innocuous matter, but too tight adherence to specific paper structure, writing style, and professional expectations do not simply reduce the individual flair of published research work, which had once existed (flat "Academese" reads terribly, which is why it is rather fortunate nobody actually reads academic papers anymore), they stifle open intellectual exploration as well. There is much in the median modern research paper that is superfluous, present for the sole reason of getting through the editorial process; and often not enough of what really matters, as by the time the authors would get to the point, there is precious little word count left. The resulting papers are supposedly on the right side of "publish or perish", but are nevertheless quite dead inside. Likewise, industry expectations, through the transmission of peer review, editing, and industry standards, make some kinds of research result relatively more easy to get through the system, and others much harder – leading to opportunity costs in original thinking. Reading early issues of Tér és Társadalom, one sees somewhat less academic rigour, but quit a lot of inventiveness and originality which, representing unruly thinking, would not be published under modern circumstances, or would be sanded down in the review or editing process. Is this truly quality control, or a prison of our own construction? I am on the opinion that there are valuable parts of the CEE intellectual tradition which would benefit the modern publishing landscape.

Yet there are further ways whereby scholarly work has become too standardised. Standardised systems interface best with standardised products,

produced through standardised methods by standardised "knowledge workers" (not a term of endearment). Successful publication strategies are often built on reducing friction with these systems and playing to systemic expectations on the level of authors and journals alike. What this describes is the academic equivalent of modular assembly work built from standard prefabricated components, with a strong division of labour in large research teams. Certainly, this produces quality work that is easily quantifiable in scientometric terms, but it makes results converge towards the null point of global homogeneity. The ideal (most publishable) research paper speaks very well to some issues, but does not speak to some which may nevertheless be important or interesting. We can find an interesting parallel in one of the grand dilemmas of modern European policymaking, the issue of "regions left behind" discussed by Rodríguez-Pose (2018). It may be that little malice was involved in the neglect, which has contributed to these places' marginalisation, but it happened nevertheless, resulting in adverse socio-economic consequences, and political reactions which are both entirely predictable and justly deserved. Similar blind spots, thorny issues, or just knotty irregularities exist in great numbers in many fields of research, left unaddressed because the results would just be less interesting to highly rated journals, or they would cross one of those lines which are not to be crossed. Publishing systems select for quality, but often, only a certain kind of quality – and cumulative causation takes care of the rest. Thus, we are here because we are here because we are here. The purpose of a system is what it does.

Can we still recognise originality? Can new paradigms arise from academic journals, and are they allowed to? If the measuring stick of acceptance is matching existing patterns, then we can reproduce those patterns a thousandfold, but create no new ones. To cite Grabher and Stark's (1997) classic paper from evolutionary economic geography, too much adherence to successful production routines reduces exploratory behaviour and produces institutional rigidity, as well as eventual lock-in effects. As an observer of long-term publishing trends, I cannot help but believe that the academic publishing systems we exist and work in show these signs increasingly clearly. And as Grabher and Stark, and others studying Old Industrial Regions have shown, industries which don't shake things up with a measure of uncertainty tend to stagnate, decline, and eventually disintegrate. Generative AI has been discussed extensively regarding its potential disruptive effects on scientific production (as reflected in the multiplication of AI policies in journals' submission guidelines), but the moral panic surrounding it notwithstanding, AI is unlikely to be the main threat. The main threat, as I see it, is academia's loss of social relevance, its retrenchment when it is confronted with this point, and ultimately, disruptive effects which will be – once again – both entirely predictable and justly deserved.

So where to with Tér és Társadalom? We should look within ourselves to recognise what should be improved, but also to find what makes us interesting and unique; worth carrying forward. Our mission should thus be to maintain and

cultivate an open intellectual tradition; not through relaxed quality controls (indeed, our rejection rates have risen, and shall hopefully rise further), but through embracing complex thinking on complex spatial phenomena, rewarding originality, and remaining open to explore unknown territory. If we do so, we will not produce the field's highest-ranking journal, but we will produce one worth reading and writing for.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the journal's vice editor, Ernő Molnár, for his insightful contributions to the section on the journal's history. György Váradi for his help with journal metrics. Mária Monika Váradi and Elemérné Fenyvesi for their thorough work on copyediting and layout (the work whose results can be invisible when it is done well – and it mostly is!). Boglárka Barsi for her work as our managing editor. Tamás Szabó for cartography and technical editing. Judit Keller for language editing. And all our authors, readers, and reviewers – you have made this journal worth editing and carrying forward. Thank you.

Notes

1 As they say, „This was once revealed to me in a dream" (Berdyaev 1949, 7.).

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