Editorial Foreword

We are glad to offer you the second issue of the *Social Analysis* journal within the larger family of *Acta Universitatis Sapientae* series. After a promising start with valuable studies in various aspects of social phenomena and processes of the post-communist Europe (particularly Hungary and Romania), the standards have been set high; thus the task of compiling a consecutive issue on a special theme with similarly high standards laid a difficult charge on the guest editor, freshman in the business of journal editing.

The special topic of this second issue, *social media*, required a different set of references, contacts as compared to the previous edition – both for articles and for the peer reviewing process. Seeking for new contacts in the field of new media communication, after exhausting a quite extensive immediate acquaintanceship of professionals in the domain, is an uneasy but exciting enterprise, and it has brought an unexpected wide response from the international palette. Authors and reviewers volunteered not only from several CEE countries, but also from the US, the Russian Federation, Turkey and even India. While unreliability of digital correspondence hindered in some cases collecting material and the editing process, in the end articles have been gathered in a number far exceeding the limits of a single issue of the *Acta Sapientiae*. A circumspect and meticulous selection based on quality, topic and relevance was needed to conform the number of articles to the journal issue parameters. Besides, the problem of harmonizing content emerged: a whole set of relatively interrelated conference papers faced a nice number of independent articles in very diverse topics. In the case of several articles the editors opted for publication in the following issue of the *Acta*.

As formulated in our call for articles, this special issue of the *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae*, *Social Analysis* is focused on the theme of ‘*Social media in post-communist Europe*’. We sought to investigate the many facets, challenges and risks social media can play in the making and remaking of today's society, being especially interested in empirical studies and theoretically well-grounded discourses which analyze the rising of network society in post-socialist contexts.

Common wisdom assesses that this part of the world constitutes a laggard in terms of Internet penetration and access to digital devices. Meanwhile, Internet, social media, web 2.0, etc. represent an emerging social reality in these countries as well. We wish to look beyond the common sense and to seek answers to the following main questions:

How social media are received and used in these countries in order to link different levels and strata of the social? How and to what degree can the Internet contribute to the dissolution of social inequalities or, on the contrary, are we legitimated to talk about new, specific, Internet-mediated inequalities in this part of the world?

How the Internet and social media are used, misused and abused in specific areas of the social (e.g. education, research, health-care, business, leadership, etc.)? How and to what degree the Internet in general and social media in particular can contribute to social and political campaigns and mobilizations?"

Apart from specific problems of the technical, communicational, pragmatic aspects of social media, we were interested in the problems characteristic for the Central-Eastern European region (from the Balkans to the Baltic) as compared to the West and other areas of the world, but also in the similarities that may occur. Internet penetration varies from country to country, it is generally well behind the western part of the continent, and also digital division is prominently sharp between urban and rural areas as well as age categories (see here in this regard Balas et al, Rohn, Bakó: Preoteasa – Comanescu). And while the political, administrative, economic, and institutional spheres, as well as society in general move relatively slowly, it seems nevertheless that the youth in particular is keeping up the pace with the western trends in matters of social networking and state-of-the-art mobile multimedia devices – as we may conclude from the articles in this journal issue (see especially Balas et al, Gajić, Baraković, Serafimovska & Markovik, Kazaka, Rohn, Kopacz and Salló).

The structure of this issue is composed of three thematic sections plus the regular book review chapter, as follows: The first part titled *Social Impacts of Social Media: Edifications of a Conference* contains five papers presented at the "*Social Media and Future of Leadership*" *Conference held in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina on 12–13 May, 2011*, by the animator of the conference, Andrew Balas and mainly researchers from the countries of former Yugoslavia. The second part, *Changing Landscapes by Social Media: An Eastern European Panorama*, containing three case studies, takes the same questions and problems regarding social media discussed in the first part to other countries of Eastern and Central Europe (Bulgaria, Latvia, Estonia, Germany, Russia). We titled the third chapter *Social Media as New Generation Communication: Theory & Practice* to stress the more general character of the three studies included in it, dealing with the same topics from rather interdisciplinary aspects as varied as communication and media theory, social psychology, linguistics or visual analysis. The last part contains three book reviews – two closely related to the special theme of the issue, social media, and the third one represents the general orientation of the journal itself, namely social studies.

The first section, *Social Impacts of the Social Media*: *Edifications of a Conference* comprises five selected papers presented at the "Social Media and Future of Leadership" Conference held in Tuzla, BiH, on 12–13 May, 2011.

In the first article *Social Media and Future of Leadership: Call for action in the Balkans* Andrew Balas from the US-based Forerunner Federation and his colleagues from Eastern Europe summarize the conclusions of this conference. As the researchers state, social media may bring considerable improvements, mobilization, better results and easier communication in such varied domains as higher education, political life, or business administration. They see in new media a potential to promote more inclusive social interaction that respects minorities and minority views. These general rules and trends however – according to the referred statistics – are less present or have weaker impact in Balkan countries. Out of this consideration, (as suggested by the subtitle), the study is concomitantly a call for action in this area, requesting fundamental progress in Internet-penetration and change of mentality towards a more competitive stance in the globalizing knowledge society.

Zlatomir Gajić from Serbia investigates the role of *Websites as Teaching Tools at the Department of Media Studies of the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad***.** His *case study* presents how the Internet, an independent medium and basic journalistic tool, is used in specialized courses as teaching instrument at the Department of Media Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad. The author describes three sites that have been created for the purpose of serving as teaching tools and public media platforms at the same time: e-papers written for the Internet journalism course, a web address for reporting on natural and man-caused catastrophes and finally a website for the lectures on Media for children. We are also informed about a multifunctional web portal set up by the Department serving as an open medium for communication, internal message board and information-source as well as a server for the other three sites.

Šejn Husejnefendić and Mirza Mehmedović provided an article dealing with *Social Media and Marketing Application in South-Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina Region*. In this study the authors look at the practical use of social media by news-portals in south-eastern BiH, analyzing the applicability of social media, especially social networking sites, by news portals with their potential of marketing and advertising in everyday advertising. The paper quotes a research that confirms a direct correlation between the visibility of news-portals and their presence on social networks. Unsurprisingly, the study also shows that most users of social media are students and young people under 35 visiting social media on a daily basis, and out of this stratum as high a number as one fifth visit news-portals exclusively through links on social networks. The portals use "Facebook statements" as a marketing tool both for finding advertisers and making profits and for establishing business cooperation with other sites.

Vedada Baraković from Tuzla University in her study titled *Facebook Revolutions: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina* analyzes the aspects of political activation of social networking sites in her homeland within the larger context of the 2011 revolutions around the Mediterranean basin. She compares the role of social media in shaping political reality in North Africa and the Middle East to the simultaneous but less confrontative initiatives of the Balkan countries, especially Bosnia and Herzegovina. The failure of cyberactivism through social media in this latter country was related by the author to the ethnic and political division in B&H. Still, the attempt of organizing anti-government protests via social media showed that activism depends both on social media users and on various social factors, which transgress from the offline world into online communities.

From the Republic of Macedonia, Eleonora Serafimovska and Marijana Markovic also investigate the role of networking social media in their article *Facebook in the Multicultural Society*, approaching the issue from another aspect: the subversive effects of the social networks. The study reveals from a psychological aspect how a real-life event transgresses, expands and aggravates in the virtual space of social media. An incident sparked between two ethnic groups of Skopje around the issue of building a Church-Museum in the Kale Fortress area, resulting in a clash between the mainly ethnic Macedonian supporters and mostly ethnic Albanian opponents of the construction of the Church-Museum building, moved into the virtual space, where the real war with words continued to be fought on Facebook. New sites dedicated to the Museum-Church at Kale Fortress were being opened with offensive language, vulgarities, threats and calls for revenge, for a 'final fight'. The study discusses the reasons for misbehaviour in cyberspace, showing that the good side of humans often 'loses the battle' with regard to issues connected to the differences in such a multicultural society.

The second chapter: *Changing Landscapes by Social Media: an Eastern European Panorama* continues the investigation of social media sites with a wider picture of Eastern Europe, offering case studies from Bulgaria up to the Baltic area.

The article titled *Between 'Dear Diary' and Changing the World*: *Assessing Motivations and Impact of Bloggers in Bulgaria* written by Christopher Karadjov from California State University offers an insight into the challenges facing the Bulgarian blogosphere. It is a first overview of Bulgaria's blogs and beyond examining the extant literature, the study uses in-depth interviews with bloggers to highlight pertinent characteristics of Bulgarian blogosphere and discover bloggers' motivations and perceived impact through illustrative examples.

In her study *Corporate communication in social media in Latvia*, Olga Kazaka presents us another aspect of the use of new media, namely in the public sphere and the business sector. As she demonstrates, such social media as blogs and micro-blogs, social networks, content communities, forums and wiki in Latvia are becoming increasingly popular among users, a fact that also motivates

companies to communicate in this environment. The research findings show that social media entering a small country, where the communication area is comparatively new, meets difficulties due to the lack of experience among communication specialists in relation to social media, as well as the inability to change their communication strategies.

Ulrike Rohn of Tartu University, in her article *Cultural and Geographic Proximity in Social Network Sites* offers us *a Comparison between Estonian, Russian-Estonian and German SNS Users*. Starting from the premise that as in many other European countries, the US-owned network Facebook has taken the lead over domestic and local SNS amongst German and Estonian SNS users, the study shows that members of the Russian-speaking minority in Estonia, however, prefer SNS that originate in Russia. The article discusses the results of the focus group interviews performed with German, Estonian and Russian-Estonian SNS-users, revealing diaspora-like attitudes and behaviour of the interviewed Russian-Estonians and an implicit separation between the ethnic Estonians and Russian-Estonians in SNS.

Labeled *Social Media as New Generation Communication: Theory & Practice*, the third set of articles was sorted together based on their interest. These studies take the issue of social media on a more general level, without being concerned with country-specific aspects. Discussing both theoretical problems and observations emerging from empirical data, the three articles incline to interdisciplinary approaches rooted in humanities and psychology.

Erika Fám from the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität in Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany in her essay *Post-mediality versus Global-mediality* sets out on a quest of theoretical relevance for defining the place and nature of the new community media within media in general. The author shows that while the concept of the media has been redefined many times, the medial interpretation of post-mediality is only a critique of existing media-approaches and actuality. Starting off from W.J.T. Mitchell's approach that media is more than a medium, but rather relation and all media are mixed, the essay draws paralleling contrasts between the concept of totalmediality and the concept of postmediality. In media-philosophical terms the study treats totalmediality as theoretical possibility for overcoming postmediality in Mitchell's interpretation of media and emphasizing the dominance of visuality in the community media.

Ildikó Kopacz, resuming her thesis written at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj, titled her article tellingly "*Say lovely things about me so that I know I am like that!*" in which she analyzes *the role of positive photo comments posted on social networking websites in the development of the self-image*. Since psychology stresses the contribution of self-image in the formation of self-esteem, virtual feedback on SNS is just as important as real-life appreciation, so investigating online social media can provide us valuable information in this regard. In this light,

the study investigates the effects of the positive photo comments on the self-image. Based on a digital questionnaire examining the self-image, the study processes data collected from 41 young Hungarian people from Romania owning a Hi5 SNS-profile. While the first hypothesis, presuming that positive comments have a positive effect on the people's body image perception proved to be false, the second hypothesis according to which women were more affected than men by the positive comments was validated by the empirical data. The author also shows that men's and women's self-image didn't reveal significant differences.

Szilárd Salló, fellow of the Szekler Museum of Ciuc dedicates his article titled *The Faces of Messenger* to the visual interpretation of the language of *emoticons in the virtual communication*. Written communication, lacking the supra-segmental elements of orality that would assure a more accurate expression of emotions, is favourably assisted by emoticons in CMC, especially in instant messaging. The study examines the virtual communication related habits on Yahoo Messenger, focusing especially on the role of the potentially emotion expressing icons in the online speech, based on a research consisting of structured interviews completed by spontaneous instant messaging conversations. Apart from rating the emoticons into categories, the study investigates what kind of general and individual meanings are associated to emoticons, how do these complete written communication, and what do they indicate regarding the relationship between discussion partners.

In the review section of this journal issue two of the three book reviews are organically complementing the panorama offered by the studies.

The first one brings additional data that contribute to the rounding of the Eastern European picture. The report *Mapping Digital Media: Romania* written by Manuela Preoteasa and Iulian Comanescu as part of the *Mapping Digital Media Project* (Open Society Foundations, 4 December 2010, Country Report) is presented by Rozália-Klára Bakó. As the reviewer points out, the most important finding of the report is that in spite of its diversity, content quality of media products remains low in Romania. With television strengthening its supremacy as the main source of entertainment, the audiovisual news market is controlled by five large commercial players and the public service broadcaster, losing audiences, in spite of its leading role in the process of switch-over from analogue to digital technologies.

The other review, of Alexandru-Brăduț Ulmanu's book "*Cartea fețelor. Revoluția Facebook în spațiul social*" (*The Book of Faces. The Facebook Revolution in the Social Medium*) (Humanitas, Bucharest, 2011) presented by Dénes Tamás offers an insight into the phenomenon of online social networking, gaining ground also in Romania. The book presents in an easily readable journalistic style, how the appearance of Facebook and other community websites have radically changed and keep shaping important sections of social life.

This journal issue is closed by Ionuț Butoi's review of a book by Zoltán Rostás: *Strada Latina 8. Monografişti şi echipieri gustieni la Fundaţia Culturală Regală "Principele Carol"* (*8 Latin Str. – Gustian Monographers and Team Members at the Royal Cultural Foundation "Prince Charles [of Romania]"*) (Bucharest: Curtea Veche Publishing House, 2009). Rostás' book is a study in the history of Romanian sociology, as the reviewer states: a mandatory reading for the social science researcher who wants to adequately understand the phenomenon of the Gustian School of Sociology. The reader can follow how a project of monographic research and social reform, inspired by Professor Gusti's ideas, takes shape, grows and eventually ends, gaining an insight into the group's organization, functioning and its relationships with the state and various other institutions.

The eleven articles, together with two of the book reviews in this issue of the *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae – Social Analysis* offer not only a clear snapshot image about the transition of the Eastern and Central European countries from post-Gutenberg galaxy to the post-McLuhan galaxy in the past first decade of this new millennium, with all its particularities within the globalizing context of the new media environment, but also provides through the analyses of empirical data and theoretical interpretations a better understanding of the impact of social media on nearly every aspect of society as well as of the trends slowly shaping (in) our everyday actual and virtual reality. With many thanks to all the authors, reviewers, referees, and those who facilitated correspondence and material gathering; the editors proudly proffer the rich and diverse content, and invite the readers to think further and continue the investigation of the questions, ideas raised and phenomena analyzed in this special issue on *Social Media in Post-Communist Europe*.

László-Attila HUBBES, guest editor