



**The Department of Social Sciences of the  
Sapientia – Hungarian University of Transylvania.  
A Brief Presentation**

In the case of Romania there are three important aspects which influenced the strengthening of the education within the domain of social sciences during the last two decades. The first aspect is the endeavour of institutional rehabilitation, as far as before the 1989 regime change social science education, particularly in the field of sociology, was extremely restricted. The second issue refers to the complex process of social change which began right after the regime change and whose approach needed systematic analyses and interpretations on the part of social sciences. Chronologically, the third important aspect is related to the European Integration. Romania's EU integration in 2007 brought on the agenda the theme of social development and, consequently, the need to generate developmental policies. In this framework the need for training in applied social sciences became obvious.

The Department of Social Sciences of the Sapientia – Hungarian University of Transylvania is placed in Miercurea-Ciuc (Csíkszereda) and was established a decade ago based on the aforementioned three reasons. Although at the time of founding, i.e. in 2001, Romania's EU integration did not constitute a salient issue, the processes of social developmental policies whose aim was to gradually prepare the forthcoming EU accession had already been delineated. Based on social needs and on developmental policy challenges to be expected, the Department of Social Sciences decided to build up two BA specializations: Sociology – with important rural development content, and Communication – Public Relations (PR).

Besides the three country-level issues mentioned in the first paragraph, the establishment of our Department was influenced by a fourth, regional aspect as well. The Miercurea-Ciuc (Csíkszereda)-based faculties of the Sapientia – Hungarian University of Transylvania and, consequently, the Department of Social Sciences, are situated in the centre of a quasi-peripheral region of the country. This

region, i.e. the Seklerland is a mostly rural region with only a few small towns and several more or less culturally integrated micro-regions inside which the need for social change and developmental policy gets further accents compared to the country. For instance, in spite of the fact that there are several developmental attempts in the region, it can be said that compared to the country-level average the region is still a laggard. That is, the scale and speed of social change are moderate, social problems are accentuated, the number of small settlements suffering from social and developmental marginalization is important, developmental success stories are limited and usually small scale, the number of economically unsustainable, family-based agricultural attempts is considerable, the capitalization of endogenous capacities is undeveloped, etc.

Given these regional specificities, we intended, ever since the time of foundation, to create a Department which is concerned not only with education and research but also with connection- and co-operation-building with other institutions of the regions. Thus, this third role of any educational institution, which is more and more important in today's academic discourse, was an important imperative of our Department from the time of its establishment. This social role became ever stronger during the elapsed decade and nowadays it constitutes one of the most important patterns of the Department. Without the aim to be exhaustive, I mention here only a few examples for our 'third role' attempts: joint meetings in forms of workshops, panels and conferences with several regional institutions involved in policy building; empirical social research with the aim of grounding regional developmental policies; assistance for knowledge transfer projects; service providing for regional social agents (e.g. issuing developmental strategies and policies for local communities and micro-regions; social and developmental consultation), longer term inter-institutional co-operation strategies with regional social agents, etc.

In terms of formal higher education, our Department runs two BA level specializations (Sociology – with accents on rural development, and Communication-PR). The educational activity is provided by a personnel of 20 professionals (three university professors, two associated professors (readers), six lecturers, five assistant professors and a referent; three young researchers participate in our research based activities) who systematically participate in national and international level scientific events.

Our research is multi-faceted but concerns two major areas: our regional development and policy-oriented research is focused on the conditions of social development, while communication-centred research is connected to the theme of information society, mostly in terms of analyzing the forms of active participation (e.g. forms and modes of participation in online communities). The work of the

several active research groups is aggregated within the framework of the department's Research Centre (the articles of Bodó; Kiss and Fejes in this issue are both based on research projects carried out within the framework of our Department).

The Department has cooperation agreements with similar departments of other universities from abroad. Within the framework of the Department of Social Sciences the Autumn School of the European Society for Rural Sociology was organized in 2004. Since 2008 we are partners of the Knowledge and Policy (KNOW&POL) integrated project funded by the European Commission under Priority Seven of the Sixth RTD Framework Programme (see the short outline of the project below and the article by Kiss and Fejes in this issue). In this year, together with the Hungarian PR Society, our Department is going to co-organize for the third time the PR Summer School.

Beyond doubt, our Department is still very young and we are continuously searching for research collaboration as well as for institutional partnerships.

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