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## KISVÁROSOK RENESZÁNSZA: A KŐSZEGI PÉLDA

ASK-KRAFT KÖNYVEK. FELSŐBBFOKÚ TANULMÁNYOK  
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How many factors can determine the quality of life in a small or middle-sized (under 100.000 inhabitants) Central European town during the second decade of the 21st century? What should be the short, middle and long term strategies of national governments and municipal leaderships concerning the development of various types of settlements? Should the dwellers of the evergrowing metropoli be encouraged to move out to suburbs and smaller towns and villages or the incentives should serve the opposite aim: to invite more and more people to the big towns. Does the future belong not even to metropoli but gigantopoli or the sustainability of our globe with its limited capacities calls for stopping the process of the concentration of populations in gigantic centres? These are far from being abstract academic dilemmas but burning social, economic and cultural issues. Trying to find good answers, reasonable and feasible solutions to these questions is not possible without a deeply analytical, scholarly approach. Successful research in today's world needs well-structured, well-funded institutions that can properly combine basic and applied research on various levels. Namely, planning the future of small towns in the heart of Europe is not possible without looking into the main global tendencies of demographic development, without estimating the number and destinations of migrations, without dealing with limits and possibilities of employment in various branches of the economy.

The small town of Kőszeg with 12.000 inhabitants at the Austrian-Hungarian border, very close to Slovakia, Slovenia and Croatia houses now a unique institution that deals with the theory and practice of the integrated regional development, the idea of creative cities as well as particular Hungarian and international examples of the implementation of respective strategic development concepts. During the last half a decade it has developed a most ambitious and very productive

research project under the name Creative Cities - Sustainable Development. The acronym for the project (based on the Hungarian name and referring to the German word meaning strength) is KRAFT and by now has become a well known concept among the experts of urban and regional planning. The roots of the KRAFT concept go back to the experiences of the inhabitants of Kőszeg and another closeby town, Szombathely after the vanishing of the Iron Curtain following the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Their region suffered due to its location at the border of the Eastern and Western worlds during the Cold War and hoped to transform this disadvantage into an advantage after 1989-90. The hopes turned out to be unfounded and the optimistic enthusiasm of the very early 1990s quickly gave way to disappointments and pessimism. Why? How could this be the case in spite of the substantial European development programs that were to help the catching up process of underdeveloped regions in the countries of the former Soviet bloc? The research and higher education institutions brought into life in Kőszeg and Szombathely as a result of the persistent, hard work of the internationally well-known Hungarian social scientist, Ferenc Mislivetz, editor of the present book, have been trying to explore the unutilised potential, the boundless opportunities along the Austrian-Hungarian border for the last quarter of the century. With the creation of the new 'knowledge hub', the Institute of Advanced Study Kőszeg (acronym: IASK) in early 2016, the institutional development reached a new level and gave a great impetus to KRAFT research. The volume under review is the second book product of the project in Hungarian (in addition to several publications in English) and was first presented at the Second International KRAFT conference in Kőszeg on September 17, 2016. Under the title: *The Renaissance of Small Towns. The Kőszeg Example*, it includes 10 studies by 11 scholars.

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Divided into two parts, *How and with Whom?, What and Why?*, it analyses Kőszeg practices and makes suggestions for Kőszeg in a very broad context. The authors and editors of the book include all generations from the early 20s to the late 60s. All of them have a university background, share a thorough knowledge of respective theoretical and methodological literature and lots of practical experiences. Most of them were supported during the time of their respective research by the scholarship fund New Central Europe, that was operated by the Pannon University, the strategic partner of IASK in the large scale regional development project of Western Transdanubia in western Hungary. Neither the research nor the publication of book would have been possible without the cooperation of municipal self-governments, university professors and civil organizations.

Four studies in the more than 460 page book deal with issues related to the preservation and utilization of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Anna Szemző and Andrea Tönkö present a number of good practices that, different as they are, are connected by exploiting the 'three Ts': technology, talent and tolerance. The example of Endhoven, the home of Philips shows how in spite of the desindustrialization process the municipal leaders, based on the triple helix of education, research and entrepreneurship developed a new strategy for keeping the town attractive. Based on the soft components of everyday life, under the motto of *Sense and Simplicity*, they have developed design-related activities as the key component of their development strategy. The second example, Szczecin at the German-Polish border is trying to exploit the advantages of its border and seaside position. The brand it is developing is that of an open, close to nature but urban settlement building 'floating gardens' with canals, small islands, huge green territories. North Italy's Reggio Emilia is trying to profit from a large-scale immigration. In 2011 17.7 % of the slightly more than 140.000 population were foreign citizens and they made this peculiarity a town brand: Reggio Emilia became well known as the Center of Intercultural Dialogue. Péter Bokányi makes a very concrete suggestion for Kőszeg, describing how the literary legacy of the town and of its immediate environment can be transformed into a brand.

A frequently neglected issue in connection with the development of tourism brands is the carrying capacity of historical towns. Tamás Fejérdy devotes an extensive analysis to this problem with numerous carefully selected case-studies where the right proportion of preservation and utilisation were implemented. Ildikó Ernst describes a tourism concept that might be especially appealing to Kőszeg, that of a 'slow town' based on high quality accommodation and

food offers resulting in more extended stays. Ildikó Ernst also points out an issue that is based on lots of empirical investigations: most travel related decisions, especially on the higher quality level, are made by women. László Karvalics and Tamás Fejérdy elaborate in great detail on the resilience capabilities of small and middle sized towns. We are not always aware of the fact that about 60 per cent of European people live in these communities with less than 100.000 inhabitants. In Hungary this figure is 65 percent. Based on data from numerous towns the authors argue that the major difference among these settlements lies not so much in their vulnerabilities but rather in their capabilities for resilience. This capability can be developed by preventive adjustment, i.e. identifying possibilities for the unfolding of potentials as waterside locations or the successful management of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. A remarkable observation of the study is that the cult of famous personalities can be as important a contribution to increasing resilience capabilities as the revitalization of emblematic buildings. The authors recommend that towns with a rich heritage hire CKOs, that is Chief Knowledge Officers, who with their expertise can help the work of public administrators. Two pieces in the book deal with innovative business models that focus not only on profits but also integrate ecological and human-social factors into the decision making processes. This strategy can pay off not only in terms of environmental protection but even in financial profits as a number of 3M solutions, for example in selective garbage management, prove. Lajos Szabó describes in great detail how development projects can integrate sustainability, Gyula Zilahy explains how new forms of cooperation can help both sellers and buyers. Depending on products, location and customer types various patterns of 'unbundling' (separation of product innovation, customer relations and infrastructure management into independent enterprises) or 'long tail' (integrating all these activities into one company) can be applied. One possible, more and more spreading solution is selling services instead of products.

Three essays address specific Kőszeg issues. Katalin Lőrincz examines how a representative group of Kőszeg citizens evaluate the quality of life in their town. Her methodology includes comparisons of the Kőszeg experience to car makes, animals and plants, a most interesting way to figure out the 'soul' of a town. Petra Gyurácz-Németh deals with the experiences of tourists at hotels and restaurants of the town, suggesting that the cooperation of the suppliers of these services can benefit both themselves and their customers more than simple competition. András Kiss lists the possible ways of making the offers of the town more visible in

the world of the Internet. Small towns comparable to Kőszeg both outside and inside Hungary could profit from the methodologies of these articles.

This last remark takes us to the target readership of this volume. Leaders of all types of municipalities, decision makers on regional development and, of course, the civil society of smaller and medium-sized settlements might find the volume useful when pondering

about problems of their communities. To use Mihály Polányi's terminology: the explicit knowledge in the volume can be the basis of specific tacit knowledge for other communities as well, namely by adding that peculiar local knowledge that we have to be aware of but can not simply learn from books or at school. An English version is in the making.

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