

**Kozma Tamás – Bernáth Krisztina (eds.) 2012. *Higher Education in the Romania-Hungary Cross-border Cooperation Area*, Oradea: Partium Press, 232 pages, ISBN 978-606-8156-41-5**

***Review by Marius I. TATAR*  
University of Oradea**

This timely collection of studies, research reports and essays edited by Kozma Tamás and Bernáth Krisztina falls in the series of 4 volumes published within the *Higher Education for Social Cohesion* R&D project carried out by scholars and specialists from Debrecen and Oradea. The project aims to investigate and promote various means through which higher education institutions from the region might contribute to increasing social cohesion in the borderland area.

But what is social cohesion and why it matters? Social cohesion gained much prominence in the last two decades as a guiding idea used by policy makers for attaining social goals in Europe. Social cohesion means the capacity of societies to ensure the well-being of all their members, minimising disparities and avoiding marginalization (Council of Europe, TFSC, 2007). After the fall of the communist regimes in 1989, social cohesion in the borderland regions of Central and Eastern European countries has been negatively affected by their peripheral position and seclusion inherited from the past. Among other hindering factors, the Hungarian-Romanian cross-border area was also characterized by low and declining stock of human capital, since a significant share of human resources from this region moved to the capital cities of the two countries or migrated abroad.

Universities are key factors in developing the human capital crucial to a knowledge-based economy. Higher education institutions are both repositories and disseminators of knowledge and innovation, and are thus a precious resource (Burnett, 2007, p. 288) for sustainable development in borderland regions. Students are direct beneficiaries of higher education programs and therefore no wonder that the main focus of this book is on students as future professionals working in this cross-border area. Moreover, the effects of universities on students as direct beneficiaries of higher education can diffuse then to the wider society. As university graduates enter labour markets they often become leaders and innovators throughout the economy, generating productivity, the benefits of which may accrue to the community at large,

as well as to them personally (Burnett, 2007, p. 288). Several studies in this book touch upon this issue of personal and community benefits of higher education by investigating students' integration on labour market, their skills, expectations and attitudes towards work and learning, and also the factors influencing their mobility plans and educational progress, as well as employers' demands of competences which are expected from young labour market entrants (see for instance the chapters by Mihály Fónai; by Gábor Flóra; by Rita Mátyási, Krisztina Bernáth, and Andrea Berce; by Judit Csoba and Katalin Ábrahám; by Ágnes Réka Dusa; and by Andor Szőcs and Márk Birinyi).

But is the role of universities limited to transferring technical skills and preparing students for careers or do they also have a social role in shaping and modelling behaviour to influence particular values and attitudes? When students attend higher education institutions, they go through a process of socialization, and it is vital to ensure that they acquire the core values that underpin social cohesion (Moiseyenko, 2005). In other words, besides developing skills and competencies, higher education also has a role in cultivating moral awareness as a vital product of colleges' and universities' primary activities (Heuser, 2007). This function of educational institutions is highlighted in several studies in this book. Thus, Katalin Kardos's paper emphasizes the role of denominational schools in the development of skills and social competencies, as well as loyalty to peer groups, while Szilvia Barta analyzes students' attitudes towards the ethics, norms and rules governing academic life. The paper of Edina Kovács discusses the development of students' professional identities and roles while Nóra Veronika Németh examines the students' patterns of media consumption and internet usage.

The Romanian-Hungarian cross-border region is also characterized by ethnical, religious and cultural diversity and this might pose further challenges to developing social cohesion. However, the studies presented in this book suggest that universities from this region can tackle these challenges. Building social cohesion in diverse societies requires a commitment to creating inclusive linkages with the wider community, building a sense of unity and tolerance and showing that everyone can benefit from higher education (Heyneman, Kraince, Lesko, & Bastedo, 2007). Several papers in this volume address the question of how to promote inclusive and fair educational policies which lead to the social and professional integration of students

belonging to disadvantaged groups, such as Roma students (in the chapter by Zsolt Botond Bottyan and Floare Chișea) or students coming from low income families or from foster homes (see the study of Ibolya Veressné-Gönczi and Erzsébet Rákó). Teachers' attitudes towards social inclusion and "teachability" of students with special needs are also investigated in this book, in the paper authored by Ildikó Pető and Tímea Ceglédi.

The general conclusion that emerges from the studies included in this book is that universities can contribute to the social cohesion of the Hungarian-Romanian cross-border area, but only if they cooperate to promote intergroup understanding, tolerance and mutual respect, and a shared sense of belonging that can bridge divisions based on ethnicity, religion, class structures and other factors. Thus one of the most important contributions of higher education to social cohesion as a public good is the universities' capability to promote shared values and to provide good organizational models based on freedom, institutional autonomy, transparency and the rule of law, models from which the wider community can learn (Heyneman et al., 2007).

As a thoughtful and well researched contribution to the on-going debate about higher education's role in fostering social cohesion, this book will interest students and teachers of educational studies, sociology, political science, as well as policy makers and experts concerned with regional development and cohesion policy.

#### **References:**

- Burnett, Nicholas. (2007). Higher education and social cohesion: an introduction. *PROSPECTS*, 37(3), 287-289.
- Heuser, Brian L. (2007). Academic social cohesion within higher education. *PROSPECTS*, 37(3), 293-303.
- Heyneman, Stephen, Kraince, Richard, Lesko, Nancy, & Bastedo, Michael. (2007). Higher Education and Social Cohesion: A Comparative Perspective. In Philip G. Altbach & Patti McGill Peterson (Eds.), *Higher Education in the New Century: Global Challenges and Innovative Ideas*. Boston: Boston College - Center for International Higher Education.
- Moiseyenko, Olena. (2005). Education and Social Cohesion: Higher Education. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 80(4), 89-104. doi: 10.1207/S15327930pje8004\_7.
- Council of Europe, TFSC. (2007). *Towards an Active, Fair and Socially Cohesive Europe - Report of High-Level Task Force on Social Cohesion*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.