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**KOMÁRNO:
TOWARDS A LEADING ROLE
IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

**by
Ingrid Szabó**

**KOMÁRNO
2006**

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1. INTRODUCTION

(Ingrid Szabó ¹)

In the countries of the Carpathian Basin, where Hungarian national minorities live (Slovakia, Romania, Ukraine, Serbia and Croatia), it has been a significant problem that the proportion of those having obtained university degree within ethnic minorities is a lot lower than the one within the majority. Consequently, the number of those ethnic Hungarians who have earned a university degree in the above mentioned countries is a lot lower than it should be on the basis of their proportion in the population.

In the 15 year-period following the change of regime in Slovakia, the education of the Hungarian national minorities was not able to follow the dynamic development – which could be detected primarily in the large number of students enrolled – in higher education. By the beginning of 2000 a considerable fallback could be experienced. While at the turn of the millennium the proportion of Hungarian national minority was around 10 per cent, the proportion of the people participating in higher education did not reach 5% (this number was even worse than the rate in 1990) (László, B. 2004).

Between 1990 and 2001 the number of university students belonging to the Hungarian minority was unevenly distributed among the different fields of sciences (arts and humanities, law, technical sciences,

economics, agriculture, etc.) The highest rate of increase in the number of students intake effected the fields of economics and technical sciences. At the same time, this increase was considerably lower than that in Hungary. This disadvantage in almost all fields has become relatively stable. (László, B. 2004)

Therefore, the establishment and gradual development of Hungarian higher education beyond the borders of Hungary became one of the most important foreign policy issues after the political-economic change of regime. In cooperation with Hungarian ethnic institutions and political parties, Hungary has made increased efforts to assist in the reaching of this aim.

As a result, several Hungarian institutions of higher education were established: the Teachers' Training College in Berehovo (Sub-Carpathia, Ukraine, 1997); the Sapientia University of Transylvania (Transylvania, Romania, 2001) and the Christian University of Partium (Partium, Romania, 2001). Similarly, J. Selye University opened its gates in Komárno, Slovakia in 2003. The establishment of this institution proved to be a significant step forward towards the increasing of the level of higher education of the Hungarian minority in their mother tongue (Baros, R. 2004).

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In 1990, right after the political-economic change of regime an attempt was made to establish an independent university (Jókai University) where the language of education is Hungarian in Komárno, Czechoslovakia. However, in spite of the considerable efforts, this initiative did not get any political support, since the bill concerning the establishment of the university was disapproved both by the federal (Czechoslovakian) and by the Slovakian parliament.

The petition justifying the necessity of Jókai University was submitted by the Hungarian members of parliament to President Vaclav Havel in 1993. The MPs also proved in the petition that Komárno possessed all the preconditions necessary to establish and operate the university. In spite of these, all the efforts seemed to be fruitless.

According to the plans, the University would have educated the Hungarian minority students at two faculties: pedagogy and humanities. At the teacher training faculty future primary and secondary school teachers would have been trained, while at the Faculty of Humanities pastors and cultural managers could have received education from the beginning of the 1990s.

The high standard of the education would have been guaranteed by the teachers and researchers of two other Hungarian

minority higher educational institutions (Bratislava and Nitra), and several guest instructors from Hungary would have undertaken the mission of teaching at the university for a certain period of time.

Since despite the failure the town of Komárno did not give up on the plan to establish a higher educational institution where the language of instruction is Hungarian, in 1992 the local government decided on the foundation of a university on its own. The establishment of the City University of Komárno (Mestská univerzita Komárno) was greatly supported by the multilateral activities of the Slovakian Hungarian politicians in universities in Hungary to bring their dream – providing higher education in Hungarian in Komárno – to life.

As a result of the efforts described above, in 1992 the Teacher Training College of Győr (Hungary), the Kindergarten Teacher's Training College of Sopron (Hungary), the University of Horticulture and Food Industry, Budapest, the College Faculty of Horticulture, Kecskemét (Hungary) all established their consultancy centers. The four-year higher educational training programs of these institutions were integrated by the City University of Komárno. (*Sidó, Z. 2006*)

To the operation of the newly established institution a wide range community cooperation was essential. To cover the operational and maintenance costs of the university, contribution came from the Hungarian Ministry of Education as well as the local government of Komárno, the Schola Comaromiensis Foundation and the

local governments of almost 30 villages in South-Slovakia where considerable Hungarian minorities live. To enhance effective and motivating training, numerous Slovakian, Hungarian and foreign organizations (*Csemadok*, *Illyés Foundation*, *Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó* [*National Testbook Publishing Company*]) donated technical equipment, textbooks and other tools.

In the frame of the City University of Komárno education started at three faculties with 108 students in 1992. After a gradual increase in the student number, by 2001 the total number of undergraduates approached 400. (*Tab 1.*).

At the City University of Komárom higher education took place for 10 years (1992-2002), then some of its functions were gradually taken over by educating the

students in the framework of the Foundation for the J. Selye University and later by J. Selye University itself.

As a first step in the establishment of the recent university, the Foundation for the J. Selye University was founded in 2001 with the assistance of the Hungarian government. In cooperation with the Budapest University of Economic Sciences and Public Administration and the Office of International Higher Education Development Beyond the Borders, university courses in economic sciences were launched in Komárno with Hungarian as a language of instruction. The following year the Budapest University of Technology and Economics opened its courses in informatics at the same place (*Horváth, T. 2002*).

Tab. 1: Number of undergraduates in academic year 1991-2002 at the City University of Komárno (faculties)

Faculty	1992/ 1993	1993/ 1994	1994/ 1995	1995/ 1996	1996/ 1997	1997/ 1998	1998/ 1999	1999/ 2000	2000/ 2001	2001/ 2002
Primary School Teacher	40	78	108	147	143	136	164	171	170	0
Pedagogical	38	74	76	63	56	44	44	47	47	71
Horticultural	30	47	57	120	90	128	142	153	171	0
Total	108	191	241	330	289	308	350	371	388	71

Source: *Sidó, Z. 2006*

3. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY AND ITS BACKGROUND

On 23 October 2003 the National Council of the Slovak Republic adopted a resolution about the establishment of J. Selye University. Institutional higher education in Hungarian language was one of the aims of Hungarian parties in Slovakia even back in 1989. By this, they primarily wanted to increase the proportion of Hungarian university graduates in Slovakia in a short term. While the proportion of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia moved between 12.2% and 10.7% in the second half of the 20th century, the percentage of Hungarians attending courses in higher education hovered only between 3.7% and 4.8% during the same period.

According to the Mission Statement of the university the J. Selye University serves as a ground for Hungarian higher education in Slovakia, in the hope that the number of Hungarian college and university graduates as well as the general erudition level of Hungarians will increase in Slovakia.

A higher level of erudition could provide an opportunity for young Hungarians to strengthen their position on the labor market; it could bring about decreased unemployment rate and the economic development of regions where Hungarians live. J. Selye University wants to contribute to the economic and social development of the region this way.

“J. Selye University promotes the development of a group of Hungarian intellectuals, who could become the pillars of our community; and who due to their knowledge of languages will be able to succeed even on international level” (*Horváth, Gy. ed. 2004*).

As well as providing education, the university also develops scientism. It assist Hungarian scholars living in Slovakia to pursue their activities on international level, it starts cooperation with the international network of scientific institutions (*Sikos, T. T.–Tiner, T. eds. 2007*).

The university's aim is to act as a regional center of scientism. With its activities and aims, J. Selye University (acronym – JSU) intends to help the disadvantaged Hungarian minority in Slovakia. The disadvantageous position is partly a result of the lack in education. JSU wants to hinder the inevitable assimilation of Hungarians this way (*Albert, S. 2005*).

4. THE FIRST ACADEMIC YEAR AND THE REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF UNDERGRADUATES

The first entrance examinations took place in June 2004, the first undergraduates enrolled in September, the first opening ceremony of the academic year took place, and 27 full time teachers started to work at the university. The institution was lead by Sándor Albert, as an appointed rector. In September and October the governing bodies of the university and of the faculties were established: the University Council and the faculty councils. In the first academic year the university had 648 undergraduates (*Tab. 2*).

In the academic year 2004-2005 the university also had an affiliated

department in Kráľovský Chlmec, Slovakia. The Corvinus University in Budapest had maintained an affiliated department there since 1994, which provided higher education in economics. Nowadays, the education there is gradually being transformed and maintained by the Faculty of Economics of JSU.

The spatial and regional distribution of undergraduates was also peculiar (*Fig. 1*). Studying the map we can state, that the first students of JSU came from 134 towns and villages of the South Slovakian region, most of them from Komárno and Dunajská Streda districts. *Fig. 1* also shows the importance of the affiliated department in Kráľovský Chlmec, since some students from Eastern Slovakia cannot afford to study in Komárno. The number of foreign students from neighboring countries is so low that it can be neglected.

The in-service courses have been very popular, because the Hungarian education in Slovakia suffers from a high ratio of

Tab. 2: Number of undergraduates in academic year 2004-2005 (faculties)

Training programs	Faculty of Economics	Faculty of Pedagogy	Faculty of Theology	Total
Full time students	175	181	39	395
In-service students	0	210	43	253
Total	175	391	82	648

Source: News Bulletin, SJE, 2004.

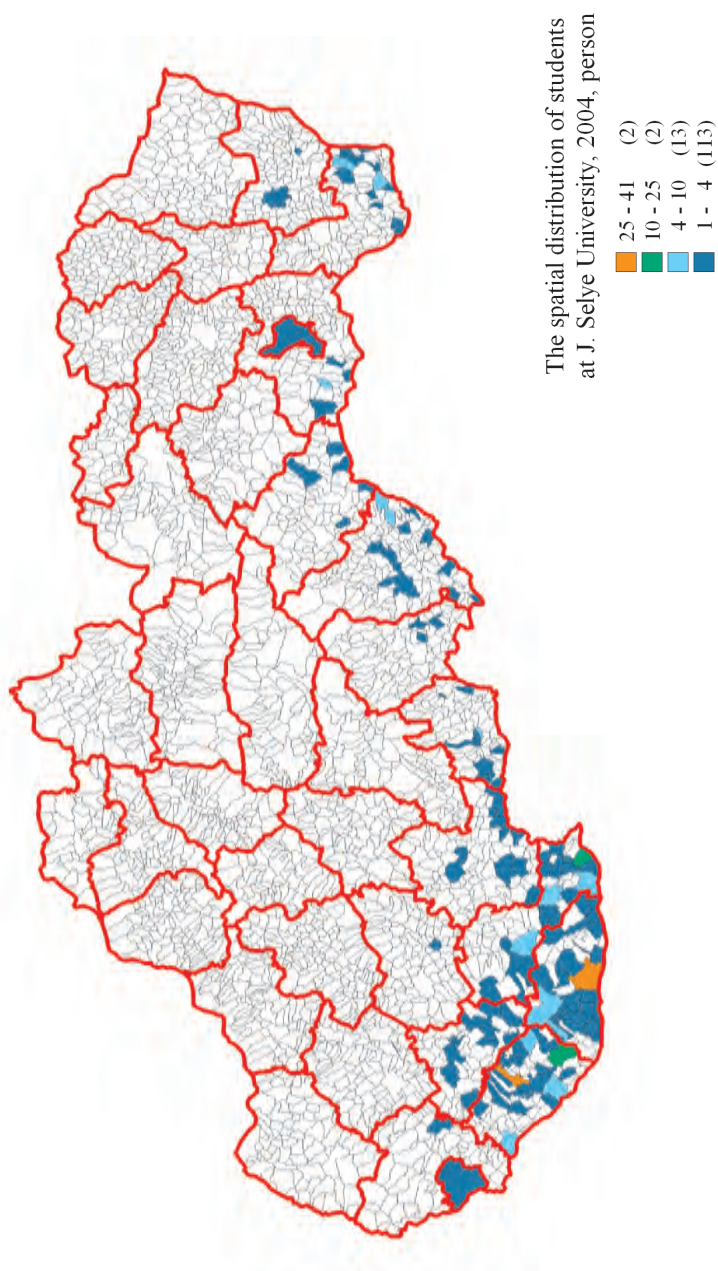


Fig 1. Spatial distribution of students admitted to J. Selye University in 2004

unqualified teachers. This course enables unqualified primary school teachers to get degrees, and engineers and economists to get teaching degrees. In the first school year 2004-2005, more than a half of the students of the Teacher Training Faculty and the Faculty of Theology were correspondent students.

At the beginning the Faculty of Economics offered study programs in the fields of management. Professional Slovak and Hungarian full time and part time lecturers have taught the students. In order to offer wider selection of courses the faculty has applied for the accreditation of the Public Administration and Regional Development study programs.

The regular and in-service students of the Faculty of Pedagogy can freely combine

the following study programs: Preschool Education, Hungarian Language and Literature, English, German, Informatics, Mathematics and Religious Education. The most popular study programs were Pre-school Education, Hungarian Language and Literature and English.

Both regular and in-service students can study in the Faculty of Theology. In the past the J. Calvin Theological Academy educated the pastors. The education of pastors was granted the Master level after JSU was founded in 2004. By taking over the students from J. Calvin Theological Academy the Faculty of Reformed Theology started not only with freshmen, but with 5 years. Further characteristic of the faculty is the high ratio of foreign students (mainly Hungarian students from the Carpathian Basin).



Faculty of Theology, J. Selye University



Faculty of Pedagogy, J. Selye University



Faculty of Economics, J. Selye University

Since its foundation J. Selye University has been cooperating with Slovak and Hungarian universities. It has signed partnership agreement with Corvinus University of Budapest, College for Modern Business Studies in Tatabánya and West-Hungarian University Apáczai Csere János Teacher's Training College in Győr. These institutions have provided professional help and lecturers.

The university has enriched the cultural life of Komárno since its foundation. The PR Department has organized lectures, which were open to the public. The professors' field of research, academic background and career were introduced to the students. During the first Komárno University Days was the ceremonial inauguration of the rector, the vice-rectors, the deans, and the vice-deans. Several accompanying events were organized such as a concert, the university ball, sport day, and student competitions.

In the second academic year the volume of full time students was two times higher than in the previous one and exceeded 770 persons. The quantity of in-service students has nearly reached 600 persons, which means a 2.3 times increase. Because of the considerable prosperity in the total volume of students, the university had more than 1600 undergraduates in the autumn of 2005. (*Tab. 3*).

The substantial growth of applicants is due to various reasons.

- The Faculty of Economics offered courses for correspondent students in 2005. Number of enrolled students was

Tab. 3: Number of undergraduates at each Faculty in academic year 2005-2006

Training programs	Faculty of Economics	Faculty of Pedagogy	Faculty of Theology	Total
Full time students	338	395	38	771
In-service students	190	377	27	594
Affiliated department	145	92	0	237
Total	673	864	65	1602

Source: News Bulletin. SJE, 2005

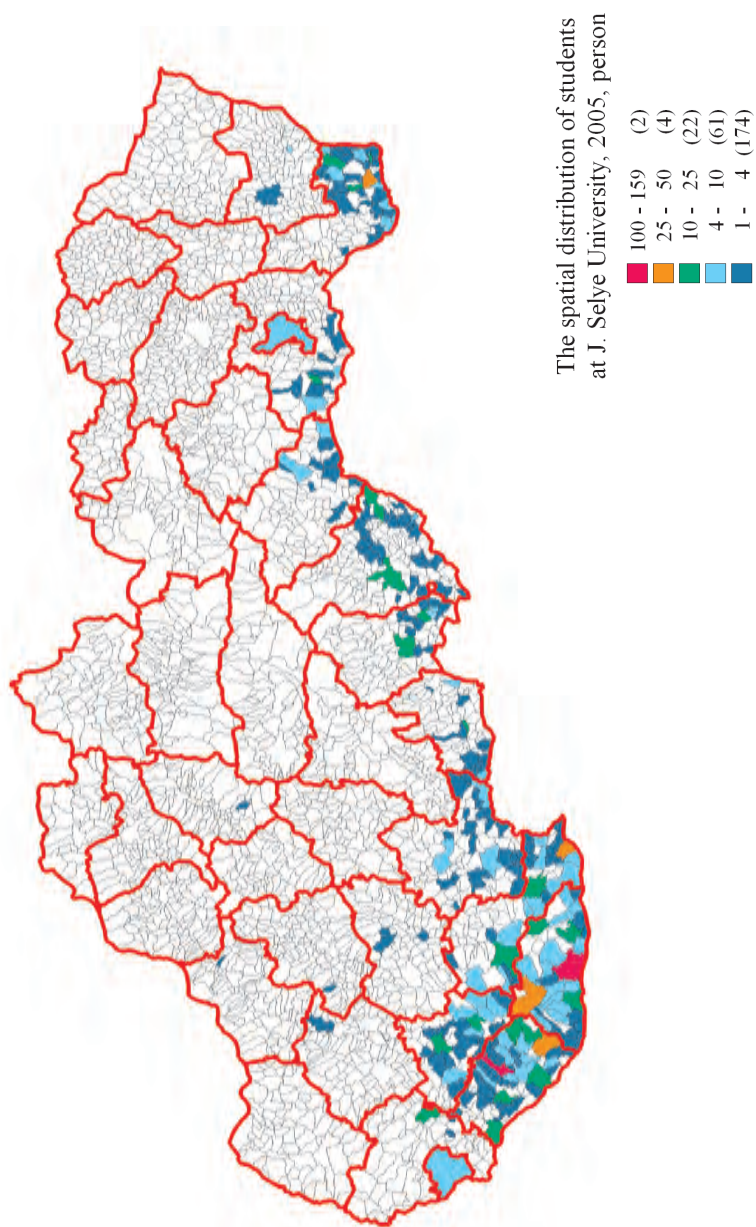


Fig. 2. Spatial distribution of students admitted to J. Selye University in 2005

190 in Komárno and 100 in Kralovsky Chlmec. The Slovak Parliament has passed a bill stating that those working in public administration are required to have a degree. Hence so many tax consultants, policemen and officers started their studies at JSU. The Faculty of Economics attracts broader range of students. Some of them want to set up their own companies later on.

- The Teacher Training Faculty provides new educational opportunities. The Department of History was founded in 2005. The opening of a new affiliated department in Lučenec has contributed to the record number of applicants. Lučenec has always been a seat of kindergarten teacher education. Now the kindergarten teachers do a Bachelor's degree in Education.
- The number of students has decreased in the Theological Faculty, because a large number of them graduated in 2004.

Students came from 269 towns and villages in 2005. The number of towns and villages more than doubled during one year. This shows that the university attracts students from various regions of the country. The dominance of Komárno and Dunajská Streda districts has strengthened and the affiliated departments of the Faculty of Pedagogy in Lučenec and that of the Faculty of Economics in Kralovsky Chlmec also attract a great number of students (*Tab. 3*) (*Fig. 2*).

In the third academic year in 2006-2007 the University already had 2520 full

time and in-service students which indicate a remarkable improvement in the university's role in higher education in the region. The data clearly show how the proportion of the students at the Faculty of Economics increased compared to that of the students at the Faculty of Pedagogy, while the number of theology students remained modest (*Tab. 4*).

While the proportion of business students at all-university level in 2004 was 27.2%, in 2006 this rate already exceeded 45%, which clearly indicates a constant and steady increase in the number of students enrolled in the study programs of the Faculty. Thus, obviously, the number of graduates at the Faculty of Economics will gradually grow, and along with it there will be an increase in the number of those who possess highly marketable knowledge in the field of business both at meso- and micro level (SMEs).

Business students have better career prospects and higher income compared to graduates from the Faculty of Pedagogy, and this surely will make the Faculty of Economics more attractive among future applicants.

The attraction zone of the University has expanded since the fall of 2006; however, this expansion is not as spectacular as it was previously (*Szabó, I. 2007*). In September 2006 the University received students from 300 settlements in Slovakia, strengthening the dominance of Komárno and Dunajská Streda districts in the spatial concentration processes (*Fig. 3*).

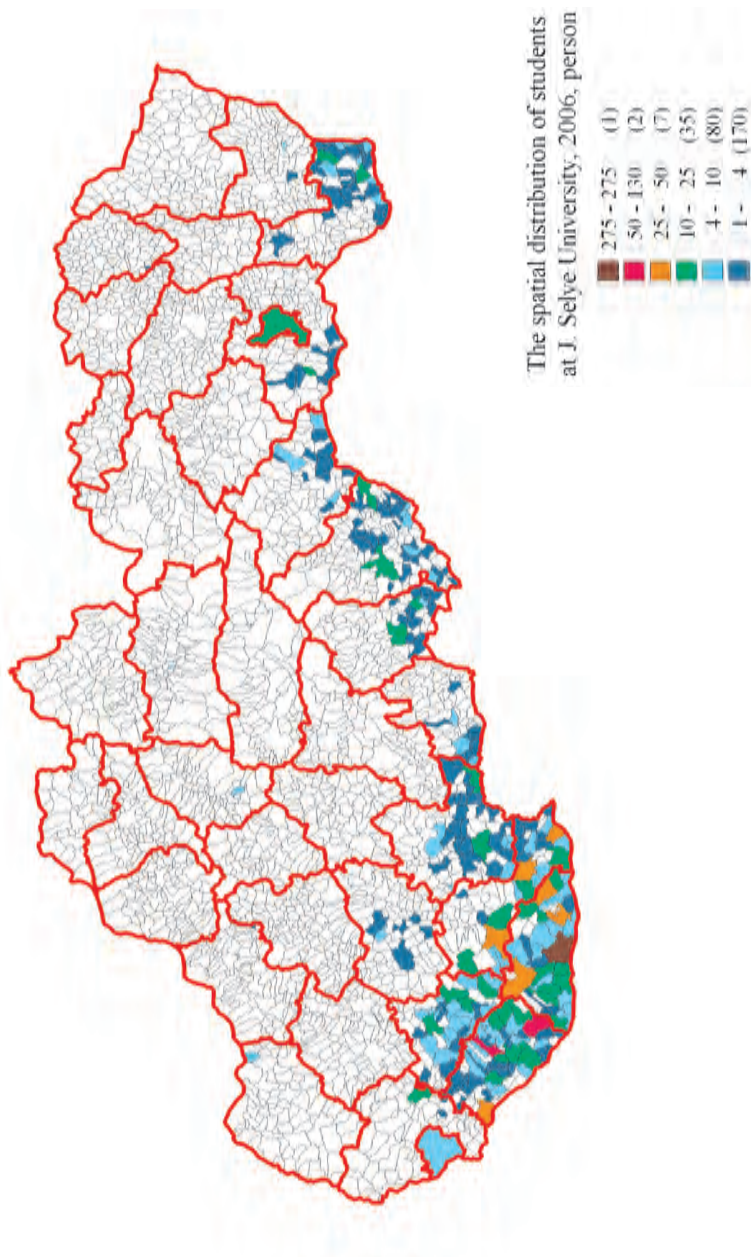


Fig. 3. Spatial distribution of students admitted to J. Selye University in 2006

Tab. 4: The number of undergraduates at the different Faculties in academic year 2006-2007

Training programs	Faculty of Economics	Faculty of Pedagogy	Faculty of Theology	Total
Full time students	518	589	45	1152
In-service students	460	622	34	1116
Affiliated department	160	92	0	252
Total	1138	1303	79	2520

Source: News Bulletin. SJE, 2006

After a thorough examination of the spatial distribution of students in the gravity zone, we can clearly observe that among the places of residence of the students enrolled in the institution some settlements in South-Slovakia are overrepresented compared to the previous data. This is supported by the fact that 30% of the students come from only 10 settlements (compared to the previous 24) and 26 out of the 35 settlements where 10-25 students attend the University are located in South Slovakia.

At the same time, there is also a great number of small villages from where fewer than 10 students enrolled the institution in Komárno. So after 2007 at regional level we can count on the stabilization of the attraction zone of the University in the long run, while concerning the settlements these students

arrive from processes towards concentration will strengthen (Sikos, T. T.–Szabó, I.–Tiner, T. 2007).

An important additional profile of the University is its research activity which is to provide a solid basis for the operation of a prospective doctoral school. To lead and coordinate this activity among the Faculties, in 2004 a non-profit organization, the J. Selye University Research Institute was established. The fundamental task of the Institution is the thorough investigation of the economic, social and environmental processes taking place in the post-transitional East-Central Europe and in the Carpathian Basin. According to this, the main activities of the Institute include the following:

- to enhance and coordinate the research activity at the different departments of the University and to provide possibility to publish the results internationally,
- to cooperate with different renowned institutions (universities, colleges, research institutions) in the Carpathian Basin in the field of minority studies,
- to establish new relationship and to improve the already existing ones with foreign universities and research institutions, to work on common projects, to organize international conferences and to publish the results of the different research activities,
- to publish the results of the scientific research both in printed and in

electronic forms, to enhance the possibility of their adaptation into the latest teaching material.

The main fields of research of the Research Institute include the exploration the regional (East-Central European) characteristics of the global environmental processes, the revelation of the peculiarities of the cycles of integrational and desintegrational processes reappearing periodically in the Carpathian Basin throughout its history, and the examination of the role of the Danube as the main tool of establishing regional links.

Another research topics of high priority – mainly in cooperation with another institutions – are the following:

- Spatial processes of the development of the modern forms of retail trade in the Slovakian-Hungarian Euroregions.
- The changing place of the Slovakian-Hungarian border region in the transport network of the European Union.
- Long-term settlement development trends along the Slovakian-Hungarian border region.
- The effect of the abolishment of the Slovakian-Hungarian border on the migrational processes in East Central Europe.
- The regional characteristics of the diffusion of mobile communication in the Slovakian-Hungarian border region.
- Spatial characteristics of the flow of capital and corporate expansion from Hungary to Slovakia.

The necessary personal conditions are provided by the staff possessing academic degree and the research fellows of the Institute, while the financial background is ensured from University resources and by participating in national and international projects for competitions.

J. Selye University as the single higher educational institution in Slovakia where the language of instruction is Hungarian wishes to satisfy the demands of an increasing number of students. Its main aim is to widen the scope of its study programs and to accredit the Master level of the already existing ones.

Among the future plans of high priority at the Faculty of Economics you can find launching and accrediting the Bachelor and the Master level of the Public Administration and Regional Development program, the accreditation of the MSc level of Economics and Business



Conference Center, J. Selye University

Administration as well as the launch of the Commerce and Marketing study programs. In the future, when education will be conducted at all the five years, the number of students is expected to reach 1,800.

The Faculty of Pedagogy is planning to launch new majors: the accreditation of geography, French language and literature, Slovakian language and literature, and Physical education allows double major students to choose their most suitable combination, while sociology and journalism would contribute to the social elevation of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. In the following five years the number of students at the Faculty may reach 2,500.

The Doctoral School at the Faculty of Theology might provide the possibility to educate the Faculty's own instructors. The

number of students at the Faculty is about 90-100 including PhD students.

As it was mentioned earlier, besides the increase in the number of students, placing more emphasis on the University's research activity is also of high priority. To support this, in 2006 the staff of the Research Institute of the University was enlarged by employing additional research workers.

This independent institute carries out a wide range of research activities in cooperation with other national and foreign research institutions and companies and it is making efforts to provide assistance in the scientific work of the colleagues. At the same time by presenting their findings it is trying to advertise the University in the business sector (*New Challenge. 2006*).



The multifunctional Library of the J. Selye University

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FIGURES:

Fig. 1. *Spatial distribution of students admitted to J. Selye University in 2004*

Fig. 2. *Spatial distribution of students admitted to J. Selye University in 2005*

Fig. 3. *Spatial distribution of students admitted to J. Selye University in 2006*

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