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Social, economical and cultural transformations as the factors determining the establishment and development of the University of Rzeszów at the beginning of the XXI century

Introduction

The University of Rzeszów is one of the youngest Polish universities and the largest public university in the capital of the Podkarpackie voivodeship. The university began its operations on the grounds of the Act of 6 June 2001 (Act on establishing the University of Rzeszów) adopted on the 14th of June 2001. Currently also the Technical University of Rzeszów and four other non-public higher education schools operate in Rzeszów.

The path towards establishing the University and the vectors for its development were largely determined by geopolitical, historical, social, economical and cultural factors.

It should be noted that the Podkarpackie voivodeship is the tenth voivodeship in Poland in terms of surface area – its area is 17,846.76 km² inhabited by approx. 2.13 million residents. The Podkarpackie voivodeship is the southernmost voivodeship in Poland (Rocznik Demograficzny GUS, 2021). The voivodeship is of strategic geological location because it is located at the crossing of the communication and transport systems joining north with south and east with west; it provides a gateway to markets of Eastern and Southern Europe. Furthermore, the voivodeship is included in inter-regional structures, e.g., it is a part of the Carpathian Euroregion.

In terms of the history of the region the Podkarpackie voivodeship covers the south-east areas of the pre-partition Lesser Poland (part of the contemporary voivodeships: Krakowskie, Sandommierskie and Lubelskie) as well as the western part of Red Ruthenia (primarily the Ruskie voivodeship and a part of Bełskie voivodeship). After the partition the area of the current Podkarpackie voivodeship fell within the borders of the Austrian partition and became the central part of the contemporary Galicia. In turn, following regaining independence in 1918, the areas of the current voivodeship were

a part of the following voivodeships: Lwowskie (the majority, including Rzeszów), Krakowskie (the western part) and Lubelskie (small parts in the north). Following the Second World War the changes of borders cut this area off from the major scientific and education centres: Kraków and Lwów. The voivodeship covered the area of the so called "Central Lesser Poland" comprising the Rzeszowskie voivodeship. On its basis, on the grounds of the local self-government reform, on the 1st of January the Podkarpackie voivodeship was established. The comparative social and economical uniformity of these areas was decided, even before the war, by their periphery location on the border of influence of two Austro-Hungarian capitals of Galicia: Kraków and Lwów. This peripheral character resulted in lack of investments and, in consequence, social and economical underdevelopment of the area: low level of urbanisation, poorly developed industry (primarily oil industry), overpopulation of villages, and fragmentation of agricultural holdings (Grygiel, Grzesik, 2003).

The economical transformations in the region were initiated in the Thirties of the XX century through establishing machine and chemical industries' plants within the framework of the Central Industrial Region. The post-war industrialisation was, for economical reasons, primarily based on workforce consisting of peasants inhabiting local villages and contributed to emergence of the group of farmer-workers. In consequence Podkarpacie became a region of exceptionally striking dissonance between rapid industrialisation and modest urbanisation. The system transformation following year 1989 caused numerous detrimental phenomena in the region related to the recession in machine and arms industries which were dominant forms of industry in Podkarpacie. In consequence the system transformations of the early nineties of the XX century resulted in inhibiting social development of the region (Grygiel, Grzesik, 2003).

Only towards the end of the Nineties of the XX century the region began to develop and the rate of its development accelerated significantly in the XXI century. On the basis of the prospective development factors two functions of the voivodeship within the national economy developed: industrial and agricultural, as well as supplementary functions: communication, construction works and socio-cultural services (*Strategia rozwoju*, 1997).

The capital of the voivodeship – Rzeszów – is currently inhabited by nearly 180 thousand residents; it is a modern and dynamic city developing in a sustainable manner and providing good quality of life (Malikowski, Szluz, 2016). It is a city leading in the field of utilising European Union resources which enable significant development of the material and social infrastructure (Ferenc, 2015). Furthermore, the fact that Rzeszów is the capital of the voivodeship is decisive for the city serving as the administrative centre with all offices necessary for operations of the voivodeship. In relationship to its dynamic demographic development Rzeszów also became a well developed and modern support area for cultural and education initiativep. Rzeszów, although

being rather small in actuality, is the centre of the region located in the periphery in regard to other large administrative and political centres. Simultaneously its location in the border region serving as a “gateway” to Europe is favourable. Both these factors, in combination with a rather significant economic potential and the scientific support constitute a foundation for playing role greater than it would appear (Majka, 2004).

Against this backdrop development of education services in the form of university education seems particularly momentous. On the day preceding establishing the University its role in the field of educating own specialists demanded by various branches of industry, initiating development of private businesses and influencing economical development of the region was emphasised. Furthermore, the increase in the demand for individuals educated in various disciplines of science, culture and arts as well as the education resulting from intensification of the socio-economical development of the region in the Nineties were also emphasised (Bonusiak, 2010a). Furthermore, the prospective potential of the voivodeship based on the demographic circumstances was also indicated. The Podkarpackie voivodeship was in 2021 and continues to be the youngest voivodeship in terms of the age of its residents. In 2001 26.07% residents were in the pre-working age in comparison to the indicator of 23.22% for the entire country (Stopa, 2003). The benefits sought in the academic education primarily consist in increasing the chance of the youth for receiving academic education within the region and limiting the process of migration to other Polish cities as well as in developing attractiveness of the region and shortening the distance separating Podkarpacie from other regions – leaders in terms of attractiveness.

This paper, due to the adopted editorial requirements, makes an attempt at synthetically presenting the economical, social and cultural factors influencing establishment and further operations of the University of Rzeszów. The attention was also focused on developing a common plane for cooperation of the “University in the frontier” with the local community and on the plans regarding cooperation and their implementation over two decades of University’s existence. The primary reference and source material for the conducted analysis consists in the documents regarding operations of the university collected in the University Archive, the Special Collection Division; furthermore, the pieces published in the selected local magazines and journals in years 2001-2021 were analysed. These papers were primarily “Gazeta w Rzeszowie [Rzeszów Newspaper]”, “Nasz Dom Rzeszów [Our Home Rzeszów]”, “Super Nowości [SuperNews]”, “Nowiny [News]”, “Echo Rzeszowa [Rzeszów Echo]”, “Gazeta Uniwersytecka [University Newspaper]”. Valuable monographs which enabled realisation of the analysed issue consisted in publications of the former Rector of the HSP in Rzeszów – Włodzimierz Bonusiak, the current Rector of the UoR Sylwester Czopek and the long-standing director of the Institute of Pedagogy – Andrzej Meissner.

The academic traditions of the region in the process of establishing the University of Rzeszów

The academic traditions reaching back to the first half of the XIX century, when the city, along with the entire region of Galicia, remained under rule of the Austrian monarchy, were not without significance for establishing a university in Rzeszów. In the later part of this century, these lands received a rather large degree of freedom in the area of social life – a fact which resulted in accelerated civilisational growth. The autonomy of Galicia (1867–1918), along with other aspects of social life, in particular enabled the development of all levels of education, including higher education at universities in Kraków and Lwów as well as the development of science and culture. It also resulted in bringing together a potent scientific staff in this area (Meissner, Pęczkowski, Wrońska, 2021). These traditions significantly contributed to establishing higher education institutions in Rzeszów as early as in the sixties of the XX century; these institutions later served as a foundation for establishing the university.

The consultation office of the Vocational Administration College of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University of Lublin (UMCS) was established first, followed by the consultation office of the Extramural College of the Faculty of Law. Two years later, in 1966, the consultation office of the Higher Vocational Economics Studies was established under the Faculty of Economics. The branch of UMCS in Rzeszów was established on the grounds of the Ordinance of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of the 18th of April 1969. In 1997, there were 3599 students learning in the UMCS branch and 93 scholars were employed, including 23 professors and habilitated doctors (Wniosek, 2001).

In turn, the Field College of the Higher School of Pedagogy in Kraków was established in 1963 and was in 1965 transformed into the Higher School of Pedagogy as an independent institution. At that time it consisted of two faculties: the Faculty of Philology and the Faculty of Mathematics, Physics and Technical Education. Initially, the school provided education in 5 fields of study. In the following years, the number of students increased and the teaching facilities were expanded. The number of learning adolescents was increasing. In years 1996/97 9870 students were learning there and 576 academic teachers were employed, including 122 professors and habilitated doctors (Wniosek, 2001).

On the 23rd of March 1973, the Minister of Science, Higher Education and Technology granted permission for establishing an extramural division of the Agricultural Academy of Kraków. In 1987, this unit was transformed into a branch of the Agricultural Academy of Kraków. During the period of development of the university, the branch of the Hugon Kołłątaj Agricultural Academy operated in Rzeszów. In 1997, 2312 students attended the branch and 136 academic teacher were employed (Wniosek, 2001). Furthermore, in 1985, the I. Łukasiewicz University of Technology was

established in Rzeszów; in 1997 the institution was attended by 7949 students and the academic staff consisted of 568 persons (Wniosek, 2001).

Despite the strong presence of higher education institutions in Rzeszów, the shortage of university education was noticeable for years. The academic community of Rzeszów was supported through various initiatives of extra-academic communities; the attempts aimed at establishing a university in Rzeszów have been made since the seventies of the XX century. The infrastructure of the existing institutions was systematically expanded, the education offer was being improved, the scientific staff was growing and the directions of scientific research were being expanded as well. In total, prior to establishing the university, the public higher education institutions in Rzeszów provided studies at 29 courses attended by more than 40 thousand students.

In 1983, the Voivode's Team for Development of the Academic Centre in Rzeszów was appointed; this team developed a concept for development of the academic centre in the years 1983-90. At that time it was deemed that reinforcement and further development towards integration of the existing institutions of higher education, including the University of Technology in Rzeszów, would constitute an optimal course of action. There were also postulates regarding the immediate appointment of the University Establishment Committee which was supposed to consist of the voivodeship and city heads of state and party authorities, a representative of the Minister of Science, Higher Education and Technology, rectors of the higher education institutions of Rzeszów and those institutions which had a branch in Rzeszów as well as members of the General Council for Higher Education of the UMCS, the HSP and the AA. Furthermore, the team claimed that "the authorities of Rzeszów should oblige themselves to prepare their own scientific and education facilities by means of relocation within the city's borders and to ensure adequate accommodation for staff" (Wniosek, 2001).

In 1988, a new draft of the concept of development of the academic centre by 2000, which took into consideration the already taken actions and their results, was presented. At that time, several variants of establishing a university emerged, including the variant within the framework of which the inclusion of the Faculty of Medicine of the Kraków Medical Academy as a non-local unit was proposed. Non-binding decisions were made at that time; only obligations regarding taking actions aimed at developing the faculty of medicine were made. Unfortunately, the political, social and economical transformations in Poland at that time resulted in some of these plans becoming unfeasible. At a later date in 1992, the Inter-university Team for Integration of the Higher Education Institutions of Rzeszów, comprised of 16 persons, was established. The team consisted of, among other members, representatives of individual education institutions, the voivode, the Labour Office and the episcopal curia. At that time, the concept of the University of Lesser Poland integrating all existing higher education institutions of Rzeszów was developed.

In turn, the Foundation for Development of the Academic Centre, which took up the ambitious challenge of undertaking and supporting actions aimed at developing the Rzeszów academic centre through publishing activities, investments and construction of houses and apartments for the scientific and teaching staff, was established in 1993. In 1995, the FDAC began the construction of the Regional Academic Library and this investment was taken over by the Higher School of Pedagogy a year later. The HSP was a school which coordinated actions for the benefit of establishing a university in Rzeszów (Bonusiak, 2001). The idea of establishing a university in Rzeszów motivated everyone to develop new courses and specialties – a fact which was supposed to bolster the required argumentation. Expansion of the education offer significantly contributed to increasing the number of students, e.g., in 1994 there were 7447 students, in 1995 this number grew to 8510 (Bonusiak, 2001). The authorities of the school expanded the scientific exchange with foreign institutions, new agreements regarding cooperation were concluded with several foreign universities, including the Bangor University of Wales, the Universities of Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk which were supposed to present an opportunity for learning about the academic achievements of other countries and to promote the University of Rzeszów. The foreign exchange expanded along with the participation of Rzeszów scholars in international studies and scientific conferences. The university procured further rights to confer the PhD and habilitated doctor academic degrees which further bolstered its scientific potential. New facilities located at Rejtana street were opened and resulted in decreasing the shortage of education and office space in the context of the dynamic growth of the number of students (Bonusiak, 2001).

In November of 2000, the contemporary Minister of National Education, prof. PhD Edmund Wittebrodt appointed the Team for Establishing a University in Rzeszów. The team consisted of: the undersecretary of state of the Ministry of National Education, prof. PhD Jerzy Zdrada, the director of the Department of Science and Higher Education Tadeusz Popłonowski, the Vice-Rectors of UMCS: prof. PhD Jan Pomorski and prof. PhD Zbigniew Sobolewski, the Rector of the Kraków Agricultural Academy prof. PhD Zbigniew Ślipek and the Dean of the non-local faculty associate professor PhD Adam Czudec, the Rector of the HSP prof. PhD Włodzimierz Bonusiak and the Vice-Rector of the HSP prof. PhD Waldemar Furmanek as well as the senator of the Republic of Poland PhD Mieczysław Janowski, the Deputy to the Sejm Stanisław Zajac, the voivode of Podkarpacie Zbigniew Sieczkoś, the Marshall of the Voivodeship Bogdan Rzońca and the president of Rzeszów PhD, Eng Andrzej Szlachta. During the first meeting of the Team, which took place on the 12th of December 2000, it was decided that the application regarding the establishment of the University of Rzeszów shall be submitted in January 2001 (Bonusiak, 2010b).

The application, along with an extensive justification for establishing the University of Rzeszów, was submitted to the Sejm in January 2001. In this application we can read:

the established university shall be in service of the development of science and shall facilitate comprehensive education of youth of the vast south-east region of Poland. Establishing a university in Rzeszów shall influence development and expansion of international cooperation between Poland, Ukraine and Slovakia; the university shall also serve the important binding role in the unifying Europe (Wniosek, 2001, p. 4).

Reading of the draft of the act on establishing the University of Rzeszów, prepared by the deputies, took place on the 16th of March 2001. The deputies from the region of Podkarpacie participated in the discussion regarding the need for establishing a university, among them were: Stanisław Zajac, Wiesław Ciesielski, Marian Krzaklewski, Jerzy Osiatyński, Józef Zych, Zdzisław Pupa, Tadeusz Iwiński, Jerzy Zdrada, Józef Górny, Ewa Sikorska-Trela. The following points of the arguments for establishing the university were emphasised: creating the opportunity to provide young people with university-level education within the voivodeship and reinforcing the position of Rzeszów as a scientific centre since, according to deputy Zajac, “changes in borders following the conclusion of the Second World War isolated this region of Poland from the major scientific centre of Lviv” (Stenogram 104 Posiedzenia Sejmu RP, Warszawa 2001, p. 1).

Ultimately, the University of Rzeszów was established on the basis of the Higher School of Pedagogy, the branch of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin and the Rzeszów extramural Faculty of Economy of Hugon Kołłątaj Agricultural Academy of Kraków (Resolution of the HPS Senat, 2001). The Rzeszów University of Technology remained an independent institution. The signature affixed by president Aleksander Kwaśniewski under the Act on establishing the University of Rzeszów (4th of July, 2001) crowned the long term efforts of the academic community regarding the establishment of a university in Rzeszów (Furmanek, 2001). The part of the speech of the President of the Republic of Poland, delivered on the occasion of signing the Act on establishing the University of Rzeszów, says: “the University of Rzeszów shall be, in this part of Poland, in this place, an institution the significance of which we will discover with each passing year” (Gazeta Uniwersytecka, 2001).

The momentous nature of this event is emphasised by the open letter of the Rector of the HSP, published on the 5th of July 2001, addressed to employees and students of the Higher School of Pedagogy in Rzeszów which constituted a foundation for establishing the University. This letter says:

Yesterday, on the 4th of July 2001 at 11:10 a.m., the President of the Republic of Poland Aleksander Kwaśniewski signed the Act on establishing the University of Rzeszów. This date is of particular significance to the history of education in Rzeszów and to other Polish universities. Establishing the University crowns the long-standing efforts of the employees of the HSP who for over 30 years have been working toward reaching this goal (Open letter, 2001).

The first inauguration of the academic year, which took place on the 11th of October 2001, was presided over by prof. PhD Tadeusz Lulek, the first Rector of the University (Lulek, 2002). He emphasised that "the University of Rzeszów had been born a long time ago as a result of the conscious need and necessity of contributing to the intellectual capital of the region" (Speech, 2001). The new university, drawing from the traditions of the three institutions which formed the University, had to tackle the necessary challenge of integrating and defining its own identity (Gazeta Uniwersytecka, 2001, no. 1, p. 8; Statute of the University of Rzeszów, 2001; Ordinance of the Rector no. 9, 2002; Regulations, 2003).

At the time of its establishment, the University of Rzeszów had six faculties: Economics, Philology, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Pedagogy, Law, Sociology and History (Bonusiak, 2010 b). In the first year of University's operation, there were 1866 employees, including 1112 academic teachers (Bonusiak, 2010c), the scientific development of the University could be observed throughout the subsequent years (Czopek, 2016).

The number of fields of study and courses in the first year of the university's operation reached 20 and it increased significantly in the following years. In the 2008/2009 academic year, there were as much as 35 available courses and fields of study, this number increased to 51 in 2016/2017. The greatest number of students learning at the UoR was recorded in 2002/2003 and 2009/2010 academic years. It reached nearly 22.5 thousand students. Currently over 16 thousand students, including 3/4 of full-time students, receives education in 58 fields of study (Strategia, 2021, p. 4). In 2014, the Faculty of Medicine was established and the education of future practitioners of medicine began. The Doctoral School, where postgraduate students receive full-time education in accordance with the new system, has been operating since 2019. The educational offer covers specialisations in the fields of humanities, social sciences, natural and medical sciences, artistic disciplines and physical culture sciences. Over twenty years, the university secured 18 separate rights to confer the academic degree of PhD and 6 rights to confer the academic degree of habilitated doctor. It should be added that the UoR is one of the largest employers in the south-eastern Poland and employs nearly 2100 persons, including 1200 academic teachers (History of the University).

Contributions of the University of Rzeszów to the city and the region

The university develops scientific research and it plays significant role in the science of south-east Poland and improves its standing on the national level through participation in various programmes. It maintains relations with foreign universities where students and academic teachers undergo internships and which the university jointly organises conferences and scientific camps with. Currently, the university cooperates

with approx. 300 partner universities from around the world, including 54 universities in Ukraine and 200 universities within the framework of the Erasmus+ programme.

Since its establishment, a major task of the University has been to develop co-operation with representatives of the state, voivodeship and city authorities as well as the local education, professional and culture community. The importance of this cooperation was emphasised in ordinances of the Rector, resolutions of the Senate of the UoR and strategies for development of the University. The University hosted presidents of the Republic of Poland as well as representatives of the authorities of the voivodeship and Rzeszów (Kobiałka, 2008; ASK, 2011). In the local press, journalists reported displays of activity in this area through writing not only about the plans and examples of cooperation, but also about the accompanying hopes and fears related to the operation of the university (Kulczycka, 2012). Since the moment of establishing the university, press pieces familiarising readers with the ideas behind functioning of the University were published. The state of the University was discussed, plans and the factual state was compared, the University and its actions was presented in the context of the events important for Rzeszów (Załucki, 2001; Pudło, 2001; Zatorski, 2001; Kulczycka, 2007). The consecutive anniversaries of establishing the University presented an appropriate opportunity for summarising plans, achievements and difficulties the University had to face (PS, 2014; Rogowski, 2013; Terczyńska, 2019).

Over several decades, authorities, academic teachers, students and graduates of the UoR have invariably engaged in cooperation with the local community. The authors working for the local press follow this cooperation carefully and assess it variously (ASK, 2009; Ray, 2010; Kulczycka, Cebulski, 2019; Kulczycka, 2020). As noted by Rector Aleksander Bobko in the beginning of the XXI century, the “academic space” had to be established in Rzeszów for the University (Bobko, Zatorski, 2012, p. 4). Within this space, the actions taken for the benefit of the local cooperation are of particular significance. These actions materialised as e.g. numerous conferences and meetings, both scientific in character as well as related to popular science (e.g., the ASK meetings, 2007). Over 20 years of university’s operations, the contributions of the representatives of the academic community as well as authorities and residents of Rzeszów and Podkarpacie consisted not only of scientific events but also of artistic and sport events. These events were described in local press but also in magazines outside of the voivodeship and abroad (Szypuła, 2010). Commemorative meetings and conferences, anniversaries of major historical events were organised jointly (incl. the anniversary of incorporation of the city, the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, events commemorating people meritorious to the homeland and the region) (jk, 2010; ac, 2010; Wit, 2015; Kaźmierczak, 2011; Nowi Honorowi, 2019; Uroczystości, 2019). Within the framework of the scientific meetings with representatives of the local institutions of culture and art, the anniversaries of their establishment were commemorated and their achievements and contributions

to the region were invoked (e.g., the Wanda Siemiaszkowa Theatre) (Zatorski, 2009). Developing cooperation with representatives of the professional community of Podkarpacie was a major task during that period. The cooperation was entered into by the academic teachers of contemporary faculties and current colleges. Initiatives in the field of promoting health and sport may serve as examples, e.g., the International Rehabilitation Days, Marrow Donors' Day, conferences organised in cooperation with nurses and midwives, Sports and Martial Arts Congresses, University Health and Sports Weeks, family trekking trips in Bieszczady, etc. (Pad, 2011; Gorczyca, 2012). The press expressed the opinion that graduates of the University will bolster the staff of Podkarpacie; these hopes were primarily related to the graduates of medical courses, practitioners of medicine (Terczyńska, 2021). Various forms of mutual support utilising knowledge and skills were developed in cooperation with uniform services: conferences or weeks during which aid was granted to victims of crime. The cooperation with and the support given to the local community in years 2001-2021 included the academic teachers, actively involved in the realisation of the initiatives significant for Podkarpacie, sharing their knowledge and experience. For instance, realisation of numerous projects regarding the improvement of communication infrastructure of Podkarpacie was preceded by archeological works of the UoR scientists and scholars; the results of these works were later displayed during the exhibition entitled "Highway to the past". An equally significant area consisted of cooperation with teachers and educationalists of Podkarpacie. Issues current and topical for life in and outside of school were tackled (autism, suicides, actions aimed at supporting families and children, including projects concerning establishing daycare institutions) (Kulczycka, 2015). Within the framework of joint students-graduates actions charities for the benefit of the youngest residents of the voivodeship were organised, persons in need were supported (Moranec, 2010; Kulczycka, 2013; Marszałek, 2015; Sobol, 2017). The new form of cooperation with the youngest residents of Podkarpacie was the initiative launched in 2013 concerning establishing the Minor University of Rzeszów (MUoR) (the MUoR regulations, 2013, p. 1, 4). Children and adolescents aged 7–15 participate in classes of the MUoR delivered by employees of the UoR as well as specialists from outside the University who provide necessary knowledge and experience to young students and inspire them to become involved in science (the MUoR regulations, 2018, p. 2, 4). The University Secondary School established in 2013, currently the Bilingual University Secondary School, is another example of contribution of the UoR to the local community and the effective cooperation with residents of Podkarpacie (Resolution of the Senat of the UoR no. 142, 2013). Operation of the UoR also include working and cooperating with adults. In 2015, the commemorative conference regarding the 30th anniversary of the University of the Third Age, which is among the oldest institutions of this kind in Poland, took place. The University of the Third Age, under the patronage and supervision of the Rector of the UoR, was established in 1983 and

currently, as indicated in its statute, continues to be “of particular value to the community of elders of the region of Podkarpacie” (Statute of the University of the Third Age, 2013, p. 1). It constitutes an example of an open form of supplementary education and intellectual, social, psychological and physical development of the aforementioned professionally inert persons in Rzeszów and the surrounding area. The forms of classes and meetings proposed by the Third Age University are supposed to develop the view that the elderly “need each other and are important for other members of the society” (Statute of the University of the Third Age, 2017, p. 2). The attention given to maintain relations with Poles residing outside the Polish borders was equally important. For instance, the “Polonus” Polish Culture and Language Centre for Poles Abroad and Foreigners organised the Polonus Days. The aforementioned unit and the UoR Centre for Studies on Polish Community Abroad were combined and on the 19th of December 2019, the Centre for Polish Community Abroad was established (Resolution of the Senate no. 523, 2019, p. 1).

Within the framework of promoting the values of the region during the second decade of operation of the University of Rzeszów, the international scientific conference entitled “The Role of non-governmental organisations in the promotion and development of tourism” was organised by the Department of Agrotourism and Economical Functions of Tourism and Recreation, the contemporary Faculty of Physical Education, the Office of the Marshall of the Podkarpacie voivodeship and the European Academy for Development of the Carpathian Euroregion; furthermore, the XXIX Polish Nationwide Meeting of Globetrotters, Tramps and Tourists co-organised jointly with the Faculty of Physical Education of the UoR was hosted by Rzeszów for the first time (8–11.11. 2013).

The cooperation with representatives of the Polish institutions of higher education, including the institutions in Rzeszów and Podkarpacie, was a precious experience (Kijanka, 2012, p. 9; Piątek, 2013, p. 11). Between 24th and 26th of October 2013, the UoR welcomed twenty Rectors of the higher education institutions united under the Conference of Rectors of Universities in Poland; in the same year the II Meeting of Rectors of Higher Schools in Podkarpacie, led by Rector prof. A. Bobko, took place (3.12.2013). Organising the Academic Job Fair is another of joint initiatives (the job fair was organised for the first time in 26.03.2014 by the UoR and the Rzeszów University of Technology). During the commemoration of the UoR anniversary in 2014, the Grand Medal of the University of Rzeszów was awarded to prof. PhD Andrzej Sobkowiak, the Rector of the Rzeszów University of Technology in years 2005-2012, for his exceptional contribution to development of cooperation between both universities.

The validity of the actions taken by the University was confirmed by the Medal of Lubelskie Eagle of Business awarded to the UoR on the 5th of June 2014 for the achievements in the field of procuring external financing for modernisation and expansion of research infrastructure and cooperation with the economic entities in the region.

The university is still an institution which continues to bolster its position owing to its achievements, an institution which 20 years ago brought hope for establishing, according to professor Paweł Grata:

a classical university serving as a space for exchanging remarks and opinions, conducting research and engaging in a scientific debate, serving a major culture-formative role and actually influencing the local community (Grata, 2021, p. 9).

Professor Paweł Grata added that the University of Rzeszów was established between Lublin and Kraków and being one of the youngest Polish universities, it strives towards consolidating its value in cooperation with the local community but the University also strives and works towards large-scale development. The current Rector of the UoR, Mr. Czopek, defines the further direction for actions of the “University in the frontier” with the following words: “to be on par with the best” (Kulczycka, 2020, p. 8).

Conclusion

The adopted Programme for development of the UoR by 2025, approved of by the Rector of the UoR Mr. Czopek in 2018, is a plan of fulfilling the mission of the University throughout the consecutive years (Resolution no. 296, 2018). Its significance is expressed through developing the intellectual capital of the entire Podkarpacie. The authorities of the University underline that the University is “a leading and integral component of the capital of Podkarpacie and the entire Podkarpacie region”, furthermore, the University aspires to become “an authority figure in the social life of our region” (Strategy for Development of the University of Rzeszów – specification, 2016). The conducted analysis of the source materials documenting the functioning of the UoR in the 2001–2021 period, press pieces from the selected regional magazines and monographs enabled us to indicate which social, economical and cultural factors influenced the establishment of the University of Rzeszów in 2001. Their importance is emphasised by the authorities of the University. Two decades of operations of the University have confirmed that the University is a continuation of the previous forms of higher education in the region. The University developed directly on the foundation of the education traditions previously effective in the Higher School of Pedagogy in Rzeszów but its operation may also directly reference the XIX century university traditions of Kraków and Lviv. In 2001, it was written that: “The University carries an obligation – to bolster intellectual and social relationship between Poland and the independent Ukraine” (Życzenia, 2001). The significant task of the University is primarily to cooperate with the local community – the actions undertaken for the benefit of the local community and in cooperation with its representatives. The analysis of the pieces in the local magazines enables us to present a claim that the residents of Podkarpacie receive current and up to date information regarding the actions taken by the

authorities of the UoR and the academic teachers; the local press provides ordinary citizens with an insight into the plans of the University and their realisation. Thus, it may be assumed that the influence over the University is exerted by the aforementioned factors and that the social view on these matters is significant – the conviction of the residents of Podkarpacie regarding the importance of the University to the development of the voivodeship and to themselves. In conclusion, it must be stated that the University constitutes an integral part of Podkarpacie. Being a university in the frontier, the University of Rzeszów attempts to play a significant role in the social, economical, scientific and educational life of this area.

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Abstract

The University of Rzeszów, which is the largest university in the Podkarpacie region, began its operations on the 1st of October 2001. The University is one of the younger Polish universities but it maintains venerable academic traditions. It was established on the basis of the Higher School of Pedagogy in Rzeszów (established in 1963), a branch of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin (the branch of the UMCS established in Rzeszów in 1969) and the extra-mural faculty of economics of the Hugon Kołłątaj Agricultural Academy in Kraków (disbanded in 1973). In the beginning of the XX century, students received education in 20 disciplines; after 20 years the number of disciplines grew to more than 50. The goal of the paper is to demonstrate the social, economical and cultural structures influencing the process of establishing the University. The attention was also given to the development of a common plane for cooperation of the “University in the frontier” with the local community as well as to the plans regarding cooperation and their implementation over two decades of the university’s existence. The primary reference and source material for the conducted analysis consist of the documents regarding the operation of the

University, collected in the University Archive, the Special Collection Division; moreover, the pieces published in selected local magazines and journals in the 2001–2021 period were analysed. The method based on the analysis of the documents and source materials was utilised. It was determined that the authorities of the University, teachers and residents of Podkarpacie jointly developed the academic community which along with science constitutes one of the pillars of University's identity.

Keywords: the University of Rzeszów, Podkarpacie, Rzeszów, education