BUILDING COMMUNITY.

Plenary Lecture Delivered at the Biennial Partnership Conference "Communitas Communitatum" on June 19, 2009 in Winnipeg, MB.

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It is truly a pleasure to speak this morning in the second Biennial Partnership Conference of the University of Manitoba and the University of Szeged, and the first that is held in Winnipeg. As the Canadian signer of the 2004 agreement that binds these two universities, I had looked forward to taking part in the inaugural conference in June, 2007. Unfortunately, fate intervened to prevent my attendance, and while the Manitoba professors were having a terrific time in Szeged, in a Winnipeg hospital I had time to reflect on the Hungarian proverb, "Ember tervez, Isten végez." That phrase is elegantly translated into English as, "Man proposes, God disposes."

The outcome of human plans, however, can lead three ways, and I hope certainly that the outcome of the partnership agreement that Dr. Gábor Szabó, Rector of the University of Szeged, and I signed in June 2004 will exceed our greatest dreams.

As some of you know, the Manitoba-Szeged Academic Partnership is supported by an endowment established in 2008 at the University of Manitoba, by a $350,000 contribution from the President's Fund. That same year, this endowment received a significant gift of $50,000 from a major donor, Mr. Arnold Frieman. To his great regret, Mr. Frieman cannot be with us today. He learned of the dates of this conference too late to alter scheduled business meetings out of town, so he called me and asked that I articulate his own hopes and support for this conference and the partnership itself. Why would a Canadian businessman have such hopes?

Mr. Frieman was born in Sátoraljaújhely, a border city in northeastern Hungary, and was just a young teenager in 1944 when the holocaust reached his part of the world. He lost many members of his family but he survived the war, and eventually he found his way to Norway, then to Israel, and finally to Canada. In Winnipeg he built a new life. Along the way he earned a degree from the University of Manitoba, and as the founder and president of Advance Electronics, today he is regarded as one of Manitoba's most successful entrepreneurs. Arnold Frieman has seen much in his life, but he chose to support the Manitoba-Szeged Academic Partnership because believes that goodness exists in all peoples of the world. Furthermore, he believes that people can discover that goodness if they take opportunities to meet, to interact with and to learn from others. He told me that, "It is fantastic that Hungarian professors can come here." His dearest wish is that students from Szeged will also have an opportunity to experience Canada, a country he calls, "a place with unlimited freedom" to pursue one's dreams, whilst helping others to do the same. He hopes that you, the professors here who have taken the time to come together to explore each other's

ideas, will find areas of common interest. And when you do, he hopes that you will encourage your students to reach out to each other too, so that many more young Hungarians and young Canadians will move between Winnipeg and Szeged to study in our universities, and to experience life as we know it in Hungary and in Canada. Through those experiences they will come to understand the commonalities that bind us, and in those commonalities they will find the faith to transcend the differences of language, place and history that divide us.

The theme of this partnership conference is "Communitas Communitatum," which means, "Community of Communities," an appropriate name for an event that is marked by plurality. Though English is the language of the conference, a significant segment of the participants speak at least one other language, and some have facility in three or more living languages. Several of the participants read and write Latin. Our areas of academic expertise differ widely, ranging from the natural sciences and medicine to literature, to film and to the fine arts. Some of us were born and raised in Winnipeg, some of us were born and raised in Szeged, some of us are transplants to these cities from other parts of Canada or Hungary, as well as from other countries. We are men and women, likely believing in different religions or in no religion. Differences mark us, so what kind of "community" can one build from so many differences? What is a "community" in the first place?

The definitions of "community" vary. On the internet at one site I found nine different meanings in the English language alone, and I read that 50 years ago sociologists had more than 90 different definitions of "community." For non-specialists, definitions of community include:

- "a group of people living in a particular local area: 'the team is drawn from all parts of the community'
- common ownership: 'they shared a community of possessions'
- a group of nations having common interests: 'they hope to join the NATO community'
- agreement as to goals: 'the preachers and the bootleggers found they had a community of interests'
- residential district: a district where people live; occupied primarily by private residences
- (ecology) a group of interdependent organisms inhabiting the same region and interacting with each other"
  (http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=community)

To sociologists, a community is a group of people bound by common identity or a common interest, in which people interact with each other. Typically such people live in a common location. Their social cohesion is shown by shared values, and their behaviors carry shared meaning as well as shared expectations (McMillan and Chavis 1986). At the same time, the behavior of community members is not homogeneous. Rather, their behaviors both differ and intersect along lines of gender, education, wealth, and social status among others (Collins 1998).

Social anthropologists do not quarrel with these views, though they would add that identity is central to any notion of community, and identity shifts, with age (Anthro-

pology 2009; Sökefeld 1999). Most human societies mark transition from one life stage to another by rites of passage. Infants become adolescents, who become adults, then spouses, parents, elders, and ultimately become the deceased. Ceremonies such as those surrounding birth, marking the onset of menarche, the coming of age of young men, graduation exercises, marriage ceremonies and the rituals of death are all rites of passage. Their functions are first, to guide individuals through a transition from one life stage to another, with each stage having different behavioral expectations of the individuals. At the same time, members of the broader community and society become aware of the new identity bestowed on these individuals, and interact with them as is fitting for their new identities. Arnold Van Gennep (1961), who first wrote about rites of passage, argued that, commonly they share three features: a phase of separation, a period of transition in which the individual belongs neither to one stage nor the other, and then the reintegration of individuals with new identities into their societies. The concept of a "community" therefore has to allow for diversity, for fluidity, for complexity.

It is quite clear from these sociological and anthropological concepts that the group assembled here does not fit within these constructs of community and identity. It does not exhibit the traits of a 'volk' such as found in German culture (Brubaker 1992), nor do we expect that at the end of the conference the participants will be transformed through socialization and learning into a single people. Our group may not even fit into a more utilitarian definition of "community"—that of a "community of practice"—a group of people who share common goals and interests, use similar tools and employ a common language (Eckert and McConnell 1998). I say this because the methods a community health professional employs in his studies differs greatly from the scholarly methods used by a mediaeval historian.

Nevertheless the medical doctor, the medievalist, the writer, the sociologist, the art historian and the film maker participating in this conference display similarities: each has chosen to participate in a conference in Winnipeg by giving an exposition of findings appropriate to his or her field, in a language all participants can understand, and hoping that, at the very least, the discourse arising in corridors and after hours will yield a germ of understanding of ideas that one holds dear. Furthermore, each has likely wondered if exposing others to the landscape, the climate, the history that have shaped their parts of the world, would raise understanding of the factors that have shaped us as individuals and members of the broader society of western Canada, and the broader society of southern Hungary.

Why would one want "understanding?" As professionals, a shared value we hold is advancing our areas of knowledge, advancing understanding, whatever these areas might be. Accordingly academics attend conferences, which are structured activities where they present their findings, and engage in discussion and critique to obtain insights on the issues with which they grapple. As human beings, however, we likely hope for more than that. We hope for recognition of similar interests, recognition of similar experiences, recognition of similar reactions, and a steady building of respect so that we could work together in the future, even if our interaction are most likely to occur via the internet. But is this akin to building a community together?

The Rector of the University of Szeged and I, on behalf of the University of Manitoba, signed a partnership agreement in 2004, but neither of us did this without con-

sidering a number of factors, somewhat like suitors contemplating marriage—factors that predicted success. On my part, I asked Dr. James Dean, the International Relations Officer of the University of Manitoba, to visit the University of Szeged, to learn if he thought that it was an institution with which we could work. Dr. Dean's views complemented mine, which were based on a number of other considerations regarding the cities of Szeged and Winnipeg in which our universities are located.

Consider that though Szeged was first mentioned by its current name in a document that dates to 1183, and the precursor of Winnipeg, the Red River settlement, did not begin until 1812, each city is laid out on a flood plain. Life in each has been dominated by the course of a major river that crosses a great plain. Flooding was a regular occurrence in each, and each city has experienced catastrophic floods that destroyed buildings, livelihoods and people. In the great flood that inundated Szeged in 1879 only 265 houses of 5,723 houses remained standing and 165 lives were lost. The re-building of the city has produced the Szeged that exists today, because at the same time, flood controls were implemented in the upper waters of the Tisza (Szeged 2009a). In the great flood of Winnipeg, in 1826, almost every building in the settlement was destroyed, though mercifully there were only a few deaths then. In 1852 the second largest flood in Manitoba's recorded history led 75% of the 3,500 people then living here to abandon the settlement. Nevertheless, some returned, and the village grew into a town and then a city, as it suffered repeated floods, until finally the Red River Floodway was built in the 1960s (Bumsted 1997). The power of the river and its ability to impact on human lives nevertheless remain in the consciousness of the people who live in Szeged or in Winnipeg, regardless of the waterways that protect them.

In addition to the presence of a major river, agriculture and the sale of agricultural products was the base for economic development over the past 150 years in both Szeged and Winnipeg. In each region the climate is continental, and the skies are without cloud cover for much of the year. In Szeged, the most important commodity for a long while was paprika, with the food industry prevailing today (Szeged 2009b). In Winnipeg (2009) the grain merchants built financial empires that remain important. Though each city is currently marked by a diversity of economic activity, agriculture remains an indispensable component of regional identity

Both Winnipeg and Szeged are located close to international borders, which make each acutely conscious of international relations. From time to time, each city has welcomed refugees fleeing war and its aftermath, though in the case of Winnipeg, the refugees, like the settlers who came to build better lives also came to Winnipeg because it was the gateway to the west. The Canadian railroads converged here, and from here trains left for Regina, Saskatoon, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver. Some refugees and settlers chose to remain here; others went on to populate the Canadian west. Over 100 languages are spoken in Winnipeg today, reflecting the pluralistic character of the city (Winnipeg 2009). The English language dominates, but the Franco-Manitobian dialect characterizes the French spoken in the ward of St. Boniface and in numerous southern Manitoba towns and villages. The inner city of Winnipeg has a large urban aboriginal population. Szeged's population includes Roma, Germans, Slovenes and Serbs (Szeged 2009b), some of whom are refugees from Serbia and Romania, but the city is significantly more homogeneous ethnically than is Winnipeg.

Finally, both Szeged and Winnipeg are located a long distance from their country's capital cities, Budapest and Ottawa, respectively. Sometimes this distance has led to local sentiment that the capital is too far away to be much concerned with lives and economic realities of these provincial centers, and the sentiment has sometimes bred local resentment of the federal government.

What then are the factors Szeged and Winnipeg have in common? Topography, floodplain location, days of endless sunshine, an agricultural component in the regional economy, the near presence of an international border, and location some distance from the federal capital. While the city of Winnipeg is much larger than Szeged, and the diversity of Winnipeg's population is greater than that of the city of Szeged, both cities have populations that differ by language, by religion and by identity.

And why should this matter to two universities that have entered a partnership? I believe it matters because universities reflect the culture of the cities in which they are embedded. The similarities that already exist bode well for building a partnership based on shared understanding of factors that give each city its defined character.

What of the universities themselves? Each has a history of comparable length, with University of Szeged's foundation in 1872 by Emperor King Franz Joseph I, and the University of Manitoba's in 1877. There the similarity, however, ends, because Szeged University's roots go back to the city of Kolozsvár in Transylvania, a province of Hungary that was given to Romania in 1919 under the terms of the Treaty of Trianon. Between 1872 and 2009 this university changed its name 7 times (Kolozsvári Tudományegyetem, Ferenc József Tudományegyetem, Szegedi Tudományegyetem, József Attila Tudományegyetem – 'tudományegyetem' = 'university'), as it moved from Kolozsvár, now known as Cluj, to Budapest, to Szeged, back to Kolozsvár, and back to Szeged. While its organization of knowledge has been typical of central and eastern European universities, its structure was fragmented further during the communist era between 1945 and 1988. However, since the change of the Hungarian regime in 1989, the University of Szeged has incorporated disparate higher education institutions under a western comprehensive university model. Today, the University of Szeged has 11 faculties compared to the University of Manitoba's 20 faculties, including Medicine, Pharmacy, Law, Arts, Science, Agriculture and Education. Its student body, now over 30,000, is slightly larger than the University of Manitoba's which is around 27,000 (University of Manitoba 2009).

The University of Manitoba's history is different from that of Szeged's, as it was created by an act of the provincial legislature. It is worth noting that in Canada education is the responsibility of the provinces, rather than the federal government, hence provincial university statutes are many, and only a handful of institutions were founded under a king's or queen's charter before 1867, the year of Canadian confederation. In 1877, the University of Manitoba was established, not as an entity in which teaching and scholarly work was to be undertaken, but as an examining and degree granting body only. The province did not have the funds to support a university, hence the University of Manitoba had neither instructors nor buildings in which they could teach courses, but it had an academic council drawn in part from the members of three religious colleges that were already in existence in the province. These colleges—St. John's College, owned by the Anglican Church, Manitoba College, by the Presbyterian Church, and the College de Saint-Boniface, by the Roman Catholic Church—did not have the authority to grant degrees in secular areas of knowledge,

but each could carry out core functions needed by the University. Instruction in the first two colleges was in English, and it was and remains French in the third. The churches provided the facilities and paid the instructors and the staff, whilst the University set examinations, and granted degrees of equal value—something that was important to the religious denominations and ethnicities that comprised the majority of the population of Winnipeg in 1877. Other colleges, such as the Medical College and the College of Pharmacy, were established in time, and within a year of their founding, each became affiliated to the University, which granted their degrees. Nevertheless, the need for more intensive education in the natural sciences than could be provided by the staff of the colleges grew over time. Public pressure on the legislature to re-think the nature of the province's only university led to a change in the University of Manitoba Act in 1902. The institution was given the right to appoint its own professors (Morton 1957) and the University of Manitoba has not looked back ever since.

Since their founding, each university can boast some outstanding people and each institution has made great contributions to the advancement of knowledge. The University of Szeged and its medical faculty point with pride to a former member, Dr. Albert Szent-Györgyi, who received the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine in 1937, "for his discoveries in connection with the biological combustion process with special reference to vitamin C and the catalysis of fumaric acid" (Nobel Prize Internet Archive 2009). The University of Manitoba has not yet had a member of faculty who won the Nobel Prize, but in 1968 its medical scientists discovered how to produce a polyclonal antibody to the Rh0 antigen of the Rh blood group system, which was then commercialized and is used to prevent the development of haemolytic Rh disease of the newborn (erythroblastosis foetalis) (Bowman 1993; Bumsted 1999). In the late 1960s, about 10% of the neonatal deaths in Canada were caused by this genetically produced maternal-foetal incompatibility, but today, the disorder is virtually unknown (Carr and Beamish 1999). With proper treatment of expectant mothers, it should simply not arise. The University of Manitoba also has an international reputation for research on HIV/AIDS based on some 30 years of work partnered with the University of Nairobi, in Kenya (Smith 2005). Its reputation for evidence-based population health research in the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy is equally stellar, with three of its professors on the ISI's "most highly cited" list. In 2008, Manitoba's Faculty of Medicine was among the 6 Canadian faculties of Medicine that were ranked within the top 100 such schools in the world in Shanghai Jiao-Tong University's Academic Ranking of World Universities by broad subject fields.

The Canadians here may remember that I am not a great fan of national or international systems of ranking, so I point to the Rector of the University of Szeged, who first commented on the Shanghai Jiao-Tong ranking of institutions to me. He said that he had compared our two universities, and we were ranked in the same range on the Shanghai Jiao-Tong list, between the 203rd and the 300th rank. That overall placement has not changed since 2004, but I should note that in 2005, the University of Szeged was rated the top school in Hungary, and was among the top 150 universities of Europe. The University of Manitoba, in comparison, was 12th among Canada's 92 universities that year, a position that has remained steady over the years.

As I had noted earlier, agriculture is a historically important part of the regional economies of Szeged and Winnipeg, so one might expect that each university has

made significant contributions in this area of knowledge. Thanks to the research of Dr. Szent-Györgyi, paprika was identified as a source of Vitamin C, a fact important to countries that do not have the warmth to grow citrus fruits. The Biological Research Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, an independent research institute with some 500 staff, is located in Szeged (BRC, 2009), and its director, Dr. Dénes Dudits, is also a professor at the University of Szeged. The University of Manitoba's greatest contribution to date to the national and international agrarian economy occurred in 1974 when the late Dr. Baldur Steffanson and his team released the first double-negative cultivar ("Tower") of rapeseed *(Brassica napus)* (NCGA 2009). This cultivar produces a low-cost, nutritious oil called, 'Canola' that is safe for human consumption and even the fodder can be used safely for animal feed. Today canola is grown world-wide, and its value to the Canadian economy exceeded $13.8 billion in 2008 (Mark Goodwin Consulting 2008).

There are other areas of knowledge to which the University of Szeged and the University of Manitoba have each made significant contributions, but the last I will mention is mathematics. Like the University of Szeged, the Bólyai Institute's roots lie in the city of Kolozsvár, Transylvania, and the Institute moved with the University after the Trianon partitions. In the interwar years thanks to the members of the Institute, the University of Szeged could claim a pioneering role in the founding of mathematical disciplines such as functional analysis and topological groups, and leadership of the Bólyai continues to this day (BI, 2009). Several mathematics professors ultimately became rectors of the University of Szeged itself, so it was no small pleasure for me to note that one of Manitoba's distinguished professors, Dr. George Grätzer, has received the Bólyai Institute's 2003 Béla Szőkefalvi-Nagy Medal for his fundamental contributions to lattice theory, an area of algebra (BSZ-N 2004).

In sum, since their founding, both the University of Szeged and the University of Manitoba have made significant contributions to specific areas of knowledge, and the benefits of their work are worldwide. These institutions have done so in spite of considerable financial difficulties and political turmoil, and this is particularly true of the University of Szeged which is located in a region that was a war zone in the two great world wars of the 20th century. Institutions that will not be shaken from pursuing their mission regardless of circumstance are admirable entities and partnership between such institutions bodes well for their enhanced success.

Building a community of scholars linked by common interest, and drawn from the University of Szeged and the University of Manitoba is not a small task. Their good fortune is that their institutions are embedded in cities that share certain fundamental features, and this enhances the likelihood of a kindred recognition that, will provide a sound foundation for mutual trust and will build a sense of shared values. With these in place, the horizon for comparison and contrast in the humanities and social sciences, for collaboration in the natural sciences and medicine, is limitless. May it be thus!

All of the participants here have taken the first tentative steps to take on a new identity—scholars who cross borders and yet feel at home in the place they visit, as they put mutual knowledge to use to promote learning and to increase understanding between communities in two different parts of the world. That transition to the new identity, the formation of this new community of scholars is not yet complete. But you—the participants—are on your way, and with determination, you and your students can indeed build a better world.

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