Cross-border connections on three Hungarian borderlands  
(in Austrian-Hungarian, Slovakian-Hungarian and Ukrainian-Hungarian reference areas)  

JUDIT MOLNÁR  

School of Geography, Queen’s University, Belfast BT7 1NN, UK  

INTRODUCTION  

EU enlargement caused worries among former EU members and sometimes also for Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs), as we learn from some recent academic papers (ANDERSON, J. 1998; BCHIR, H, FONTAGNÉ, L. AND ZANGHERI, P. 2003; TUPY, M. L. 2003. etc.) and as we could hear from some EU politicians. Certainly Europe has more problems after enlargement, at least in the short-term. Apparently it is advantageous for the new European Union as a whole, but we have to be wary of giving conclusions now and we have to think about the future watchfully if we would like to predict it. In the European Union, in spite of globalization, the Single European Market (SEM) and a proliferation of transnational bodies, there are still national, economic and other conflicts here. Liam O’Dowd, concluded that “As the meaning of national borders changes, existing borders are challenged, old borders re-emerge and new ones are established often in the midst of bloody conflict. The whole process reminds us that we should never see boundaries as natural, fixed or immutable, rather they should be understood as ‘temporary’ constructions dependent on the balance of forces at specific times in history.” (O’DOWD, L. 1994).  

It is very important that borders are “dependent on the balance of forces at specific times in history”, because we could be misled into analysing situations without enough of a grasp of their history. We can approach conflicts from the point of view of “subject positions” (DIEZ, T, STETTER, S, ALBERT, M. 2004). Certainly it will help us to understand the actual situation because finally the result will depend always on the actors in the conflicts’ positions, and who has more power, resources and a bigger hinterland. The example of the former Yugoslavia also shows us that conflicts were latent during the Communist era, but afterwards turned into a manifest ones (DIEZ, T, STETTER, S, ALBERT, M. 2004).  

In such processes, old borders disappear and new ones are born. This can change peoples’ lives dramatically on the borderlands. This paper tries to show contacts through and across the borders of Hungary and the some of the impact of those redrawn borders on peoples’ lives.  

Method  
The study is based on survey by questionnaire, which is a common procedure in borderland studies. An empirical study was made, at the household level, of the:  

- existence of relatives beyond the border  
- level of relations maintained with the relatives from the other side  
- frequency of border crossings  
- purpose of the border crossings  
- municipal attraction centers in these areas - places visited for the use of retail and services.  

We used a non-probability sample in the villages and a probability sample in Sopron town.
Research areas

The study is based on three border regions:

- 98 settlements running of the full length of the Hungarian-Ukrainian border, called the “Szatmár-Bereg-Kárpátalja borderland” (Figure 1)
- 105 settlements along the border section between the Sajó and Hernád rivers of the Hungarian-Slovakian border, called the “Sajó-Hernád borderland” (Figure 2)
- the Sopron region of the Austrian-Hungarian border with 35 settlements including the city of Sopron and the Fertő-lake region, called the “Kékfrankos borderland” (Figure 3).
After the two world wars, the new borders of Hungary were not created to take notice of the ethnic compositions of the areas they bisected. As a result of these treaties, many Hungarian people found themselves left out of their original home country. After the Treaty of Trianon, Hungary lost 67% of its territory; its population decreased dramatically from 18,264,533 to 7,990,202; and its territory decreased even more dramatically from 282,870 km$^2$ to 93,073 km$^2$. 1.7 million Hungarian people were left in Romania, 0.5 million Hungarian people in the Serb-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom, 1.1 million Hungarian people in Czechoslovakia, and 26,000 Hungarian people in Austria (ZEIDLER, M. 2001) (Figure 4).

Two of our research areas contain ethnic Hungarian majorities on the non-Hungarian side of the border: the Szatmár-Bereg-Kárpátalja borderland and the Sajó-Hernád borderland. Within these areas there are settlements with Hungarian minorities and settlements with Hungarian majorities.
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES OF THE BORDERS

The existence of relatives across the border

In all of three research borderlands connections were found with relatives from the other side of the border (Figure 5) and social interweaving across borders is often strongly felt. Hungarian people living in the Ukrainian and Slovakian research areas, have the most relatives across the border in Hungary. More than 70% of the people asked in each of these areas have relatives. It is interesting that those living in the same borderlands on the other side apparently have many fewer relatives on the other side of the border (20% in Hungarian side of the Szatmár-Bereg-Kárpátalja borderland and around 40% in Hungarian side of the Sajó-Hernád borderland).

In these areas lives the Hungarian diaspora, people living abroad (from Hungary’s point of view), and these people would like to keep contact strongly with their native country so they keep tally on more distant cousins than people who live in Hungary do. In the Austrian-Hungarian research area, there are very few Hungarians on the Austrian side and also just a few Austrians on the Hungarian side, so they have few relatives across the border. But the Hungarians on the Hungarian side would like to keep the contact with their families who live west, so they also keep count of distant cousins on the Austrian side.
The level of relations maintained with relatives across the border

We can see that, in all research areas, most people meet their relatives rarely - more rarely than monthly, or only for an important family occasion (Figures 6-8).

Figures 6-7 The intensity of visits to relatives in the Szatmár-Bereg-Kárpatája and Sajó-Hernád borderlands
The frequency of border crossings

Despite the “Schengen border” the frequency of travelling across the border is highest in the Kékfrankos borderland. In all three research areas most people never or very rarely go cross the border (Figures 9-11). Really very few people go to Ukraine from Hungary (20%) and Hungarian people who live in the Sajó-Hernád borderland on the Slovakian side travel most often to Hungary. In two of the three research areas, we find “tourists”, who go to the neighbouring country for business or to work as cheap labour. These border crossings are illegal, so these people do not always want to tell us the truth about them.

Figures 9-10  The intensity of journeys across the border in the Szatmár-Bereg-Kárpátalja and Sajó-Hernád borderlands
In Ukrainian-Hungarian borderland is an illegal petrol trade and lot of Hungarian people from Ukrainian side have no alternative to this for earning money. In the Austrian-Hungarian borderland Hungarians go to Austria to work as a cheap labourers. In both cases they these things secret and only when we talked informally would they tell us their true situations.

The purpose of the border crossings

There is a large difference between the research borderlands, and between the difference sides of the borders, in the purposes people have for crossing the border (Figures 12-14).

Mostly, people travel to Hungary from the Ukrainian side of Szatmár-Bereg-Kárpátalja borderland to visit their relatives, and for foodstuffs, clothes and manufactured goods. Hungarians travel to the Ukrainian side also to visit their relatives and to buy petrol and as tourists (Figure 12).

People living on the Slovakian side of the Sajó-Hernád borderland go to Hungary to shop for clothes, foodstuffs and manufactured goods and to visit their relatives and for a holiday. Hungarian families go to Slovakia to visit their relatives, as tourists and for shopping something (Figure 13).

In Hungarian-Austrian research area we can find intense contacts between people living two sides of the border. Austrians travel to Hungary for holiday, for services and shopping, Hungarians go to Austria to buy foodstuffs, clothes and manufactured goods and to visit their relatives (Figure 14).
Figures 12-13  The purpose of travelling across the border in the Szatmár-Bereg-Kárpátalja and Sajó-Hernád borderlands

Figure 14  The purpose of travelling cross the border in the Kékfrankos borderland

Municipal attraction centers based on the use of retail and services

When a political frontier does not run on a natural border, it can divide areas that rely on same resources of nature, humans, and economy etc. This happens easily when a new border is born after the settling of an area and it happened in the last century after each of the two world wars and their peace treaties. All of the new Hungarian borders “forgot” to consider the original connections and structures and made difficulties for the border people and indeed for the whole country. From this point of view the situation was same in Hungary as it was in Ireland, as O’Dowd has described it: “The meandering 280-mile boundary confirmed in 1925
cross-cut 1,400 agricultural holdings, approximately 180 roads and 20 railway lines. It bisected villages and, in some cases, private houses." (O’Dowd, L. 1994).

The settlements of these bisected areas had to rebuild their relationships, the border people had to make new centres and form new catchment’s areas, but sometimes these cannot work successfully. Is it possible to reform the original texture when the border becomes opened and permeable again? Is it necessary or not? Is there any claim to be made for it or not? And what is the situation in those areas where the border obstructs movement across it?

Method

This research also based on a questionnaire survey. We asked where people usually go buy 1. foodstuffs, 2. clothes, and 3. manufactured goods. Then, where do they usually go 4. to shop at the market, 5. to fill up their gas bottle, 6. to amuse themselves, 7. for the theatre, 8. for the cinema, 9. for the hairdresser, 10. for the tailor, 11. for the shoemaker, 12. for the repairman, 13. for petrol, and 14. for the car garage? They were able to name a maximum of two places used for each activity. A town or village got 1 point each time it was mentioned for any activity (i.e. if one person named the same town for every activity it would receive 14 points). The number of mentions received by each (possible) centre of attraction was summed. If the respondent named their home settlement it was not counted: only places travelled to were. Each centre’s score was divided by the maximum possible score (14*total number of respondents) and multiplied by 1000 to give a per-thousand score. We call this the ‘attraction index’.

We also gave a score to each area from which people were attracted to these centres based on how attracted people from these settlements were to particular centres. The number of mentions that one particular centre received from each settlement was divided by the maximum possible score (number of people asked in the settlement*14) and multiplied by 100 to give a per cent score. We call this the ‘attracted’ (or ‘attracted-ness’) index.

Results

The attraction index shows us which settlements work as ‘centres’ in the research area. In the Szatmár-Bereg-Kárpátalja borderland (Figure 15), there are two main centres: Beregszász from Ukrainian side and Vásárosnamény from Hungary (Figures 16-17). If our research based on the local reference area, which means that we observe whether is there any attraction centre on the other side of the border. We can see no single place on the Ukrainian side that works as a centre for Hungary, despite the traditions of the past, when Beregszász, Ungvár, Munkács, Nagyszőlős had a complementary region in this area (when the whole region still belonged to Hungary). From the Ukrainian side people go to Nyíregyháza (Figure 18), Vásárosnamény and Fehérgyarmat on the Hungarian side, but not so many people and not so often (Figure 15). In this research area on the Hungarian side we can find good structures of settlements, there are some well-working centres with their catchment areas close to them (Figure 19). But on the Ukrainian side there is only one big centre from this research area with a high score on the attraction index and in some cases the villages forming its complementary region are very far from it (Figure 16).
Figure 15  Centres and their scores on the attraction index in the Szatmár-Bereg-Kárpátalja borderland

Figure 16  Beregszász and its catchment area in the Szatmár-Bereg-Kárpátalja borderland
Figure 17  Vásárosnamény and its catchment area in the Szatmár-Bereg-Kárpátalja borderland

Figure 18  Nyíregyháza, capital of local county, and its catchment area in Szatmár-Bereg-Kárpátalja borderland
In the Sajó-Hernád research area, the situation is opposite to the previous area’s (Figure 20). Here the Slovakian side has the more favourable structure of centres and catchment areas and on the Hungarian side we can find really a very bad situation. The main centre of this side is Miskolc (Figures 20, 21), which is as far as 50-70 kilometres from the villages forming its complementary area in several cases, and the road network is also very bad. On the Slovakian side the main centres are Kassa (Kosice) (Figure 22), Rozsnó (Roznava), Tornaalja (Tornála) and Szepsi (Moldava Nad Bodvou), and every town is very close to the villages attracted towards it. On the Hungarian side the main centres are Miskolc (Figure 23), Encs, Kazincbarcika, Putnok, Ózd, and in several cases to go to these centres is very difficult from the little villages. The traditional centres were Rozsnó, Rimaszombat (Rimaska Sobota), Kassa, but these towns were dislocated from their catchment areas after the two world wars. On the Hungarian side the new centres do not work well, so the people from this area have to go a greater distance, to the capital of the county, Miskolc. But Miskolc is very far from these villages. The structure of settlements is the worst from the three research areas here.
Figure 20  Centres and their attraction indexes in Sajó-Hernád borderland

Figure 21  Miskolc, capital of local county and its catchment area in Sajó-Hernád borderland
The smallest area is the Kékfrankos borderland, especially if we focus on the Hungarian side. Here we have the Sopron as the main centre with its complementary region, as we can see in Figure 25. Sopron has the highest level of attraction (or it is the most attractive), in particular if our assessment is based on only the Hungarian reference area (Figure 24). On the Hungarian side there is no other important centre in this research territory. On the Austrian side there are two main centres, Eisenstadt (Kismarton) (Figure 26) and the capital, Wien (or ‘Vienna’) (Figure 27). We can find an important role from a very local point of view, if we observe the magnitude of Mattersburg, as a local centre. The people asked from Hungary, they did not mark any centre on the Austrian side, but marked Austria in general. But we can
see that Sopron, as a centre, is working a little from Austrian side (Figure 24). There is good structure of settlements in this borderland, with favourable central places hierarchies (Figure 28).

Figure 24  Centres and their attraction index scores in the Kékfrankos borderland

Figure 25  Sopron and its catchment area in the Kékfrankos borderland
Figure 26 Eisenstadt and its catchment area in the Kékfrankos borderland

Figure 27 Wien and its catchment area in the Kékfrankos borderland
All three research areas can be defined as the main central places and their primary attracted settlements (Figures 29-31). We can find concentrated but heterogeneous complementary regions on the Hungarian side of Szatmár-Bereg-Kárpátalja and the Slovakian side of the Sajó-Hernád borderlands (Figures 29-30). There are concentrated and homogeneous attracted areas on the Ukrainian side of Szatmár-Bereg-Kárpátalja and the Hungarian side of the Kékfrankos borderlands (Figures 29, 31).
On the Hungarian side of the Sajó-Hernád borderland there are also concentrated and scattered heterogeneous complementary regions (Figure 30). Finally, on the Austrian side of the Kékfrankos borderland there are very scattered areas attracted to the centres (Figure 31), some villages are a long distance from their central places.

Figure 30  Central places and their catchment area in the Sajó-Hernád borderland

Figure 31  Central places and their catchment area in Kékfrankos area
It is important not to forget that this research (in terms of data gathering) finished before the 1st of May in 2004, that is, before Slovakia, Hungary became EU members. These relations may now change, especially if these countries are to have the same currency in future. Maybe the old connections can be rebuilt and help the lives of people living on the border.

**SUMMARY**

It may seem to us that these borders are mostly open without any real obstacles to crossing it. This research allows us to see what the real situation is. Despite the busy border check points, there were rather illegal movements across the border and only few proper connections between the border regions. This conclusion also could be drawn if we see the results of central places research. There are not any real central places, which could have attracted people from settlements on the other side of the border. In some cases the settlements structures are highly unfavorable (Hungarian side of Sajó-Hernád and Ukrainian side of Szatmár-Bereg-Kárpátalja borderlands, and Austrian side of Kékfrankos borderland as well). The original structures of social and economic communication were broken by the new borders imposed, and the new ones do not work well even after a considerable passage of time. After EU enlargement, we may guess that border crossing and connections across borders will improve in the Austrian-Hungarian and Slovakian-Hungarian borderlands, but this is only a hopeful hypothesis now, which new research from these areas will test in future. In the Ukrainian-Hungarian borderland, however, the situation may well become more difficult for the people still for those who live in this area. We know, however, that the processes of global and regional political-economic restructuring do not always have the effects anticipated of them.

**REFERENCES**


BCHIR, H, FONTAGNÉ, L. AND ZANGHIERI, P. 2003:


