Comparative study of cross-border relations in Hungary
(Austrian-Hungarian, Slovakian-Hungarian and Ukrainian-Hungarian research areas)

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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 Zanghieri, 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). 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-Hermád 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 borders connections were found with relatives from the other side of the border (Figure 4) 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-Hermád 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 not many relatives across the
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 5-7).
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 8-10). 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.

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 11-13).
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 11).

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 12).

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 13).

Figures 11-12 The purpose of travelling across the border in the Szatmár-Bereg-Kárpátalja and Sajó-Hernád borderlands

Figure 13 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

The method is based on a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire posed a series of questions about where respondents engaged in consumer activities (for example buying foodstuffs or visiting the cinema). Respondents 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 the maximum number of points available). 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 counted. Each centre’s score was divided by the maximum possible score and multiplied by 1000 to give a ‘per-thousand score’. This was termed the ‘attraction index’.

We also gave a score to each area from which people were attracted to 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 and multiplied by 100 to give a per cent score. This was termed 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 14), there are two main centres: Beregszász from Ukrainian side and Vásárosnamény from Hungary (Figures 15-16). 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, Nagyszölős had a complementary region in this area (when the whole region still belonged to Hungary). From the Ukrainian side people go to Nyíregyháza (Figure 17), Vásárosnamény and Fehérgyarmat on the Hungarian side, but not so many people and not so often (Figure 14). 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 18). 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 15).
Figure 14  Centres and their scores on the attraction index in the Szatmár-Bereg-Kárpátalja borderland

Figure 15  Beregszász and its catchment area in the Szatmár-Bereg-Kárpátalja borderland
Figure 16 Vásárosnamény and its catchment area in the Szatmár-Bereg-Kárpátalja borderland

Figure 17 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 19). 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 19, 20), 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 21), Rozsnyó (Roznava), Tornaalja (Tornal’ a) 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 22), Encs, Kazincbarcika, Putnok, Ózd, and in several cases to go to these centres is very difficult from the little villages. The traditional centres were Rozsnyó, Rimaszombat (Rimaska Sobota), Kassa, but these towns were dislocated from their catchment areas after the two world wars. On the Hungarian side the new little 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 19  Centres and their attraction indexes in Sajó-Hernád borderland

Figure 20  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 24. 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 23). 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 25) and the capital, Wien (or ‘Vienna’) (Figure 26). 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 23). There is good structure of settlements in this borderland, with favourable central places hierarchies (Figure 27).

Figure 23  Centres and their attraction index scores in the Kékfrankos borderland

Figure 24  Sopron and its catchment area in the Kékfrankos borderland
Figure 25  Eisenstadt and its catchment area in the Kékfrankos borderland

Figure 26  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. 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. There are concentrated and homogeneous attracted areas on the Ukrainian side of Szatmár-Bereg-Kárpátalja and the Hungarian side of the Kékfrankos borderlands. On the Hungarian side of the Sajó-Hernád borderland there are also concentrated and scattered heterogeneous complementary regions. Finally, on the Austrian side of the Kékfrankos borderland there are very scattered areas attracted to the centres, some villages are a long distance from their central places.

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. Legal border crossing was more frequent when there were close familial relationships between people living on two sides of the border. Despite the busy border check points, there were rather illegal movements across the border and only few proper connections between the border regions. The intensity of illegal border crossing depended on the economic and political situation. Where there is a big difference in the price of certain goods between the two countries some inhabitants try to exploit this. 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 findings suggest
another main factor of border life and contact is whether the area is rural or urban. It appeared to be easier to build cross border relationships in urban areas.

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