

MURA REGION EGTC, THE INTEGRATED BORDER REGION AT THE MURA BEFORE SCHENGEN¹

MURA REGION EGTC, INTEGRACIJA GRANIČNIH REGIJA OKO MURE PRIJE PROVEDBE SCHENGENA¹

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SUMMARY

With Croatia's EU accession, the process of etherialization of the Croatian-Hungarian border accelarated. One important step was the foundation of the Mura Region EGTC. The organization is made of Muramenti Nemzetiségi Területfejlesztési Társulás, Donja Dubrava, Donji Vidovec, Gorican and Donji Kraljevec. Instead of the Hungarian-Hungarian relations, typical for Hungarian neighborhood politics, the Croatian- Croatian ethnic relationships dominate in this case. The aim of this study is to show through the example of the Hungarian Mura-side and the Croatian Muraköz (Međimurska) the qualitative transformation of a previously alienated border area. First, we examine the socio-economic system of relations, whose activity is clearly shown by the IPA cross-border relations development tenders.

¹ The Mura Region EGTC was funded by Muramenti Nemzetiségi Területfejlesztési Társulás, and Goričan općina, Donja Dubrava općina, Donji Vidovec općina. Kotoriba općina, Donji Kraljevec općina, Podturen općina and Legrad općina wish to associate in the near future.

Key words: *Mura, reintegration, EGTC nationalities in regional development, cross-border co-operation*

Ključne riječi: *Pomurje, reintegracija, EGTC, nacionalne manjine u regionalnom razvoju, prekogranična suradnja*

INTRODUCTION

The Mura region is a landscape of the Carpathian basin bearing unique historical and natural characteristics in which the development took a new direction in the aftermath of the millennium. The only part of the Croatian-Hungarian border region, where the within the inter-state relations Croatian-Croatian "interethnic" relations dominate. In this respect it shows partial similarities with Baranja where the Hungarian-Hungarian relations determine the cross-border cooperations. Nevertheless, it is a multi-ethnic ethnic contact zone we are talking about, where apart from the Croatian and the Hungarian, the Slovenian is also present (Sršan, S. 2003).

We actually represent the economic reintegration processes of the former regions historical Zala county when examining this Croatian-Hungarian-Slovenian triple border area. With the approach and the accession to the European Union of our southern neighbours, the borders became ethereal, which will be fulfilled with Croatia's latter accession to the Schengen zone. this process has been facilitated by continuous expansion of EU funds in support of cross-border relations. Although there is a triple border, this Slovenian-Croatian relations system was not taken into consideration. We only approach the matter from the Croatian-Hungarian perspective (Bali L. - Fitos G. 2012.).

THE THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF CROSS BORDER RELATIONS

From the aspect of our topic, it is definitely important to identify the concept of border areas, as well as to clarify the difference between the over-border and cross-border relations, and the different forms of co-operation and techniques deriving from their qualities, as well as their point of origin. "Considering the spatiality of the two approaches are applicable when examining borderlines: line theory and the zone theory. The border is a line in legal and also geographical terms, but it is a zone in content and impact, a lesser- larger area, where the interaction of states prevail" (Hajdú Z. 1988).

In order to depict this zone, it is important to identify what exactly we call cross border area. There are different definitions, characteristic is however that only those actors of aggregation levels of data are included in the analysis (settlement, sub-region, county) that contact any state border. This also influences our examinations, as the economic and political impacts of border affect a larger area, while those affecting social relations may be felt usually on the closest settlements. (Hardi T. 2000, 597 p.).

The accurate limitation of cross-border areas is totally land- and region-dependent. In Europe the particular countries bear different political geographical characteristics, their borders are on a distinct historical development path. Therefore in the following, we attempted to create a definition applicable for the relations of the Carpathian basin only. Under cross-border areas we understand the geographical territory at a borderline, on which all the negative and positive social-economic components deriving from the presence of a state border can be felt. These territories show a dynamic nature, as their latitude may drastically vary depending on political and economic changes in a short period of time. Their effect on the network of settlements is partially static in medium terms, therefore – especially in the period of "etherealising" borders – the older catchment areas find it difficult to develop reconstruction! The latitude of cross-border area is highly dependent on the characteristic of the geographical area which are influenced by historical and actual political factors. From this derives that only momentarily can the accurate km distance of this area from the state border be defined (Gulyás L. 2012).

From the point of view of Croatian-Hungarian cooperation, because of the loose texture of cross-border areas, we must make a distinction between cross-border and over-border relations. Deriving from the incomplete texture, the amount of affinities are hardly detectable, or non-existing on certain sections of the Croatian-Hungarian border, so there is no cross-border cooperation in the classic sense. On the two sides of the border the social-economic relations of the territories are in some cases dimi-

nishing. We may find in every case two-way relations of some sort between the macro- and mesoregional centres of the neighbouring territories. Here we may not talk about cross-border relations, because cooperation is not organised locally and bottom-up, but from a border neutral centre, these connection systems exhaust the fact of cross-border relations (Bali L. 2012).

The occurrence of over-border relations is characteristic for the segment of space, where positive social-economic components deriving from the state border can be felt hardly, or not at all. The interactions happening here start from the centre, or centre-like area of the countries concerned, and the actual cooperation is carried out by these actors. The over-border relations mean therefore a broader, bigger system than cross-border cooperation. Latter is the type of over-border relations that are realised far from the centre areas in a narrower border region, organised bottom-up, sometimes in a peripheral position.



Figure 1. Interactions in cross border areas
Source: *Hardi T.* 2009.

Based on the border classification system of Tamás Hardi (Fig. 1.): in the 90's the yet co-occurring Croatian- Hungarian border regions reached the mutual cooperating level. The relation between the two countries are characterised by political stability, and social-economic comparative possibilities foster the development of interactions. The most advanced level is not yet achieved. Some results can be experienced in traces, with ad hoc characteristic, however, these do not fulfil the term "integrated" (Hardi T. 2009 p. 30.).

For this reason, drawing on the experience so far established the European Parliament and Council Regulation 1082/2006 /EC the institution of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation to make the cross-border relations more dynamic. The document 'Perspectives on Territorial Cooperation and the EGTC CoR political strategy and supporting actions' has been adopted by the Committee of the Regions in 2006, in which strategic orientations were proposed for regional cooperation and to exercise institutional tasks within the framework of the EGTC action area. Over the past eight years, a lot of changes took effect. Almost every government succeeded in incorporating the legislation of EGTC-s in their jurisprudence, early formed organizations already possess multiple successful projects. Hungary was among the first to have transposed the rules for the EGTC into their legislation in 2007, Croatia did that in 2014. There was major disruption in the transposition process in countries where strong provincial system operates, such as Germany, Austria. To date these states have also largely settled legal correspondence relating to the EGTC. From the first formed EGTC (Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai EGTC) the circle has widened. Organizations are created in the topics of growth, employment, education, culture, heritage, tourism, environment, health care, mass transport and administration. By the middle of 2012, 28 over-border initiations were registered, 16 Member States connected to the program. Most territorial cooperation groups are created on the territories of France, Hungary, Spain, and Slovakia. The secondly formed Ister-Granum EGTC in the Union is a good example of initiative skill noticeable in Hungary. 51 Hungarian and 38 Slovakian local governments belong to the Hungarian-Slovakian border region around Esztergom. Its primary objective is to realize cross-border cooperation programs and projects co-financed by the European Union, as well as to fulfil a representative role. (Bali L.- Fitos G. 2012).

The participating organizations are usually local governments, governments, committees, advisory boards, etc. A further characteristic is that there is no, or only restricted financing from the Union. The 16 member states of the 28 EGTC-s, the 550 local and regional authorities may help the everyday life of almost 25 million European citizens with their operation. In the 2014-2020 planning period new options reveal. The Regional Committee will continue to promote in accordance with the territorial cohesion objectives the cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. The EGTC is an instrument for 2020, which clarify the multi-level governance, foresees a greater role for local democracy². It can be a basis of economic growth in the affected areas. The review of the EGTC Regulation clarifies the conditions, creates legal certainty. It's importance is in the acceleration of foundation of new EGTC-s. In regards of the examination area, only one organization was established prior to Mura Region EGTC so far. Pannon EGTC has a very large extent, and the membership composition is multi-heterogeneous. It includes Pécs, as the functional centre of Southern Transdanubia, and Máriagyűd, Tófejeet, Misesfa, Keszthely, Kiskutast, Tamási and Slovenian Lendava (Lendva) etc. It is about a fifty-two-member organization where knowing the purpose of the regulation for the establishment of the EGTC, it becomes clear to everyone that the operation is only formal. Presumably, it satisfies the political interests of certain political actors³.

SPATIAL LOCATION OF MURA REGION EGTC

With Croatia's accession to the EU on the 1. July 2013., the already bright Croatian-Hungarian international, regional and local government, non-governmental relations are more constantly booming. Further minimal increase of EU funds supporting cross-border relations in the border region ensure that.

The economic development of the area along the Mura depends on the successful cooperation of local authorities, civil society organizations and the regional socio-economic organizations. The Lead Beneficiary in the project is the Muraside Gentilitial Region-Development Association, which has been an active participant in the forming of territorial processes of the area along the Mura for 19 years. The organization and its partners Donja Dubrava, Goričan, Donji Vidovec (Kotoriba, Donji Kraljevec)⁴ has implemented a number of successful cooperation in the past 15 years. However, these achieved significant results in the fields of ethnic, cultural, sports, educational interactions, as well as in the development of infrastructure, they lacked actual economic aspect (Fig. 2).

During the organization's founding, the municipalities and the općinas, as well as spatial development associations were addressed. After its foundation, the objective of the organization was continuous expanding, they were counting on 30-40 municipalities, associations and authorities, NGOs, and the region's leading academic institution, the University of Pannonia (Georgikon Faculty) to be involved. From the point of view of success, the as strong as possible inhomogeneity⁵ of the membership is important, which allows all municipal, civil and administrative idea to prevail! Apart from the municipal, the official and the civilian level, they also counted on organizations involved in research and development, and territorial innovation.

² This is in contradiction to the fact that the consent of the actual ministry of the Member State is required for the entry of the organization.

³ Statute of Pannon Limited Liabilities EGTC. 15. February, 2012.

⁴ The three settlements will probably join the organization in 2015, after its foundation.

⁵ The Hungarian experiences according municipal associations created for regional development show so far that the cooperation of similar sized settlements is more beneficial. It is especially true for the utilization of certain development sources. According to the experiences after the regime change, the bigger settlements are more dominant, have higher advocacy skills, they pushed back on multiple occasions the "public interest" of the association.



Figure 2. Mura Region EGTC¹

Legend: The members of Mura Region EGTC are signaled with red

Source: Bali L. – Gulyás L. 2013.

¹ Figure shows the situation in 2014.

APPLICATION ACTIVITY, AS A MEASURE OF INTERACTION AND COHESION

We can draw the best conclusion regarding the interactions from the evaluation of the tendering activity manifested in the IPA program, through which we can justify the creation of the organization's reason for existence in addition to the historical aspects. It was the only credible source, which had a detailed database about the relations., Croatian-Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry - in business for several years, and has a branch in both countries - does not have the appropriate data regarding bilateral mutual investments. Therefore we relied on the IPA program data (Gulyás L.- Bali L. 2013).

Based on the results of the first round a special situation emerges, as the most successful projects were coming from the topics of education and training, and the "interpersonal" relations (Table 1). In relation to education, the range of participating municipalities moves on a wide spectrum, such as: Murakeresztúr, Čakovec (Csáktornya). In fifty percent of these cases, the existing and well-established twinning relations gave the foundation, as well as in the topic of interpersonal relationships, where the small Croatian and Hungarian towns along the Mur (and Drava) (Čakovec, Križevci, Letenye) were successful. In the priority topic of cooperative economy serving the deepening of the actual economic cooperation activity, one project was created for the topic of cross-border business partner search with the beneficiary of the Zala County Foundation for Enterprise Development (Zalaegerszeg).

A historical trend emerges again from the overview of second round winner topics, where the shortage of sources is remedied by municipalities through cross-border cooperation funds (Table 1). Two project examples come from priority 1.1.1. and 1.1.2.: "The Letenye wastewater treatment plant improvement and south-western part of Prelog sewage" and "Bázakerettye, Donja Dubrava, Donji Vidovec and Kotoriba technical documentation of sewage" and "Órtilos and Goričan technical documentation for sewage system." In each case, socio-economic cohesion of the border region is questionable, particularly in the case of Bázakerettye. In the second priority, no similar trends are observed. The experiences so far show that the density of cross-border interactions are primarily determined by space- structural and transport, as well as the ethnic relations. Exclusively cross-border cooperation interpreted as co-operation has only rarely been observed, for example: Letenye (HUHR / 1001 / 2.2.2 / 0012), Tótszerdahely (HUHR / 1001 / 1.1.2. / 0004). In each of these cases, minority aspect has a strong influence of the, virtually the pre-state socialism micro-regional contacts were revived by the effective support of the EU (L. BALI - FITOS G. 2013).

When reviewing the winning applications of the third round, we see a picture, different from the previous ones (Table 1). Most applications had the main topic of "Sustainable tourism in the Mura-Drava-Danube river area", in the active and ecotourism topics. Projects for the development of active tourism and coherent tourist image resembled a further priority by the decision makers. In the first two rounds there was only one winning project, while in the third twenty-six. "Our economy" topic experienced a significant reduction of more than fifty per cent. An even greater number of drop back was visible in the winning applications addressing the issues of "Human resource development between communities", where in contrast to the 11 in the first round and 31 in the second round, only three were winners (Gulyás L.-Bali L. 2013).

Table 1. Priorities/Areas of intervention/Action
Hungary-Croatia Cross-border Co-operation Programme
(Az első, második és a harmadik forduló összesített, áttekintő táblázata)

Priority 1 – Sustainable Environment and Tourism			
1.1 Sustainable and Attractive Environment			
1.1.1 Development of landscapes in the Mura-Drava-Danube area and its natural and rural surroundings	2	3	1
1.1.2 Environmental planning activities and minor public actions to improve the quality of the environment in the natural areas	4	6	1
1.2 Sustainable Tourism in the Mura-Drava-Danube River Area			
1.2.1. Elaboration of a regional tourism product plan	1	0	0
1.2.2 Bicycle paths; Development of infrastructure for active and ecotourism in the river border area	0	0	13
1.2.3 Thematic routes of cultural heritage	0	0	7
1.2.4 Promotion of the river area as a single tourism product	0	0	4
1.2.5 Private investment attraction	0	0	2
Priority 2 – Cooperative Economy and Intercommunity Human Resource Development			
2.1 Co-operative Economy			
2.1.1 Cross-border business partner finding	3	6	0
2.1.2 Cross-border labour market mobility promotion	2	3	2
2.1.3 Joint research, development and innovation	8	6	3
2.1.4 Joint local planning, strategies, programmes	2	5	3
2.2 Intercommunity Human Resources Development			
2.2.1 Joint cross-border education and other training projects between educational institutions	7	12	3
2.2.2 People to people actions	7	16	0
2.2.3 Bilingualism actions	4	3	0
Summary of all winning projects	40	60	39

Source: Gulyás L. – Bali L. 2013.

VISION INSTEAD OF SUMMARY: THE GOALS AND STRUCTURE OF MURA REGION EGTC IN THE LIGHT OF INTEGRATED CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION.

The objective of the forming Mura Region EGTC⁶ with the assistance of Muraside Gentilial Region-Development Association, Donja Dubrava, Donji Vidovec, Goričan and scientific background of the University of Pannonia is to implement further environmentally sustainable investments by using the traditional inter-settlement (networking) system of relations of the past 20 years, and based on the realized developments, and to keep to existing plans. Aim is to put down the basis of foundation of knowledge and culture based development grounded on intensive ethnic and social-economic relations with the successful usage of natural and cultural heritage on the EGTC area, which is practically the Lower- Mura on the Hungarian side and the Mura-Drava triangle in Croatia. The local economy can only be strengthened with the use of third generation technologies connected to renewable energy sources, with the invitation of local entrepreneurs during industrial park development, and with the involvement of those that only produce supplementary income. The first such project is still going on, Tótszerdahely and Goričan wishes to build up the basis of a joint microregional industrial park and the future strategies in the framework of the application HUHR/1001/2.1.4./0004, and to further develop existing industrial zones (Goričan), as well as cell-like industrial units (Tótszerdahely). The proximity of the two towns and ethnic homogeneity of the region with the diminishing borderlines foresees also the start of a two-way employee movement. In the intended Donja Dubrava and planned Donji Vidovec industrial park - matching the hydropower production on the Mura (floating mini-power plant in Tótszerdahely) and the Drava (Donja Dubrava hydro-plant) - the aim will be to produce natural- material- based parts and equipment necessary for usage of the renewable energy. This will put down the foundations of a complex regional energy production from renewable energy sources, to which industrial production will also connect.

The tourism development intends to work out an integrated tourism destination, some parts of this already exist. These are the demonstration of region's the typical dishes during the Full Bowl Festival HUHR 0901/2.2.2/0002 (MNTT-Goričan) and the regional strudel festival organized by the municipality of Tótszerdahely. Thus the goal is to create a single tourist destination in the triangle formed by the Mura-side and Mura-Drava based on the common nationality, especially the fishing and farming traditions and the related craftsmanship. Bike paths designed by MNTT may provide a direct connection to the bicycle road development plans of Zalaegerszeg – Goričan - Ludbreg-Prelog - Donji Kraljevec which is in the planning phase. With this not only the MNTT and its partners will have an integrated bicycle path network, because certain municipalities Međimursak and Zala county will also be involved. The plans to develop in relation to Goričan are linked to the improvement of the established industrial park's infrastructure and to the settlement centre. The built environment and the individual services under development will further enhance the attractiveness of the town, even for the ones coming with bicycle. As seen from the above, from the plans in implementation the vision of a successful "future region" emerges, where the development ideas are built on the past cooperation, organically connected to one other, planning for the future!

⁶ The organization will be realized through the winning application of Hungary-Croatia IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013 identification number HUHR/1101/2.1.4/0004. Project title: Mura Region EGTC, let's plan together, so that our future may connect us. For the project implementation 11 months were available from 01. October. 2013. The Lead Beneficiary is Muraside Gentilial Region-Development Association seated in Tótszerdahely with the following partner organizations: Goričan, Donja Dubrava, Donji Vidovec and Georgikon Faculty of the University of Pannonia.

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SAŽETAK

Priključenjem Hrvatske Europskoj uniji ubrzao se proces ukidanja hrvatsko-mađarske granice. Jedna od važnih stepenica tog procesa je formiranje Mura Region EGTC. Organizaciju su osnovali Muramenti Nemzetiségi Területfejlesztési Társulás (Pomursko nacionalno udruženje za regionalni razvoj), i općine Donja Dubrava, Donji Vidovec, Goričan i Donji Kraljevec. Umjesto mađarsko-mađarskih odnosa koji karakteriziraju susjedsku mađarsku politiku, u našem slučaju dominiraju hrvatsko-hrvatski nacionalni odnosi. Cilj studije je prikazati kroz mađarsko Pomurje, odnosno hrvatsko Međimurje kvalitativnu promjenu pograničnog područja koje je u nedavnoj prošlosti bilo otuđeno. Prije svega, istražujemo sustav društveno-gospodarstvenih odnosa koji se aktivno razvijaju, a što je vidljivo na temelju IPA natječaja za razvoj prekogranične suradnje.