

ROLE OF EUROREGIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF BORDER PERIPHERIES

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Abstract: At the beginning of the 1990s cross-border co-operations were in the making along the entire Hungarian border. The most significant such cross-border co-operation along the eastern border was the Carpathians Euroregion, that can be regarded as a mega regional model. Later the Hajdú-Bihar – Bihar and the Bihar – Bihar euroregions were established following the model of small regional euroregions. Communities on the two sides of the Romanian-Hungarian border have the same needs and demands. These could be satisfied with the establishment of an Eurometropolis, an European Regional Co-operation Group. Positive results are suggested by the fact that this form of co-operations has already been used successfully.

Key words: borders, cross-border co-operations, euroregion, Carpathians Euroregion

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INTRODUCTION

Character of the border influences fundamentally the fate of settlements along borders and the quality of the life of their inhabitants. Possibilities of extended co-operation between countries, regions and settlements (e.g. sister towns, labour exchange, nature protection, joint urban development, retail) may improve the life standard of those living along the border. Where crossing borders become easier the bonding character of the border become dominant and local development can be based on new regional co-operation. Where, however, borders remain to be separating the regions along the border will remain in periphery (Amin & Tomaney, 1995). Regions along border that have no co-operations with the neighbouring regions at all are extremely rare today in Europe. One specific geographical example of such cross-border co-operations is euroregion (Süli-Zakar, 2008). According to the framework agreement of the European Council, euroregion is a geographical area where cross-border economic, social, cultural, environment protectional or other type of co-operations are active between two or more states or their local

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governments. Thus euroregion is an organisation above nations and it is not a legal entity but the organizational form and institution of cross-border co-operation suiting European norms (Illés, 1997).

Following the regime change in Hungary the peripheral areas along the borders tried to make use of a new organisational form, euroregional co-operation in order to break out of their poverty. The system had been widely utilized for a long time in Western Europe at that time. Such co-operations were realized in mega-regional co-operations in multi-national framework initially. Small regional and bilateral cross-border co-operations were based on towns later (Baranyi, 2008).

BEING NEAR THE BORDER AND IN THE PERIPHERY IN HUNGARY

Current underdeveloped state of the periphery areas in Hungary is the result of partly historical and partly political reasons. Maybe the most significant among these historical and political events is the treaty, disadvantageous for Hungary closing World War I. at the beginning of the 20th century. Periphery state can be explained by a double event group. On the one hand, the areas becoming new along the border as a result of the Trianon Treaty became more distant from the capital and from the main economic fields of the country. On the other hand, the new borders divided several counties therefore the number of areas loosing their centres increased (Hajdú, 2001). Several areas were already lagging behind even in historical Hungary. The broken counties also contributed to the periphery state of areas along the border. Areas along the border loosing touch could have been detected since the 1920s. Due to their location close to the border, these counties were left out of economic development continuously, especially in the development policy of the socialist era. Between the two world wars the hope for revision of the borders did not justify the economic development of the areas in periphery due to the change of borders therefore there were no attempts to develop economically these areas. This situation did not change in the socialist period when borders were closed hermetically. Following World War II a socialist block preparing for another military conflict was formed. In Hungary – similarly to several other socialist states – the front of economic development was the heavy industry serving the defence industry. However, natural conditions of Hungary were not, or only slightly suitable. Since areas along the border were unsuitable for establishing significant industry regarding military points of view – as these areas would have been lost early in the case of a hostile intervention – and their natural conditions were also disadvantageous. They were understandably left out of significant development in a time period when development of the defence industry dominated. Industrial development along the western border was avoided – due to Austria of course – while the same was justified by the separate policy of Yugoslavia along the southern border. The fact, however, that development was kept back even along the borders with the “friendly socialist” countries due to military political reasons is telling regarding the conditions at that time. Conditions that seemed to be easing from the 1980s but the socialist world order kept its tight hold therefore the separating role of borders did not change.

The situation did not change following the regime change either it became even more severe in some respects. As a result of the transforming economy the periphery state of areas along the borders was even worse. First cross-border co-operations, however, were started in such by no means advantageous conditions (Süli-Zakar, 2008). These co-operations were very initial at the beginning of the 1990s, however, the early appearance of initiatives showed that cross-border co-operations held significant amount of energy to be utilized and the possibility of reducing backwardness, expressing that borders not only separate but also connect areas. Numerous Western European examples show that areas along the border can break out of the periphery and become centres of development if neighbouring countries can overstep their historical complaints. This, however, does not mean that Western Europe transformed from one moment to the other after World War II. International conditions did not favour cross-border co-operations while isolation caused by the war eased slowly. In Western Europe the atmosphere eased enough to enable cross-border co-operations to revive by the 1950s. Countries, once enemies, realized that cross-border co-operations and the connection between those living on the two sides of a border

have to be as strong as possible as this is the only way to ease the stress accumulated along the borders and the economic backwardness caused by the periphery state of the areas along the borders. Development of such co-operations was intensified by the forming European integration that is comparable to the European Union integration efforts of the former socialist countries, Hungary among them in the 1990s.

CROSS-BORDER CO-OPERATIONS AS POSSIBLE TOOLS FOR BREAKING OUT OF THE PERIPHERY STATE IN HAJDÚ-BIHAR COUNTY FOLLOWING THE REGIME CHANGE

At the beginning of the 1990s cross-border co-operations were in the making along the entire Hungarian border. The most significant such cross-border co-operation along the eastern border was the Carpathians Euroregion, the first euroregion in the region that established the political stability of the region and made the development of cross-border co-operation initiations possible. Its pioneer role contributed to the establishment of the Hajdú-Bihar – Bihar and the Bihar – Bihar Euroregion the co-operation experiences of which founded the formation plan of the Debrecen-Nagyvárad Eurometropolis. Formation of the first euroregions started in the 1990s based on Western European examples (Regio Basiliensis, Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai, SaarLorLux Euroregion). Three cross-border co-operations were formed in Hajdú-Bihar County. The Carpathians Euroregion that can be regarded as a mega regional model. Then the Hajdú-Bihar – Bihar and the Bihar – Bihar euroregions were established following the model of small regional euroregions (Baranyi, 2008). The ultimate aim of establishing these euroregions – regarded to be Utopian at the time of regime change – is to create a border region living together and having many-sided social, economic and cultural connections.

The Carpathians Euroregion (figure 1) was established on 14th February 1993 with the aim to provide appropriate organizational framework for the participating countries to control cross-border co-operation, also to strengthen connections of neighbouring regions and to contribute to faster regional and economic development (Süli-Zakar, 2003). This euroregion is unique as this was the first solely Eastern European initiation. It is important to note regarding both the founder states and those joining later that member regions were in periphery conditions in all countries and they regarded the euroregional co-operation as one possibility of breaking out of this periphery state.



Figure 1. Geographical extent of the Carpathians Euroregion

(Source: www.tradecarp.com)

Founding members: Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county, Hajdú-Bihar county, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county and Heves county in Hungary; Transcarpathia Oblaszty in Ukraine; Przemysł Voivod, Krosno Voivod in Poland; Bártfa district, Felsővízköz district, Homonna district, Nagymihály district, Töketerebes district and Varanno district in Slovakia. Several neighbouring regions joined the co-operation later. Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county in Hungary; Lviv Oblaszty, Csnyivc Oblaszty, Ivano-Frankivszk Oblaszty in Ukraine; Rzeszów Voivod, Tarnów Voivod in Poland; Kassa Kraj and Eperjes Kraj in Slovakia; Szatmár county, Máramaros county, Bihar county, Szilágy county, Botoșani county, Suceava county and Hargita county in Romania.

The Carpathians Euroregion, however, grew too large and thus developments were difficult, its power was less than it was expected at the beginning. Currently it can be regarded to be a frame that co-ordinates the co-operation of the various intermediate level administrative units of the region. Later the participants preferred the bilateral and not multi-lateral cross-border co-operations based on the positive experiences of the Carpathians Euroregion. Doubtless positive result of the Euroregion was easing the tension in the region and proving that it is possible to establish a relatively effective mega-regional integration organization in an Eastern-Central European region in conditions much less advantageous than those in Western Europe. It proved that private enterprises and civil organizations can be included in the cross-border co-operations apart from the local government sector. The geopolitical environment has changed, however, due to the Euro-Atlantic Integration and to the joining of most of the countries the European Union. These processes resulted in permanent stability in the region. This made one of the aim of the Carpathians Euroregion partly needless, namely the political stability of the neighbouring countries and their neighbourly relationship. In this way the Euroregion completed its historical destiny and the rest of its aims were transmitted to the bilateral or even trilateral cross-border co-operations.

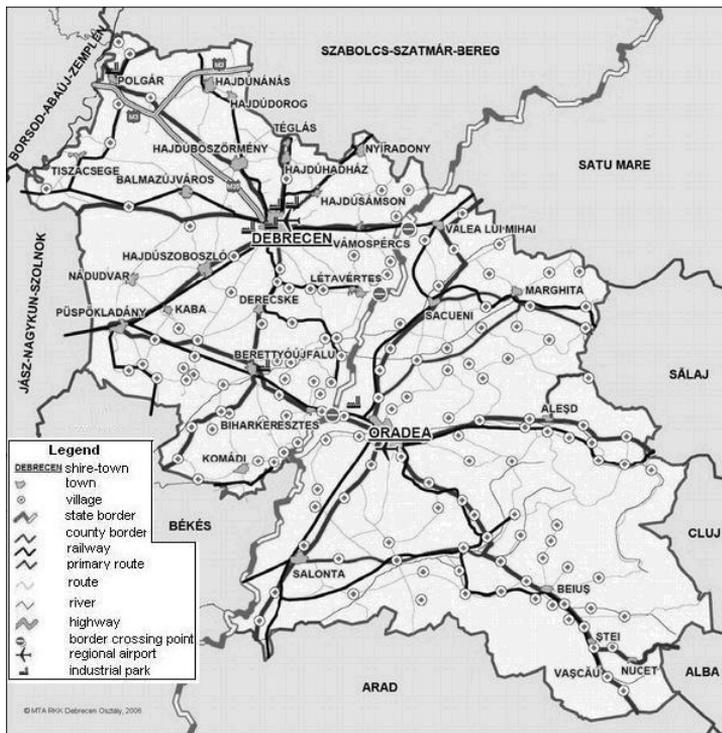


Figure 2. Hajdú-Bihar – Bihar Euroregion

(Source: A exposing the state of the Hajdú-Bihar – Bihar, MTA RKK Debrecen, 2006)

Members of the Carpathians Euroregion focused more-and-more on the more effective and more concentrated bilateral co-operations. As a result the Hajdú-Bihar – Bihor Euroregion (figure 2) was formed on 11th October 2002. Bilateral small regional co-operations involve mostly co-operations between settlements and these are much more concrete than regional ones. The Euroregion was formed by the Hungarian Hajdú-Bihar and the Romanian Bihor counties based on the already existing connections thanks to the Carpathians Euroregion. Significant role in the co-operation is played by two cities of the counties, Debrecen and Oradea. It has been one of the most successful Euroregions as the two counties formed co-operations in numerous fields. One of the most recent result of the Hajdú-Bihar – Bihor Euroregion is the plan of the Debrecen – Oradea Eurometropolis. In this project the most evolved forms of cross-border co-operations are intended to be realized in the form of a European Spatial Co-operation Group.

The Bihar – Bihor Euroregion was founded on 12th April 2002. It was formed by the Regional Development Association of Borderland Settlements in Bihar with 19 settlements, 24,000 inhabitants and Biharkeresztes as a centre from Hungary and by the Association of Borderland Settlements in Bihor with 17 local governments, 40 fellow settlements, 85,000 inhabitants and Bors as a centre from Romania. This co-operation organizes settlement co-operation in areas along the border at small regional level (Baranyi, 2008).

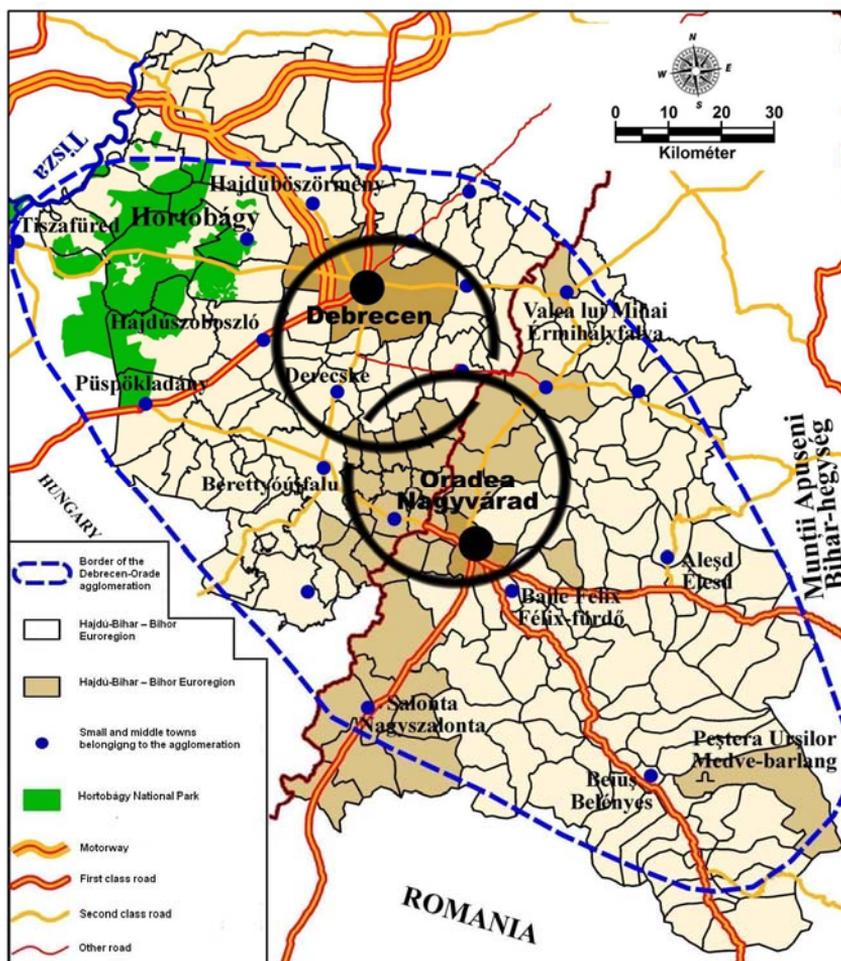


Figure 3. Debrecen-Oradea Eurometropolis
(Source: Süli-Zakar I., 2009)

Communities on the two sides of the Romanian-Hungarian border have almost the same needs and demands. These could be satisfied easier with the establishment of an Eurometropolis, an European Regional Co-operation Group between the two poles – Debrecen and Oradea – of the region determining the urban development of the area (Debora Eurometropolis: figure 3). Major aims of the regional development and regional policy of both countries include the reduction of regional differences and the improvement of living conditions.

The Eurometropolis would be established by the 10 local governments in Bihor county, Romania: Biharia, Borş, Cetariu, Girişu de Criş, Nojorid, Oşorhei, Paleu, Sânmartin and Sântandrei and by the 6 Hungarian settlements in Hajdú-Bihar county: Debrecen, Berettyóújfalu, Biharkeresztes, Derecske, Hajdúszoboszló, Püspökladány (Popoviciu & Ţoca, 2010).

It would be reasonable to involve Hajdúböszörmény in the northern agglomeration of Debrecen and Mikepércs in the southern agglomeration of Debrecen into the co-operation as these settlements have traditional close relationship with Debrecen. Major development aims of the agglomeration also important in these areas, they have good infrastructural conditions and food transport connections to Debrecen (infrastructure, development of public transport, educational co-operation).

Aims of the co-operation are the improvement of the living conditions of those living in the region, increase of employment, maintaining and strengthening cross-border co-operations and the realization of a united and sustainable development policy for the settlements on both sides of the border. The Table below (table 1) summarizes the plan of the Hungarian-Romanian European Regional Co-operation Group and the Debrecen-Oradea Eurometropolis.

Table 1. *Debrecen-Oradea Eurometropolis (EGTC)*
(Source: Popoviciu & Ţoca, 2010)

EGTC name	Debrecen-Oradea Eurometropolis
Mosaic names	EMOD (DebOra)
Executive decree	project recommendation
Countries involved	Romania (RO) Hungary (HU)
Area	The Romanian-Hungarian border zone composed by Bihor county in the Northwestern Development Region in the east and by Hajdú-Bihar county in the North Great Hungarian Plain Region in the west.
Members	16 local governments: 10 in Bihor county: Oradea, Biharia, Borş, Cetariu, Girişu de Criş, Nojorid, Oşorhei, Paleu, Sânmartin and Sântandrei; 6 in Hajdú-Bihar county: Debrecen, Berettyóújfalu, Biharkeresztes, Derecske, Hajdúszoboszló, Püspökladány.
Time period	Undetermined
Aims	To establish the area of welfare, employment and sustainable development; To strengthen cross-border co-operations; Harmonize cross-border practice and policy by harmonizing the inter-institutional Euro-metropolitan conversations; to realize common development strategies for the two people of joint history and future.

As demonstrated above significant and effective cross-border co-operations are active in the county. These co-operations can prove the basis for breaking out of the periphery state as seen in the case of several Western European examples. The effectiveness of the cross-border Eurometropolis as a policy tool for development and as a tool for regions along the border to break the crisis will be seen clearly following a few years of co-operation. Positive results are suggested by the fact that this form of co-operation has already been used successfully in Western Europe in the development of several border regions.

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