POSSIBILITIES FOR CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE (PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE)

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Abstract. For geographers, it is evident to claim that Hungary is in East-Central Europe. This geographical fact, however, is often made uncertain in several respects by changes in international politics that take place in Europe and often modify the balance of power. As a matter of fact, we do not even know what the name of the continental region (East-Central Europe) means, since there is no consent in matters of either the name or the borders of the region.

Key words: cross-border cooperation, East-Central Europe, Hungary

1. INTRODUCTION

For geographers, it is evident to claim that Hungary is in East-Central Europe. This geographical fact, however, is often made uncertain in several respects by changes in international politics that take place in Europe and often modify the balance of power. As a matter of fact, we do not even know what the name of the continental region (East-Central Europe) means, since there is no consent in matters of either the name or the borders of the region. One thing is sure: this region differs in important aspect from both Eastern and Western Europe. We can also be sure that Hungary is a part of this region. The things that happen in Hungary and the way they happen can be considered, with little restraints, as typical of the whole region. This is the case despite the fact that the regions of East-Central Europe in many respects are different from each other (Fig. 1.).
The Entente states winning the First World War made possible the independence of such territories which were not even contemplated by the German experts a few years prior to that. In Germany, following the defeat suffered in the world war, the Mitteleuropa concept introduced by Naumann and Penck was complemented with the recognition of the “small state Zwischeneuropa” where German dominance – naturally – was to be enforced (in an intensified manner year by year). Thus, by the thirties Central Europe became the label for the area lying between the River Rhine and the Soviet Union (Fig. 2.) (SULIZAKAR, I. 2004).
Later, (after the Second World War) the American, French and British analysers resigning to the bipolar world order have questioned the independence of Central Europe for a long time.

From the seventies we can see the reborn of Central Europe (SÜLI-ZAKAR, I. 2004) (Fig. 3.) and according to the new content is distributed to two parts: East and West (Fig. 4.).
2. HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF REGIONALISM IN HUNGARY

Regionalism can only be examined correctly if examined in a historical perspective. In Hungary this has to be done by identifying three periods.

2.1. Until the end of the World War I
Disregarding earlier history and considering only the fifty years preceding the World War I, we can state that since the Compromise of 1867, Hungary (integrated in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy) reacted to the question of regionalism in a rather contradictory way. On the one hand, it acted – as a sovereign unit extending over the entire Carpathian Basin – as a member state of a bigger Monarchy and as a country with the strongest manifest
interest. It had established legal bases for its relations with Croatia, it considered each and every regional process related to the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and especially to the Carpathian Basin as natural. The only disturbing factors were the centralization efforts within the country, which were trying to reinforce the role of the city of Budapest as opposed to Vienna (Fig. 5).

On the other hand the regional relations on the borderlands of the Empire were different. The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy did not ‘cover’ all of East Central Europe, a region with uncertain borders. In all directions (Galicia – Poland, South Tirol – Italy, and related to Hungary: Transylvania – Rumania, Southern Parts – Serbia) the state power – motivated first of all by the policy towards the nationalities – wanted to prevent the strengthening of regional contacts.

Fig. 5. The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy

Naturally, the result was also ambiguous: on the one hand, the processes inducing regional relations did not cease to strengthen, on the one hand centralization left its impact on certain areas, which were later attached to sovereign units – and can still be felt today. (A good example is Poland, which was unified after several divisions, and where certain
In this half century of rapid capitalization, Hungary was moving towards unification: industrialization, unified market, railway network, public administration, a capital on the way of becoming a metropolis and getting undoubtedly to the top of settlement hierarchy etc., but at the same time the tendencies of regional development were present and increasing. The appearance and institutionalization of certain regional functions (higher education, administration, legal, ecclesiastical, financial, cultural, commercial etc. activities) began regional centre type development in cities like Pozsony (Bratislava), Kassa (Košice), Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca), Nagyszeben (Sibiu), Brassó (Brașov), Temesvár (Timișoara), Arad, Debrecen, Nagyvárad (Oradea), Pécs, Szeged, Újvidék (Novi Sad) and of course Zágráb (Zagreb). Some of them fulfilled relatively complete regional functions Beluszky P. 1990), others partial ones (in division with other centres), although on a reduced scale as opposed to the capital. In those days regions only took shape in Hungary, so their centres can only be considered as initial regional centres.

The Trianon Peace Treaty found the country at this initial phase of regional development and placed the majority of Hungary’s forming regional centres outside the new borders of the country (Fig. 6.).

![Regional centers in Hungary at the beginning of the 20th century](image)

**Fig. 6. Regional centres at the beginning of the 20th century**


You can see several aspects of regional situation of this period (Fig. 7-10.).
Fig. 7. Railway-network of Hungary in 1913
Source: The History of Hungary 4 vol.

Fig. 8. The rings of the high hierarchy-level centres around Budapest in the historical Hungary
I. inner ring; II. Middle ring; III. outer ring
Fig. 9. Regions of the Carpathian-basin

Fig. 10. The dismembered Hungary according to the peace treatment of Trianon
Source: Census of 1920. VI. part Budapest, 1929.
2.2. Between the two world wars

Regarding regional development, the quarter century between the two world wars brought undoubted disadvantages. The new borders cut thousand year old contacts, and the weight of Budapest, in a country which was reduced to one third of its territory, became overwhelming. Centralization became ever stronger for several reasons. However, with the university of Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca) moving to Szeged, and the one in Pozsony (Bratislava) to Pécs, and with the transfer of other functions, the scopes of activities of the larger cities remaining inside the country increased, but this could hardly compensate for the loss of their hinterlands. In the Carpathian Basin, which had suddenly become international, regional development was also blocked by the fact that the defeated Hungary and the successor states were equally wriggling in the spasms of hate and fear, cooperation was impossible, and a series of absurd situations was appearing in the borderlands. The leading slogan of Hungarian politics was revenge, and the successor states — in accordance with the French superpower interests which prevailed in this area — formed the Little Entente which surrounded and isolated Hungary. As a consequence, the only partner for regional cooperation remained Austria. From the point of view of regionalism, before or during the war there was no change in this situation, the short-lived borderline corrections mostly stayed within the confines of nationality areas (Fig. 11).

![Fig. 11. Political-geographic changes in Central-Europe](Source: Golobics, P. – Tóth, J. – Trócsányi, A. 1999.)

2.3. After the World War II

In what evolved after the World War II, there were some elements which seemed to be leading towards regional cooperation and towards a general advance of regionalism (for example the Rumanian — Hungarian reapproachement under the prime ministry of Petru Groza, the federalism in Yugoslavia, the prevailing ideology of proletarian internationalism whose phraseology later emptied, the fetishism of the economic zone theory regarding the inner territorial division etc.), but these could not be influential or prolonged. They were
suppressed by strong, from the point of view of regionalism, disadvantageous features of state and alliance system, like centralization, the favouritism of relations with the Soviet Union at the expense of natural cooperation.

Motivational factors were accidental but also typical elements — as the deportation of the Hungarian population from Czechoslovakia under the disguise of a population transfer, the deportation of the Germans from the whole area, the referendum in Ruthenia, and as a consequence, the appearance of the Soviet Union in the Carpathian Basin, the deterioration of relations with Yugoslavia, the appearance of the 'iron curtain' during the Cold War, the elimination of Hungarian-Austrian relations, border areas finding themselves in an unfavoured position, military occupation, a general mistrust and mystification.

Centralisation was reflected in the fact that each and every important decision was made in the capital. Thus, in the common affairs of projects located on both sides of the border, at the end of a lengthy and in most cases hopelessly bureaucratic process, positions were taken up by people who knew nothing about local conditions. This way mutual interdependence or identical interests could not prevail and foreseen internationals zones could not form. Similar consequences arose from the efforts of the Soviet Union to promote bilateral relations to attach the 'satellite countries' to itself by means of political and economic pressure and seeing a threat in any effort of these countries to strengthen their relations. This is how the COMECON, an organisation sharply different from the EEC, operated. It was undoubtedly favourable for the Soviet Union, leaving the other member countries, possessing much less economic potential and unilaterally allied, at its mercy.

This was the time when — on a macro-level — Eastern Europe was created, isolated from Western Europe by an 'iron curtain' (even forgetting de Gaulle's call, according to which Europe lies between the Atlantic and the Urals), Western Europe was spoken of as Europe, and Eastern Europe was tied to the Soviet Union. Contrary to declared principles between its satellite countries, regional relations actually were not strengthened. The centralized model did not exert a positive influence on inner regional development either. In spite of the changes in the allocation of the productive forces which followed large-scale industrialization, and the collectivization of agriculture and the changed international orientation working in the same direction, regional development in Hungary did not strengthen. It is an interesting and apparent contradiction, that while the central power apparatus concentrated in the capital, the principal guarantee of centralization became the counties 'reorganization' in 1950. Since in the centralized model territorial units are created from above, placed there by the central apparatus and playa secondary role in redistribution, they had nothing to do with the forming of regions, or even with a medium-level of self-government. As important stabilizing elements of the power structure, they could always prevent the introduction of the otherwise ideologically accepted and supported economic sphere-system, and the adjustment of the administrational system to it.

Although, among the great number of 'rayon' (i.e. planning district) projects there were some professionally sound, and the elements of which can still be accepted today (Krajko, Gy. et al. 1969), the 'rayon' projects were put forward either too early or too late, the counties remained in possession of their power positions, and hindered the emergence of regionalism, and the growth of regional centres (Fig. 12-15.).
Fig. 12. International regional-structural relation-system of Hungary


Fig. 13. Regional structure of Hungary and border region attraction

3. REGIONALISM IN PRESENT-DAY HUNGARY

The situation of regionalism in Hungary is affected by the internal political changes, which began a longer time ago and accelerated in the last couple of years, and the changed relations with the neighbouring countries. The evolution of the democratization process, and further, the redistribution of power through democratic elections, the increased representation of local interests, the appearance of local authority as a factor, the
reformation of the financing system, the decentralized model, the gradual development of the self-governmental system all support regionalism.

The need for a regional approach has become obvious at the lowest level of territorial development, among the settlements. It was generally accepted that the virtually exclusive hierarchical order had to be supplemented by numerous horizontal relations. In spite of the still rather strong resistance, the settlement (local) financial basis of regional developments, built (also) on a system of horizontal relations are appearing gradually.

In the new situation the contradiction, for a long time present between the units of the next level, different in their origins and functions, the counties and configurational units which are the results of the development of the regional division of labour, inevitably deepens. The counties of heterogeneous configuration have naturally complex institutions for the representation of their interests, but as they are incapable of functioning in a productive way (because of their heterogeneous nature), they are not clearly expressed. Meanwhile the homogeneous interests are not represented by an institutional system, and so they are either averaged or fragmented and cannot be identified anymore. In short, the component with an identifiable interest has not got its appropriate representation while where interests can be represented there is nothing to be represented. The best example of this contradiction is the Mid-Tisza region (Beluszky, P. 1981, Csatári, B. 1989). The area for several reasons is in an unfavourable situation, it is a homogenous unit, and its territory is divided into four counties (Fig. 16.-18.).

THE REGIONS AND SPATIAL UNITS OF HUNGARY

Fig. 16. The regions and spatial units of Hungary
Fig. 17. Configuration of the Hungarian settlement-network

Fig. 18. The place of the southern highway in the transportational structure of Hungary
Hence the interests of this region has never been articulated except in scientific research, in the present situation the effort to eliminate, basically reconstruct the county system and to substitute it with a certain kind of regional system is getting stronger. However, it is very difficult to predict the chances of this effort for success. A prediction is especially difficult in a multi-party system during the learning (re-learning) phase of the practice of democracy. Now we have administrative regions above the county-level, but they are only quasi-regions.

In the past few decades following the 'policy of opportunities' we have gradually improved our relationship with Yugoslavia, and new ways of cooperation have been explored in the border areas with our neighbours. For years, we have been successful to create cordial relationships with the neutral Austria, exemplary ones between two countries with different social systems. We strengthened our efforts to become economically and politically independent from the Soviet Union, to create a Polish-Czechoslovakian-Hungarian bloc which could cooperate more intensely within the COMECON, and to intensify the Austrian-German relations. Hungary has become; more and more engaged in the regional actions of the Alps-Adria Work Team (Fig. 19.). We have repeatedly expressed our readiness for regional cooperation with our neighbouring states, and proved our openness, in relation to either the great region and the whole of Europe, or to other parts of the world. To be open is a national interest of Hungary: there cannot be a change in the world, no matter how sudden or profound, which would find Hungary unprepared for cooperation.

After the change of our social system we are ready to use the new opportunities for international cooperation: with the newly independent Slovenia, Croatia or the Ukraine (Fig. 20-21.).

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Fig. 19. The countries and regions participating in Alps-Adria Team
Fig. 20. The Carpathian-Tisza region

Fig. 21. The interdependence of universities and regions
Source: Tóth, J. (1998), University of Pécs
REFERENCES


