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45th Congress of the European Regional Science Association
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THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUNGARIAN-ROMANIAN CROSS-BORDER CONNECTIONS AFTER THE CHANGE OF REGIME*

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Abstract:

The purpose of the study is to summarily describe the development of cross-border connections along the Hungarian-Romanian borderline from the democratic transformation to hitherto. This is one of the temporary external borders of the European Union and we intend to pay special attention to the development of effective cooperation accomplished in the immediate border region. The Hungarian-Romanian PHARE CBC program had/has a significant role in intensification of connections among people living on both sides of the border (e.g. to organize common educational, cultural, economic etc. Programs, expert's meetings, common investments), which extended the funding system of the EU for two non-member states at its startup (in 1996) in a unique way. For this reason the presentation focuses in the effects of those projects which were realized with the financial assistance of the Union and had significant influence on cross-border connections and makes an attempt to highlight the main features of prospective tendencies of cooperation. Beside the summary of the already terminated or proceeding common applications the perceptions of active Hungarian and Romanian participants about the activity of the application system will be mentioned as well. We'll also focus in the results of a survey carried out among people living in the direct border, which summarize the opinions of local inhabitants about the characteristics and intensity of connection and the possibility of continuation of the development process.

Keywords:

cross-border co-operations, development of relations, Phare CBC projects, border region location, bilateral agreements

* The essay is also connected to the research programme called EXLINEA (Lines of Exclusion as Arenas of Co-operation: Reconfiguring the External Boundaries of Europe – Policies, Practices, Perceptions).

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Preliminaries

The Hungarian-Romanian border is 443 km in length and runs from Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (HU) and Satu Mare (RO) counties in the North to Csongrád (HU) and Timis (RO) counties in the South. The present Hungarian–Romanian border region is not the product of an organic historical development, it was created on legal grounds, it's an artificial borderline created by the Peace Treaty of Trianon signed on 4 June 1920.

It is mostly due to the fact that among the artificially designated new state borders, the designation of the Hungarian–Romanian border, completely neglecting the ethnic relations, was the most painful for the mutilated mother country, because of the loss of territories bigger than the “remaining” country and the large number of Hungarian ethnic population living in them. The new eastern borders cut the biggest territory and population from Hungary. As much as 103 thousand square kilometres and 3.5 million population was given to Romania, of whom some 1.7 million declared themselves Hungarians.

The “friendship and brotherhood” declared in the socialist era only existed in the slogans, in reality the relationship between the two countries was rather tense. The border functioned as a real wall in these times, practically blocking any co-operation and it was almost impossible even to pass the border. Following the revolution of 1989, the collapse of the dictatorship of Ceausescu, the hope was born for the settling of the relationships. However, the co-operation quickly starting at lower levels was seriously hindered by the reviving nationalism, which brought to the surface again the latent or suppressed problems, which naturally resulted in the growing fear of the modifications of the border.

The favourable political, economic and social transitions, however, gradually amount to the easing of the suspicious, untrusting and consequently often tense relations, because both parties are slowly starting to recognise the necessity of co-operation, learning from the European examples. The co-operation as close as possible is inevitable not only because of the Euro-Atlantic integration of the two countries, but also because the Trianon borders tore apart economic units that had functioned for centuries, and divided shaping macro-regions.

The dominant principle behind the designation of the border was the principle of “reorganisation”, which aimed at the creation of viable successor states by the acquisition of the necessary macro-infrastructure, above all the traffic system, especially the key railway networks. This is why the victorious powers awarded to the successor states the semi-circle shaped railway network constructed on the line of medieval market towns, on the edge of the mountains and the Great Hungarian Plain, which of course created the connection among the

states of the shaping Little Entente. The “railway driven” state borders, however, neglected not only the ethnic borders (they ran in almost completely Hungarian-inhabited territories), but also tore the towns of the direct border region and their catchments areas, in some cases even splitting settlements (e.g. Nagylak). The result was a distorted spatial structure on both sides, and in Hungary also a town-deficient border region, peripheral in both economic and spatial structural sense, was born.

The Eastern border counties of Hungary are the most peripheral (relative to Budapest) and underdeveloped in the country with above average rates of unemployment, lower rates of economic growth and a history of out-migration of younger and the most economically active part of the population. The local economy is strongly dependent on agriculture and primary industry and has suffered over the past decade as markets to the east in the former Soviet Union and countries such as Romania have drastically declined. Towns with a considerable level of industry have likewise suffered from the economic consequences of the transformation from Communism to market Capitalism. There is a strong perception among people in the border areas that successive governments have not implemented an effective regional development policy for the eastern parts of the country as the economic gap has widened with the more prosperous Transdanubian areas to the west.

The Romanian border areas with Hungary have some significantly different characteristics. While unemployment has become a major economic and social problem in Romania mainly as a result of the restructuring of the economy and the decline of traditional markets, the border areas with Hungary have not been as severely affected. The border areas are more developed with a higher number of new private companies (more evident in the northern part of the border area) and a higher concentration of industries. This higher level of development can be related to factors such as its location as a ‘gate to the west’ and also to the ethnic mix of the population which includes Hungarians, Serbs, Jews and Germans (the latter has decreased in recent years). Many of the joint ventures and inward investments in the border area are linked to some of these ethnic groups and many of the joint ventures have cross-border partners in Hungary. The major advantages of the border area include its proximity to Western markets, availability of skilled workers, improving transport and communications structures and foreign investment. Due to the greater levels of development and the presence of greater employment opportunities, the border area has seen considerable inward migration of people from other parts of Romania, particularly Moldavia.

In the cross-border relations of two neighbouring states, the permeability of the borders plays a dominant role. It is important whether the border has connecting (bridge) or separating

(wall) function. The Hungarian–Romanian border has always been one of the most closed borders since it was drawn in 1920. Following the division of Hungary after World War I, the relation between the successor states was rather hostile, that made the establishment of any partnerships impossible between the cities having been cut off from Hungary (Satu Mare, Carei, Oradea, Arad) and their agglomeration having been remained partially on the Hungarian side but these villages left without centres. The separating function of borders became dominant and the Hungarian government considered all this as a temporary situation, and as a result it did not try to make any efforts for the development of rural, peripheral border areas.

At the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, the crossing of the border was simplified. With the end of socialism the rigidity of the border eased, even new border-cross checkpoints were set up. Cross-border trade between the two neighbour countries is still very weak and the number of enterprises is too small (*Baranyi, B. – Balcsók, I. – Dancs, L. – Mező, B. 1999*).

Relations at national level

Improved inter-state relations is evident between the Hungarian and Romanian governments since the signing of the Basic Treaty (Treaty between the Republic of Hungary and Romania on Understanding, Cooperation and Good Neighbourliness) which upholds the legitimacy of the present border while recognizing the rights of ethnic minorities in both states. The Treaty addresses some of the core causes of decades of mistrust and suspicions between both states and identifies areas of mutual cooperation, particularly in the context of pre-accession negotiations to the EU of both countries. It states that the two countries ‘will continue at different levels, regular exchanges of view in order to ensure further development and deepening of their bilateral relations...cooperation in the realization of regional and sub-regional projects and other forms of cooperation with the aim of promoting, in the field of economy, industry, agriculture, ecology, transport and communications as well as in other fields of mutual interests.’ Increasing inter-governmental contacts and its spill-over to regional and local cross-border cooperation has been further strengthened by the composition of the present coalition government in Romania which includes representatives from the ethnic Hungarian parties. At the same time, two of the centrally appointed regional Prefects are from an ethnic Hungarian background.

The inter-governmental special committees (e.g. Special Committee for Co-operation in Ethnic Minorities Issues; Special Committee for Co-operation in the Field of Economy, Trade

and Tourism; Special Committee of Cross-border Issues and Inter-municipal Co-operation; Special Committee for the Co-operation in the Field of Infrastructure, Transport, Water Management and Environmental Protection etc.), set up in accordance with the Basic Treaty, are to work out and supervise the co-operations concerning the “common issues” of Hungary and Romania.

In addition to the Treaties, several other Hungarian–Romanian agreements are in effect, such as the ones on water management and environmental protection. A closer co-operation at national level is evidently justified in these fields. The importance of this issue is indicated by the huge floods and the cyanide pollutions killing an enormous mass of fish in the Tisza River and the tributaries: all three countries are affected by these issues.

Although it is not a bilateral agreement, we have to mention the *Act No. LXII of 2001*, commonly known as the *Status Act*, on Hungarians living in neighbouring countries, which gives special (health care, travel, employment etc.) allowances to the Hungarians living outside Hungary. This Act is very important because the borders drawn in the peace treaty concluding World War (when Hungary shrank to approximately one-third of its previous size in 1920) did not consider ethnic relations (either), and so a significant number of Hungarian ethnic minority live on the other Romanian side of the border. It is not surprising that in the relations of Hungary to the neighbouring states, the co-operations between the Hungarians living in Hungary and those in the respective countries always played an important role. The Act led to fierce debates in Romania, and there are still debated details after a lengthy reconciliation process.

Relations between counties

The *counties (NUTS 3 level)* have a much more limited role and independence in Romania than in Hungary, coming from the strong central will in the two countries. Still the cross-border co-operations at county level are much more versatile than the relations among the young NUTS 2 regions. In Hungary the first twin or partner county relations were created before the systemic change, while they were created somewhat later in Romania, because of their isolation and the more centralised attitudes.

The present partner county relations cannot be identified with the former twin county relations in their names, as these new co-operations are not always reinforced with official co-operation agreements. At the establishment of the partner county co-operations the counties tried to establish a wide range of relations not only with their counterparts in the neighbouring

countries but also with overseas countries. Among the 15 partner counties of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County e.g. we find, in addition to the direct neighbour regions in Romania, areas from Denmark, Russia, the Netherlands, Germany and even the United States of America. We can say thus that in most cases it is not the neighbourhood relations that represent the majority, although there are counter-examples: three of the six existing partner counties of Békés can be found in Romania.

It is typical of the cross-border relations of the county self-governments that they are more and more trying to raise the interest in their respective county and region. Although co-operations of economic character and connections among entrepreneurs and businessmen have increased in the partner county relations, it is still the cultural, educational, training and youth co-operations that are successful. The further expansion of some partner county relations is blocked by the great physical distance and the deriving high costs of keeping in touch (Japan, USA and China). The most active and best functioning co-operations have usually been established among neighbouring counties or counties in the vicinity of each other.

In addition to the bilateral co-operations in the region, some counties are also related as members of the same Euroregions, because the majority of the Euroregions created along the East Hungarian borders consist of counties. In the Hungarian–Romanian border region, there are two large Euroregions with different history and operational conditions: the Carpathians Euroregion and the Danube–Körös–Maros–Tisza Euroregion.

The Carpathians Euroregion was created in 1993 and now involving member regions from five countries (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and the Ukraine). The establishment of this huge interregional organisation – as opposed to the Danube–Körös–Maros–Tisza Euroregion created in 1997 – was not an independent, bottom-up initiative; it started its operation within “top-down” defined frameworks, with higher political objectives. In addition, the Danube–Körös–Maros–Tisza Euroregion re-connected regions along the southeast borders of Hungary that used to be situated in the relatively more developed part of one single country, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and they have centuries of common historical past, while the Carpathians Euroregion is an absolutely “multi-national” formation.

Although both Euroregions have had and still have indisputable role in the recognition of the advantages of partnership based on mutual benefits, they still have not been able to fulfil their objectives, for different reasons. These vast Euroregions have not been able yet to demonstrate significant results in the region in our survey; they have not been able to penetrate down to the level of the individuals living in the border regions. The establishment of really

intensive multilateral relations is blocked by the excessive size of the Euroregions in the first place, as the Danube–Körös–Maros–Tisza Euroregion covers a territory of 77.000 km² that of the Carpathians Euroregion equals to 161.000 km² and they are home to a population of 6 million and 16 million people, respectively. In addition to their too large territory, co-operation is blocked, especially in the Carpathians Euroregion, by historical–territorial–ethnic and other problems inherited from the past. Recognising this problem, the local stakeholders thought of establishing smaller and thus more effective euroregional organisations. The ideas were followed by action and now there are three interregional organisations of micro-regional character operating in the border region (Interregio, Hajdú-Bihar–Bihar Euroregion and the Bihar–Bihar euroregional Organisation) (Baranyi, B. 2002).

One of the most important proofs of the development of the county level relations is the fact that cross-border planning documents going beyond protocol and cultural co-operations have been made over the recent years. For the Hungarian–Romanian border region, a development concept and programme was made back in September 2000, which was upgraded in 2003. The priorities of this document are the promotion of the socio-economic development and catching up of the border region, improve the living conditions of the population and exploit as much as possible the possibilities lying in cross-border co-operation. The document called *The Development Concept and Programme for the Hungarian–Romanian Border Region* concerns counties, like the previous document: Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Hajdú-Bihar, Békés and Csongrád counties from Hungary, Satu Mare, Bihor, Arad and Timis from Romania are target areas.

The main barriers to cross-border cooperation on the Hungarian–Romanian border in the last decade were state centralization and bureaucratic procedures for cross-border travel and trade have severely restricted the cross-border movement of people and goods and inhibited the development of cross-border cooperation. Mutual suspicions between both countries remain a major obstacle to cross-border cooperation. However, the existence of ethnic minorities on both sides of the border also provides a means of developing cross-border contacts (e.g. language skills, business linkages). Like border regions throughout Europe, there is some mismatch of competencies and responsibilities for organizations engaged in cross-border cooperation. This problem becomes a bigger obstacle due to the general lack of contact between organizations on both sides of the border.

The significance of the Hungarian-Romanian Phare CBC programme

The European Union's Phare programme has been, for the past 10 years, the prime vehicle for financial support to the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs). Cross Border Co-operation (CBC) programmes are based on the successful model of the Interreg scheme that supports joint projects by different regions of the member states. Naturally, CBC programmes usually cover beneficiaries from two countries at a time.

As a CEC-CEC border, organizations on the Hungarian-Romanian border have a relatively high awareness of cross-border cooperation issues and growing knowledge of CBC programmes such as Phare CBC. At the same time, there is a strong realization on both sides of the border that regional cross-border cooperation can help to address problems such as underdevelopment, poor transport, low trade, cross-border travel and unemployment.

The Phare CBC Programme has funded cross-border projects since 1996 with a budget of 5 million Euro on both sides of the border. Regional offices have been established on both sides of the border (Békéscsaba (HU) and Arad (RO)). These offices have provided a local dimension to the programme (e.g. information and awareness) and have taken a role in the implementation and management of the Small Project Funds. Some of the key actors on both sides of the border have acquired experience of programming under the Phare CBC Programme. This is due to increase under the new Phare CBC Programme when the HU/RO border will be fully eligible for Phare assistance. However, there is a realization that key needs, mainly at regional level, in terms of programming exist such as project development and financing procedures and regulations. The Phare CBC offices in the border area have been responsible for promoting and tendering of the Small Project Funds under the Phare CBC Programme. However, the monitoring and evaluation of projects under the SPF lacks a strong cross-border dimension and there is scope for greater coordination between regional offices in Hungary and Romania (*Simona, P. 2000*).

In the period between 1996–2003 altogether 34 million euro have been allocated for CBC projects to be implemented on the Hungarian side of the border and 23 million on the Romanian side between 1999 and 2004. The use of these funds has been centred around three main priorities, identified at the beginning of the Hungarian-Romanian CBC programme. These priorities are as follows: regional development, infrastructure development, environment and nature protection.

Two main types of projects have been supported. Large scale physical infrastructure projects (road building and rehabilitation to improve access to the state borders, rehabilitation

of border stations, flood prevention, development of business infrastructure) and small projects mainly in the fields of economic development, education, environment protection, as well as a wide variety of people-to people actions.

A number of local authorities together with business organizations and NGOs have secured funding from Phare programmes and some are engaged in cross-border projects. However, many new project proposals are mainly theoretical and require more firm financial projections as well as more coordination with similar organizations across the border.

Strategy development within the context of new regional development policies and actions, the border areas on both sides of the border have recently prepared (or are preparing) development concepts. Organizations such as the Carpathian Euroregion have also recently developed concepts which investigate the obstacles and opportunities for cross-border cooperation with the constituent border regions (*Baranyi, B. 2003*).

Political agreements have been signed between local authorities along the Hungarian–Romanian border and these agreements have led to increased cross-border contacts and exchanges. Some of these linkages have recently been funded under the Phare CBC and Phare CREDO Programmes, while the majority continues to be funded by municipalities and local governments/NGOs in both countries. For example, Hajdú-Bihar (HU) and Bihor (RO) county councils have gradually developed cross-border linkages over the past decade and this cooperation is now becoming more formalized through the establishment of joint committees and structures on areas such as environmental protection and infrastructure development.

Business co-operation linkages have increased in recent years and are strongly promoted through various international programmes. For example, Hajdú-Bihar and Bihor Chambers of Commerce established an agreement for cooperation in 1992 which has led to a mutual exchange of information and organization of exhibitions and fairs. Since 1997, this cooperation has included joint project applications for Phare funding. The operation of Phare CBC and to a lesser extend Phare CREDO have raised the profile of cross-border co-operation throughout the border area and helped to identify new opportunities of mutual benefit.

In summary, we can say that the Hungarian-Romanian CBC programme – although using a very limited budget – has succeeded in laying the foundations and improving the basic conditions of long-term co-operation.

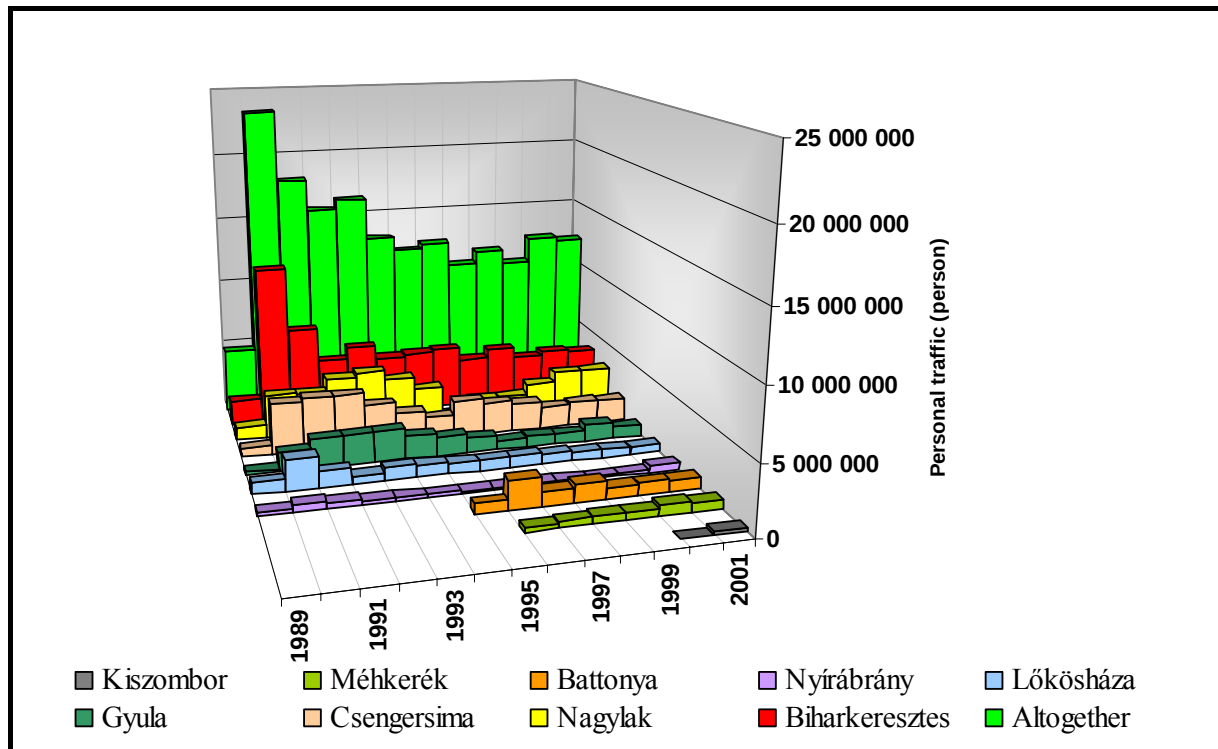
Tendencies of border traffic in the last 15 years

Over the decade and a half since the systemic change, the opinion about the border of those living along the eastern borders of Hungary changed several times and rather quickly. After the strict isolation typical for long decades, the change of the political systems in 1989 raised the hope in many that the opening of the borders would allow the regular touch with their relatives on the other side of the border, and that the relationship between the two countries would be finally normalised. The initial enthusiasm, however, was soon overshadowed by the difficulties concomitant with the systemic change, because in Hungary it was mostly the eastern part of the country, originally in a backward position that suffered the most from the economic transformation, the shift to the market economy. The declining standards of living, the mass unemployment etc. made more and more people think that the unlimited opening of the Eastern borders was a mistake. The Hungarian–Romanian border was crossed not only by masses of emigrants escaping from the troubled inner political conditions following the revolution in Romania, but a formerly unknown phenomenon, criminals and illegal workers appeared, too.

The total *passenger traffic across the Hungarian–Romanian border* mostly adapted to the national trends over the last decade, although special characteristics could be seen as well. The systemic change resulted in the complete opening of the borders, amounting to a sudden growth in the traffic of all border sections. This reached its peak in 1995, after a gradual increase (in 1995, 115 138 000 border crossings were registered). Since then there has been a continuous decline, which is the result of a natural balancing process, and according to experts the traffic will stabilise around the present 80–90 million border crossings (*Figure 1*).

In addition to following the national trends, the most important regional characteristics is the fact that the *Hungarian–Romanian border* was the busiest in 1990 and not 1995, because of the inner political events in Romania. The average daily number of vehicles has been some 8–10% of the total figure for Hungary over the last few years, while this figure was 19.5% in 1990, due to the large number of refugees. In the following five years, however, the traffic continuously decreased and dropped by almost a half. Since then the size of the traffic has more or less stabilised, besides some ups and downs. As the Romanian citizens can travel without visa to the member states of the European Union since 2002, the main difficulty will be not the more strict legal regulations but the proof of the adequate financial means.

Figure 1
Personal traffic across the checkpoints of the Hungarian-Romanian border (1989-2001)



Source: Hungarian National Headquarters of the Hungarian Border Guard, 2003. Edited by the authors.

Characteristics of personal connections

The Debrecen Department of the CRS of the HAS conducted a questionnaire survey in 2001–2002, in which we asked the opinions of the population of 18 settlements (9 pairs of settlements) about border region location and the cross-border relations. The findings of the survey are comparable with the data of a survey conducted in the summer of 1998 along the Austrian–Hungarian border, allowing this way the comparison of the opinions of the citizens living in the western and the eastern border regions about borders, border region location and the cross-border relations (*Nárai, M. – Rechnitzer J. 1999*).

When selecting the pairs of settlements, settlements of similar size, in the direct proximity of the borders and neighbour to each other were designated, in a balanced distribution along the border section. This is how the following pairs of settlements along the Hungarian–Romanian border, from north to south, were selected: Vállaj and Csanáros (Urziceni), where a bilateral railway border crossing and a temporary (seasonal) road border crossing operate; Létavértes and Székelyhíd (Săcueni), that are neighbour to each other but do not have a border crossing station at the moment. The next group of settlements was made of

Biharkeresztes and Ártánd in Hungary and Bors on the Romanian side. The reason why two settlements were selected in this case on the Hungarian side is the division of the functions of the border crossing station of international importance, implementing rail and road personal and cargo traffic; also, the population of Ártánd directly neighbour to Bors is far below that of its Romanian counterpart. In the southern part of the border section, the settlement pairs are Elek and Otlaka (Grăniceri) with a temporary border crossing station, and Kiszombor and Nagycsanád (Cenad), recently qualified as international road border crossing station. The questionnaire survey took place with the help of interviewers and a random sample selection in each case. There was no person younger than 18 of age among those filling out the questionnaires. In the Hungarian–Romanian border region, 600 questionnaires were filled out on each side of the border¹ (Figure 2.).

Figure 2
The settlements involved in the survey in the Hungarian-Romanian border region



Source: ed. Dancs, L. CRS of HAS Debrecen Department 2004.

¹ On the Hungarian and the Romanian side of the Hungarian–Romanian border, a total of 1200 questionnaires were filled out (600 on both sides). In Hungary, the following settlements with the following numbers of questionnaires were part of the sample: Ártánd 50, Biharkeresztes, Elek, Kiszombor and Vállaj 100 each, Létavértes 150 samples. The respective figures on the Romanian side are as follows: Bors and Székelyhid (Săcueni) 150 questionnaires each, Csanádos (Urziceni), Nagycsanád (Cenad) and Otlaka (Grăniceri) 100 questionnaires each.

In order to get a more subtle picture, we examined the associations concerning the neighbour country with open questions, the respondents had to list three concepts that first came to their mind in connection with the neighbour country. At the subsequent definition of the categories we naturally strove for the comparability of the answers received, nevertheless we also found categories specific of the respective countries, only.

As regards the Romanian respondents along the Hungarian–Romanian border, most people associated Hungary with *sights of interest, landscape features and concrete places* (nice landscapes, concrete settlement names, Lake Balaton) and also with the notions of *richness and welfare*. More than 37% of the responses are in these two categories (Table 1.)

Table 1
Associations of ideas in Romania related to Hungary, 2002

Categories	Cumulative rates (%)	Rates according to settlement (%)				
		Borş (Bors)	Urziceni (Csanáros)	Cenad (Nagycsanád)	Grăniceri (Ottlaka)	Săcueni (Székelyhid)
Landscape, spectaculars, characteristics, concrete places	18,8	3,7	21,5	19,9	15,0	25,1
Well-doing, prosperity	18,7	18,0	9,7	22,0	32,4	16,0
Motherland, Hungarian identity, mother language	11,3	22,9	17,2	3,7	0,4	11,5
Personal connections	8,8	12,2	6,7	14,5	4,5	8,0
Positive mentality, culture	6,6	6,5	2,7	7,1	17,0	3,5
Concrete object, person	6,5	2,5	13,8	3,3	1,2	8,7
Border, border traffic	5,5	2,9	4,7	8,7	10,1	3,3
History	5,1	1,2	10,1	1,2	1,6	8,2
No association (!)	3,0	13,1	-	1,7	2,0	0,7
Purchasing, leisure time activities	2,8	2,4	2,7	2,1	1,6	4,2
Free jobs, employment	2,4	2,0	1,7	2,1	2,0	2,4
Negative mentality, culture	1,7	1,6	0,0	0,8	4,0	2,3
Subsistence	1,6	0,4	2,4	2,1	0,4	2,4
Europe, West	1,1	2,0	0,7	1,7	1,2	1,6
Other	6,1	8,6	6,1	9,1	6,6	2,1
<i>Total</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>100,0</i>

Source: Questionnaire survey, 2002.

Among the associations relating to Romania, responses in the categories *landscape, countryside, sights of interest and concrete places* were most frequent, closely followed by the category of *poverty, derelict places and lagging behind*. The proportions of the responses in the first two groups are similar to that of the associations concerning Hungary: 36.3%. It is striking but not surprising that on the Romanian side people think of Hungary as a rich place, a welfare state, while just the opposite is typical in connection with the associations

concerning Romania: poverty and lagging behind appear in the mind of the Hungarian respondents (*Table 2*).

Table 2
Associations of ideas in Hungary related to Romania, 2002

Categories	Cumulative rates (%)	Rates according to settlement (%)					
		Ártánd	Bihar-keresztes	Elek	Kis-zombor	Léta-vértes	Vállaj
Landscape, spectaculars, characteristics, concrete places	19,6	13,0	20,9	20,4	14,3	26,3	14,70
Poverty, desolateness, underdevelopment	16,7	9,1	13,0	22,0	17,9	16,3	17,5
Negative mentality, culture	9,7	10,4	10,2	9,1	13,3	8,7	7,3
Neighbours, neighbouring country	9,2	7,8	10,2	7,5	10,2	9,0	10,2
History	6,4	2,6	3,9	4,8	6,1	7,0	11,3
Personal connections	6,1	10,4	4,5	3,2	4,6	5,0	12,4
Subsistence (fuel)	5,5	6,5	8,5	8,6	7,6	2,7	1,1
Hungarian identity, Hungarians live there	4,8	6,5	3,9	3,8	6,1	4,0	6,2
Positive mentality, culture	4,4	5,2	2,8	1,6	5,1	5,0	6,8
Border, border traffic	3,9	10,4	2,8	3,8	1,5	4,0	4,5
No association (!)	3,5	7,8	2,8	3,8	3,6	3,3	2,3
Concrete object, person	3,0	0,0	4,5	3,2	4,1	3,3	1,1
Purchasing, leisure time activities	1,4	2,6	2,3	2,2	1,0	0,3	1,1
Emigration	1,3	2,6	1,1	0,5	1,5	2,0	0,0
Other	4,5	5,1	8,6	5,5	3,1	3,1	3,5
<i>Total</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>100,0</i>

Source: Questionnaire survey, 2002.

Among the associations, the proportion of responses in the *mentality and culture* category has an important position. They were divided into two groups in the evaluation (positive and negative). On the basis of the associations, the attitudes towards Hungary and the people living there can be seen as positive: although their proportion is not very high (6.6%), still it is almost four times higher than the proportion of the negative responses. On the other hand, the associations concerning Romania are definitely negative, according to the responses: the category called negative mentality and culture has the third position with a 9.7% proportion in the order of the associations, surpassing the positive assessments more than twice.

On both sides, *personal relationships* are relatively important (friends, acquaintances, relatives), but the memories of the common *historical past* are also present in the mind of the people. The importance of the latter and the significant number of Hungarian ethnic group living in Romania are indicated by the fact that among the associations relating to Hungary, the category called *home, Hungarian nationality, mother tongue* had the third position. On the

Hungarian side, the respondents did not completely forget about the Hungarians living in Romania, either, as 4.8% of the associations concerning the neighbour country are connected to them. Also, there were respondents, in largely the same proportion in both countries, who could not associate any notion to the neighbour country.

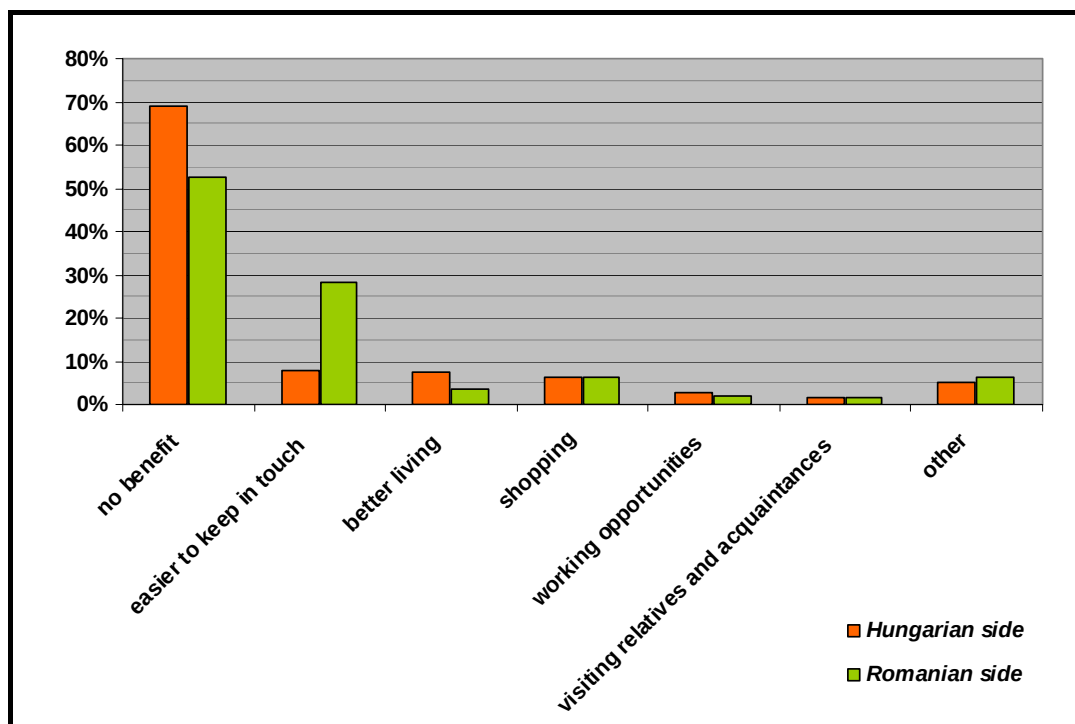
Border region as the scene of everyday life

Naturally each border region has their advantages and disadvantages, which may be different for those living on one or the other side of the border and which may also change in time. The *advantages of the border region location* are very similar on the two sides of the Hungarian–Romanian border. On both sides, those respondents had the highest the proportion who did not sense any advantage of this situation (this figure was 16.5% higher on the Hungarian side). As regards the assessment of the advantages, however, there are differences between those living on the two sides of the border. On the Hungarian side, the better living (primarily because of the lower fuel prices in Romania) is more frequently mentioned, while in Romania the respondents more often talked about the easier keeping in touch with the neighbour country (i.e. with the mother country in the case of Hungarian ethnic citizens). Also, the number of respondents mentioning shopping is significant in both countries. It is interesting that the possibility of cross-border employment was more often seen as an advantage on the Hungarian side (*Figure 3*).

The opinions about the *disadvantages of the border region location* are divided in the Hungarian–Romanian border region. On the Hungarian side, almost two-thirds of the responses fall into the “no disadvantage” category, while this proportion reaches 73.5% in the Romanian settlements. In the Hungarian settlements the other most frequently given responses were backward position and underdevelopment and the rise of crime, while the Romanian respondents mentioned increased traffic, the existence of the borderline and the difficult border crossing (in the case of Székelyhíd, the lack of a border crossing station) most often (*Figure 4*).

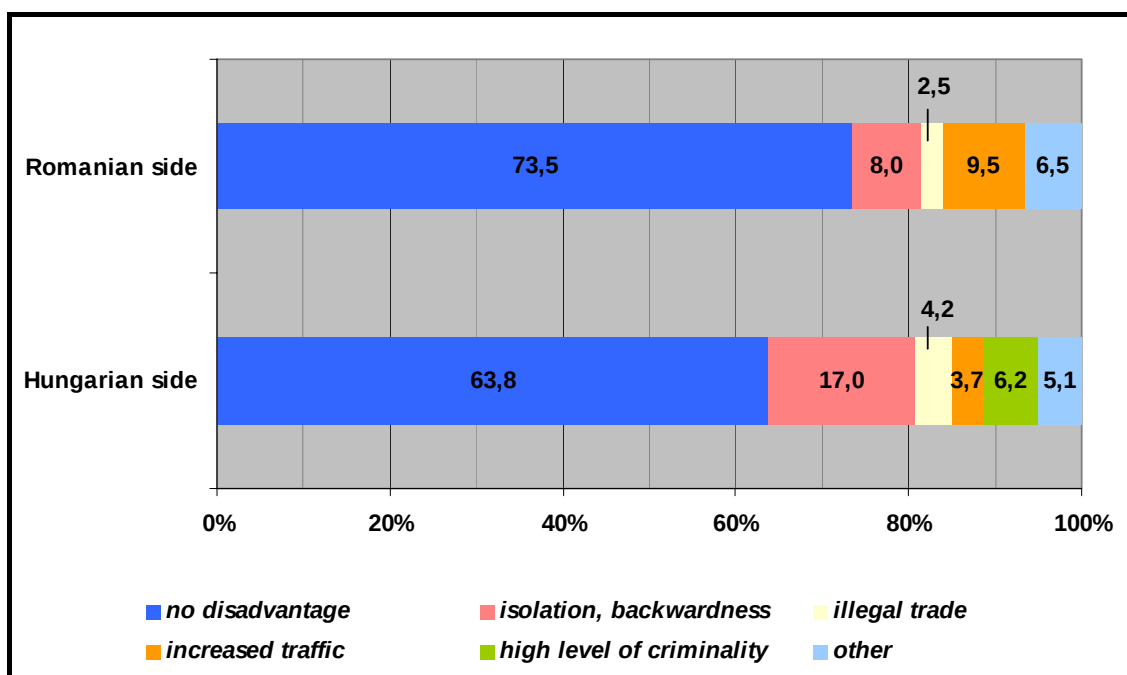
Because of isolation, increasing crime rates, the high number of refugees, the scarce job opportunities and other problems one can ask with right *whether the citizens of the border region would like to move out from their present place of residence*. On the whole, the proportions of those who would move if they could are largely the same on the two sides of the Hungarian–Romanian border (32% each), but there are considerable differences among the individual settlements in this respect. While more than half of the citizens of Székelyhíd in

Figure 3
The benefits of border situation in the settlements along the Hungarian-Romanian border involved in the survey, 2002



Source: Questionnaire survey 2002. Edited by the authors 2004.

Figure 4
The disadvantages of border situation in the surveyed settlements in the Hungarian-Romanian border region, 2002

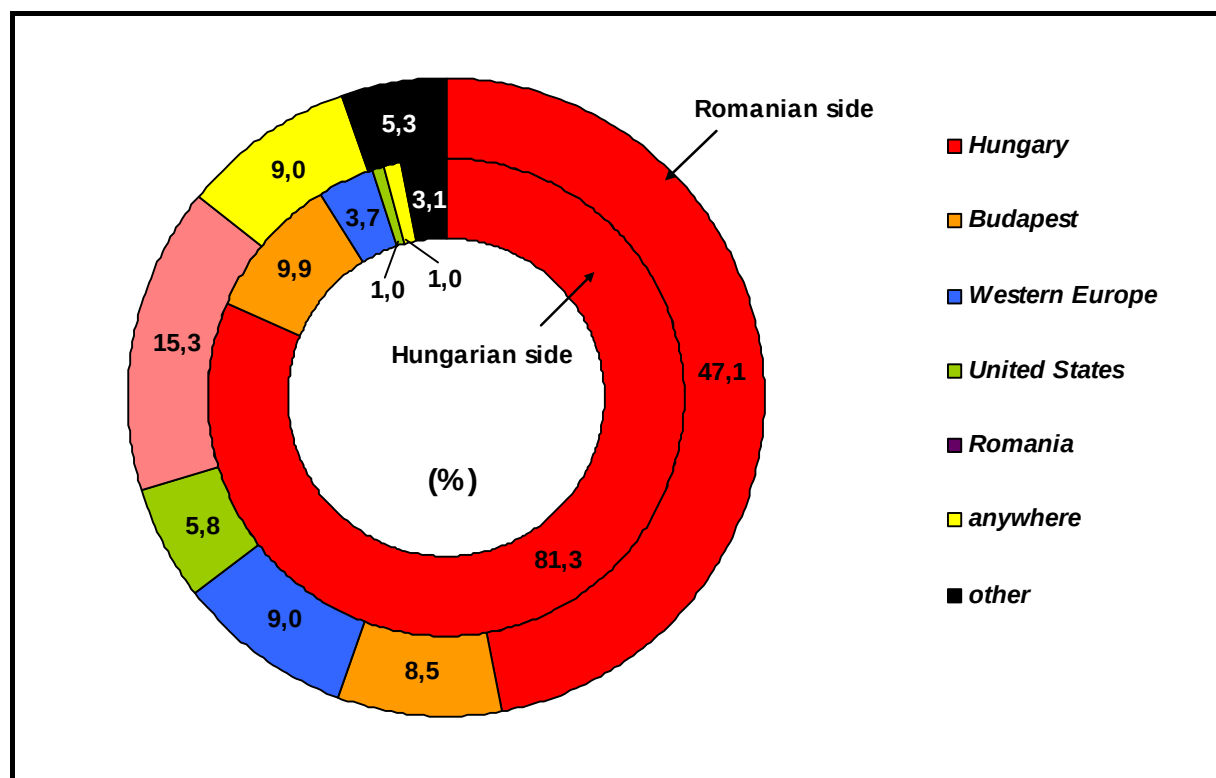


Source: Questionnaire survey 2002. Edited by the authors 2004.

Romania would happily move, this proportion is just over 13% in Bors. On the Hungarian side, the people of Biharkeresztes are the most willing to move out (49%), while less than one-quarter of the respondents living in Kiszombor would choose a new place of residence.

In the Romanian border region where the greater part of the population was native Hungarian speaker, Hungary is the most popular destination as a *potential new place of residence*. A Romanian destination was only indicated in Romania. In each settlement, with the exception of Otlaka, Budapest was mentioned among the destinations as a city where those wishing to move out would happily go. On the Romanian side of the Hungarian–Romanian border region, the proportion of Western European countries and the USA as potential new places of residence is higher, also, more people indicated here that they would happily move anywhere. Among the settlements in the sample it was only Biharkeresztes where these two destinations were not mentioned by the respondents. On the Romanian side, the proportion of the category called “other”, involving all other countries, is also higher (although the respondents in the sample only indicated some of the neighbour countries and Canada in some cases) (*Figure 5*).

Figure 5
The distribution of potential new habitations of local people along the Hungarian-Romanian border, 2002



Source: Questionnaire survey 2002. Edited by the authors 2004.

Relations of the citizens of the border region to the neighbour country

A considerable part of the population in the Hungarian–Romanian border region has relations to the neighbour country. While almost two-thirds (64%) of those living on the Romanian side have contacts in Hungary, this proportion is much lower in the settlements on the Hungarian side, where only 42.3% of the population have relations in Romania. Among the Hungarian settlements in the sample, Ártánd and Vállaj stand out, they are the only settlements on the Hungarian side where the proportion of those with relations in Romania exceeds 50%. The proportion of those with Romanian contacts is lower along the southern stripe of the border (33% in Elek, 38% in Kiszombor) and in Létavértes, lacking a border crossing station (36.7%). As regards the Romanian settlements, Székelyhíd and Csanálos have the highest proportion of those with contacts in Hungary (90% and 86%, respectively). The findings reveal that in the Romanian settlements along the border, the proportion of those with contacts in Hungary is closely related to the ethnic composition of the settlements. Accordingly, both in Nagycsanád and Otlaka, where the proportion of the Hungarian ethnic population is the lowest, the respective figures of those with contacts in Hungary are 37%.

The development of the relations in time

During the decades of socialism, the closed borders were a great obstacle blocking the crossing of the borders and the establishment and deepening of the cross-border relations. This statement was also true for the eastern border regions of Hungary. On the whole, the Hungarian citizens could cross the border relatively more easily, unlike in the case of the Austrian–Hungarian border where it was the Austrian citizens who could travel more freely. Following the political transformation of Central Europe, the situation changed from 1989, the borders became more open, new border crossing stations were established, the visa regime ceased to exist, in fact, bilateral border crossing became possible. Within the new circumstances, Romanian citizens could travel abroad easier, too.

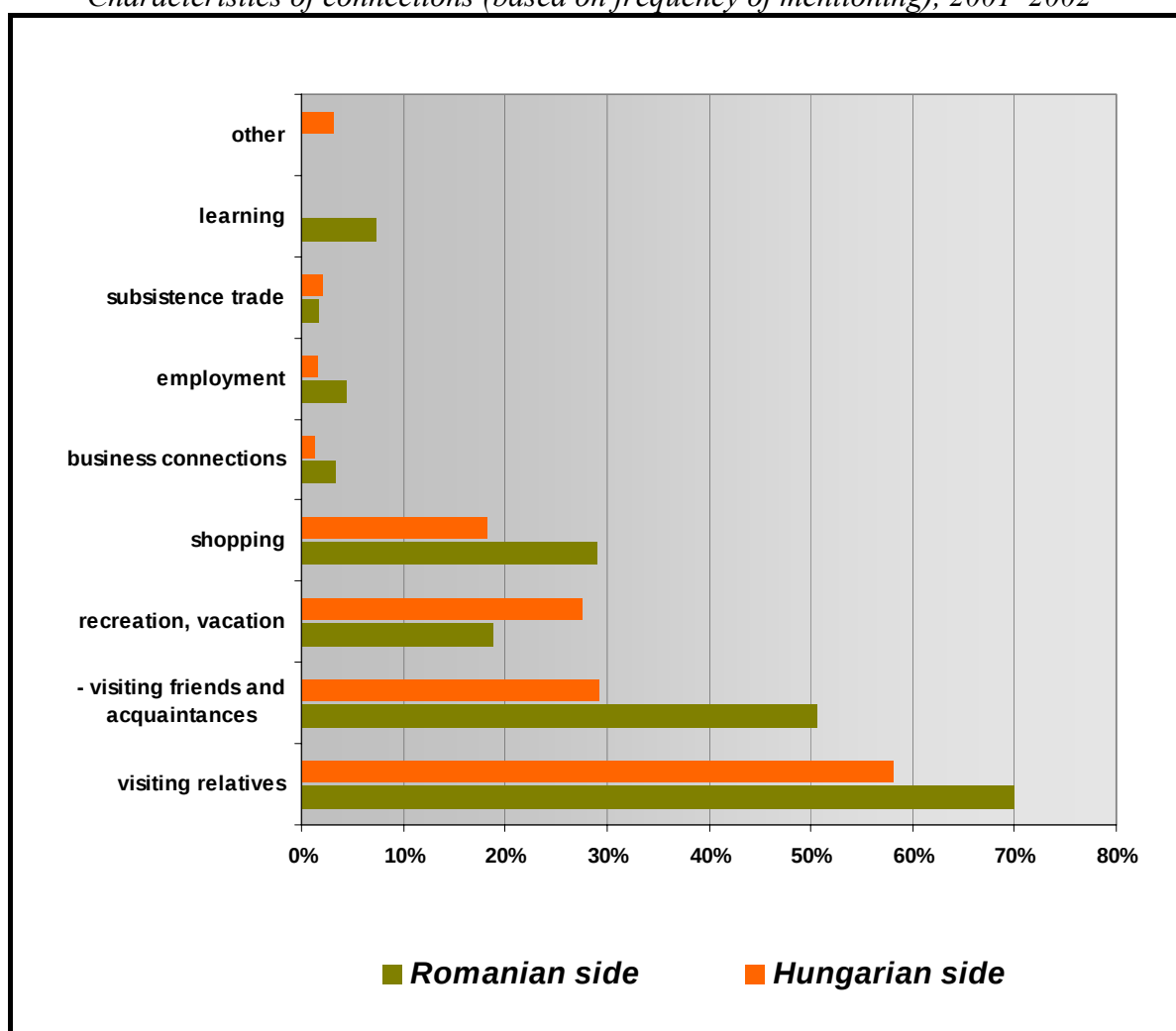
On the Hungarian side of the Hungarian–Romanian border, almost two-thirds of the relations had been established before 1989, only Ártánd is an exception from this: the majority of its contacts to Romania have been established since 1989. On the Romanian side too, most of the relations of the inhabitants to Hungary had been born before 1989, and the proportions measured in the respective settlements are not very far from the average. The only exception is Nagycsanád (there had not been a border crossing station here, then the temporary border crossing station created in the 1990s was reconstructed and opened for the

international traffic in 2002) where more than two-thirds of the relations were established after 1989.

Character of the cross-border citizen relations

As regards the character of the cross-border relations to the neighbour counties, relations of personal type (visits to relatives, friends and acquaintances) were most frequently mentioned among the respondents. On both sides of the border, the categories of recreation and holidaymaking and also of shopping appear quite frequently (*Figure 6*).

Figure 6
Characteristics of connections (based on frequency of mentioning), 2001–2002



Source: Questionnaire survey 2002. Edited by the authors 2004.

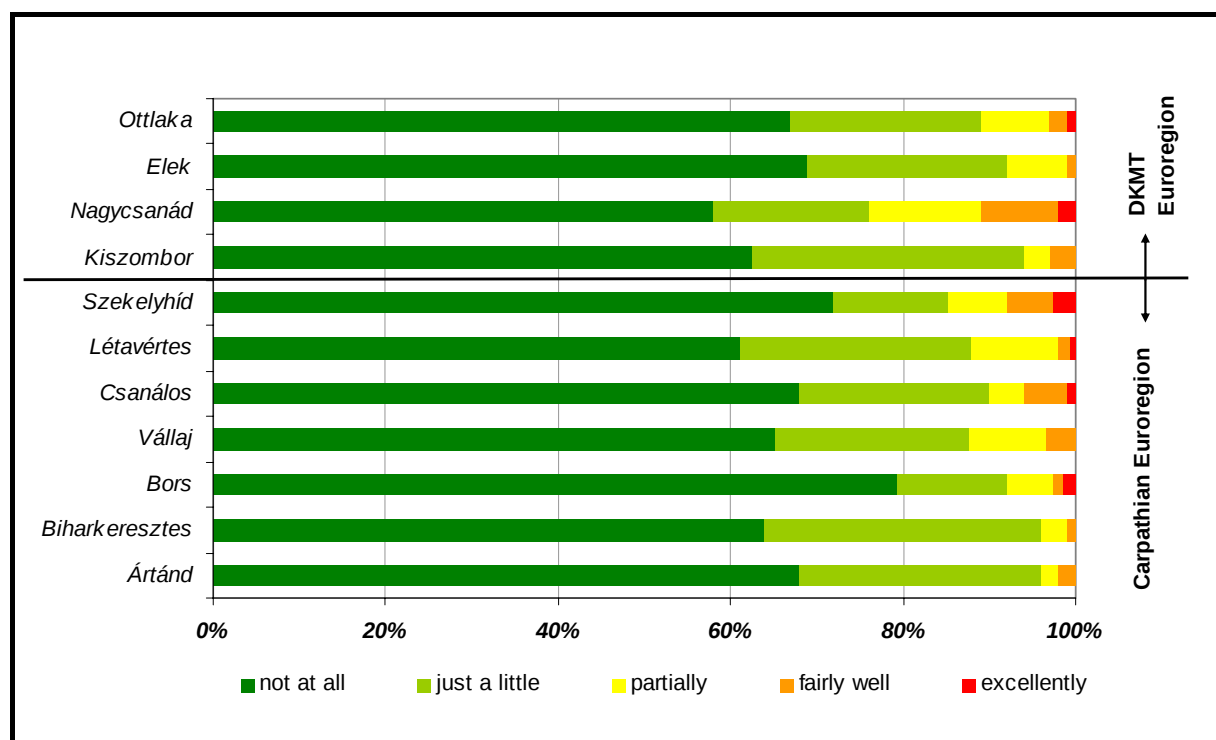
The role of Euroregions along the East Hungarian borders

In the 1990s, the first euroregional organisations were founded along the eastern borders of Hungary, following Western European patterns. Their most important objective was the promotion of the cross-border relations and the catching up of the border regions. Of the Euroregions involving border regions from several countries, two can be found in the area in our survey: the Carpathians Euroregion created in 1993 and the Danube–Körös–Maros–Tisza Euroregion (DKMT) founded in 1997. During the questionnaire survey we tried to assess the level of the presence of these Euroregions in the everyday lives of the population in the border regions. In the northern part of the Hungarian–Romanian border, the counties are members in the Carpathians Euroregion, while Békés and Csongrád in Hungary, and also Arad and Temes counties in Romania are participants in the DKMT co-operation. Accordingly, in the case of the Kiszombor–Nagycsanád and the Elek–Ottlaka settlement pairs we asked the citizens about how much they knew about the DKMT Euroregion, while we tried to map the level of information on the Carpathians Euroregion in the other settlements.

The findings revealed that in the examined settlements along the Hungarian–Romanian border, usually less than half of the respondents had heard about the Euroregion working in the area. On the Romanian side, more respondents had already heard of a euroregional organisation competent in their region, this proportion remained below 50% in Bors, only. On the other hand, the Euroregions are less known on the Hungarian side, the proportion of positive answers exceeded 60% in only one settlement, Biharkeresztes.

In the Romanian–Hungarian border region, the *population of only a few settlements thinks that their county is part of the respective interregional organization*, the proportion of those who are uncertain is much higher. In this case too, the proportion of positive answers was higher in the Romanian settlements; in Ottlaka, Nagycsanád and Csanálos the “yes” answers exceeded half of all responses. Knowing all this it is not surprising that the *proportion of those informed about the objectives and mission of the Euroregions is very low*, more than 60% of those living in the Hungarian–Romanian border region are not aware of them at all (only in Nagycsanád remained the proportion of those without any information on the objectives under 60%). With the exception of Létavértes, there was no Hungarian settlement in the sample where there was one respondent completely competent on the mission of the Euroregions (*Figure 7*).

Figure 7
Knowledge of the goals and functions of the Carpathian/DKMT Euroregion
in the settlements near the Hungarian-Romanian border, 2002



Source: Questionnaire survey 2002. Edited by the authors 2004.

The responses of the citizens reveal that neither the Carpathians Euroregion nor the Danube–Körös–Maros–Tisza Euroregion has been able to become fully operational yet in the region. The majority of the people living in the border region do not know at all the reasons for the creation of these organisations, their mission and objectives. Really significant achievements cannot be made without an adequate level of awareness. In the future, the currently shaping two- and trilateral cross-border co-operations in the area (Interregio, Bihar–Bihar Euroregion etc.) may become more important than the large interregional organisations.

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