

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIPS IN THE HISTORY OF THE CENTRAL- -EUROPEAN REGION*

1. INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this paper is to overview the history of more borderlands in the core region of Central Europe. This topic is obviously a very wide one, therefore some restrictions need to be applied. The focus is on those 20th century historical events, which could determine the current situation in social and economic relationships between the several border regions in Central Europe.

The paper highlights the most typical features of the given border regions in the past and today. It is not an attempt at deep analysis, as its aim is to overview the 20th-century history of the borders in question and investigate the social and economic processes, including those factors which describe the cross-border interactions and relationships.

The first part highlights the difficulty in delineation of 'Central Europe' and discusses two different approaches to doing this. The first one is based on an empirical research; the second one comes from a concept of a European cross-border project. The second part summarises the main characteristics of several historical and present-day relationships at the borders of the Centrope region, with a special regard to the everyday movements, such as cross-border commuting and other labour market processes.

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2. THE MEANINGS OF ‘CENTRAL EUROPE’

The Central and Eastern European countries have had a long common history. At the dawn of the First World War, the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy occupied contemporary Austria, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as present-day Czech and Slovak Republic, Vojvodina, Transylvania, Trentino-Alto Adige, and parts of contemporary Southern Poland and Western Ukraine. In contrast to the Western European countries, it was a multi-ethnic state formation, in which people of different ethnic descent (Germans, Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, Serbs, Bosnians, Romanians, Poles, Ruthenians, Slovenes and Italians) lived together (Jennissen 2011). However, after this empire split into a number of different countries in 1918, this coexistence determined the historical and economic development processes in these states for a long time.

As we know, there are numerous approaches to the interpretation of the term ‘Central Europe’. A detailed description of the several Central European definitions is not the objective of this study. Nevertheless, I would like to mention one of our research projects, in which – among others – we are looking for an answer to how the university students define several geographical categories in the Carpathian Basin. One of our important results is the interpretation and division of ‘Central Europe’. Based on our questionnaire surveys¹, two main directions can be identified. The first one is a Central Europe with centres on Austria and Germany. Such view is characteristic mainly among Austrian responders. The other approach imagines Slovakia, Czech Republic and Poland as ‘Central Europe’. This latter notion is specific to Slovakian responders. For the sake of the paper, these Austrian and Slovakian answers are the most relevant. The Austrian responders² come from the universities of Eisenstadt and Linz and the Slovakian³ one from Košice, Trenčín and Bratislava. More than 90% of Austrian responders perceive their own country and Germany as belonging to Central Europe. The other countries are less noted. In contrast, more than 90% of Slovakian responders think that Czech Republic and Slovakia for Central Europe, but Poland, Austria and Hungary also were noted in high rates. Figure 1 represents the responses of these two nations.

Moreover, Central Europe can be interpreted and delineated from other point of view as well. Another concept of Central Europe is the so called ‘Centroepe’,

¹ Total sample size: 826 university students from the following countries: Austria, Slovakia, Romania, Serbia, Croatia.

² Total 112 responders.

³ Total 194 responders.

which has been created 10 years ago, and is one of the most important formal frameworks for the cooperation in the Central-European region. It is currently functioning in several regions, including Vienna and other Austrian provinces such as Lower Austria and Burgenland, the region of South-Moravia in the Czech Republic, the region of Bratislava and Trnava in Slovakia, Győr-Moson-Sopron and Vas counties in Hungary, and the cities of Eisenstadt, St. Pölten, Brno, Bratislava and Trnava (Fig. 2).

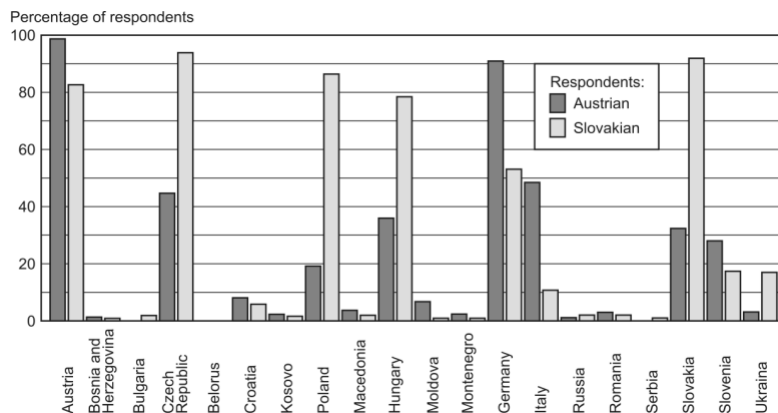


Fig. 1. Which countries belong to Central Europe?

Source: OTKA research program, 2014



Fig. 2. Centrope partner regions and cities

Source: Regional Development Report 2010 Returning to Growth

The Centrope concept is especially important, as this paper focuses on this region, which can be defined as a cross-border functional urban area with the centre in the Austrian capital, Vienna. The Centrope region was established and defined through the Declaration of Kittsee in September 2003. This declaration was signed by governors and committee presidents of the above mentioned countries, provinces, regions and cities. (Schwiezer-Koch 2013) Today, it may be called one of Europe's most dynamic and interesting economic areas: almost all partner regions are among the economic driving forces of their respective countries and boast above-average performance indicators. Roughly six and a half million people live in the eight federal provinces, regions and countries that make up the Central-European region. Two capitals, Bratislava and Vienna, are situated at a distance of around 60 kilometres from each other, while Brno and Győr are additional cities of supra-regional importance. It also includes numerous other towns that are the driving forces of an economically and culturally expanding European region (centrope.com 2014).

3. RELATIONSHIPS AT THE BORDERS OF THE CENTROPE COUNTRIES

The Centrope region, where four countries and four languages meet, has 5 borderlines, namely Austrian-Hungarian, Austrian-Slovak, Austrian-Czech, Hungarian-Slovak and Czech-Slovak. This fact makes the analysis more exciting. The aim of this section is to explore the historical and political events that formed the present economic and social relations among the partner regions and countries of Centrope. The paper tries to summarise the most relevant historical events and omits the ones which are not important for these relations.

3.1. Austrian-Hungarian border region

The border between Austria and Hungary is 366 km long and begins on the river Danube. The border has a mostly north-south orientation, but includes a significant westward deviation around the village of Tárnokréti (Hungary), creating a portion of Hungarian territory protruding into Austrian land. The border comes to an end near the village of Felsőszölnök at the Austria-Hungary-Slovenia tripoint (Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière, 2014c) (Fig. 3.)

Firstly, let us present the main historical events that determined the Austrian-Hungarian cross-border relationships. It is worth mentioning the so called 'gate

function' of this border region, as different borderlines (countries and empires) ran at this territory from ancient times, such as the border of the Roman Empire, Eastern border of Charles the Great's Empire, Western border of the Hungarian Kingdom, and others (Rechnitzer 1999).



Fig. 3. Austrian-Hungarian borderline
Source: edited by the author

There were no significant border debates between the Hungarian Kingdom and the neighbouring Austria until the end of the First World War. The border ran along natural lines, the Leitha river in the north, the Rosalie Mountain in the middle and along the Lappincis river in the south (Molnár 2010). At that time, the Hungarian border was the Western border of the current Burgenland. Its importance decreased significantly during the dualistic Austria-Hungary (Hardi 1999). The creation of the current border is due to the Trianon Treaty, signed on June 4, 1920⁴.

Between the First and the Second World Wars, the borders were easily crossed, but direct trade and currency exchange were limited, while employment was subject to authorisation, therefore the attractiveness of Vienna in the

⁴ The detailed overview of the circumstances of the Trianon Treaty is not subject of this paper.

Hungarian area has waned, but the knowledge about the parts of neighbouring country remained, owing to familiar relations and friendships (Rechnitzer 1999). Between 1945 and 1948, the population of the border zone could cross the border relatively easy from both sides (Molnár 2010). This situation has changed in 1949, when the so called 'Iron Curtain' emerged along the Eastern borders of Austria. The crossing points were eliminated and the border was transformed into a 'dead frontier'. Basically, all contacts between the populations on both sides of the border ceased (Rechnitzer 1999). However, the possibility of travel to Western countries was became gradually easier starting in the early 1960s, while the frontier zone remained tightly guarded until 1989 (Molnár 2010). After 1989, the situation of the region changed again due to the political transformations in Hungary. The borders were opened and the crossings were more and more significant, with shopping tourism flourishing to an especially high extent. The cross-border relationships have become stronger and diverse (employment, ownership, tourism, use of services etc.). After the EU accession of Austria (1995), the country turned westward and paid more attention to the Western integration, so the economic and political importance of the Austrian-Hungarian border region temporarily decreased (Rechnitzer 1999). Despite this political phenomenon, the connections have become more intense, with estimated 10–15 thousands commuters from Hungary coming to Austria at the end of the 1990s (Hardi 2005.)

Based on the HV/WIFO-INDIV data, the first cross-border commuters got around €1000 basic wage (without supplementary allowances and gratuities), which increased to €1200–1500 to the year of 2008. This amount has likely continued to rise since then.

In the last decade, the population growth of Vienna became more dynamic – especially owing for the foreign immigrants. The proportion of foreign babies steadily increases, which has an impact on the labour market as well: 30 out of 100 new-borns were not Austrian in 2012. This proportion in Burgenland is 9, in Lower-Austria 11 and in Styria 12. Foreigners comprise 11% of the total population of Austria. The number of foreigners is growing in Burgenland as well, though it still has the lowest rate compared to the national average. Since 2001, the population of the province has expanded by five thousands of non-Austrian citizens. Hungarians, Germans, Romanians, and Slovaks are the most prominent among foreigners.

Hungarians in Burgenland mostly work in agriculture and forestry (63% in 2011). It is not surprising, since this sector is dominant in this province. Therefore, the rate of unemployment shows higher seasonality than the national average. One third (30.4%) of the workers in catering and gastronomy are

Hungarians. As for geographical location of foreigner employees, Neusiedl am See district has emerged from the other districts of Burgenland in the last 20 years. Here, the rate of foreign employees exceeds 30%. Burgenland province as a whole can be observed as a north-south slope: the more developed northern part of Burgenland where the service sector dominates provides more job opportunities for foreigners. Hungarian employees also find the northern Burgenland region (Eisenstadt, Mattersburg, Neusiedler am See) to be the most attractive (Pogátsa 2014).

According to an estimate of the qualification of commuters between 1998 and 2008, the employees commuting to Burgenland mostly have basic qualifications, while the commuters with secondary and higher education degrees are underrepresented. In commuting, transport connections plays a significant role. Connections are excellent in the northern part of region, but it is still difficult to get from Vas country to northern Burgenland in a reasonable time (Pogátsa 2014).

As part of a cross-border cooperation project named EMAH⁵, travel surveys were carried out to capture the actual traffic and the information about the travellers crossing the border occasionally or regularly. Several surveys on railway and road traffic over the regional border crossing points were carried out; the outcomes present a detailed picture of commuting and travel behaviours in the border region. The main findings are summarised below.

As for *railway* passenger traffic on the, surveys were carried out twice in the border-crossing trains; one was in the spring and the other was in the summer of 2013. In total, more than 30,000 passengers on the five cross-border railway lines⁶ were sampled to analyse the passenger traffic. The results of the survey show that the train lines play an important role in the regional transport in both countries: approximately 35 to 40% of the passengers crossing the Austrian-Hungarian border travel by train. The main destinations are Sopron, Győr and Mosonmagyaróvár in Hungary, and Vienna, Wiener Neustadt, Neusiedl am See and Graz in Austria. Other important destinations include Parndorf and Mattersburg in Austria. The passenger traffic flows are relatively large during the

⁵ The project 'Eco-mobility in the Austro-Hungarian border region' (EMAH) is funded as part of the cross-border cooperation programme Austria-Hungary 2007–2013 by the European Regional Development Fund, by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, by Burgenland, and by Hungary.

⁶ Railway Line 524: Deutschkreutz – Sopron – Wiener Neustadt – Vienna, Railway line 512: Deutschkreutz – Sopron – Ebenfurth, Railway line 700: Győr – Hegyeshalom – Bruck an der Leitha – Vienna, Railway line 530: Szentgotthárd – Fehring – Feldbach – Graz, Railway line 731: Fertőszentmiklós – Pamhagen – Neusiedl am See.

morning and evening hours, especially the passenger traffic from Hungary to Austria in the morning and from Austria to Hungary in the evening. This implies a large number of commuters from Hungary to Austria. In total, 3,000 passengers were asked about their destinations and purpose. This corresponds to about 10% of the total passengers or, if we only consider the passengers crossing the border, to about 20%. The analysis shows various aspects and differences of the commuting behaviour: travelling to the educational facilities drastically decreases in the summer (by 19%), while tourism increases strongly (by 15%) compared to the spring questionnaire. As for the reason for choosing the train, majority of the respondents quoted favourable travel cost as the main reason, while a portion of the respondents who changed from cars to the train for environmental reasons is marginal.

During the three-day *road traffic* survey in October 2013, 79,554 vehicles crossing the seven border points between Austria and Hungary were counted. Among them, 59.5% had Hungarian number plates while 32.1% were Austrian. Most of them were passenger vehicles (88%), followed by small trucks (5.5%). 2,625 people or 13% of the vehicles counted during the survey were surveyed in detail with questionnaires. 60% of the surveyed drivers travelled alone. 75% of vehicles with more than one person were travelling to a destination common for all passengers. Most of the cross-border travellers make the trips both ways on the same day. On weekdays, the percentage of the commuters is 80%, and this group crosses the border many times in a week. Majority of the commuters crossing the border typically work for the manufacturing or service sector (*Eco-mobility in the Austro-Hungarian... 2014*).

A relatively new migration trend within Hungary has also been observed, namely people moving from the less developed eastern regions of Hungary to the border area in search of better employment. A significant proportion of the jobs are temporary or seasonal. The increased Austrian employment opportunities and the considerable differences in the wage level brought about a shortage of well-trained labour in certain sectors within Hungary (e.g. in tourism-related services, construction or engineering) and put a constant upward pressure on the wage level in Hungary. Employment of Austrians in the Hungarian counties is practically negligible (*Cross-border Cooperation Austria-Hungary 2014–2020 Regional Analysis and SWOT 2013*).

3.2. Hungarian-Slovak border region

The length of the Slovakian-Hungarian border, which bisects a varied natural and social environment, is 679 km (Hardi 2009a) (Fig. 4). First of all, we have to mention that the Slovak-Hungarian border region is situated in an area which belonged to single state formations until the end of the First World War: the Kingdom of Hungary and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (Hardi, Csizmadia, Lampl et al. 2008).



Fig. 4. Hungarian-Slovak borderline

Source: edited by author

After the First World War, with the separation from the Kingdom of Hungary, a virtual, symbolic region was set up in Southern Slovakia (Mannová, 2009). This state border was created by the peace treaty at the end of the First World War and did not follow the ethnic border. In 1920, the border between Czechoslovakia and Hungary was designated mainly on the basis of military-strategic, transport, and economic conditions. It ran through seven former Hungarian counties, often severing family ties. In 1938, the border was pushed northwards by the Munich Treaty, and this situation remained until the end of the Second World War, when the ceasefire restored the situation existing before 1938 (Hardi, Csizmadia and Lampl et al. 2008).

As far as the ethnic composition of population are concerned, Hungarians became the largest minority ethnic group in the 1980s. In 1984, approximately 590,000 Hungarians (concentrated in southern Slovakia) made up 11 percent of Slovakia's population⁷. In the 2001 census, more than 520,000 citizens declared themselves 'Magyars' (9.7% of all the inhabitants of Slovakia). They live in relative concentration in Southern Slovakia (Mannová 2009) (Fig. 5).

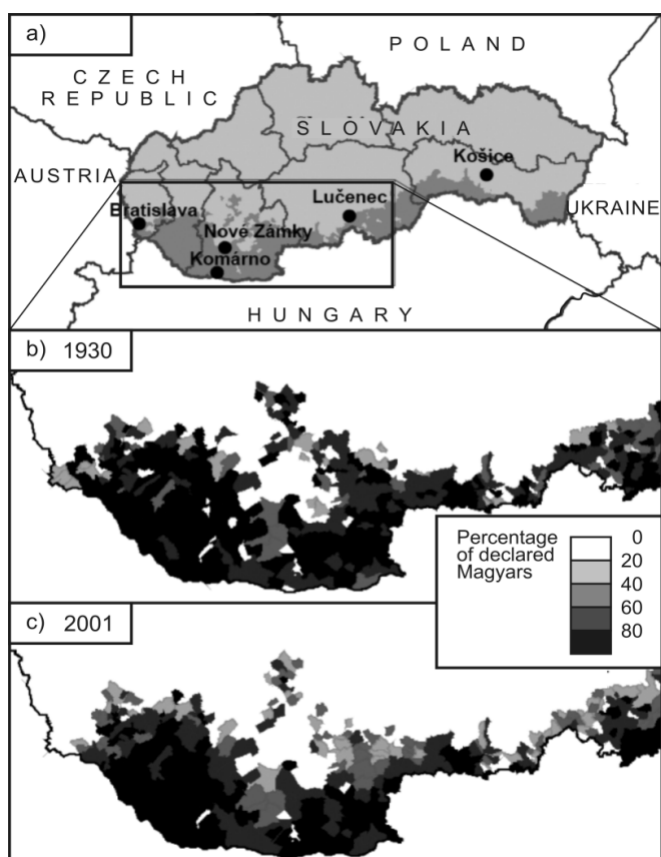


Fig. 5. Location of the Hungarians in Slovakia

- a) Slovakia and its administrative units showing the areas inhabited by Magyars; Deeper grey represents settlements with more than 9.7% of Magyars (9.7% was a statewide average in 2001); b) declared ethnicity in settlements of Southern Slovakia (1930); c) declared ethnicity in settlements of Southern Slovakia (2001)

Source: E. Mannová (2009)

⁷ Data as of August 1987, <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-3686.html>.

If explore the ethnic processes of the last 10 years, we can see that the proportion of the Hungarian population have decreased in the Southern Slovakian regions. Based on data from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic for 2001, 4.56% of the total population of the Bratislava region, 23.74% of the Trnava region and 27.52% of the Nitra region were Hungarian. By 2011, these proportions became 3.97%, 21.73% and 24.54%, respectively. Moreover, it is worth noting that the Slovak population in the South-western Slovak regions also decreased in this period, while other nationalities grew.

In this region, the cross-border employment and shopping were already usual activities during the socialism (Jagodič 2010). The two states, Czechoslovakia and Hungary have signed an international convention of bilateral employment in 1985. In this era, the commuting was dominant in both directions.

Opposite Mosonmagyaróvár there is Bratislava, which went through significant economic-and industrial development in the 1980s. Thus, many employees went across the border to work in plants in Bratislava from Mosonmagyaróvár and its surroundings. Employees from the other side of the border mostly worked in the textile industry in Győr or in the alumina plant in Almásfüzitő in 1980s, but other factories also gave jobs for domestic and foreign employees. Because of the economic recession of the transition period, the cross-border employment temporarily discontinued. After the stagnation, the number of commuters from Slovakia to Hungary started rapidly increasing since 1999. In the western part of the Slovakian part of the border region, the unemployment rate is higher than on the Hungarian side, as large industrial centres can be found near the border (Győr-Komárom-Almásfüzitő, Esztergom-Dorog-axis, Tatabánya, etc.), which have exhausted the local workforce capacity. Since 1999, the development of commuting was supported by a Framework Agreement between the two countries, with conditions becoming so lenient that any barriers practically ceased to exist. Therefore, May 2004 has not changed the labour market significantly. In 2005, the number of the Slovak citizens working in Hungary has been estimated at around 30 thousand. Since the EU accession, very strong economic development can be observed in Slovakia, with obvious effects on its labour market. The number of commuters is probably decreasing in the western border section as well, but it should stabilise at a healthy level. However, a process in the opposite direction has also started. The Slovak companies attract domestic workers across the border, especially looking for skilled workers. A new tendency can also be observed. At the less-developed eastern part of the border region, Slovak entrepreneurs are looking for employees from Hungary. Demand for skilled labour is also dominant in this case. All in all, the economic development creates interesting movements (Hardi and Lampl 2008.)

Besides cross-border employment, last years have also seen a tendency of a significant number of Slovak citizens settling down in Hungarian settlements near Bratislava. Their lifestyle is primarily connected to Slovakia, so cross-border travelling is a daily occurrence (Prileszky 2010). Based on the data (March, 2010) of the Land Office of Győr-Moson-Sopron country, 1,269 people living in Győr-Moson-Sopron have registered address in Slovak, and 1256 of them purchased real estate since May 1, 2004 in this country. The purchases were made mostly in 2008 and 2009, but the wave of real estate purchases started in 2004. The resolution of the country office confirms that Rajka, Dunakiliti, Dunasziget, Feketeerdő settlements are the most attractive due to the proximity of the Slovak border and the expanding suburbanisation of Bratislava (Baj 2010).

3.3. Czech-Slovak coexistence, relationships and main features of the border

With a length of 251.8 km, the border between the Czech Republic and Slovakia is one of the newest borders in Europe. It begins in the north at the tripoint formed by the Polish, Czech and Slovak borders. The border is fairly straight and takes a south-westerly direction up to the crossing of the borders of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Austria (Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière 2014d) (Fig. 6).

Regarding to Czech-Slovak relationships, we have to mention that the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy of 1867 established the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary. After the collapse of this Monarchy at the end of the First World War (1918), the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938), and then the Second Czechoslovak Republic (1938–1939) were established. During the Second World War (1939–1945), the Slovak State was established. This one-party Slovak State ended in 1944, when democratic and communist forces organised a revolt. In 1948 dramatic changes took place, and the communist period lasted from 1948 to 1989 in different political-administrative forms as the Czechoslovak Republic (1945–1960), the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (1960–1990), the Czechoslovak Federative Republic (1990) and the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic (1990–1992). In 1993, the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic split into two independent states, the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic (Kanianska et al. 2014).

Besides this fact, it is worth mentioning that the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia remained poorer during the whole period of the existence of the common country and, until 1970s, relatively less developed. While the Czech part hosted

a mixture of industries, heavy industries of steel and armaments were operating in the Slovak part. It explains high unemployment that Slovakia has been struggling with throughout the whole transition period: unemployment jumped high due to the abundance of heavy industries, especially armaments and steel, which went bankrupt due to the loss of export markets and old-fashioned ways of production which were not able to survive the competition with Western markets. The level of development of the two countries measured by GDP per capita differed by over 20% in 1990 and it has not changed much since. A return to 1989 wage levels was much faster and more successful in the Czech Republic, which surpassed its wage level from before the transition towards the end of 1990s (Kurekova 2009).



Fig. 6. Czech-Slovak borderline

Source: edited by author

Questions about the meaning of the border in this new situation arise. To answer, we can overview the tendencies of labour mobility before and after the dissolution. The intensity of cross-border population mobility expressed by the frequency of crossings (i.e. the intensity of movement through the official border crossings) is also included in the evaluation of migration-commuting relations. A radical increase of this indicator was registered at the Slovak-Czech border during 1994–1996, when the number of crossings (railway and road crossings in total) increased 2.4 times. In this period, the number of Slovaks employed in the

Czech Republic increased from 25,000 to 70,000. This intensity has not been increasing further since, with a slight decrease between 1996 and 2002 (Halás 2006).

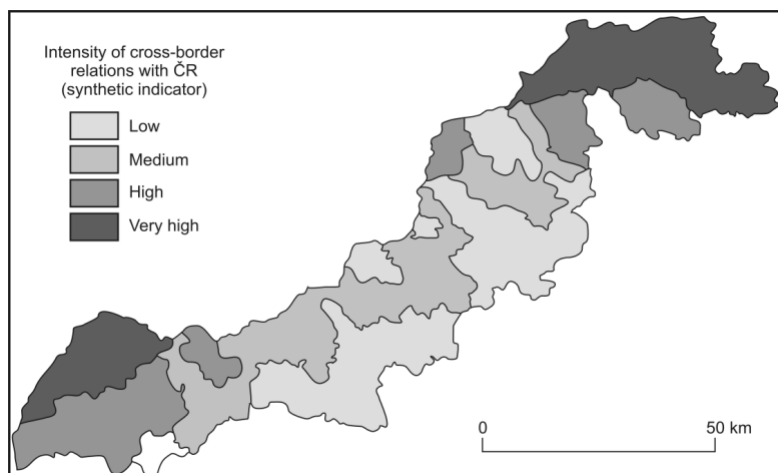


Fig. 7. Regionalisation of the Slovak part of the Slovak-Czech borderland on the basis of the intensity of cross-border relations with the Czech Republic
Source: M. Halás (2006)

According to research by M. Halás (2006), the intensity of cross-border relations is very different in different parts of the Czech-Slovak borderland. It is especially high in the northern and southern parts of the borderland, though both sections are clearly different in character. In the southern part, besides good permeability of the state border making it possible to expand inter-settlement relations, short transport distances support the creation of relations. For the inhabitants in the northern part of Slovak borderland, the Ostrava-Karviná region in the Czech Republic is very attractive. These centres are more remote from the state border in comparison with Hodonín or Břeclav in the south, but are much more numerous and larger. In the central section of the borderland, the intensity of the cross-border relations is very low, as local communities mostly concentrate on the regional centres of the Central Považie region (Halás 2006) (Fig. 7).

3.4. Austrian-Czech-Slovak border region

The length of the Austro-Czech border is 466,3 km and it begins at the border tripoint formed by the Austrian, German and Czech borders. It then turns eastwards to end at the tripoint formed by the borders between Austria, Czech Re-

public and Slovakia. Its demarcation crosses the rivers Inn and Morava (Fig. 8). This border was established in 1918, with the end of the First World War, the fall of Austro-Hungarian Empire and the creation of Czechoslovakia. During the Second World War, the region was annexed by Germany, becoming the protectorate of 'Bohemia-Moravia'. The demarcation remained unchanged, with the border becoming a part of the 'Iron Curtain' during the cold war. On January 1, 1969, Czechoslovakia officially became a federation made up of two states, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, establishing the Austro-Czech border with the dissolution of Czechoslovakia on 31 December 1992 and the independence of the Czech Republic on 1 January 1993. Before the Czech Republic's entry into the EU, the Austro-Czech border was the crossing point for illegal immigrants coming from Eastern Europe to Western Europe. This border region is characterised by numerous protected natural areas that attract many visitors each year. Tourism is thus considered to be a potential factor in the development of the region (Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière 2014a).



Fig. 8. Austrian-Czech borderline
Source: edited by author

With the opening of the borders between Austria and Czech Republic in 1989, two contrasting economies and societies confronted each other. The remarkable economic contrasts still exist. In Austria, the GDP per capita is above

the EU average, while in the Czech Republic it is below it. Of course, the opening of the borders and the liberalisation of trade had the greatest impact in the border regions (Intensification of EastWest... 2000).

Since 1990, the Austrian-Czech labour market relationship emerged either in the form of cross-border labour migration or cross-border commuting, especially from the Czech regions to Austria. The regional labour market is characterised by one-way economic migration and commuting. Workers from the Czech Republic use the opportunity to find employment in nearby Austrian regions in such sectors as construction, tourism, social and private services, agriculture and forestry. Although the EU accession in May 2004 allowed Czech citizens to enter the Western Europe labour market without work permits, most EU15 countries, including Austria, introduced transitional provisions concerning free movement of labour lasting up to 7 years, which affect the bilateral labour market. The workforce of the border region is well-trained. Employed people with secondary education account for about 80% in the Czech Republic and 64% in Austria. As far as higher education is concerned, the index is 19% in Austria and 14% in Czech Republic. The Austrian-Czech border region has substantial disparities in wage and productivity levels in a national and a cross border context. While the immediate border regions in Austria are low wage regions, this applies only to some parts of the Czech border regions. Jobs with wages higher than the national average are found mostly in Czech cities. The labour market situation is much better in the Western part of the border region than in the Eastern part. The cross-border region also suffers from an unbalanced transport accessibility. Good accessibility only exists around the economic and population centres, while peripheral regions are weakly connected to the centres and to each other. This relates to the road and, even more, to the railway system of this border region. On the Czech, side the orientation and construction of transport infrastructure has been focused on the Prague-Brno-Bratislava axis, so the South Moravian region is one of the best-situated regions in Czech Republic. The City of Brno is the second most important intersection in Czech Republic. On the other hand, the development of north-south connections has been relatively neglected. The situation was very similar in the Austrian regions. Motorways still fail to connect some regions on the Austrian side, which results in a peripheral status of many areas and makes the economic and labour market centres of the region difficult to reach. Only Vienna, Linz and Krems, as well as cities and municipalities along the East-West route have high-capacity road and railway infrastructure. But it is not only the national, international and supra-regional connections that are lacking. The cross-border interregional infrastruc-

ture is insufficient as well (Operational Programme Objective European Territorial Co-operation Austria – Czech Republic 2007–2013.)

The Austrian-Slovak border is 91 km long and divided into three distinct spatial-functional areas: The first one is the northern part of the region (Wiener Umland-Nordteil, Weinviertel, Trnava), which is predominantly agricultural and lacks cross-border transportation links due to the natural barrier of the March/Morava river. The second one is the agglomeration axis of Vienna-Bratislava. Vienna and Bratislava have a joint population of over 2 million and are the major centres of the region as far as population, jobs, infrastructure and industrial zones are concerned. The third one is the southern part of the region (Wiener Umland-Südteil, Nordburgenland, the city of Bratislava and the southern parts of the region of Bratislava), attractive as business locations. This is one of the most dynamic areas within the joint Austrian-Slovak border region. The border region is characterised by large urban-rural disparities. Both capital regions, Vienna and Bratislava are close to areas at extreme peripheral locations (e.g. Weinviertel, northern parts of the districts of Bratislava and Trnava) (Österreichisches Institut für Raumplanung et al. 2007) (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9. Austrian-Slovak borderline
Source: edited by author

The current demarcation of this border was established in 1993 with the creation of Slovakia, following the partition of Czechoslovakia. It had already been in existence since 1919 after Czechoslovakia's declaration of independence. In 1939, Germany invaded the region and divided it into several protectorates, subtly modifying the borders in favour of Austria. At the end of the war, the previous demarcation was re-established (with the exception of part of Bratislava). During the cold war, this border was part of the iron curtain and thus represented a real obstacle between the two countries (Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière 2014a).

Since the accession of Slovakia to the EU in 2004, there has been greater cross-border movement in the region, with people living on the Austrian side and working on the Slovak side, and vice versa (European Commission 2014.) The proximity of the two capitals, Vienna and Bratislava is also an important economic factor (Wilfried-Gunther 1996.) The strong growth dynamics of Bratislava is affecting the rural Austrian villages through increased demand for new settlements, leisure and recreational areas. Former villages are becoming suburban towns (European Commission 2014). Due to more affordable housing, many Slovaks have moved to Austria in recent years while continuing to work in Bratislava. Thousands of young Slovaks study at Austrian universities and an estimated 40,000 Slovak citizens has found employment in Austria. The number of Austrians studying and working in Slovakia is still marginal. In addition, the number of Austrian tourists visiting Slovakia for more than a couple of hours remains modest, whereas the duration of the visits of Slovak tourists to Austria has impressively grown in recent years. According to a survey that was conducted in the Austrian-Slovak border region in 2012, only 38% of Austrians welcomed the abolishment of border controls, while the accession to Schengen was greeted unequivocally on the Slovak side (Gruber 2014).

During the last 10 years, cross-border labour market relations in the border region gained an entirely new quality. The typical sign of the labour market is one-way economic migration – workers from Slovakia, mostly from the area around Bratislava, used the opportunity to find employment in nearby Lower Austria, Burgenland and Vienna. According to data of Arbeitsmarktservice Österreich, in 2005 about 7,300 Slovak people were employed in Austria. Parallel to labour migration, the number of daily and weekly commuters from Slovakia to Austria increased. Workers from Slovakia are employed in just a few sectors of the Austrian labour market, mostly in hotels and restaurants, in social and public services, and in agriculture and forestry (Österreichisches Institut für Raumplanung et al. 2007).

4. CONCLUSION

Summarising, the paper highlighted the historical and present-day relations in several border regions in Central Europe, with special regard to the cross-border movements and ethnic composition. All in all, we can say that this process has been especially strong since the breakdown of the border restrictions. This topic has also numerous other dimensions, which can be examined in the future, such as the activity of the entrepreneurs on the other side of the border, relations between several institutions and settlements, and so on.

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