

## **Sátoraljaújhely: New situation for a state border divided town after EU Joining of Hungary and Slovakia, 2004-2014<sup>+</sup>**

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### Historical Geographical Background

The new borderlines of new Hungary were drawn in 1920 by the Peace Treaty of Trianon, after sustaining defeat in the First World War. The country lost a large share of its territory and population, and so did Zemplén County, formerly seated by the city of Sátoraljaújhely. 71.7% of the county's territory and 61.1% of its population became a part of the newly established Czechoslovakia. The most determining factor of drawing the new borderline was of a strategic nature: Czechoslovakia intended to possess the Košice – Sátoraljaújhely – Čop – Mukacheve – Kiev strategic, double track rail line.

Sátoraljaújhely (with a population of 19,940 in the 1910 census), due to the new position of the border, became a border-town, losing the larger part of its county and district, and the new state border even cut in two the city itself. The major parts and the historical centre of the city remained in the Hungarian part, while the industrial parts, urban industrial district with the railway machinery works, and a part of the agricultural areas were given to

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<sup>+</sup> Research was made and financed by FP7 EU Project, EUBORDERSCAPES.

Czechoslovakia with approximately 700 inhabitants, but the number of jobs was much larger than that. The in-town state border ran at the edge of the inner city and Ronyva stream became the common border along an extensive segment. The newly transmitted areas were gradually organized as a new town which was named Slovenské Nové Mesto.

The border cut the technical infrastructure (rail lines, waterworks, electricity system, road network etc.), it detached families, vineyards and farmlands, separated enterprises. The majority of the former Hungarian citizens moved over to the Hungarian part of the city. The ones that lived under the impact of the 1918-1924 period (the finalization of the border line ended in 1924, and the premises of the waterworks were given back to Hungary in this year) can be well regarded as the „first generation of border-trauma”.

After the division there were basic asymmetrical structures between the two settlements. Sátoraljaújhely stayed to be a relative big and well developed administrative, economic, cultural central place, Slovenské Nové Mesto a small, relatively underdeveloped village, and an important military and railway centre.

During the interwar period, the in-city border became strictly controlled, yet permeable. The establishment of „dual ownership” helped to handle disrupted agricultural and industrial fields and plots, however, it remained difficult to keep the connections. From 1923, the cross-border traffic was regulated by a bilateral agreement. Customs control was extremely strict

on the Czechoslovak side, with the aim to restrict cross-border traffic.

On the basis of the maleficent interstate relations, the two settlements created peculiar local political identities. Sátoraljaújhely became one of the significant national centres of the Trianon-memory and Hungarian territorial revision. The local society faced the absurdity of the local border on a daily basis. Numerous Trianon-monuments were raised in the city. Slovenské Nové Mesto, in the new situation, became a settlement of Czechoslovak state employees (railwaymen, border wardens, customs officials etc), where the new Czechoslovak state idea became dominant.

In November, 1938, due to the First Vienna Award, the two settlements reunited inside Hungarian borders, and almost all of the Czechoslovak state employees moved away from the site. In the period until the end of 1944, fundamental demographic, economic, cultural, religious, social etc. changes were induced by the holocaust in the reintegrated city. Jewry, making up 22.6% of local population (4.690 people) according to the 1941 census, was deported, and only very few of them returned. Neither the demographic, nor the economic patterns of the city could be recovered after this fundamental, severe loss that influenced all aspects of economic, social, cultural life.

Sátoraljaújhely was occupied by the Soviet troops in early December, 1944, and the former state border was almost immediately restored, once again inducing significant in-city migration. The Hungarians that returned to their homes in 1938, now moved back to the inner city from the parts beyond Ronyva. The border was

closed to the inhabitants; it was not possible to cross it. The end of 1945 brought some consolidation, former local border traffic facilities were prolonged with two years. Those people that experienced the period between 1938 and 1945 and suffered from the negative impacts as adults, can be regarded the „second generation of border-trauma”.

Between 1945 and 1948, Hungarian-Czechoslovak bilateral interstate relations were deteriorated once again, even worsened by a population exchange. Around Sátoraljaújhely only a smaller volume of people were affected, though it worsened interpersonal relations on all levels.

The two – now Socialist, neighbour countries – signed their treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance only in April 1949, under heavy Soviet pressure. Despite of a „friendly consolidation” of interstate relations, the tensions did not disappear, none of the countries sought for a real cooperation, thus the in-city relations also did not improve. For a longer period, the border became officially impermeable. (Beyond obligate official contact, there was almost no personal transfer between the two countries.)

After reordering the Hungarian county system in 1950, Sátoraljaújhely lost its position as a county seat. Zemplén county merged into Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county, the seat of which became Miskolc. Every important decision about the city from then was made in Miskolc and not in town. (Sátoraljaújhely turned to be one of the looser of state socialist settlement development policy in Hungary.)

In 1950, a school and college with Slovak language teaching were established for children of Slovak nationality. This education centre became the fundamental institution of the Slovaks in Hungary, today it is maintained by the Slovak Minority Government. The school started to build cross-border relations from the late 1960's.

From the beginning of the 1960's, a longer period of consolidation started. In 1962 the local border transfer was restored by an agreement. The zone for local border crossing was defined as wide as 15 kilometres. Within this zone, one border crossing journey was permitted per year. Regular, continuous cross-border traffic was impossible, although in theory it was easier to keep connections after the cease of obligatory visa.

The invasion against Czechoslovakia in 1968 repeatedly worsened the in-city relations. The situation became quasi as war, the Soviet army troops and military forces marched only few meters from the Hungarian border on the Slovak side towards Kosice. The border-crossing point was hermetically closed.

The „red Hungarian passport” was introduced in 1972, and it was valid in the socialist countries. Hungarians were able to travel without almost any restrictions to the neighbouring socialist countries. In effect, from 1972, we can talk about the forming of a new “generation with an experience of permeable borders”, that saw the border as open, even if causing a certain level of excitement. The reciprocal, massive shopping tourism started to cause increasing problems for the official bodies of both countries.

The most neuralgic element in the cross-border relations was the water-service. Until 1974, the Slovak parts were supplied by the Hungarian water works. Then, the possibility of the service was terminated on the Slovak part, a one-meter long piece was cut out from the drinking water channel on the border-bridge. (The restoration of the relation is a permanent issue from the 1990's, with no progress so far. The affairs of the Zemplén Water Works were reviewed in full detail on the 2010 November meeting of the local authority. The idea of a common, cross-border water supply service was raised, but no effectual decision was made since then.)

A new, large capacity border crossing point was opened in 1987 at the Northern part of the city, and parallel to this the previous crossing point in the inner city was to be closed from cars, it would operate as a pedestrian and cyclist crossing point. The new crossing point suited the requirements of long distance traffic, but it did not meet the needs of in-city movements of the local inhabitants, since it created long circuits. In the end, car traffic was allowed at the old crossing point as well.

Figure 1:

Topographical map of the border region



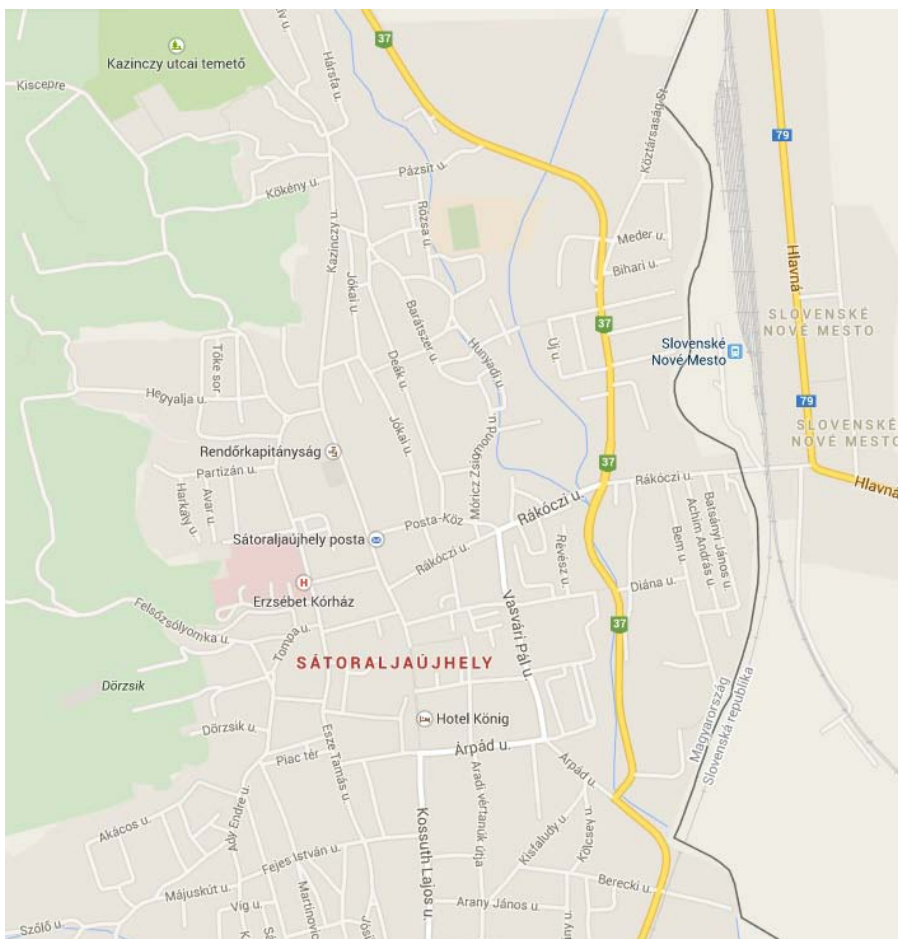
### System changes and their consequences in the border region

Both countries went through the collapse of the socialist system from 1989 with the speciality that from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1993 Slovakia became an independent state. The interstate relations between the Visegrád group became consolidated, and it had an effect on the in-city border as well. (In December 1991 the Ukraine also became an independent state. Subcarpathia intended to open up towards Hungary and Slovakia as well.)

Border crossing within the city became easier than ever before, citizens of both settlements could cross the border with a passport, but with almost no obstacles. Relations were dominated by the movements of local

people. Official relations between settlements also started to form, especially in the fields of education, sport and culture. Meetings and knowledge-sharing of organizations became regular.

Figure 2: Sátoraljaújhely and Slovenské Nové Mesto





In 1991 in Sátoraljaújhely the Regional Enterprise Support Foundation of Zemplén was formed, which took on the analysis of local territorial processes on a voluntary basis, and it also helped to supply local and regional enterprises with information. The foundation was created by the „generation of open borders”, that were no more hit by former, personal border-traumas.

The new circumstances induced new opportunities for Sátoraljaújhely. It not only turned towards the other side of Ronyva stream, but it also became an actor of a larger area. In effect, the basis of cross-border interregional relations was set in the first phase of the systemic changes. In November, 1994, the Carpathian Border-side Economic Development Association was created. The Association was founded by three business development organizations from the three countries. Its overall aim was to give an insight into the founding countries' regional economies, to support cooperation between the enterprises and to give information about the operational techniques of the free market and each other's legal frameworks. A boost for innovation of border-side enterprises had a special emphasis.

They developed and introduced a strategic programme that presented the economic structure of the regions, they built a database and organized exhibitions. This initiative was hindered by the assumption of local and regional political powers that it is merely the interest of Hungarians living in the three countries, and so the issue gained moderate support from Slovakian and the Ukraine.

Privatisation brought an abundance of new actors to the border region as well. Cross-border relations were more or less in order, but “wild-Eastern capitalist” traits could also be observed. Negative elements of Hungarian-Slovakian, Slovakian-Ukrainian and Ukrainian-Hungarian cross-border processes started to appear in the region. The local inhabitants formed a peculiar micro border economy, they bought whatever goods wherever it was the cheapest.

NGOs also took part in cross-border community building. From the point of view of our topic, the most significant is the Association for Borderless Cooperation of Zemplén Youth, established in 2001. According to the general rules of the association, their aim is to foster economic, cultural and environmental cooperation beyond state borders. The association is active, and not only in the Slovak side of the border area.

In 2002 the Hungarian part of Tokaj Wine Region was declared by the UNESCO to be Historic Cultural Landscapes. After it a new discussion was started between Hungary and Slovakia about state border divided wine region and right of Slovakia using Tokaj trade brand. Curia in Luxembourg after some discussion in 2012 decided that Slovakia had right to use Tokaj trade brand.

#### After the EU accession

After decades of a very complicated local, regional and interstates history, Hungary and Slovakia joined together the European Union in 2004, and Schengen Zone in 2007. The state border in the centre of the town was

totally opened for the population living on the other side of the border. Very intensive personal connections started to flourish between the two parts of the formerly one single town.

The reactions of some of the local leaders of the Slovakian village were negative at the early stage of open borders. On the day of the Schengen opening, the road that lead through the border was blocked with iron barriers and later with concrete flower pots, only pedestrian and cyclist traffic was allowed to pass through. This local tension generated a national upheaval both in Hungary and in Slovakia. Reaction in Hungary was almost collectively negative, while in Slovakia opinion were divided. (Shortly after the local conflict gained a resolution and in June 2011 the border was re-opened for car traffic as well.)

Figure 2: „Silent border” after Schengen



Source: MTI

The mostly elderly Hungarian people that live beside the border crossing point give voice to their dislike and time to time protest against the heavy traffic. The high traffic double track rail line passes directly at the Slovak side of the border. The bar is very often closed, resulting in hundred meter long rows of cars on both sides. When the bar is up and the traffic starts to move, it is impossible to cross the road as a pedestrian.

From the aspect of everyday life and movements of population a new functional unity was formed, with expectations of political and administrative sphere. After the EU accession, no detailed statistics are made of the border crossing traffic, thus the daily pace of the traffic can be approximated by interviews with inhabitants living next to the crossing point:

- a slight out and back car traffic starts at 5:30 am, and it continuously increases until 8 am,
- 8-10 am is the first period of shopping tourism,
- 10 am – 16 pm: stabile urban traffic,
- 16-19 pm: evening peak hours, out and back.

The big multinational stores (TESCO, Penny) established their units on the Hungarian side, where local demand was significant. The level of cross-border trade continuously fluctuates, its intensity is determined by the current HUF/EUR exchange rate. In some periods, 30-40% of the total turnover is made up by foreign purchase.

The two local governments formed official connections step by step and managed to have a common meeting as a result. Based on the interviews made with the two mayors in 2014, connections between the two local authorities are positive, the level of information

exchange meets the needs. They mutually help and support each other in EU tenders. Both local authorities endorse cooperation between institutions. They are not able to diminish the difference that arises due to the demographical imbalance (in 2014 Sátoraljaújhely has 15 thousand, Slovenské Nové Mesto only 1100 inhabitants), but they accept it as a circumstance.

The economic, cultural, service etc. connections are dominated functionally by Sátoraljaújhely, but Slovenské Nové Mesto has an own inner integration from many aspects. In interpersonal relations the market has resolved language barriers. In Sátoraljaújhely almost every shop has Slovak labels as well, and the same on the Slovak side. Knowledge of language is valued, Hungarian-speaking shop assistants are sought for in Slovakia and Slovak-speaking ones in Hungary.

An abundance of enterprises were formed only to exploit the actual advantages and that disappeared after a while. (There were businesses that based their existence on tax fraud, and other big companies whose criminal cases are still not closed in 2014.) It is especially difficult to get people to talk about certain areas of entrepreneurship on the Slovakian side. The „Master” is able to handle his business even from the prison.

With the EU accession it was possible to establish the institutional structure of the EU in the region. For Sátoraljaújhely, Slovenské Nové Mesto appeared as a potential partner in these cases, but its most significant partners were central places (district seats) in Slovakia.

In April, 2004 the Zemplén Euroregion (Interregional Development Agency of Zemplén Area) was established, which regarded the territory of previous

Zemplén County as a sphere of its activity. (The Euroregion compassed the whole territory of the onetime county, not only the settlements with Hungarian population, so it could be regarded as a significant step forward.) According to the establishing document, the overall aim of the Euroregion is to prepare and realize a common, harmonized development plan for the border-side areas in Zemplén. The cross-border territory is to be handled based on partnership, and they intend to use local resources and national funding schemes and EU support to promote development. Associations of settlements, advocates of the economic sector, economic actors and NGOs can be found among the founders of the Euroregion on both sides of Zemplén. Adaptation of EU techniques and introducing innovative practices are emphasized among the goals.

Figure 3: Territory of Zemplén Euroregion



Source: Zemplén Euroregion

The development plan of the Euroregion renders possible financial sources to each of its programme points. They had high expectations about boosting development in the Euroregion based on the then current EU priorities (Development of cross-border economic relations, Common infrastructure and environmental investments, Cultural and exchange relations between border-side settlements) and that the EU financial sources would be a great help in fostering development in the region).

In November, 2004 the agreement for a „Carpathian Subcontractor Cluster” was signed with Hungarian, Slovakian and Ukrainian actors. The cooperation was grounded by non-profit organizations to enhance the relation between economic actors, enterprises. The founders aimed to help the formation of economic processes based also on the facilities of the Zemplén Euroregion within the Hungarian-Slovakian-Ukrainian triple-border area.

The „Europe House”, built close to the border crossing point, became the motor of the formation of cross-border relations. A dozen institutes are operating within its frames, all aiming to foster cross-border relations. Europe House is also an incubator house for newly established enterprises. It provides room for them for a few years to assist cross-border activity and relations.

Both settlements strive to get the maximum of tenders. Thanks to its size, Sátoraljaújhely is more intensively taking part in EU projects, but the successful application for the regulation of Ronyva stream has had basically positive impacts on the Slovak side as well.





its specific functional role and the strong presence of armed corps). The rate of Roma population is under 10% here, contrasting the average 50% in other areas. From 2007, after the cease of border control, a part of the Roma population living in Hungary replaced their sphere of criminal activity to the Slovakian side. Theft and robbery became common. They cross over the border not on the border bridge but through the green border and they bring whatever they can move from the Slovakian to the Hungarian side. This issue became common talk, and even a topic in local political campaign. Many of the affected inhabitants regret the strict order on the border, when no crime was committed on the Slovakian side.

## Summary

The state border has been a determining element in the life of Sátoraljaújhely and its region from 1918-1920. The particular generations have gained very different experience about the border and its changes. The generations with border trauma, the ones that personally suffered the most from the negative changes between 1918-1920 and 1944-1945 are passing away these days. Leading positions are now held by the generation that socialized in the era of permeable borders and have little negative experience about the border. This facilitates the forming of relations on both sides.

With the EU accession, an era of open borders with no control has come within the city. The inhabitants in their everyday lives have accustomed to this favourable situation very quickly. Regarding economic, trade, service relations the functional unity of the city has

been restored, however this cannot be said about the official and public service relations, but necessity overleaps these sectors as well in the reality.

In this region the state border haven not been a source of innovation, but first of all an object of permanent adaptation.

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