

Border Proximity as a Factor in Strategic Urban Planning - on the Example of Sub-region Centres Within the Slovak-Hungarian Border Area

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Introduction

Our study aims to assess types of focus that derive from a border's proximity and that act as factors determining the main directions and dynamics of urban development and urban planning strategies in the centres of Hungarian sub-regions in the Slovak-Hungarian border region. The fact of being located on, or close to the border alone is not sufficient to be an aspect worth studying, many other related features play a significant role in perceiving the state border as an environmental element (or as an internal resource) of strategic importance for the development and future of a border settlement. The most important factors related to the border are its legal status and its physical permeability (border-crossings, bridges in case of rivers, road connections). Additional factors such as the state of economic development of the area, other "soft" factors like traditions of cross-border cooperation and a formalized framework (formerly Euro-regions, presently EGTCs) also play a significant role. Historical administrative roles which existed prior to the Trianon peace treaty may still have impacts on the present, but these can easily fade away by a destroyed and not restored bridge over a border river (e.g. in the case of Szécsény). All these factors should be evaluated together attentively during urban development processes, so that they are incorporated into future visions, as well as medium and long-term strategies and all different stages of strategy planning (vision, goals, interventions). We chose to study Hungarian sub-regional centres of the Slovak-Hungarian border area because the legal status of the border practically ensures full permeability, while other, previously mentioned factors occur in very various ways, providing different opportunities for cities to shape their future.

Medium-term strategic documents about Hungarian towns have been developed constantly since 2007 (initially named as integrated urban development strategy (IVS) and as integrated local development strategy (ITS) after 2009) and in some cases have already been reviewed. In a Hungarian context, the obligation of strategic planning along with the preparation of strategic documents was

legally recorded in the Building Act (Étv.) and in its amendment in 2009. Further content clarification took place within the framework to the 314/2012. (XI.8.) Government Regulation. The examination of external and internal environments (status analysis) was a basic starting point in the strategic planning as an inevitable step in planning practices.

In our study, we seek to find out about the way integrated strategic urban development plans evaluate border proximity as a positively or negatively influencing factor on urban development within the Slovak-Hungarian border region, and about the extent to which visions and goals defined in the documents are built upon positively, in each given town. What are the ideas set out in comprehensive development activities and in specific projects that are designed to have a positive effect on the situation of the affected towns, or eliminate the negative consequences?

It is important to note, that based on previous IVS research (Földi et.al., 2009, Balás et.al., 2013), strategic plans were often carried out in a short time and were considered to be compulsory and time-bound to proposal-deadlines in the initial period (2008). Therefore, the actions of real strategic approaches in town management are not necessarily reflected in the documents. However, examining a greater number of documents, certain trends and other factors can be highlighted which relate to the effect of borders on urban development planning.

The study begins with the clarification of basic concepts, including the external and internal factors of strategic planning, followed by placing the state border and the attributes of border proximity - as a determinant of the relative position of settlements - within the definition group of planning-methodology. We take a short tour around the objective factor group that rates border situation followed by a synthesis based on the uniform analysis of the individual plans of each town.

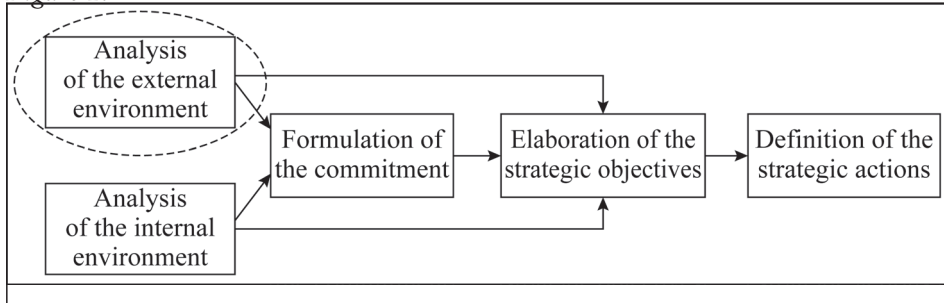
Internal and external factors of strategic planning – location compared to state border, as an external factor

Strategic management that has evolved from the business and enterprise sector (Balaton, 2010) is operated as a flexible system, and is built upon strategic planning and related feedback. During the rational decision-making process of strategy creation (Figure 1) prior to defining the future vision (for enterprises: Quest) the uniformly weighted analysis of external and internal environment is a requirement.

Figure 1.

During the evolution of the strategic approach to corporate governance the simplified scheme of planning-implementation was quickly surpassed and evolved into a flexible management system responsive to external and internal changes, where planning is only a sub-element - more of an iterative process rather than

Figure 1.



Forrás: Balaton, 1997 In: Mészáros 2005, 35.

the manufacture of formalized products (documents).

Seeing the benefits and effectiveness of a strategic approach to planning within company and organisation leadership, urban planning and management and facing new global challenges in the Anglo-Saxon countries, tools applicable to urban areas were gradually adapted by constructing them from the bottom-up in the early 1990s. In addition to recognizing the benefits of the new design approach, strategic management has also gradually become popular during the 1990s. The strategic design method emphasises the impact of external factors (e.g., global economy, environmental problems) in urban planning, rejects the project approach and follows a logic based on dialogue and broad consensus (population, operators, NGOs, urban areas) where an integrated approach and accuracy based on action areas dominates during planning implementation (Albrechts, 2004; 2006).

Strategic thinking and planning - although there are progressive domestic examples from the EU pre-accession period - have been brought to the attention of municipalities as an instrument of development policy (top-down) rather than a grassroots demand for the planning initiative, which is scarcely present in a Hungarian context. The introduction of the plan type was based on government expectations, in compliance with the principles of integrated planning, the basis of the Leipzig Charter, 2007 (The preparation of documents from 2007 was an indispensable condition for the accessibility of the tender funds aimed at urban regeneration and functional expansion available through the construction of ROP, which was founded by the New Hungary Development Plan (2007-2013), the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) and the ESF (European Social Fund)). According to the Étv. (BEA) modification of 2009 the preparation of a strategic plan is no longer optional (depending on intended application), but compulsory for all urban settlements as an additional document to the urban development concept.

What is strategic urban planning? According to the normative definition: “It

is a socio-spatial planning process managed by the public sector, through which a system of visions, interventions and enforcement tools are created. This system integrates and transforms space along with what this space may transform into.” (Albrechts, 2004)

The most important practical characteristic of strategic urban planning and related mentality is that it concentrates on decision-making, actions, results and execution. In order to underpin process-orientation with sustainability it eventually includes efficiency testing (monitoring), feedback and review (Földi, 2011).

Principles and guidelines in the area of urban design within the field of strategic planning have introduced several new extensively examined aspects to the design methodology and practice, such as community (involvement) planning, action area planning, anti-segregation planning or examination of social and financial sustainability. Practical guidelines can be found in the Urban Development Manual (2007, 2009). Although these do not entirely follow the requisites of international scholarly literature on strategic planning, both versions focus on the acquisition of resources as their main goal. The 314/2012. (XI. 8.) Government Regulation has clearly distanced itself from the application requisites while classic hallmarks of strategic planning appear with an increased role, e.g. regarding external factors, a more significant emphasis is placed upon the examination of the agglomeration in an integrated unity with its city and the sectorial environment. However, the actual design scope of ITS is restricted to the area of the settlement, but urges a joint design with the agglomeration.

The range of development is expanded to its immediate vicinity and even global trends, as well as certain economic sectors; social policy requirements may also broaden the definition of the external environment. According to the Urban Development Manual (2007, 2009) the analysis of the external environment in the IVS includes the description of regional role and an analysis of several development documents of various levels that might have an influence on the town. Additionally, the classical external factors influencing the strategy works are not discussed by the document in a systematic way but by a random design based on the demands and preferences of designers and clients. Despite their importance, most of the higher dimensions of the external environment barely appear in national strategic plans, as they are not compulsory chapters (e.g. local effects of global financial market changes or the rearrangement of focal points in the global investment economy, , which undoubtedly affect local opportunities and prospects).

Therefore, based on the scheme of corporate strategic planning (Figure 1) the most important foundation of the urban development strategy is the examination of the external and internal environment. By a classical definition, this can be called evaluation. Regarding future design in terms of external environment, we examine

the ways processes at various territorial levels, structures and their changes are or may be influencing local events, developmental and operational opportunities. During the examination of the internal environment (which represents the town itself or the town and its agglomeration after 2012) a situation assessment is being made of the town and its districts, substantiated by highlighted qualities, statistical data and a complex organizational and operational analysis of the given subject area of development. Findings of the two-level study present ways a town - which is an elementary part of the settlement network, operates in an open system, and can almost only be defined together with its immediate area - can have the ability to adapt to external changes, assess internal capabilities accordingly and build a future based on all of this. The next part of the document after the complex situation assessment is the SWOT analysis - also taken from the business world - that firmly separates the internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external (opportunities and threats) factor groups. Although these analyses have also been made on a district level, their subject was deemed inapplicable at regional level - due to the fact that the external environment is not interpreted the same way as for an entire town. A situation may arise where one of the external factors or processes is evaluated on both levels, or even cases where nearby settlements evaluate the same external factors in opposing ways regarding their future. Some factors of the external environment may even take part in forming the vision. Based on the local evaluation of changes in global economic trends and regional position, the vision of the town may include goals of survival, level control, or dynamic growth, depending on the transformations of the external factors. It is most common for a planning document to include a development priority such as the development of urban services or for a major project to have strong dependence on an external circumstance (other attractions, transit traffic).

The state border is given importance in planning as a factor influencing urban development of those towns that are located close enough to be affected by it in this context. This includes not only the immediate border towns, but also those with a current catchment area that extends to the border, or a road leading through them which leads to a border crossing. Since the territorial scope of practical planning within Hungarian design practice - in the case of the examined IVSs - is mostly limited to the administrative boundary or in some cases to town limits, the state border is usually considered as an external environmental factor. However, as we will see, this is not obvious because many consider the relative position as an internal resource and consider it as a part of the internal environment (border proximity as an internal feature). This mostly has nothing to do with the physical distance of the border and the town. State border characteristics strongly influence even local development strategies (interoperability, availability of crossings, international traffic corridors etc.) and the reason for their changes can be found at higher levels (EU, level of intergovernmental agreements). It calls for a higher level of

analysis of the external environment to understand reasons behind geopolitical, security-related considerations and decisions that result in changes in the quality of borders. There are development programs known from the EU pre-accession period (though not on an urban level, but much like Euroregion programs such as the Euroregion Development Programme, 2001 (Terra Studio Ltd.)), that were significantly dependent on the different accession dates of Hungary and Slovakia, imagining serious logistical improvements based on the traffic load stationing in the Salgótarján area. Because the two neighbouring countries ultimately became EU members at the same time, these plans had to be re-evaluated due to changes in external factors.

In the preparation of the IVSs the specific situation (characteristics) of state borders was considered by planners, but in varying depths, and potential modifications to this situation were generally overlooked in the medium term, which means they have ignored the possibility of change. This, in the ideal situation, is clearly not required in the case of the Austro-Hungarian and the Slovak-Hungarian border areas, since they are within the Schengen zone. Changes with such magnitude regarding borders are possible e.g. the inclusion of Romania into the Schengen zone, which may justify the reassessment of the strategic goals and development of border towns in the future. However, this more than likely will not be realised in 2014 because of the resistance of some EU member states. Besides the legal status that affects the permeability of state borders, the examination of the region's economic and social situation is important in addition to the cooperation's possibilities that can be termed 'soft characteristics'. This may significantly affect local opinions on the way borders might affect urban development.

The role of the state border in the strategic plans of Hungarian sub-region centres along the Slovak-Hungarian border

The Slovak-Hungarian border region belongs to the Schengen zone, thus crossing the border is completely unhindered. The entire length of the border section is 679 km (Hardi, 2008). There are 16 sub-regions located along the Slovak-Hungarian border section; therefore we overviewed the IVSs of 15 towns. The sources of the documents were www.terport.hu and the websites of towns concerned. The IVS of the town of Encs is not included in the documents processed, as it was not available in either of the sources. Findings in respect of the towns' strategic documents were synthesized according to the following document analysis criteria:

- Findings in relation to border proximity, assessment of the border and border margins from the town's viewpoint (e.g. border crossings)

Figure 2. The Hungarian-Slovakian Borderregion



Source: vam.gov.hu

- References to historical role, previous cross-border catchment areas
- Integration of border proximity into the vision and the target system
- Interventions and projects explained by border proximity in the document

In the following, we provide an overview of the effect that borders – as factors coherent with external environmental elements – had on the strategic plans of the towns, the most important being the possibility of crossing and a well-established relationship supported by appropriate infrastructure.

As the test has not calculated in the three ferrying options and the two planned bridges there are currently 29 crossing options (vam.gov.hu) from which five road crossings have opened up since 2007 while nine others opened between 2011 and 2013. This means the latter crossings did not yet exist during the time IVSs were being written (2008-2010)(Figure 2). Prior to 2011, there were only three sub-regions, Tatai, Szécsényi and Encsi without a relevant crossing point, the subsequently created road links have minor cross-border traffic. The Danube and the Ipel are major physical barriers which presuppose the existence of bridges at border crossings in the sub-regions from Mosonmagyaróvári to Szécsényi (although there are three ferry crossings on the Danube). There are two additional border crossing bridges in preparation: near Helemba and Ipolypásztó - the first bridge has a significant role in the strategy of Szob.

Figure 2.

The town of Szob, which is also equipped with a rail station is in a unique position since the town itself has no border crossing (that would be feasible with a bridge on Ipel), but the IVS indicates that the bridge at Helemba is an external factor with a positive future impact that will determine the development (during the strategy development in 2008 only preparations were made, then an intergovernmental agreement decided on the construction of the bridge in 2012). The town's IVS bases the role of being the centre of the Lower Valley of

Ipel on this opinion. A similar bridge construction plan (with capacity-building purposes) that extends beyond local or even national competence is known from the strategy of Komárom. However, the IVS of Szécsény indicates that there is no intention to rebuild a bridge blown up in the war in the foreseeable future, obviously the creation of a direct road link between the two sides of the border was not anticipated either when preparing the IVS (2008). Since the completion of the IVS of Nógrádszakál, the construction of Madách bridge over the Ipel has been completed (2011). The strategic plan of Szécsény has not been renewed; therefore we do not know to what extent a bridge would be of strategic importance.

It can be observed that the border towns that gave more importance to the state border regarding future planning were those with a border crossing that also plays a role in the international transport network plans (such as the Pan-European transport corridors). According to the NRDC (OKT; VATI, 2005) the eastern section of the border - with the exception of from Sátoraljaújhely - is completely disregarded from the European network, which weakens the role of the crossing points within strategy-building as its impact and importance is below European scale. On the western border section, however, the international network connection is in contact with every crossing point (Rajka (Mosonmagyaróvár) Vámosszabadi (Győr), Komárom, Esztergom) so they are evaluated accordingly within strategies. Traffic -related development analysis about the impact of the border (and its crossings) also receives a high priority within the situation assessment and the strategic chapters of the IVSs of border towns in the eastern section.

Beyond infrastructure-related external factors certain settlements also put emphasis on the traditional, historical role of their town during strategy building, but as we shall see below, this role may be strongly modified by other factors. Mosonmagyaróvár, Győr, Komárom, Esztergom, Balassagyarmat and Sátoraljaújhely were all county seats in 1900. Some played the role of district centres: e.g. Salgótarján, Szécsény and Szob. The Trianon peace treaty caused changes in the administrative status, a significant retraction of catchment areas and the birth of areas without any centres on both the Hungarian and Slovakian sides of the border (Beluszky, 1999, Baranyi, 2004; Hardi, 2008). This was a historical setback in the case of multiple towns (e.g. Balassagyarmat, Szécsény), but later upgraded other settlements in their former catchment area, that were trapped on the other side of the border without urban centres (e.g. Encs, Cigánd, Gönc) or were given a role in the socialist industrialisation (e.g. Ózd). Despite their 'artificial' upgrading, new sub-centres regard themselves as being isolated due to their border position, which could not even be changed significantly by the free passage benefits of the Schengen zone, at least according to the testimony of the IVSs (Ózd, Encs, Gönc, Cigánd). The joint Hungarian and Slovak accession to the EU (2004) followed by unlimited border permeability (the extension of the Schengen Convention in

2007) has reawakened the mutually nostalgic and realistic vision of expanding sub-regional centre roles of several border towns. As we shall see, this ambition presents itself as an external factor in setting the vision and the target system of the IVSs, but in a different fashion on the western and eastern borders.

Another external soft factor besides urban strategy-building and cross-border bilateral cooperation is the specific formalised framework they are included in. The formalised background of cross-border cooperation is productive on both sections (east-west), so the EGTCs (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation) formerly known as Euro-regions enabled the foundation to create a number of organisations to stimulate cross-border cooperation and to mobilize targeted development resources. Opportunities and the area of free movement differ within Euro-regions and EGTCs, clearly in favour of the latter. The EGTC delegates much wider powers to municipalities operating on a cross-border basis: they can create and maintain joint institutions and may also found economic enterprises. Thus they receive similar powers as counties in Hungary (IVS, Esztergom, 2010, p.66). There were eight Euro-regions operating on the Slovak-Hungarian border, while nine EGTCs were formed in the period up to 2013 (Raba-Danube-Vah EGTC (2011), Arrabona EGTC (2011), Pons Danubii EGTC (registered in Slovakia), Ister Granum EGTC (2008) Novohrad-Nógrád EGTC, Karst Bodva EGTC, Sajó-Rima EGTC (2013), Ung-Tisza-Túr Sió EGTC (2012), Bodroghközi EGTC (2012), Abaúj- Abaujban EGTC (2010)). Since 2007, founding an EGTC in Hungary is possible in the framework of the law of XCIX. 2007 on the European groupings of territorial cooperation, but the Slovak-Hungarian border collaborations have mostly been created since 2010, which means that EGTCs could not be published in IVSs written between 2008 and 2010 yet - except for the Ister-Granum EGTC (it was formed from a Euro-region with the same name in 2008). This, along with local EGTC development aspects, was also mentioned in the IVS of Esztergom and acts as a foundation for the town's agglomeration and development plan. The IVS of the town of Szob forms ambitions to become a cross-border centre to the Ipel Lower Valley area in reference to the goals of both the Ister-Granum and Ipel Euro-regions (Szob IVS, p.29). From the rest of the IVSs, Balassagyarmat IVS (Ipel ER) and, in collaboration with several partners, Sátoraljaújhely IVS discusses in detail the versatile options of potential euro-region cooperation. The IVS of Salgótarján calls the effects of formal cooperation (Euroregio Neogradiensis) moderate, and sees its reason in the mutually disadvantaged state of the neighbouring region of Slovakia (IVS Salgótarján, p. 5). Komárom mentions two euro-regional memberships as well, but does not consider the role and objectives to be well enough established (Komárom IVS p.88.). The IVSs of Mosonmagyaróvár, Győr, Tata, Szécsény, Ózd, Kazincbarcika, Edelény, Gönc and Cigánd do not formally give relevance to this factor regarding their strategic plan; nevertheless they also

build strategies for cross-border relations systems (e.g. Mosonmagyaróvár).

East-West development dichotomy experienced in both of the neighbouring countries strongly affects operative cooperation willingness and activity that has significant implications for local development needs and opportunities. This is partially due to the tangible differences between how border proximity is being perceived regarding the development of different towns within the development documents of eastern and western border regions. Both sides of the eastern border section are seriously lagging behind particularly in terms of economy which has an impact on cooperation and on the nature of (visible) development requirements incurred by each town. As already mentioned, the strategic plan of Salgótarján identifies the similarly low development level of the Slovakian side as the reason for failure in formalised cooperation. A total of two IVSs were found in the eastern part of the Slovak- Hungarian border section (Salgótarján and Szécsény IVS), which provide an explanation for the reason for giving a restricted role to borders in the towns' future plans in terms of economic cooperation. It is more typical not to mention non-existent features (in their case, an economic cooperation) in situation assessments and to refrain from indicating possible obstacles besides the possibilities in development documents. Explanatory texts in the two IVSs are almost identical since their supplements were made by the same consulting firm, but its validity can be uniformly interpreted along the entire border section:

“The development effects deriving from border location have so far remained subdued despite the initiatives implemented in this area, as the connecting Central Slovakian area is also less-favoured within Slovakia [...]. Some of the economic development regulators and incentives in effect in Slovakia often have adverse impacts on the bordering Hungarian areas in particular, including Szécsény and surroundings (business relocation, significant labour inflow in addition to high unemployment rate, a more favourable support of applying Slovak workers in Hungarian businesses). All of these largely determine the socio- economic development opportunities in the region.” (Szécsény IVS, p.5.)

Based on the development strategies of border towns in the eastern section and the above mentioned citation, the analysis of the effects of economic, educational and other cooperation is much less typical than in the documents of border towns in the western border section. The development strategy of Mosonmagyaróvár deals with incomparably different external conditions:

“The situation in Mosonmagyaróvár is determined by a very dynamic border-related regional economic environment within which keeping and improving competitiveness appears to be a significant challenge. Since the EU accession and the termination of state borders Mosonmagyaróvár must stand its ground in an international competition within the Vienna-Bratislava-Győr triangle. Though the town's previous 'gate role' resulting from the meeting point between three countries (Slovakia, Hungary, Austria) is losing its importance exponentially, its

place is taken over by a regional industrial-commercial and service-recreational role under the growing appreciation for regionalism. Economic development processes and municipal relations are now formed by much more organic regional organizations based on infrastructural features” (Mosonmagyaróvár IVS, p.19.).

In the IVS of border towns, an important aspect of analysis within economy is the assessment of commercial and other services, based on which planners (especially in the eastern section) were able to notice the impact of border crossings on urban development (i.e. development of shopping tourism attractiveness). Regarding permeability participants of the planning process recognised further opportunities concerning cross-border ecological zones in the fields of nature and environment protection and more importantly in tourism development - a topic which is addressed with a similar emphasis in the case of towns close to the border (Szob, Salgótarján). In the IVS of towns along the western section of the border, topics on permeability in terms of urban development are based on deeper, more versatile relationships, and cover development in fields such as education and healthcare (Mosonmagyaróvár, Esztergom).

Various factors related to the border should not merely be examined by themselves, but also depending on how they are evaluated in various stages of strategy construction and on what level they are integrated in future planning (vision, goals and specific interventions).

Borders are not necessarily interpreted as part of the external environment in analysis documents; it is rather its presence that is expressed through the relative position of the town to the border (border or close to border position). Materials mostly consider this situation (position) as a fact so it is indeed difficult to judge whether border proximity (position) is interpreted as an internal attribute or it is a part of the external environment which determines internal conditions and development demands. This has relevance in the SWOT analysis - but is also an important aspect in determining the competence of development demands. It is important to note that not all documents include a town level SWOT analysis (e.g. Komárom, Mosonmagyaróvár, Esztergom, Szob, Szécsény, Salgótarján, Sátoraljaújhely) - this is most likely because it is expected solely on a district level in thematic schemes. Tata and Kazincbarcika assess the proximity of the border as a possibility (external feature), due to their significant physical distance from the border. In the fine-tuned IVS of Győr neither the border nor the border river are considered as relevant: the economy-based SWOT indicates the cooperation with Vienna and Bratislava as an opportunity. Similarly, the proximity of the border or the border crossing are not evaluated in the subject area of regional endowments since in the case of Győr, being part of the Golden Triangle, this factor does not even come up in this context.

Balassagyarmat assesses the strong transport hub and gateway function as a strength (i.e. internal factor) while in the case of Edelény the proximity of the

border is also evaluated as a strength (in the latter case, it is difficult to understand because while Balassagyarmat is practically on the border, Edelény is approx. 40 km away). For Ózd the proximity of the border is evaluated only in relation to infrastructure as both a strength (internal) and an opportunity (external), but in all cases as positive. Gönc is 3 km from the border crossing, its overall location is assessed as a weakness (internal factor):

“The town of Gönc lays in the Abaúj part of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, on the east side of Hernad river valley, at the foothills of the Tokaj-Prešov (Tokaj-Eperjes) mountain range, near the Slovak border. The settlement is remote from the capital city, the county seat and other more developed regions, and is logistically misfortunately secluded” (Gönc IVS, p.63.)

This shows how diverse the perception of a permeable border section with the same neighbouring country can be from an urban planning perspective, and how many other factors can influence the approach to the visions about the border and the impact on local development opportunities.

In theory, the vision and objective settings contained in the documents shows the extent to which a town bases its future on border proximity. For the towns of Tata, Szécsény, Edelény and Gönc there is no reference of any form to the role of the border in the towns' vision and objective settings. The IVSs of Tata and Gönc explicitly state that all developments must rely on the internal resources of the sub-region. In the case of Tata this is more comprehensible due to its bigger distance and the lack of border crossing, while in the case of Gönc this strategic concept is more difficult to accept since the town is only 3 km away from the border, and serves as an international animal health care station.

The vision clearly builds upon its border proximity in the case of Szob: successful integration role in the Lower Valley of Ipel (both Hungarian and Slovak sides). Salgótarján envisions itself as the centre of industrial employment and labour markets for the eastern part of Euregio Neogradensis. Sátoraljaújhely does not consider becoming the centre of a cross-border region in the future, but regardless it aims to expand relations with some settlements across the border besides its own sub-region. On the western border, the ambition of obtaining a central role in a cross-border area (with managing undertones) is only marginally emphasized. In this border region, the levels of both economic development and structuring are high, cross-border roles are based on partnerships. Economic poles such as Győr indubitably have a significant cross-border attraction – however the same catchment area is targeted by Bratislava as well. Mosonmagyaróvár, located near the tri-border point, aims to keep and strengthen international competitiveness besides the recovery of the town's old catchment area. For towns along this border region, such as Esztergom, position in the macro-regional networks serves as a benchmark. Towns also aim to locate themselves within the pan-European structure (transport, economy). This kind of thinking is scarce in

the IVS of towns along the eastern section of the border.

The nature of the specified interventions and projects reflect on the complexity of features of the border section as well as the perceptions regarding proximity to the borders. There are three development goals with the same weight along both the eastern and western border sections. One of them is the demand of lifting traffic load generated by border-crossings (construction of bypass roads, road widening, increasing traffic safety). These development demands arising from increased border traffic are also present in towns without border crossings or even towns further away from the border such as Ózd, Kazincbarcika or Edelény. Traffic problems on feeder roads of border crossings can also be felt here resulting in major urban development issues. The second, similarly influential target generated by the border is the development of urban services, both quantitatively and qualitatively. These measurements fundamentally aim to service transitional traffic, but increasing the direct commercial and service attractiveness of the destination is also gaining emphasis in the case of towns such as Balassagyarmat, where the IVS is designed to create opportunities to exploit larger chain stores and to attract customers from the other side of the border. The townscape and functional development of the town centre is linked to the goal of strengthening central functions and thereby its attractiveness – the studied towns intend to fulfil their duties with a townscape and content worthy of their title of at least sub-regional centres, which is only fortified further by their ambitions of extending their catchment areas beyond borders.

Further development ideas in development strategies on the western section of the border (e.g. the development of higher education institutions, infrastructure and development of health services) are not only based on border location, the documents also show that during the planning of the scale and quality of improvements, needs of the adjacent areas in Slovakia were calculated in as well.

Summary

In our study, we examined the extent to which sub-regional centres on the Slovak- Hungarian border considered various factors related to their border proximity during the preparation of their urban development strategies. In our view the border is mentioned as an external environmental element (external factor) in the strategic planning process, but we accept that in some cases it can also be interpreted as an internal factor. During our survey, we found that free passage of the Schengen zone border is not uniformly perceived as a positive asset and integrated in the strategy when preparing the urban development document. Evaluation and integration of the role of the border in the strategy depends on further objective facts (factors) which can be examined on the basis of the document. However, regarding the rate the topic is processed, the attitude and thoroughness of local leaders with respect to planning also plays a role.

Differences between development strategies, concerning the rate at which the topic is processed primarily occur in correlation with an east-west slope of development on both sides of the border, traditions of cooperation and the nature of bilateral relations. Perceptions on the development impact of the state border also vary according to its physical permeability, its distance from the town and the town's traditional roles. Individual factors are typically added up and thus significant differences are mapped out in the nature of strategy building and in its formalised presentation. The border on the western part - in spite of the Danube as a border river - was scarcely interpreted as an obstacle to overcome in the integration process. Towns envision themselves as part of a macro-regional network with an integrated transportation, economic and human service role. In the case of the documents of historic centres on the eastern border section, the recovery of catchment areas and the fortification of their central features (primarily service, commercial roles) were prevalent which is reflected in the vision and the formulation of development goals as well. Sub-regional centres along the eastern border section - from Salgótarján to Sátoraljaújhely - are mostly non-traditional centres falling further away from the border, and the possible energizing effect of the border is much less detectable in their strategies - even compared to towns of the eastern border section.

In a historical perspective the state border is not a factor that is reasonably easily stimulated; however a number of related features arise (change in legal status, new border crossings, road link building, intensification of cross-border cooperation and exploitation of EGTC opportunities) that may change the way of development of border settlements in the future. These factors are external factors of urban development, which, in contrast to the current design practice are worth deeper consideration to allow towns to receive the greatest possible benefits from their proximity to the border. It is advised to pay heed to the process of change in border-related dynamic factors and to initiative processes besides changes in the preparation of strategic documents that envision the future of towns near non-EU neighbours and border sections still outside of the Schengen zone.

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