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**Transborder Movements and  
Relations in the Slovakian–Hungarian  
Border Regions**

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of the Slovakian–Hungarian Border Region



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## Introduction

Our study features the findings of a research conducted in the Slovak–Hungarian border region, implemented in the framework of the Hungary–Slovakia–Ukraine Neighbourhood Programme, co-financed by the European Union and the Republic of Hungary. Two institutions participated in the research: the West Hungarian Research Institute of the Centre for Regional Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Győr) and the Forum Institute in Slovakia (Somorja).

The aim of the research was to study the everyday movements of the population living in the border region. We assumed that the accession to the Union and the Schengen Zone would promote the integration of the border region, the development and expansion of the cross-border interactions, and in the end the birth of cross-border regions in the areas in good positions.

Along the internal borders of the European Union it is an ever more important issue whether the integration of the states will bring about the integration of the cross-border regions as well. The possibility is given, the borders can be crossed without any problem, the movements of the citizens and the businesses are free from any obstacles. The issue of integration is of special importance in the border regions: the other state and its citizens are “physically close”; a single space built on geographical logics can be created in the everyday life. It is a question, however, how the border affects the lives of the citizens in the border region. Do they actually use the other side of the border? Can the border region of the neighbour state become part of their everyday lives? In the use of workplaces and economic opportunities which factor will be stronger: the nation state traditions or the logics of the geographical proximity?

The answers to the questions above are different in all various border regions. Integration is influenced by the historical past, the ethnic and geographical conditions, the economic development and the differences of this, and not last the disparities in the political, administrative and public services systems of the neighbour states.

Travelling in Europe we experience that border regions do exist, we see existing and formalised relations, but the “wall” between the two border regions are still there, despite the physically non-existing borders (*Paasi-Prokkola*, 2008), the number and content of the interactions do not increase to the extent that is expected. In other places the inhabitants of the border regions have a rich system of relations with those on the other side of the border, irrespective of the relationship of the two states and the officially created cross-border organisations.

Our research conducted in 2007 and 2008 was focused on the Slovak–Hungarian border region. The research area was usually the 20-kilometre stripe along the border, extended in accordance with our experiences in some places with settlements and areas that functionally can be taken as border settlements or regions. Our

research area is thus a functional area, home to approximately 2 million people, which cannot be designated by administrative borders. We made a questionnaire survey with the population, with a sample of 2000 people, and we also approached approximately 500 commuting employees. We also made interviews with non-governmental organisations, public institutions, local governments, economic actors etc.

The Slovak–Hungarian border section is 679 kilometres long; this is the longest border section of Hungary. Moving from west to east along the border the development disparities are definite. A speciality of the border region is that even on the Slovakian side of the border the number and proportion of the Hungarian ethnic population is significant; there are settlements and areas where Slovak citizens with Hungarian ethnicity are the majority.

In the border region the integration of the population and the economic actors is increasing. Approximately 30 thousand employees from Slovakia work in Hungary, and commuting from Hungary to Slovakia has also appeared by now. More and more businesses have locations in the neighbour country, other choose school or even placed of residence in the neighbour state. The agglomeration of Bratislava, the capital city of Slovakia, has reached Hungary by now, several hundreds of Slovakian families have bought homes in the villages along the border of North-west Hungary, in fact, the extension of the public transport of Bratislava towards Hungary is an issue today. At the same time, Budapest has a strong gravity on the border areas of Central Slovakia. On both sides we find smaller towns in the proximity of the border whose theoretical (and more and more often the practical) catchment areas reach into the other side of the border and integrate smaller areas. For a part of the population it has become natural by now to do the shopping or use services on the other side of the border. Due to the common past there are also family and friendly relations.

The accession of the two states to the European Union in 2004 and to the Schengen Agreement later also contributed to the development of the everyday relations, but the process have decades of history by now. The occasionally “cool” relationship of the two states cannot be felt in the micro-level relations, in the economically more advanced areas of the borders we can see the first steps of the birth of single border regions. The private sector is ahead of the official relations. A part of the inhabitants and the economic sector “use” the other side of the border in their everyday lives. The separating role of the “mental border” is less of a problem here than in some other European border areas. In the areas more developed economically (especially in the western part, the areas along the axis of the Danube River, belonging to the hinterland of three capital cities: Vienna, Bratislava and Budapest) the joint development is very dynamic. The rapid economic development of Slovakia has also given a great momentum to the integration, and now areas at the same level of development are building a common cross-border region

and urban network. On the eastern part of the border this dynamism is less palpable. This is an area where less developed regions meet each other. Nevertheless the city of Košice and its environment is developing, and the labour market of this region is now seeking skilled employees on the Hungarian side of the border.

Of course there are still many obstacles to the complete integration. The national systems (education, health care, public administration, bureaucracy etc.) still have difficulties in handling the natural processes of cross-border areas. Those who cross the borders are actually foreign citizens but still “local inhabitants”. It is difficult to put them into the traditional categories of “domestic” and “foreign” citizens, and the administrative problems coming from this may cause difficulties e.g. in the joint and thus more rational use of health care institutions. These problems often lead to harmful phenomena; some use the existing differences for e.g. tax evasion purposes. Our experiences suggest that these phenomena are important but their significance is relatively small compared to those natural processes that bind the border regions and strengthen its integration.

## **1 Integration of the border region**

Border regions are those areas along the state borders whose life and socio-economic processes are considerably influenced by the existence of the state border (*Hansen, 1983*). By now the separating role of the borders within the European Union has weakened in importance. We do have to emphasise the fact that the extension of the border region is now regulated not (only) by the state border itself but also the spatial structural characteristics of the separated border areas, the cross-border linkages of the urban and transport networks, and the different socio-economic features of the two sides of the borders. These factors together make those cross-border civil and economic movements that make the border regions of the nation state areas so peculiar. These days and in the region in our survey those areas can be taken as border regions whose everyday lives are basically influenced by the interactions maintained with the neighbour border region. The literature on spatial borders more and more often refers to the fact of practical life that the sharp separation of regions (areas belonging to different states in this place) is now outdated and its more and more transitory zones among the systems that become typical (*Fleischer, 2001; Novotny, 2007*). In reality the two definitions together are valid, as the role of the state border shaping the spatial structure still cannot be neglected, even if the physical barrier of the state border has ceased to exist in the case of the internal Schengen borders. Even in the case of the total elimination of the state border (like the internal German border) the borderline lives on coming from its historical role, as it played an important role in creating the development and network characteristics of the border region during the development of the nation state. The

internal borders of the EU only secure the complete freedom of border crossing; the differences of the nation state systems regulating everyday life still exist. The external borders of the European Union and the non-EU borders are still a physical barrier to the free development of interactions. This double definition thus involves the functional approach to the border region and is less suitable for the designations on administrative grounds. We can see that neither definition allows us to make a sharp and exact designation of the border regions, as each function has its own space of action different from the others: employment creates a catchment area different from that of shopping etc. Also, in many places we must make a compromise, e.g. when making the reference area of this present survey. Based on the findings of our researches conducted beforehand, we automatically specified a 20-kilometre stripe as border region, then we enlarged this zone on empirical ground by mostly urban areas that are the centres of the cross-border movements and the first important stations along the roads crossing the borders.

Our definition of border region can be based on the examination of the following phenomena:

- We must look at the position of the border region in the order of the regions of the neighbour countries by level of spatial development; also, the introduction of the development disparities among the border regions gives us important information. Besides the featuring of the structural basis and the centre-periphery relations it is important to know those development axes of spatial development that have been or are born in the frameworks of spatial units, macro-regions bigger than the nation states. These may be determined by the urban network, the historical state or empire frameworks but also by the spatial features of the modern economy on European scale.
- One of the most important influencing factors of the movements (or potential movements) of the inhabitants is the space of action of the cities, the relationship of the urban network and the state border. The separating role of the border narrows down the theoretical hinterlands and vice versa, there are areas that are not in the hinterland of any Hungarian town or city or are only weakly integrated, they are peripheries without urban centres. In general we can say that one of the most important manifestations of the historical spatial development role of the state borders is the transformation of the urban hinterlands. The majority of our daily movements are linked to the characteristics of the settlement network: employment, or the use of different services, schools are less and less restricted to the place of residence, we have jobs or use these services in different settlements or centres. For the population in the border region these can be in the same country but can also be other settlements closer in space but in the territory of another country.



- The development of the transport network usually has a mutually reinforcing interaction with the above two factors. The cross-border sections of the elements of the large-scale networks are usually designed for transit traffic and are not very important in themselves for the border regions. The actual crossing of the border is not a loss of time these days, the former function of the border, the stopping of the traffic does not exist any longer. These tracks, however, may be very important for the accessibility of the border regions, which may lessen the peripheral situation that is often caused by other factors. The other important level of the transport network is the elements of the network connecting the inner areas of the border region, whose cross-border integration is often much more problematic than that of the large axes. One of the most important determining factors of the spatial structure of the border regions are these roads (including bridges, ferries and lines of public transport), as they directly influence the accessibility of the centres (including the ones on the other side of the border).

All these designate the range of those movements and interactions that shape the internal network and integration of the border regions. The number, intensity and direction of these movements allow us to differentiate among the basic types of the cross-border interactions, on the basis of which we can define the basic inner structure of the whole border region (alienated, co-existing, mutually cooperating and integrated border regions). These types are splendidly featured by the model of Martinez (*Martinez, 1994, 7*), that we used during our work.

## **2 The Slovak–Hungarian border region**

### **2.1 History of the border**

The Slovak–Hungarian border region is situated in an area that belonged to single state formations until the end of World War I: the Kingdom of Hungary and the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy. The state border between Czechoslovakia and Hungary was created by the peace treaty concluding World War I. The state border did not follow the ethnic border: significant areas with Hungarian majority were annexed to Czechoslovakia. In the peace treaty of 1920 the border was designated mainly on the basis of economic, military-strategic and transport geographical considerations (*Hevesi–Kocsis, 2003*), thus the network of personal relations, the aspects of the settlement network and ethnic considerations, all important for the organisation of the everyday life, were not considered during the decision-making. The border was pushed northwards in connection with the Munich Treaty in 1938, and this situation existed until the end of World War II. Then the agreement on the

ceasefire restored the situation existing before 1938, and the peace treaty annexed another small area to Czechoslovakia from the area of Bratislava. After the disintegration of Czechoslovakia, Slovakia inherited the state borders.

The border regions are multi-ethnic areas. On the Slovakian side the proportion of the Hungarian ethnic population is significant along the total border section; in fact, there are still areas with Hungarian majority, especially along the western part of the border. In some districts Hungarians make over 80% of the inhabitants. (In the whole of Slovakia the proportion of Hungarians is around 5%, most of them live in the zone along the border.) Along the eastern section of the border the situation is different, areas and villages with both Hungarian and Slovakian majority can be found here.

On the Hungarian side we also find inhabitants and villages of Slovak ethnicity. Although the proportion of Slovaks within the population of Hungary is small (0.17%), along the border we still find many villages where Slovak ethnicity lives.

## **2.2 Economic development**

The amount of GDP produced at NUTS 3 level clearly indicates that the most developed areas of both states can be found along the common border. The strong economic concentration of the western border section is undeniable. The capital cities of both countries have a significant and still growing share of the production in their countries. Bratislava in 1995 possessed 24.6% of the GDP produced in Slovakia, and this share grew to 27.3% by 2005. The concentration of Budapest is even bigger, as it was 33.9% already in 1995, to increase to 35.9% by 2005. Among the NUTS 3 units along the border, the growth of the western ones is dynamic. Both in Hungary and Slovakia the increase over the national average was typical in these areas from 1995 to 2005. In Slovakia it is Trnava after Bratislava that boasts of the highest production per capita, but during the whole of the decade the districts of Nitra and Zilinsky show the fastest growth after Bratislava. Their share from the production of Slovakia also increased during this decade, while the proportion of Banská Bystrica, Prešov and Trenčín districts decreased. In the east it is only the Košice district that shows a considerable growth, approaching the national average. All these demonstrate that the economic power of Slovakia is concentrated in the western and northern areas of the country, in the east Košice stands out as an island. On the Hungarian side of the border it is the western areas too that show the fastest growth, and the highest amount of goods produced, only surpassed by the capital city. The weight of Budapest (and Pest county) within Hungary exceeds that of Bratislava and Trnava districts together in Slovakia, both in value produced and the number of population. Despite the basically high level of development of the western counties in Hungary then the regional disparities in the whole of Hungary and

also across the border counties are bigger than in Slovakia. In Hungary the western counties (Győr-Moson-Sopron and Komárom-Esztergom counties) grew far above the national average in the decade in question, and have become the most developed Hungarian counties after Budapest by now.

Symmetry is clearly visible: along the western section of the border the most advanced areas of the respective countries can be found on both sides. In Slovakia the three neighbouring western districts (Bratislava, Trnava and Nitra), in Hungary Budapest and three counties (Pest, Komárom-Esztergom and Győr-Moson-Sopron) produce half of the GDP of the respective country. Especially in Slovakia this proportion seems to be growing. On the other hand, the development level of the eastern part is below the average on both sides; although Košice stands out as an island in Slovakia, Miskolc is unable to have the same function in Hungary.

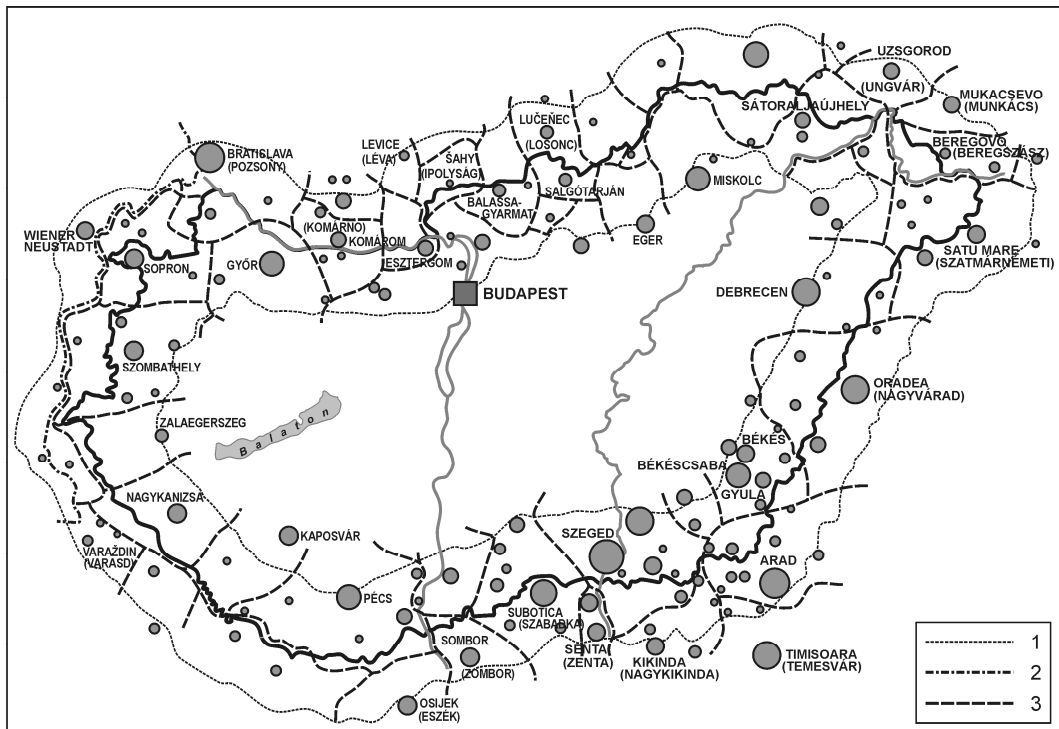
### **2.3 The urban network**

The borders in the Carpathian Basin are young historical creations, and in many places the spatial structural elements (transport axes, urban hinterlands) crossing the present borders did not cease to exist; they may only have weakened to some extent. The weakening of the separating role of the borders allows their partial re-creation. At the same time we cannot neglect the fact that over the last decades, both in Hungary and in the neighbour states, processes affecting the spatial structure took place (industrialisation, urbanisation, transformation of the administrative structures and the ethnic relations) that in many places do not allow the automatic restoration of the spatial relations that had existed before the designation of the borders (*Figure 1*). On the other hand, there are new, formerly non-existing spatial needs that cross the present borders (suburbanisation, commuting of the labour force).

The borders drawn in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century had an impact on the further development of the cities and other settlements in the vicinity of the borders. Several cities lost some of their previous functions, but some settlements came out as winners, especially in areas where the region was cut by the border from its former centre (*Hardi-Pap, 2006*). After the designation of the borders there were several cities that lost the major part of their hinterlands and thereby their central functions within the new state territories, and their population hardly increased during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, parallel to the decline of their central roles (e.g. Balassagyarmat, Kráľovský Chlmec). These cities and towns, having lost their county and district functions, found themselves in lower hierarchy categories. In the areas along the present borders, especially in the mountainous areas, the average size of the towns was smaller anyway than in the Great Hungarian Plain, thus the same hierarchy levels concerned smaller towns in these regions (*Beluszky-Győri, 2005*). These small towns, having lost their administrative functions, were practically

Figure 1

Urban hinterlands in border regions cut by the borders of Hungary



Legend: 1 – Boundary of 30 km border zone; 2 – Historical state border; 3 – Zone of influence.

Source: Kovács, 1990.

deprived of any considerable urban development during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Especially in the eastern, mountainous section it is typical that the peripheral situation of the border regions is due to a large extent to the tearing apart of the urban hinterlands. Areas of considerable size remained without service centres during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the small and medium-sized towns were cut from their rural hinterlands by the border, and the substituting centres were far away in bad traffic access. The designation of the border deprived several towns and cities of their county seat role, and there were towns (especially in the east) that could not develop further after the loss of their hinterlands (*Mezei, 2006*).

On the other hand, many towns and cities were born or strengthened, climbed up in the hierarchy during the past decades, having services with more significant attraction on the other side of the border than at any time of their past. Such a city is Bratislava itself, together with South Komarno (*Sikos–Tiner, 2007*) and Salgótarján.

Of course there were cities that developed due to political and economic effects. In the socialist era, in addition to the political decisions also the economic policy decisions, giving preference to industrialisation-linked urban development, often favoured the cross-border regions and settlements. In Hungary the goal was the development of the northeast-southwest “industrial axis”, in the neighbour countries the objective was to increase the proportion of the urban spaces. Parallel to this, industrial development also affected settlements in the proximity of the borders, as they were either traditional urban/industrial centres or were important due to their geographical location. This way a considerable industrial development took place along the Danubian section of the Hungarian–Czechoslovakian border (Bratislava, Győr, Komárom/Komarno, Nové Zámky, Lábatlan, Nyergesújfalu etc.), and also along the eastern section (Salgótarján, Ózd, Putnok, Kazincbarcika, Košice). All these factors explain why in the socialist era the border regions were not always identical with the regions in the economic peripheries; several border regions and cities had a considerable development in these decades. There are many essays drawing attention to this fact (*Rechnitzer, 1999; Süli-Zakar, 2000; Baranyi, 2004*).

The cities formulating cross-border regions can be classified into three categories: capital cities, middle towns in the border region or in the vicinity of border, and finally the small towns along the border.

This border region is shaped by the effects of three capital cities. All three capital cities can be found close to the state border, accordingly their hinterlands reach beyond the borders in some form. Each has significant, although different impact on the development of the border region. Vienna and Budapest have been restoring their traditional catchment areas since the middle of the 1990s. It is especially Vienna that has outstanding opportunities in this respect. Vienna has actually made Bratislava its “twin city”, what is missing for the faster common develop-

ment is primarily the direct and good quality transport connection. The commuters' trains of the Austrian railway company (Euroregion trains) have scheduled lines and preferential tariffs from Vienna towards Tatabánya and Szombathely in Hungary, and also towards the border region of the Slovakia and the Czech Republic. It is no wonder then that in the western part of the border region it is the central relations directed towards Vienna that are strengthening. Budapest has, may have a similar function in the central part of Slovakia. However, the infrastructure background for this is missing, and the establishment and organisation of these systems is blocked by political problems, among other things. There is no high quality road and rail access from Budapest to Central Slovakia; although its construction fits into the network development plans of the Union, the designation of the tracks is a matter of political debates between the two countries. Compared to the two big capital cities, the cross-border role of Bratislava is much more moderate. Bratislava is strengthening its relations to Vienna, there are several fast ship lines between the two cities (Wienslava–Bratiswien), the motorway has already been built and the construction of through train, in fact, high speed railway line is also probable. The cross-border attraction of the capital city of Slovakia is mostly built on the suburbanisation process. Real estate prices in the rapidly growing Bratislava are in a sharp contrast with the relatively lower real estate prices on the other side of the border, in the Austrian and Hungarian areas, which are peripheries in their respective countries. The outmigration of the inhabitants of Bratislava to these areas started quickly, and they commute across the border towards Bratislava. This process has an increasingly important impact on the Hungarian areas along the border, as they are in an extremely good transport position. Outflow is further reinforced by the elimination of the control on border crossing; on the other hand, it is set back by the fact that the Hungarian areas – unlike the Austrian ones – lack suburban public transport towards the capital city of Slovakia. Infrastructure is given (motorway, railway). If transport is organised, the agglomeration of Bratislava will reach right to Mosonmagyaróvár, as not only the population moves out from a big city going through suburbanisation, but also the economic actors that follow the inhabitant, seeking lower cost locations (or rented offices), as it has already happened in the agglomeration of Vienna and Budapest. In addition there is a geographical point of outstanding value, a crossing of motorways in the vicinity of a big city, like the crossing of the motorways M1 and M15 in the Hungarian territory.

Along the total length of the border we find small and medium-sized towns from Győr to Košice and Sátoraljaújhely, and these towns are expanding their catchment areas to both sides of the border in some way. In some places it concerns the commuting of the labour force (Győr), in other places it is in commerce (Salgótarján, Sátoraljaújhely), in other places it is in the field of public services, almost the total of life (Komárom, Esztergom). In western part we find cities in

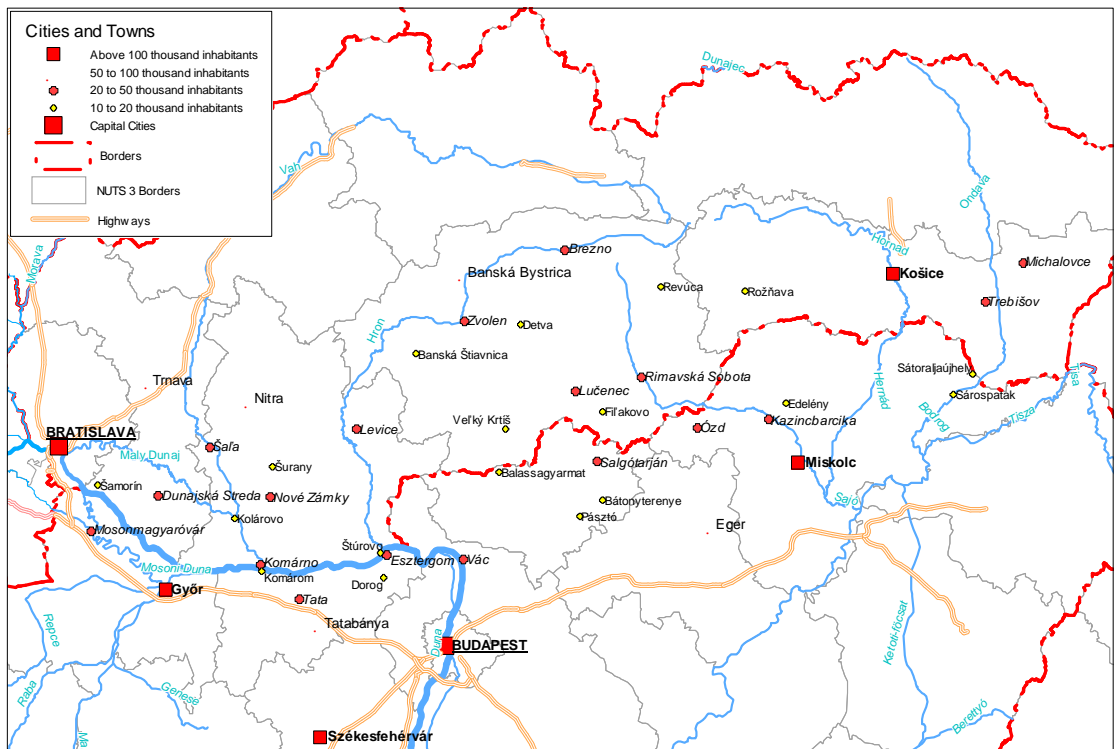
the direct proximity of the border which are bigger and have more significant economic potential (Mosonmagyaróvár, Győr, Komárom and Komarno, the twin cities Esztergom and Sturovo [Figure 2]), in the eastern part of the border region the bigger cities are farther away from the border. Not even the hinterlands of the towns with 20 to 50 thousand inhabitants, offering an almost complete range of central functions, cover the whole region. Along this long border section we find Salgótarján, Ózd and Kazincbarcika, in Slovakia Lučenec and Rimavská Sobota in the vicinity of the border. All are small towns, even the county seats, except Salgótarján. The major centres (Košice and Miskolc) are situated a bit farther from border. In Slovakia the urban development of the last decades took place more north of the border (with the exception of Košice), while the majority of the towns that were middle towns in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were not able to increase the number of their population (Horváth, 2004). As a result of this, significant areas without urban centres emerged, especially in the contact zone of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county and the district of Košice.

By the location of the centres, the border region can be divided into five typical functional zones.

- 1) The agglomeration of Bratislava. This involves the traditional suburban zone of the Slovakian side right until Somorja, the main commuting region of the capital city of Slovakia. The agglomeration of Bratislava has reaches across the state border by now; it involves the area of Mosonmagyaróvár close to the border and also some Austrian territories. The agglomeration is contiguous to the agglomeration of Vienna; the impact of the two capital cities is jointly shaping the area.
- 2) The zone of the Danube cities. This entails Győr and the so-called Danube city pairs, e.g. Komarno/Komárom and Sturovo/Esztergom. It is especially the transport geographical location of the two Komárom settlements and Győr that leads to the birth of considerable cross-border catchment areas. The special importance of these city pairs is given by the fact that they can actually be taken as single urban agglomerations by now. Together they have a population in excess of fifty thousand, so their common services and economic attraction is equal to that of a medium-sized Hungarian city, not to mention the high density of population in the economic agglomeration along the right bank of the Danube River (from Almásfüzitő to Dorog).
- 3) Zone of the mountainous towns. This zone reaches from the mouth of the Ipoly River to the edge of the hinterlands of Košice and Miskolc. Its western part is adjacent to the agglomeration of Budapest, including Vác. On the other hand, the low level of urbanisation along the Ipoly River is also due to the drainage effect of Budapest. The area between the Börzsöny Mountains and the Ipoly River gravitates to the city of Esztergom, allowed by the

Figure 2

Cities and towns along the Slovakian–Hungarian border by number of inhabitants



Source: By the author.



Schengen borders and the planned bridges across the Ipoly. At the northern feet of the North Hungarian Mountain Range there are the already mentioned towns with 20 to 50 thousand inhabitants (Salgótarján, Ózd, Kazincbarcika, Lučenec, Rimavská Sobota), but they are somewhat farther from the border (10–20 kilometres). Directly on the border we only find smaller centres (Šahy, Balassagyarmat).

- 4) The hinterlands of Košice and Miskolc. The border regions of the two cities are characterised by a deficient urban system, especially on the Hungarian side (being one of the least urbanised areas in Hungary). North of Edelény in the Zemplén Mountains we do not find any major central settlement. The areas right on the border may gravitate to Košice more than to Miskolc, even on the Hungarian side.
- 5) The area of the triple border in the east. This region has a weak urban network in both countries. Smaller centres can only be found on the Hungarian side, such as Sátoraljaújhely and Sárospatak. Especially the latter has strong cross-border attraction. On the Slovakian side, Trebišov can be found a bit farther from the border, and its services are too weak to have attraction on the Hungarian side of the border as well.

### **3 Relations capital in the Slovak–Hungarian border region**

#### **3.1 Basic features of the cross-border social relations**

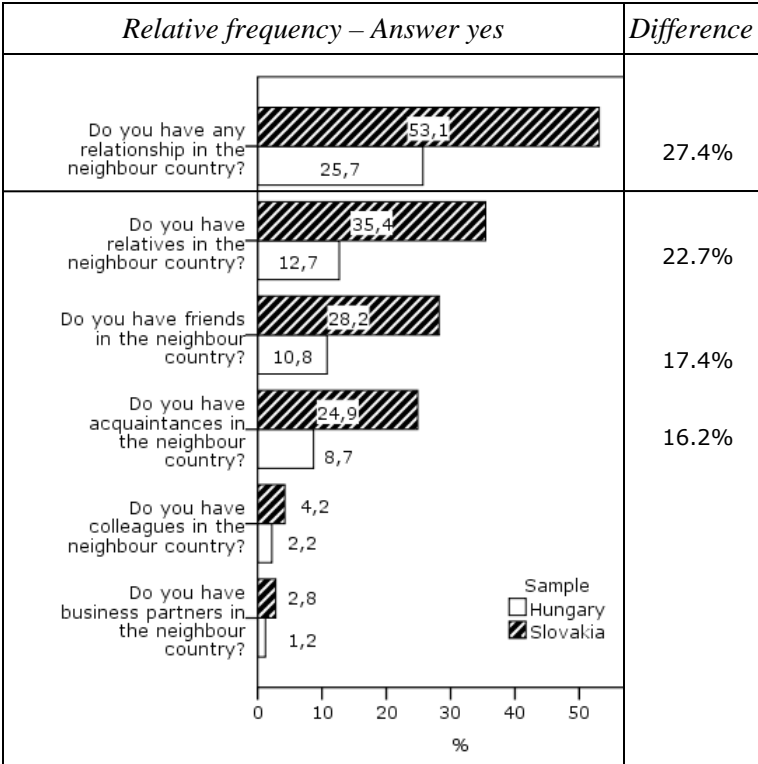
In the Hungarian and the Slovak sample of the questionnaire survey (a total of 1,000 people in the Hungarian and 996 in the Slovak sample) there are significant differences as regards the cross-border personal relations. On the Hungarian side one quarter, on the Slovak side half of the questioned persons had some sort of contact in the neighbour country (*Figure 3*). Our expectation regarding the different ethnic composition was verified: in the Slovak border region the proportion of inhabitants with such contacts was 27% higher. This relationship index measures the existence of the connections, irrespective of their number and character. As regards the number of respondents, in the Hungarian sample 250, in the Slovak sample more than 500 persons were suitable for a more detailed analysis.

In the questionnaires filled out on the Slovak side, due to the overrepresentation of the social layers with secondary school and higher education certificates, the activity of relationship network is probably higher than the actual proportions, due to the conversion mechanism of the relationship capital and the cultural, and also the closely related economic capital. This phenomena is well described by Bourdieu (*Bourdieu, 1997*).

Relationships were measured in five forms: family, friends, acquaintances, colleagues and business partners. The probability of the existence of relations follows the same logic in both countries, but the proportions are much higher also in this case on the Slovak side. The biggest share of the inhabitants has family relations on the other side of the border, which is natural, coming from the historical past of the border region. The second most frequent type of relationship is acquaintances, followed by friendships. Colleagues and business partners make a negligible part (2 to 4%) of the personal interactions in both countries. The proportions and their differences are very informative: more than one-third of the inhabitants on the Slovak side have relatives, 28% have acquaintances and 25% have friends in Hungary; the same relationships of the Hungarian respondents were only 13%, 11% and 9%, respectively (Figure 3).

Figure 3

*Probable frequency of the relationships and the types of relationships*



Source: Questionnaire survey of inhabitants (2008).

Based on Mark Granovetter (1988) we can differentiate between strong ties (relatives or friends) and weak ties (acquaintances, colleagues or business partners), which have different values and functions at the level of the individual and the whole social structure. Also in this approach the frequency of strong ties is higher on the Slovak side (*Table 1*).

Table 1

*The frequency and institutional background of official relationships, %*

	Hungarian sample	Slovak sample
Had contact to any office or authority in the last five years	2.7 (N=27)	10.1 (N=99)
Frequency (first mention)		
– daily	3.7	2.1
– several times a week	0.0	1.1
– several times a month	3.7	13.8
– less frequently	92.6	83.0
What sort of institution? Most frequent mentions of first institutions and the number of mentions)	Police (8) Border Guard (6) Municipal government (2) Land Registry Office (2)	Labour Office (22) Hungarian Tax Authority (19) Police (14) Municipal government (7) Registry Office (5) Border Guard (4)

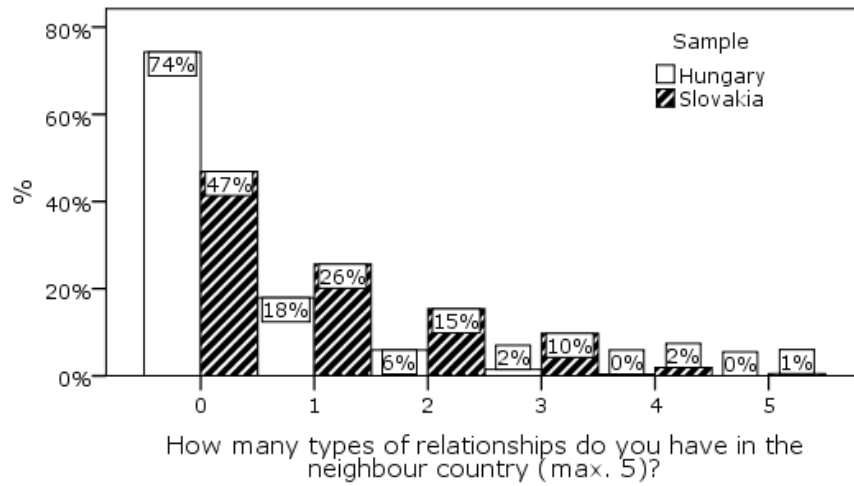
Source: Questionnaire survey of inhabitants (2008).

The proportion of multi-layer, multiplex relationship networks is much lower. Both strong ties (i.e. friends and relatives) were mentioned by 32 Hungarian respondents, only (3.2% of the sample), whereas there were 158 such respondents (16%) on the Slovak side. As regards the three weaker ties – acquaintances, colleagues and business partners –, involving less emotional elements and intensity, only 10 Hungarian and 47 Slovak respondents mentioned such ties, which mean very low proportions: 1% and 5%, respectively. Of course the borders and the historical vicissitudes annihilated many relations or did not allow the birth of such ties (*Figure 4*).

The inhabitants living in Slovakia have more complex relationship systems in Hungary (*Figure 5*). The majority has only one type of relationship, of course, and as we have formerly seen, these are usually family ties or less intensive acquaintanceships. Of all Hungarian respondents having any sort of ties, 70% have only one kind of relationship. In the Slovak sample the proportion of such respondents is much lower (48%), almost half of them (47%) have personal networks consisting of 2 or 3 sorts of relationships simultaneously (this proportion is only 28% on the Hungarian side).

Figure 4

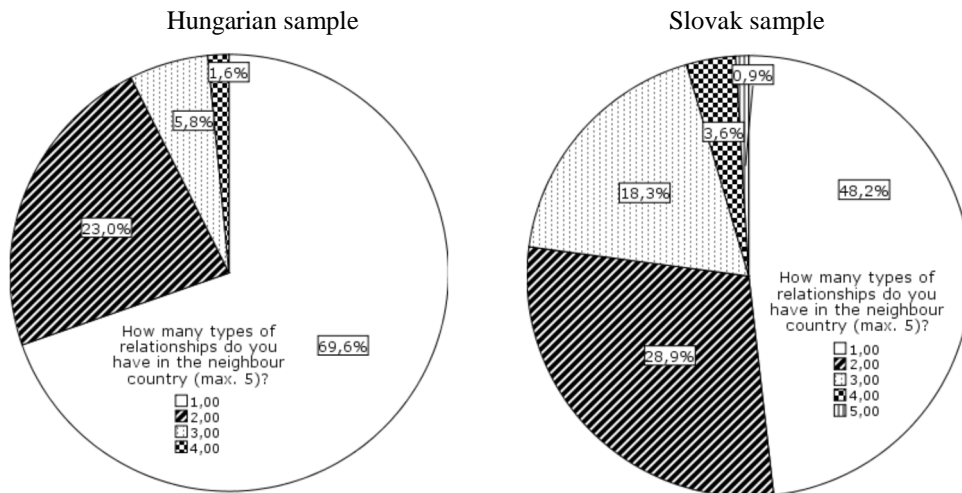
*Number of different kind of relations in the other side of the border – ego-network multiplicity*



Source : Questionnaire survey of inhabitants (2008).

Figure 5

*The complexity of the personal cross-border relationships*



Source : Questionnaire survey of inhabitants (2008).

According to our calculations, an average inhabitant in the south Slovak border zone has contacts to at least 10 persons in Hungary, if s/he is not isolated. This is true for the Hungarian side as well, but the average number of contacts in Slovakia is only 6. The maximum values highlight the background of the significant differences between the average and the mean values. The questionnaire survey involved persons who have a large number, maybe 200–300 contacts on the other side of the border.

### **3.2 Basic features of the cross-border institutionalised (official or administrative) interactions**

Only a small proportion of the inhabitants had contact to the official authorities of the other country in the last five years (Table 1). In the Hungarian sample there were only 27 such persons, somewhat more on the Slovak side, but their proportion remained below 10% even in Slovakia. In addition, such relationships were occasional; most respondents (83% and 93%, respectively) contacted some institutions a few times, only. Continuous touch to the official organs is negligible: only 3-4% of the inhabitants had daily or weekly contacts to the offices and authorities in this period.

The organs most frequently mentioned by the Hungarian respondents were the police, border guard, municipal governments and land registry offices. The list of the Slovak respondents is more complex and mostly concerns labour and taxation issues. The most frequently mentioned organs were the police, border guard and some municipal government also in this case.

### **3.3 Possible explanations for the frequency of the cross-border relations**

Summarising the most important features of the strong and weak interpersonal relations, and the contacts with the official organs it became clear that the interactions from Slovakia to Hungary are much more intensive (due to the Hungarian ethnic minority living in Slovakia) than the interactions from Hungary towards Slovakia.

The social interactions of this type of the people living in the eastern and western part of the border region have been built out on the other side of the border with by and large the same probability. The settlement size is a not differentiating factor either: the inhabitants of neither the rural areas nor the big cities have bigger or more complex relationship networks. The respective age groups of the sample also feature relationships with the same frequency. Social activity and family status do not seem to play a role in this respect, either.

There are two clear things, however. 1) On the Slovak side, as it had been expected, the ethnic belonging was the main determining factor differentiating the contacts. 2) In both samples, significant differences could only be detected by the level of school education and the closely related employment position.

On the Slovak side of the border region, 62% of the respondents with Hungarian ethnicity had some cross-border relations. Among the population of Slovak ethnicity the proportion of such inhabitants was just half of this (35%), which is a surprisingly high proportion, considering the much lower rate in Hungary (*Table 2*).

Table 2

*The differentiation of network properties according to the nationality of the respondents – Slovakian side*

	Hungarian nationality	Slovak nationality
Do you have any contact on the other side of the border (in Hungary?), %	62.3	34.5
How many persons do you keep in touch with? (average)	25	14
How many relatives do you have? (average)	10	11
How many friends do you have? (average)	11	7
How many acquaintances do you have? (average)	20	8
With one kind of contact only, %	45.6	58.2
With two kinds of contacts, %	30.6	23.6
With three or more contacts of different types, %	23.8	18.2

*Source:* Questionnaire survey of inhabitants (2008).

It is also visible that the Hungarians have bigger and more complex relationships than the Slovaks. The average number of family, friendly, acquaintanceship and colleague relationships featured in the table demonstrates that the majority of those with Hungarian nationality have the weaker forms of contacts (e.g. they have twice as many acquaintances and have four more friends on the average).

In the relationships towards the other side of the border school education and the partly connected higher status also play an important role. Even on the Hungarian side, the proportion of those with contacts on the other side is 10% higher among those with higher education certificates. The responses received in Slovakia show a similar hierarchy: e.g. 65% of those who had finished university studies gave positive answers.

The number of contacts is also positively influenced by the higher social status, but this is mostly true for the weaker ties and mainly on the Hungarian side. In Slovakia this parameter did not show significant differences. In the complexity of the relationships, however, on both sides it is the schooling and the

concomitant social milieu that dominate. Respondents with higher education degrees are the least frequently those who have single-component relationships, and they are the ones who most frequently possess complex contacts of at least three different types.

On both the Slovak and the Hungarian side the differentiating factor is the blue collar or white collar job, besides which the higher qualification and position are not so important. The mean value of the number of contacts on the Hungarian side well demonstrates that those in leading positions and the self-employed have the more extended networks of relationships. This correlation on the Slovak side is slightly modified: probably because of the more active employment practice even the blue-collar workers have a higher probability of contacts to the Hungarian side and a larger number of ties as well.

### 3.4 Possible obstacles of the strong cross-border ties

In case of the family and friendly relations we asked about those external obstacles which may make difficult, or set back keeping in touch with the people on the side of the border. The list is not complete but it involves the most important elements, among which the first ones are time, spatial distance and the impact of infrastructure (*Table 3*).

Table 3

#### *The obstacles of strong ties*

Obstacles	Hungarian sample, %	Slovak sample, %
Shortage of time	38.1	45.6
Financial reasons	25.7	41.5
Illness	24.8	26.4
Lack of car	23.6	25.5
Big geographical distance	16.8	25.0
Bad public transport access	15.2	18.6
State border	8.8	2.1
Bad accessibility	7.2	6.7

*Source:* Questionnaire survey of inhabitants (2008).

Among the inhabitants living on the Slovak side and having contacts in Hungary we found a bigger proportion of those who met some difficulties. The first in the order of the obstacles was the lack of time, which in the globalising society of our times does not only affect the interpersonal interactions but also

several other aspects of our lives. The smallest problems were accessibility and the role of the border, according to the respondents. It seems that the closer communication and interaction of the inhabitants on the two sides of the border have mostly been set back by unfavourable factors coming from their own lives, in which the two dominant factors are the lack of free time and the disparities of the financial means.

#### **4 Social capital and its spatial aspects**

At each strong and weak tie we asked about the spatial location of the contact persons on the other side of the border. On the basis of this we can designate the extent of the cross-border social capital and the concentration of the ties. Our question concerned if there were dense points of ties and if so, which settlements concentrated the contacts. We expected the appearance of the natural tendencies coming from the demographic weight of the respective settlements, i.e. that in the cities, due to their size, we would possibly find more relatives, friends, acquaintances and colleagues.

In the case of strong ties, most respondents on the Slovak side have relatives or friends in the capital city, which is followed by the big cities and the local centres along the border. A similar logic can be seen at the weak ties, where the outstanding position of the capital city can also be seen. The situation of Komárom is to be selectively mentioned, as this city has the third highest number of mentions in all four contact types, following Budapest and Győr – despite its much smaller number of population (*Figure 6*).

Of course the list is not suitable for making far-reaching analyses but it well demonstrates the major junctions of integration mechanisms realised through interpersonal ties in the border region.

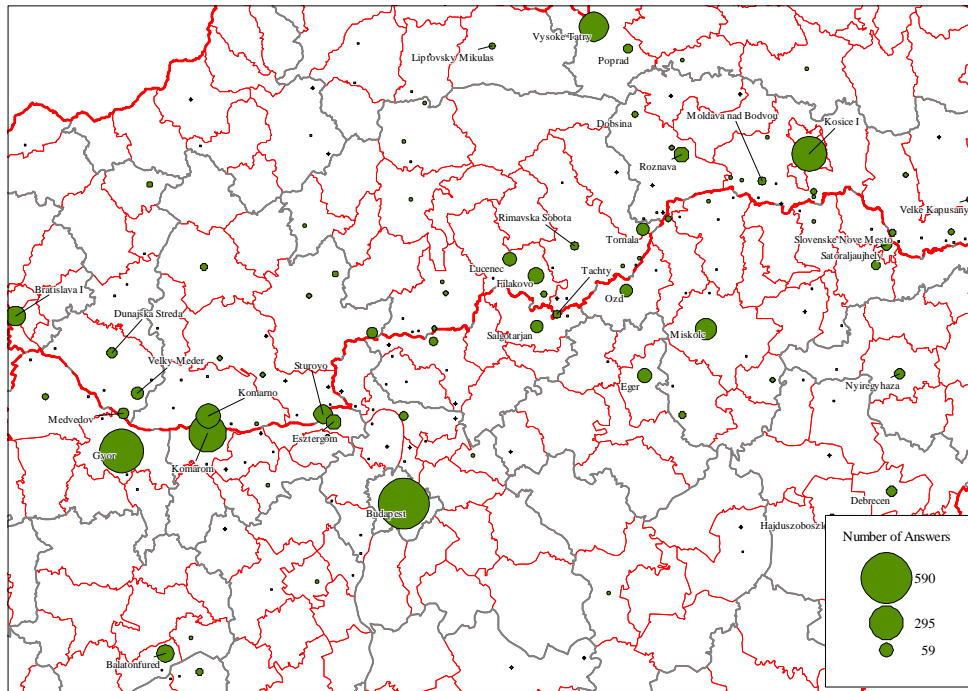
##### **4.1 Frequency and objective of border crossings**

The frequency of travels also reveals the bigger activity of the Slovakian side. The Slovakian respondents (who have already been to the other side of the border) travel to Hungary much more frequently than the Hungarians to Slovakia (*Table 4*). The proportion of daily commuters is also significant among the Slovakian respondents. West of the Ipoly River it concerns over 3% of the respondents, evidently due to the better employment possibilities in the first place.



Figure 6

*Destinations of the cross-border travels*



Source: Questionnaires (filled out in 2008).

Table 4

*Breakdown of the travellers by the frequency of the border-crossings, in per cent*

Country	Border section	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Few times a year	Every few years
Hungary	Western*	0.0	3.4	12.7	39.8	44.1
	Eastern	0.9	4.3	11.2	39.7	44.0
	Total	0.5	3.9	11.8	39.7	44.0
Slovakia	Western	3.1	8.4	19.5	48.8	20.2
	Eastern	2.1	8.0	13.6	45.4	30.9
	Total	2.7	8.2	17.4	47.6	24.0
All	Western	2.0	6.7	17.2	45.6	28.5
	Eastern	1.4	5.9	12.2	42.1	38.5
	Total	1.7	6.3	14.9	44.0	33.1

\* Sections: west or east of the Ipoly River.

Source: Questionnaire survey of inhabitants (2008).

The definition of the objective of the travels is not less important. *Table 5* demonstrates the most frequently mentioned reasons for the travels in the questionnaires. A relatively small proportion of the respondents mentioned work and business affairs as the motivation of travel. However, if we consider that these goals are strongly connected to the travels of daily or weekly frequency, we can see that this objective is becoming more important among the motivations of cross-border travels. The purchase of durable goods is more frequent at the eastern section of the border, on both sides. It is most typical at this border section that the nearest urban centre with a larger supply of durable goods can be found on the other side of the border.

Table 5

*Breakdown of cross-border travellers by purpose of the travel, in per cent*

Border section	Western		Eastern		Total	
	Hungary	Slovakia	Hungary	Slovakia	Hungary	Slovakia
Employment	1.3	4.1	0.4	3.3	0.8	3.8
Business affairs	2.8	3.6	1.7	4.5	2.2	3.9
Purchase of durable goods	6.6	18.7	21.7	22.8	15.6	20.1
Weekly or monthly shopping	24.1	11.1	11.9	4.8	16.8	8.9
Leisure, holiday, sightseeing	44.9	35.2	39.7	46.8	41.8	39.3
Cultural events	2.8	12.9	4.7	9.0	3.9	11.5
Visiting relatives	5.4	10.5	10.0	5.1	8.1	8.6
Other	12.0	3.9	10.0	3.6	10.8	3.8

\*Sections: west or east of the Ipoly River.

Source: Questionnaire survey of inhabitants (2008).

## **4.2 Image of the other people, the inhabitants of the other country**

In our research we looked at how people viewed the nation on the other side of the border and what characteristics they attributed to the people living there.

Hungarians have traditionally considered themselves as a friendly nation. This characteristic is on the top of the list not only in the self-image of the Hungarians; the neighbour nation, the Slovaks also think that the most characteristic feature of the Hungarians is their hospitality, friendliness. This is true for both the Hungarians living in Hungary and the Hungarian ethnic citizens in Slovakia. The average values always reached, in connection with the Hungarians living in Hungary even

exceeded four (on a five-grade scale). Besides the above-mentioned two characteristics, the Slovaks basically see the Hungarians as a happy, proud, clean, creative, helpful, busy and educated nation (with average values at or over 3.8); this image is by and large identical with the self-image of the Hungarians. Practically these are the traits that the respondents of the survey found most typical for the Hungarians living in Slovakia too, irrespective of the ethnicity of the respondents (Hungarians in Hungary, Hungarians in Slovakia, or Slovaks), with one more characteristic mentioned as typical of the Hungarians in Slovakia: they are faithful. This characteristic definitely reflects the historical relations of these people to Hungary and the judgement of this relationship.

The findings of the research reveal that the judgements of the Hungarians, both of those living in Hungary and in Slovakia, are largely the same: there is a harmony between self-evaluation and the image living in the nation on the other side of the border. On the other hand, the self-image of the Slovaks and the image of them in the Hungarians are completely different. The Slovaks consider themselves as friendly, hospitable, peaceful, sympathetic, helpful, busy and happy people, the mean value of these characteristics ranged from 3.83–3.98. A totally different image of the Slovaks, the Slovak nation was revealed by the Hungarians – both the Hungarians living in Hungary and in Slovakia. The most typical characteristic associated with the Slovaks was pride. This was the only characteristic whose mean value approached four (3.98 and 3.9, respectively). In addition to proud, the Hungarians see Slovaks as self-confident and material, but the mean value of these traits ranged from 3.5–3.6 on a scale up to five. It seems that the evaluation of the Slovaks, the image made of them is strongly influenced by the former stereotypes, the old attitudes (the relationship between the two nations has never been really friendly), at least this is suggested by the significant “gap” between the self-image of the Slovaks and the judgement by the Hungarians.

The research findings suggest anyway that there is a kind of restriction in the case of the Hungarians living in Hungary not only in their self-evaluation but also in the judgement of the people (Slovaks) and minority (Hungarians of Slovak nationality), as there is not one reply where a value above four (on a five-grade scale) was given to a question “How much is it typical ...”. The judgement of the Hungarians living in Slovakia was anyway usually more positive, both in their self-esteem and their evaluation by the Slovaks, or the Hungarians living in the mother country.

## **5 Economic relations**

### **5.1 Business foundation in Slovakia**

It is a general view that the different taxation systems in the two countries reinforce the economic movements between the countries. The better economic environment does not only mean the simpler and more comprehensible Slovakian taxation system but also involves the simpler legal environment, the less difficult procedure of the foundation of businesses and the lower administrative and additional costs (e.g. attorneys' fees). Entrepreneurs often use the opportunity of moving their businesses from Hungary to Slovakia, in order to exploit the better conditions of taxation. This means that the business remains to be a Hungarian enterprise but the taxation is based on the Slovak system.

The opening towards Slovakia has another important objective: the expansion of the market, as the penetration into and opening up of new markets offers higher revenues for the growing businesses. In addition, expansion to the border region actually means that the Hungarian firms get into a Hungarian environment, as the proportion of inhabitants with Hungarian mother tongue or with Hungarian language skills is high in the border region. Another very attractive factor is the skilled, reliable and cheap Slovak labour force. In the 1990s Slovakia had an unemployment rate of 20–25%, a significant part of the former unemployed are now employed by Hungarian entrepreneurs, among other things. In the Bratislava district and in West Slovakia several multinational corporations – e.g. large automotive companies – appeared where the Hungarian companies wish to be come suppliers of the suppliers. This significant junction of automotive industry is a great motivation for the establishment of suppliers' contacts, while the opening of the border allows the Hungarian businesses to locate to Slovakia easily.

The economic opening to Slovakia also has a negative side, unfortunately. The entrepreneurs have to be very thoughtful, as it may happen that the partners in Hungary are not very keen on seeing a car with Slovak licence plate at a business meeting. This makes the image of the respective entrepreneur totally different. It is true, on the other hand that this negative discrimination may happen on the Slovakian side of the border as well.

### **5.2 Business foundation in Hungary**

The Slovak companies too try to expand their economic activities to Hungary. The main reason for this effort is the demand for expanding the market, the acquisition of new markets. Coming from the bigger size of the market, Hungary is a

significant potential market for the goods, so the Slovak companies – if they have products that are competitive on the Hungarian markets too – try to fill in the market gaps. An example to be mentioned is the Slovak-owned businesses operating in the Entrepreneurs' House [Vállalkozók Háza] in Komárom in Hungary, trying to serve the Hungarian market. Another motivation of the Slovak businesses may be the bigger purchasing power of the Hungarian market; in Hungary the prices are higher, e.g. higher profit can be realised. In the western area of the Slovak–Hungarian border the market is easier to access than in the eastern part of the countries, because in addition to Bratislava the Győr–Esztergom region too has a significant concentration of inhabitants, not to mention Budapest and its agglomeration. From the other side of the border it is typically those with Hungarian mother tongue who come to Hungary. As in the north-western part of Hungary there is a growing shortage of skilled labour, the foreign businesses located here (e.g. Nokia, Suzuki) attract masses of relatively weak Slovak labour force. The role of labour recruitment agencies in this process is unquestionable. At the same time, despite the large number of commuters across the border it is less typical that masses of Slovakian businesses locate to Hungary, the main reason for which is the much less business friendly environment in Hungary than in Slovakia. It is only worth for a Slovak company locating to Hungary if they can become suppliers to a multinational corporation operating in Hungary; however, a company does not need to found a new business to expand its markets, as they can serve the other side of the border from the existing locations too. Finally we have to remark that the opening towards the Hungarian areas cannot only mean competitive advantages in manufacturing but also in the field of receiving finances.

### **5.3 Investment propensity, economic movements**

An ever increasing intensification of the economic movements can be seen – as we have mentioned earlier –, nevertheless the number of investors on the other side of the border is still low, there has not been and still there is no mass re-location. The primitive accumulation of capital is a process just going on in the region, which means that the businesses do not possess enough finances. The Slovak–Hungarian capital is not competitive; there are no mass investments by this capital. However, parallel to the strengthening of the small and medium-sized enterprises, there will be more and more foreign direct investments. These days these movements are rather one-way movements, to Slovakia – due to the favourable Slovak economic environment. Presently there are almost thirty Slovakian companies engaged in business foundation and car purchase for Hungarian citizens, typically close to the border, from Bratislava right to Košice. They offer tailor-made solutions for all requests, from business foundation to car rent; in fact, they even go into a price

competition to win the Hungarian customers in some cases. This is a process definitely concerning the border region, as the majority of the Hungarian companies locating to Slovakia choose their locations in the stripe within 20 to 30 kilometres from the state border.

The chambers of commerce have definitely good connections with several institutions. The most important cooperating partners are the chambers of commerce in Slovakia (e.g. in Bratislava or Nitra). These relations are very versatile, ranging from the professional forums of general character through targeted partner mediation of businesses to the implementation of joint projects. In addition to the chamber of commerce of course they have other institutions and organisations as partners, including business development foundations, vocational training institutions, the Bratislava Office of the ITDH (Hungarian Investment and Trade Development Agency), the Hungarian-Slovak Section of ITDH, or the Hungarian Embassy of the Republic in Slovakia in Hungary.

#### **5.4 Cross-border commuting and the local labour market**

The phenomenon of cross-border commuting is interesting because in legal sense it is an international migration, but mostly within local circumstances. This phenomenon is different from the traditional employment “abroad”, as the employees live their lives in the neighbour country and have their place of work in the other state. This situation differentiates this circle of employees from other foreign citizens, as their situation is special, raising a number of issues from the organisation of daily traffic through the use of public services to taxation and the conversion of the incomes. According to our survey, approximately 10% of the inhabitants living in the Slovak border region have either worked already or is presently working, maybe planning to work in the future in Hungary. If we also take their families into consideration, cross-border employment involves a much bigger part of the population.

We can see a phenomenon thus that is known within the space of a single nation state; in this case, however, obeying the rules of the market and utilising the possibilities given (permeability of the borders, institutional integration, better access to the neighbouring border region in the broader sense of the word), some local labour market districts have already penetrated into the neighbour state and are shaping their relationships on the other side of the border too.

Since the turn of the millennium, one of the most dynamically developing cross-border movements has been commuting to work. Mutual employment in the neighbour state has traditionally existed in the region. Due to the axes of industrial development and the lack of language and cultural barriers, mutual employment in the neighbour country existed already in the socialist period, but it temporarily

ceased to exist after the systemic change, because of the economic decline of those years. After a few years of stagnation, since 1999 the number of employees commuting from Slovakia to Hungary has been steadily growing. In the western part of the border region unemployment rates are higher in Slovakia than in Hungary, whereas in Hungary there are significant industrial centres in the vicinity of the border that have already exhausted their local pool of labour force. Regular commuting, on the other hand, is set back by the low number of bridges. Significant indicators of the contacts of Mosonmagyaróvár, Győr and Komárom were their Danube bridges (and the same role is played by the reconstructed Mária Valéria Bridge in Esztergom and its environment). Ferry as a means of transport is rather uncertain, dependant to a large extent on weather conditions, and the barriers of the seasons of the year. After 1999 the development of commuting was also promoted by a framework agreement between the two countries, allowing a larger number of employees to work in the other country (which was evidently Hungary in the first place at that time). In fact, the frameworks were so generous in the years preceding the EU accession that the barriers to the movement of labour practically ceased to exist in these years. The May of 2004, the accession of Hungary and Slovakia to the European Union, was not a shock to the labour market then. In 2005 the number of Slovak citizens employed in Hungary was approximately 30 000 already, and this number has remained largely the same since then, with some ups and downs. Since the accession to the Union, Slovakia has undergone a very rapid economic development. This fact also affects the labour market of Slovakia of course. In the western part of the border region, the number of those travelling to work to Hungary is decreasing and is probably going to stabilise at a natural level: those will choose to work in Hungary for whom the nearby town or city in Hungary is a spatial advantage. At the same time, a process of opposite direction has already started. Hungarian labour force is attracted by Slovak employers to the other side. It is especially the tackling of structural problems, i.e. the lack of experts that makes Slovak businesses seek Hungarian skilled labour: from Komárom-Esztergom county, for example, workers commute to Trnava, employed in the automotive industry. A very recent phenomenon is that in the eastern part of the border region, struck by significantly higher unemployment, Slovak entrepreneurs are now trying to find labour force in Hungary. It is the demand for skilled labour again that plays a dominant role, especially in the peripheral border areas from where the majority of the skilled workers have already moved.

We only have estimations concerning the composition of the 30 thousand employees. From regional aspects, approximately two-thirds of them are from the border districts of West Slovakia, from the Dunajská Streda, Komárno, Nove Zamky and Levice districts inhabited by mixed population, i.e. both Hungarians and Slovaks. In December 2007 a total of 9,780 persons from these four districts were employed directly by Hungarian firms – 2,220 employees from the Dunajská

Streda, 6,000 from the Komarno, 1,200 from the Nove Zamky and 380 from the Levice district (Source: Eures Danubius Conference, Dunajská Streda, 14 March 2008). The rest, i.e. approximately 10,000–10,200 persons found employment in Hungary via Slovak labour recruitment agencies. As regards the similar breakdown of the by and large 10 thousand labour force living in East and Central Slovakia, we do not have exact figures, we only presume that mostly the same tendencies are also valid in their case as in West Slovakia.

Our researches highlighted that the phenomenon of cross-border employment in the region does not only depend the elements of economic boom. The respondents thought it was important to have higher salaries in the neighbour country, but the spatial proximity of the workplace was just as important. We can say with certainty that the commuting employment in our region is not a traditional international migration; it is based on the classic urban-rural relations. Its intensity and volume are influenced by the wages available, but we also have to see that the bulk of the commuters have more poorly paid jobs where the wage differences will not change much across the two countries. The introduction of Euro in Slovakia will evidently set back movements to some extent, but it will not eliminate them. It is worth continuing the professional talks in this field and promoting an even broader cooperation in the fields of vocational training and retraining, strengthening thereby the cross-border labour districts.

## **5.5 Commuting with educational purposes**

Cross-border commuting with educational purposes mostly concerns secondary schools and higher education. One of the bases of commuting again is the use of Hungarian language, but there are students commuting from Slovakia to Slovak speaking institutions in Hungary too (offering accommodation and catering for minorities). Students from Slovakia commute to Hungary, no process of opposite direction can be seen, although the demand for it has already appeared. This demand is based on the Hungarian speaking college in Komarno, there is an interest in this institution by students living on the Hungarian side of the border region. Our research findings reveal that both along the western and the eastern border section, approximately half of the students of the institutions are Slovak citizens, as regards the Hungarian settlements included in the survey it is only Balassagyarmat where in each secondary education institution there are students from Slovakia (*Figure 7*).

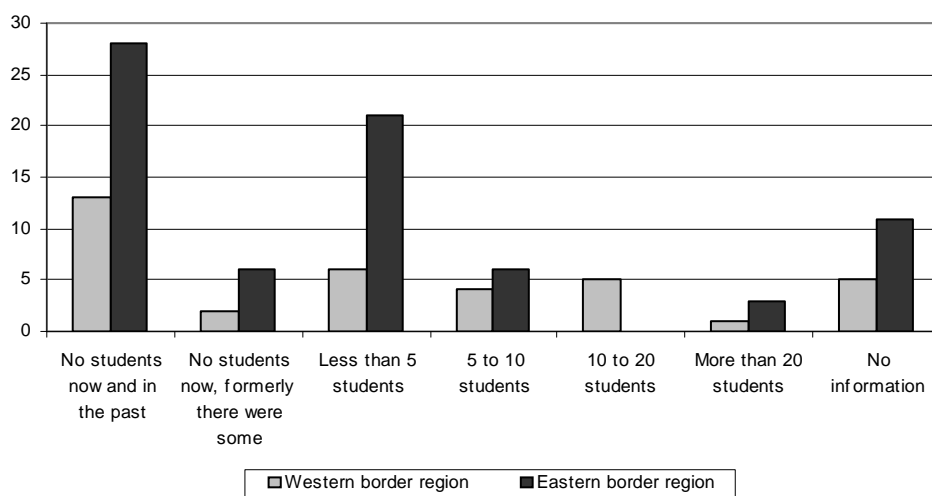
Along the western border section there is only one institution where more than 20 Slovak citizens with Hungarian ethnicity study, whereas there are 3 in the eastern part of the border region. Two of these can be found in Balassagyarmat, in each school there are some 40 such students. In the institutions in question approximately 360 students with Slovak citizenship but Hungarian ethnicity study,



of whom 100 are in Balassagyarmat. The reason for this high number is seen by the leaders of Balassagyarmat in the proximity of the border; however, there are other settlements in the direct vicinity of the border but without such a high number of students. Another possible reason is the supply of trainings in Balassagyarmat.

Figure 7

*Breakdown of the institutions of secondary education by the number of the students with Slovak citizenship and Hungarian nationality, 2007/2008 – number of institutions*



Note: In Győr there are 26 institutions of secondary education altogether, of which 7 are institutions with a larger number of students examined in the survey, according to the data of the local self-governments. The remaining 19 institutions are not included in the statistics demonstrated in the chart. These institutions are, in all probabilities, among the first three categories in the diagram, as we were informed.

Source: By the author.

In the recent years several institutions experienced fluctuation in the number of students, the reason for which was the accession to the EU in the opinion of several school leaders. Where the number of students decreased, the school leaders referred to the more rigorous regulations, as a consequence of which in several cases tuition fee has to be paid. Despite the regulations, in the majority of the institutions contacted no tuition fee has to be paid, or even if it is necessary, the headmasters usually use the possibility of providing allowances. The practical application of the legal regulation can be said to be flexible then, it is up to the

leaders of the respective institutions if tuition fee is to be paid or not. It is not only the issue of tuition fee, however, that depends on the individual institutions; the admission procedure of the students also does. In some institutions the procedure is similar to those valid for the Hungarian students, while there are schools where students from Slovakia are admitted irrespective of the result of their admission exams (or without such exams), supporting this way their studies in Hungary.

Among the settlements involved in the survey, Győr even has an agreement with a Slovakian municipality, Dunajská Streda on the education of students with Slovak citizenship and Hungarian ethnicity in Győr. The agreement has been signed by all new mayors entering office by now, it is still in effect. According to the agreement, if a student of Slovak citizenship wishes to study in Győr, s/he has to turn to the municipality of Dunajská Streda and s/he has to submit the official registration form stamped there to the municipality of Győr. The secondary schools specified in the registration form will receive the registration sheets of the students from the municipal government of Győr. The admission procedure is the same as that of the students with Hungarian citizenship, with the exception of the process mentioned above.

The students can be divided into four basic categories as regards their purpose to study in the Hungarian institutions. Some students would definitely like to have higher education studies in Hungary, for which they feel it necessary to have final exams in a Hungarian secondary school. There are two reasons for this: on the one hand, they would like to study in Hungarian environment, on the other hand, because of the differences between the Hungarian and the Slovakian school leaving exams they think they have better chances with the Hungarian papers to be admitted to a higher education institution. The majority of the students would like to go on to a higher education institution in Budapest or Pécs. A small part of the students would like to continue their studies in higher education outside Hungary, but not necessarily in Slovakia; this is especially typical in the education of arts. The talks with the leaders of the institutions revealed two further smaller groups, of those who wish to do their secondary school studies for employment considerations. Some of them would like to work in Hungary later, a smaller part would like to find a job in Slovakia and come to the Hungarian side to study to have a higher level of training.

The majority of the students come from the area close to the respective settlements; it is less typical that students arrive from larger distances, mostly due to the difficulties of travel.

It was raised as an important issue in several institutions that the Hungarian students in Slovakia should be given the possibility to learn Slovak language, as they need to know the official state language as well, especially if they wish to return to Slovakia later to study or work. Among the contacted institutions, only a few provided training in Slovak language, but in one grammar school of Győr the

final exams included the compulsory exams in Slovak language for the Hungarian speaking students from Slovakia.

During the research we wanted to receive the opinions of the leaders of the educational institutions on the fact that students with Slovak citizenship but Hungarian ethnicity come to study to Hungary. The following opinions were expressed:

- Their education should be supported primarily in those institutions that provide trainings missing on the Slovak side, so many argued that the specialised secondary schools should be supported in the first place, because grammar school training was also available in Slovakia. If the students come from Slovakia to Hungarian grammar schools, the demand in Slovakia decreases, which may cause problems for the Hungarian schools in Slovakia that are not in an easy situation anyway.
- One school leader emphasised that the movements with educational purposes of the Hungarians living in Slovakia should be treated separately from the education of students from other countries in Hungary, as they have a special situation coming from their foreign citizenship but Hungarian ethnicity. It should not even be an issue that the institution requires them to pay tuition fee; to the opposite, the Hungarian state should support their education.
- Almost all headmasters emphasised that very talented students come to study in Hungary who are happy to take up extra tasks. There is usually no problem with them; they successfully integrate into the school society.
- Many drew the attention to the necessity of a single and more unequivocal regulation.

## **6 Conclusions**

Regular cross-border movements only concern a relatively small share of the total population of the border region. On the Hungarian side this is relevant for 1 to 2% of the total population, whereas some 20 to 30% of the inhabitants on the Slovak side are involved in such movements. The main driving forces of the movements are economic growth, economic interests and the characteristics of the spatial structure (revival of the centre and hinterland relations). The EU accession promoted the increase of the intensity of the movements in all fields and directions. The differences of the national systems (social security, training, taxation etc.) promote the penetration of the shadow or black economy; also, they set back the simplification of the affairs of everyday life. The official organs only acknowledge Hungarian citizens or foreign citizens living in Hungary. They have difficulty in

handling cases when somebody is a foreign citizen, living in another state (in the proximity of the border) but working or wishing to use public services in Hungary. It is necessary to work out cross-border urban area strategies built on the cities, with feasible examples to be followed and also to carry out an in-depth survey of the operational rules of the institutions in order to harmonise them with their Slovak counterparts.

The accession of the two states to the European Union in 2004 and to the Schengen Agreement later also contributed to the development of the everyday relations, but the process have decades of history by now. The occasionally “cool” relationship of the two states cannot be felt in the micro-level relations, in the economically more advanced areas of the borders we can see the first steps of the birth of single border regions. The private sector is ahead of the official relations. A part of the inhabitants and the economic sector “use” the other side of the border in their everyday lives. The separating role of the “mental border” is less of a problem here than in some other European border areas. In the areas more developed economically (especially in the western part, the areas along the axis of the Danube River, belonging to the hinterland of three capital cities: Vienna, Bratislava and Budapest) the joint development is very dynamic. The rapid economic development of Slovakia has also given a great momentum to the integration, and now areas at the same level of development are building a common cross-border region and urban network. On the eastern part of the border this dynamism is less palpable. This is an area where less developed regions meet each other. Nevertheless the city of Košice and its environment is developing, and the labour market of this region is now seeking skilled employees on the Hungarian side of the border.

Of course there are still many obstacles to the complete integration. The national systems (education, health care, public administration, bureaucracy etc.) still have difficulties in handling the natural processes of cross-border areas. Those who cross the borders are actually foreign citizens but still “local inhabitants”. It is difficult to put them into the traditional categories of “domestic” and “foreign” citizens, and the administrative problems coming from this may cause difficulties e.g. in the joint and thus more rational use of health care institutions. These problems often lead to harmful phenomena; some use the existing differences for e.g. tax evasion purposes. Our experiences suggest that these phenomena are important but their significance is relatively small compared to those natural processes that bind the border regions and strengthen its integration.

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