

THE BORDERLESSNESS OF ECONOMIC LIFE AND INTENDED REGIONALISATION Thoughts about Boundaries and Regions

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ABSTRACT – The long area from the Baltic to the Adriatic and the Black Sea between the German and the Russian (and the 19th century Turkish) empires is called Eastern-Central Europe in the Hungarian academic discourse. The peoples living here were forced to conform to these big empires for long centuries. They needed strong adaptability in the 20th century, after the disintegration of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy, too. The independent states that emerged as succession states had to conform sometimes to the empires in the west and sometimes to those in the east both in an economic and a political, and a social sense. Economic development was influenced considerably by the political ambition of building an independent country, which meant radical elimination of century-long relations. Every country made a new, centrally controlled internal regional division. This was what happened in all the different political systems. In these decades, borders, both state borders between countries, and administrative boundaries within a country played an important part. Central political intention could only manifest itself through a hierarchical system, which postulated the exact detachment and the strong protection of the individual administrative areas. Consequently, the belts along the borders of the countries increasingly became depressed areas. The number of the inhabitants decreased and the population was ageing because the economy in these areas was not developed. In the new bourgeois period it was the economic political ambition of each country to be able to join world economy. On our continent the easiest way to achieve this aim was to join the European Union. However, as members of the European Union, these countries have to give up their former policy of isolation and they have to form organic (economic) regions. We can witness the weakening process of borders. This holds true for both state borders and administrative boundaries and the new method of enforcing central political will. The democratic bourgeois establishment tries to reduce the power of hierarchical systems. The increasing economic relations between the countries, the increasing role of cross-border relations, and the disputes regarding internal regional divisions are all markers of this process.

Key words: border, cross border cooperation, Euroregion

Since the 1980s the theory which traces back the changes of space to social changes has become dominant in geography. According to this approach, space is the relationship between objects and people. If we want to interpret the processes that take place in space, we have to take social changes into account. It is individuals, groups, institutions and organisations, i.e. society that forms space (*Benedek 2003*).

This statement was a reaction to the significant social changes in the past decades. I would like to draw your attention to two such phenomena, one of them being the change in the role of borders and the other one the appearance of the cross-border region, a new space category. The basis of my description of the changes in the role of borders is the study by *Strassoldo (1982)*.

I. THE CLOSED SYSTEM

As civilisation changes in time, man creates newer and newer boundaries around himself by establishing new institutions and organisations. In this way he sets up boundaries between those belonging to the institution or the organisation and those not belonging there. Institutions and organisations have members. They are inside the boundaries; they set up rules to promote cooperation. The rules govern the answer to questions such as under what conditions new members can be accepted, what rights members have, who can make decisions and who is obliged to implement them, etc. As a matter of fact, written law, the function of the whole legal system is to define the boundaries of our behaviour, attitude and deeds. It sets and protects such boundaries.

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Administration also draws its own boundaries. Administration means the boundaries within which the control of power is exercised and power sets up administration so that political public will can be exercised.

The way society is surrounded by borders has been the subject of several analyses. We are familiar with the studies describing the societies of primitive isolated tribes, the inner world of the autonomous, isolated Greek polis described by Plato, and later the closed world of the nation states, which, of course, kept expanding or wanted to expand.

The main characteristic feature of this institutionalised and organised world is expansion, the establishment of larger and larger organisations. This is also typical of states, because they want to increase their power by conquest. Most historians share the opinion that it is a sign of the decline of an empire or civilisation if it only wants to defend its borders and does not expand further. This was typical of both the Roman and the Chinese empires. The history of the Soviet Union and that of the Third Empire are also proofs of the fact that building an empire has no future.

The 19th- and 20th-century success of the nation states suggests that this method of societal and state organisation is the ultimate solution, the natural solution for human coexistence. As for more comprehensive categories, such as western civilisation, it really means the whole of nation states.

The emergence of the nation states is in close connection with the bourgeois period of modernisation. The victory of national movements, the establishment of national administration and of the national political organisation did not only mean new borders, but also the organisation of the so-called Western, i.e. the modern European societies. Consequently, nation builders are sensitive to the question of borders, although most new states have been established by diplomats at European conferences. These new state borders have little to do with what we call natural borders because they do not mark a 'pure' unit either in a geographical, cultural or ethnic sense. Borders in Europe are artificial borders. Wars, compensations, marriages, agreements, the resettlement of the population and the oppression of ethnic groups were the reasons why certain countries could emerge. The nation develops within the new borders set in this way. The sanguinary European history teaches us that there is no natural, rational and just solution of border questions. Good borders are those that have been agreed on and which have been accepted by the participating parties.

As opposed to building empires, European capitalism has found the new form of expansion. It was Wallerstein who proved that the network of trade routes and markets has covered the whole world since the 16th century. In the beginning, European capitalism applied a bad solution. It wanted to satisfy commercial needs by building empires, which resulted in the establishment of colonies.

The United States, however, applied a different method. It did not build an empire, but developed a network of commercial and financial relations. Having obtained the world market was sufficient for this purpose. By developing its commercial and financial relations permanently, it still manages to be the first among all the other countries belonging to its sphere of interest. Meanwhile, however, the fight for the world markets has been and is still often accompanied by wars and military force, but its target is not to try and annex other states. After the colonial empires had disintegrated, European countries began to apply the method introduced by the US. With this method they managed to preserve their economic and financial leading role in their former colonies.

However, after long antecedents, new phenomena appeared. As man and human societies are spreading on the earth, as the wide frontier areas between the individual nations are decreasing and the internal structure of societies is growing more refined, there are more and more boundaries dividing man from man and institution from institution. Former widely uninhabited border areas became as thin as a borderline and institutional and organisational cooperation increased. This means that relationships became tight; everybody had to belong somewhere. This process was symbolised by the fact that people began to be identified and passports were introduced.

II. THE WORLD OF OPENNESS

The development of the network of boundaries, which resulted in closure and organised forms was always accompanied by the other factor, the world of openness. Man has always searched for the possibility of unity to replace discrepancy and division. Man has always wanted institutions and organisations to humanize so that he will not work in a discriminative way. Man has always longed for a unified, universal community and has always been trying to abolish the boundaries between social groups. Supporters of the

THE BORDERLESSNESS OF ECONOMIC LIFE AND INTENDED REGIONALISATION THOUGHTS ABOUT BOUNDARIES AND REGIONS

idea of the classless society stand up for the elimination of discrimination between political and economic groups. Cosmopolitans claim for the abolishment of boundaries between nation groups. Ecologists criticise the artificial division of nature, the social system, and the environment.

The above-mentioned closed Platonic circle, however, was only followed by the negation of boundaries, as a consequence. Besides the fact that a lot of institutional, organisational and nation state boundaries have become less strict, we can also witness a new phenomenon - since closed systems ended up in their opposite, the open-ended network, - i.e. boundaries have been replaced by a new, increasingly strong quality.

Networks are open-ended structures, without boundaries. They are continuously increasing or decreasing depending on whether they accept new elements or whether the number of elements decreases, whether somebody joins them or leaves them. The most important feature of the network is that it is not attached to a certain space, because it has been set up to defeat space, its most important quality is its spatiality. Elements are connected by some task or function, and the connection between them can be maintained by communication. The frequency and intensity of communication depend on the function. Networks can produce the widest spatial structures with intersections which assign a certain central role to the elements included, but they may also change in time.

The individual can take part in several networks. Almost all the elements of his life do or may connect him to some kind of network. The main obstacle to the development of networks is the existence of some kind of boundary. For the network all kinds of formal boundaries are arbitrary. The most typical feature of building networks is borderlessness.

Networks as such are all the more significant because they are also built in the layers of society above the individual. The states that have been developing in the framework of nation states underwent such deep changes, set up such a high number of different subsystems that began to expand gradually that they crossed the borders of nation states. Even more these subsystems went beyond the nation states. Nowadays economic relations, financial and market relations begin to go beyond borders, transportation, the spreading news and events, communications channels keep crossing borders. The world population is becoming part of world society gradually, and this phenomenon is accelerated by the increasingly intensive effect of environmental changes. Climate changes are basically due to the environmentally harmful activities of industrial countries. Worsening climatic conditions can only be improved by the common activity of world society.

A real breakthrough for networks is globalisation. The wide variety of regulations had to be simplified to clear obstacles to market conditions (deregulation). All the products of world companies have appeared on local markets, very often causing local producers and local service providers to go bankrupt. Transportation and telecommunications have become much simpler (the communication revolution). Nation states have lost their traditional tools (e.g. protecting tariffs) to protect their own national economies (Lengyel 2003).

III. REGIONALISM

As the number of institutions and organisations has increased as well as their efficiency, their ability to safeguard their interests increased, too. Besides national institutions, local institutions strengthened as well. Meanwhile, in the age of globalisation, the role of local and regional units was increasingly appreciated. Since governments could not provide general protection for national economies, local forces (companies, cities, etc) pulled together and were successful and both nation states and the European Community started to support their activities.

Weakening nation state units and strengthening lower, regional units led to a new situation. A direct and 'obstacle-free' relationship developed between global and local actors, which was true not only of the economy but of all areas of social life. By practising the principle of subsidiarity, nation states supported and did not hinder these processes.

Important areas for the activities of local forces were the emerging borderland regions.

IV. REGIONS ALONG THE BORDER

Since the Peace Treaty of Westphalia (1648), it has been a European practice to separate states from each other with borders (before that, dynasties fulfilled this role). If we take into consideration the fact that the 30-year war before the Peace Treaty of Westphalia was a religious war, then we may say that it was the

different religions, i.e. the Catholic and the Protestant religions that gave the ideology to determine the dividing lines between the territories of the different powers. Afterwards, however, language and ethnic units provided the ideology for drawing borders. After the bourgeois nation states had developed and, especially, after the French revolution and the establishment of the German and Italian unions, the establishment of the independent nation state became an example for all the peoples of Europe to follow. This was what motivated the movements against the empires, against the Russian tsar, the Habsburg emperor and the Turkish sultan i.e. in Eastern and Central Europe. The aspirations of such movements in the above-mentioned empires proved to be successful during the two World Wars.

Borders, however are not stationary, they keep changing. The best example, in this respect, is Poland, which used to be surrounded by three countries until recently: Czechoslovakia, the GDR, and the Soviet Union. Today none of these countries exists any more. A similar example is that of Yugoslavia. After its disintegration, the individual states became independent and this process is going on even today, the latest case being that of Montenegro. Border changing has resulted in the fact that, after 1920, in the Eastern-Central European region between Germany and Russia, the number of small states increased and since 1990 this process has been going on. This separation process is completely different from the unification processes all over the world.

Since the 1950s, Western Europe has chosen a different alternative. These countries wanted to get over the consequences of the two World Wars by solving the conflicts between individual countries through negotiations, so that they could open their borders to each other and become one dynamic economic and social area. This was what the changes in the other parts of the world required and this did not allow the isolation of individual countries or groups of countries.

European borders kept changing in the past. The constantly changing borders tore ethnic, cultural, religious and economic communities and regions apart. Being military areas, borderlands became depopulated or, at least, sparsely populated and the inhabitants moved to the central parts of their country for defence reasons. If, owing to some kind of mineral or processing activity, a borderland region began to develop, it aroused jealousy in the other country.

The separating character of the borders was strengthened even more by the fact that the individual countries differed not only regarding their languages, but also their administration, their legal system and taxation, which made crossing borders and cooperation difficult. Due to isolation and separation there was antipathy against the people living beyond the border, which also meant an obstacle to developing relations.

In the decades following World War II, especially in Germany, France and Holland, but also in the Scandinavian countries people living in the borderlands tried to live in the same way as those from inside the country. In order to achieve this aim they had to eliminate the closed character of borders. They had to realize, however, that, owing to their lack of competences, they could not do so at the level of their settlements. Regional associations began to emerge on both sides of the borders, everywhere according to the laws of their own country; what is more, in most places they set up common organisations to achieve their goals. These organisations were the euroregions.

V. REGIONS AND EUROREGIONS IN EASTERN-CENTRAL EUROPE

In the countries of Eastern-Central Europe, (the list of the countries is narrowed down to the countries belonging to the Carpathian Basin: Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, and Hungary), the old characteristics of closed borders are still typical, and openness is still in its infancy.

In these countries borders are of great significance, whether there is a border between countries or an administrative boundary within the country. It is typical that the administration systems of these countries are constantly re-organised so as to be able to establish new territorial units to replace traditional administrative units inherited from the past. Its purpose, whether declared or not, is to cut up minority areas and to modify the number and proportion of minorities. The central political will can only be implemented through a hierarchical system, which assumes the exact separation of administrative competences. Another consequence of centralisation is that borderland areas of the countries became increasingly backward because they were far from all the centres in a social, communicative, and economic sense, too. Therefore, the number of inhabitants has decreased and there is an ageing population.

Economic development depends on the market but authorities have a direct say in locating companies. Allowances and the stimulation of emerging businesses depend on certain aspects of state-power.

THE BORDERLESSNESS OF ECONOMIC LIFE AND INTENDED REGIONALISATION THOUGHTS ABOUT BOUNDARIES AND REGIONS

This solution is in close connection with regional development. Regional development is supervised from the higher hierarchical level, and local initiatives play but a very small role. I call this phenomenon intended regionalisation.

The interests of the central power prevent it from dealing with such a peripheral phenomenon as the backward situation of the people living on the borderlands. That is why most cross-border euroregions are only symbolic; they are not really effective politically, ideologically or economically, either.

With the revival of a new bourgeois era, the economic political goal of each country was to join world economy. On our continent this can best be done by becoming a member of (or a candidate for) the European Union. As members of the European Union, however, they have to give up their former policy of closure and have to set up a uniform economic space. The function of borders has to be changed, and isolation and discrimination have to be replaced by a filtering function both in case of borders and administrative boundaries. More decentralised methods of the implementation of central will have to be introduced and local and regional forces must be allowed to get stronger. Local and regional governments, rather than the central government, should be given more power.

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