

TRANSPORT DISPARITIES IN A CROSSBORDER REGION. CASE STUDY: THE LAND OF MARAMUREŞ

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ABSTRACT - The Land of Maramureş is one of the most representative natural regions. It has become a cross-border region on a segment of the Romanian-Ukrainian border because of the evolution of human society. The placement of the present border on the material and spiritual convergent axis represented by the Tisa Valley (in 1920) determined a reorientation of the transport systems of the two Maramureş components. The transition from the planned socialist economy to the market-oriented one in 1990/1991 produced rapid changes both in the structure of the transport systems and in the orientation of the transportation flow. The new conditions allowed the appearance of the first tendencies to restore the Maramureş transport system. Still, the different ways chosen by the two countries (Romania and Ukraine) in their relation with the European power centres created new barriers for these new tendencies.

Key words: Maramureş, transport system, border effect, cross-border interrelations.

The transport system is part of the social and economic environment that combines the human, the economic, the political, and the financial resources. It allows substance, energy, and information exchanges that make possible the functioning of the economy. Settlements, especially towns, are convergence points for transport networks (Tălângă, 2000), favouring multiple interrelations between the transport system and the settlements network.

Borders are “scars” of history according to the Introduction to the European Charter for border and cross-border regions. In many places, they have divided clear geographical entities. The most visible effects of borders are on the transport systems because of the amputation of networks, the destruction of bridges, longer time span needed for short travels, and the difficulties in transmitting cross-border messages. Thus, unitary territorial systems are fragmented and the directions of the transport vectors are distorted from their traditional orientation. If the border crosses a river, the gravitational concentration axis of the geographical space becomes a political-administrative discontinuity (Cocean, 2002), and the transport systems have to be restructured. Many times, the new flux directions oppose the gravitational ones and, thus, isolation is promoted while flux decrease is encouraged.

Maramureş is an obvious geographical entity lying on the Maramureş Depression and the mountainous space from the South-Eastern Carpathians neighbouring it (Mihăilescu, 1963). The unitary character of this space is augmented by its belonging to only one hydrographical basin (the basin of the Tisa river) and by its long common history from ancient times up to the end of World War I. After 1920, the material and human concentration axis represented by the Tisa Corridor became the border dividing the two Maramureş sectors.

TRANSPORT SYSTEM EVOLUTION

We have identified the following periods and stages in the evolution of the transport system in Maramureş:

Table 1. *Transport system evolution*

No.	Period	Stage	Duration
1.	The pre-modern period	the appearance of the transport system	13 th c. BC -1872
2.	The modern period	unitary development	1872-1920
		border fragmentation	1920-1940
		forced restoration	1940-1945
3.	The contemporary period	quasi-total isolation	1945-1990
		contemporary	1990-

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1. THE PRE-MODERN PERIOD (13th BC -1872)

This period began with the first documentary record of man in Maramureş and ended with the appearance of the railways in this territory. During this stage, the road network was created together with the settlement system along the hydrographical network. The Tisa Valley became the flow concentration axis where the first towns developed: Sighetu Marmatei (it had a central position and an administrative function as the county administrative centre) and Hust (at the foot of the homonym fortress. It controlled the entrance into the region and the exit from Maramureş).

Rafts were used for the transport of export goods (salt and wood). In order to build rafts, dams were created. Several traces of their existence can still be seen.

2. THE MODERN PERIOD (1872-1945)

2.1. The Unitary Development Stage (1872-1920)

The modern period began with the appearance of railways in Maramureş and thus with its connection to the European transport system. The appearance of the processing industry was supported as a consequence. The railway was along the Tisa Valley, switching from one river bank to the other. It depended on the location of the most important centres and forms of relief. In order to transport salt, narrow gauge railways leading to the mining centres (Ocna Şugatag, Coştiui, and Slatina) and the chemical factory in Bocicioiu Mare were built.

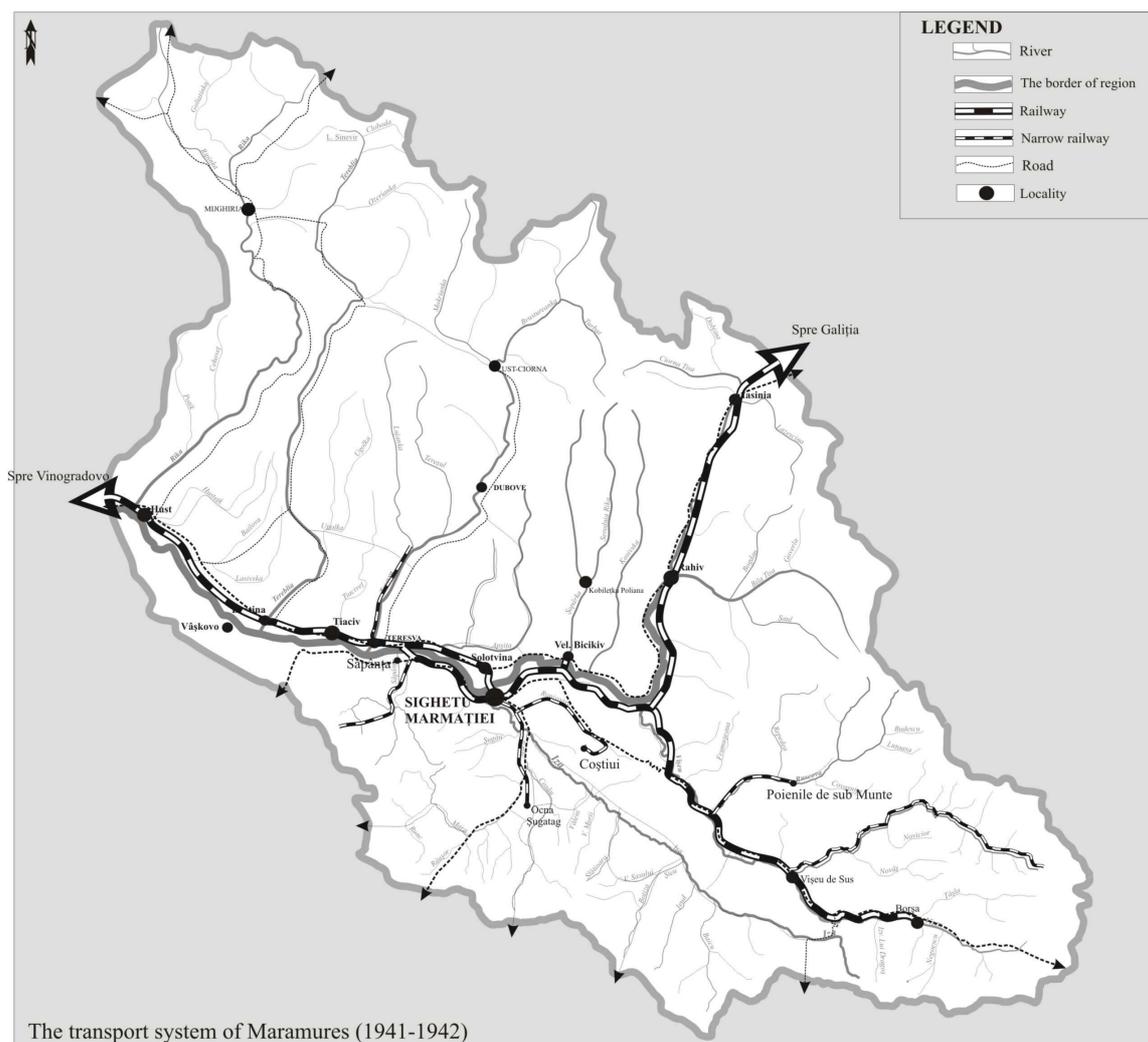


Figure 1. The transport system of Maramureş in 1941 (after Radnai Havasok, 1941)

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2.2. The Border Fragmentation Stage (1920-1940)

After World War I, the northern part of Maramureş, ethnically dominated by a Slavic population (the Carpathian Russians), was attached to Czechoslovakia. The southern sector of Maramureş, ethnically dominated by Romanians, together with Transylvania, united with Romania. The Tisa became the border between the two states. The border effects were mitigated thanks to permissive border crossing regulations which maintained the common railway system functional and also because of the eight bridges (five road bridges and three railway bridges) which linked the two banks of the Tisa.

Wood was transported via the railway system and, consequently, new narrow gauge railways were built along the main valleys. The modernisation of the road transport began.

2.3. The Forced Restoration Stage (1940-1945)

As a result of the two arbitrations in Vienna (1939 and 1940), Hungary occupied Maramureş and north-western Transylvania. Maramureş County was restored and its capital became Sighetu Marmăţiei. Several bridges were restored and the railway to Slatina was also restored. While the Soviet troops came closer, in 1944, Zakarpatia and the northern part of Maramureş decided to join the Soviet Union that had promised these two territories an autonomous state structure. Taking this into account, the southern part of Maramureş was to be included into the Soviet Union as well (January-April 1945). The local population's protest and the Romanian governmental efforts put an end to this attempt (Gherheş 2002).

3. THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

3.1. The Quasi-total Isolation Period

In 1946, our new neighbour in the north (the Soviet Union) abruptly closed the border with Romania, the connection bridges were dismantled or destroyed, and the human cross-border contacts decreased significantly. The new reality imposed a series of changes in the transport systems.

The Romanian Maramureş was incorporated administratively into the Maramureş County and had its capital moved to Baia Mare. Thus, for the first time, the capital was outside the Maramureş region. This changed the orientation of flows especially in the road transport system. The roads were modernised and the road transport became the most important transport system.

The railway system was isolated and that was why the Romanian state had to reconnect it to the national system by building the Salva-Vişeu railway connecting Maramureş to Transylvania. The competition with the road system and the abandonment of salt mining led to the dismantling of the narrow gauge railways, except for the one along Vaser Valley.

The transport system remained polarised and Sighetu Marmăţiei City maintained its function as a polarising centre for Maramureş.

The Ukrainian Maramureş was attached to the Zakarpatia region. Ujgorod became its administrative centre and the Ukrainian Maramureş became an administrative unit of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Autonomy promises were not kept. On the railway along the Tisa, the transport of people was interrupted. For the transportation of Soviet Union goods the Romanian sector of the railway was used (along the Tisa, between Vişeu Valley and Câmpulung on Tisa), and the gauge had to be widened. Thus, for a certain period of time the town of Sighetu Marmăţiei was the settlement where all three types of railway gauge were in use. Some of the narrow gauge railways were abandoned.

The road network was modernised and consisted mostly of the national road (part of the Ukrainian outer transport ring) along the Tisa Valley. This gave a transit character to the transport in the Ukrainian Maramureş territory, none of the settlements having succeeded in becoming a polarising centre. The transport system was a lineal one, along the Tisa Valley to which all the low potential flows from its tributaries descended.

CONTEMPORARY CHANGES

3.2. The Contemporary Period (1990-2006)

After 1990, significant changes took place in the urban transport system in the Romanian sector. The most important ones were:

- strong decrease of the railway activities and abandonment of certain unprofitable sectors;
- complete privatisation of the road transport system;

- increase of comfort conveniences due to almost entire replacement of the facilities;
- adjustment of the flow rhythm and orientation according to the market demand;
- high numerical increase of the gas stations;
- connection to Maramureş of international transporters (Eurolines, Atlassib)
- local transporters who owned minibuses occasionally met local demands.

In the Ukrainian sector of Maramureş changes were slower to appear. We noticed:

- transport companies and their equipment did not change;
- private gas stations appeared;
- a private bus network appeared;
- international migration was supported by the private transporters, owners of minibuses.

The political, social, and economic changes in the two countries (Romania and Ukraine) opened the perspective for restoring the Maramureş transport system due to cross-border interrelations. Under the impact of the existent laws, several changes were noticed.

Between 1990-1997, the border crossings became very intense because of the collapse of dictatorial systems and because of the appearance of new cross border passages. Although these border passages were built under poor conditions (e.g. walking passages on the Câmpulung railway bridge at Tisa-Teresva), they were very busy. The record number of 8,846 border crossings per day was reached. The phenomenon is typical of the border crossings evolution at the eastern border of the European Union (Vandermotten, 2004). The increase was explosive at the beginning of the 1990s.

Between 1997-2004, border crossings are regulated through the Ismail Convention (March, the 29th, 1996). This convention refers to the simplification of border crossings. It limits the number of border crossings number to two per month and only the residents in the border area may be its beneficiaries. Border crossings are by train, on the Sighet-Teresva route (3 days: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday) and the Sighet-Rahău route (2 days: Wednesday and Friday). The new restrictions reduce the number of border crossings to an average of 225 persons per train. Nevertheless, during this period, through the effort of the local community, the road bridge linking Sighetu Marmatei (Romania) and Slatina (Ukraine) was restored (2002), but its use was postponed.

Before Romania's accession to the European Union, borders had to be better secured and this also led to the visa introduction on the 22nd of June 2004. Afterwards, border crossings strongly decreased so that during the first nine months of 2006 the average was 45 persons per train. The Agreement reached on the 19th of December 2003, between the Romanian Government and the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers, stipulated, besides the visa introduction, the use of the simplified border crossing points in international points, both for people and goods.

On 15 January 2007, in the presence of the presidents of Romania (Traian Băseşcu) and Ukraine (Victor Iuşcenko), the crossing point of Sighetu Marmatei-Solotvina international border was inaugurated. This was a very popular event. Although visa is still necessary, the number of people crossing the border both ways has increased a lot. In March 2007 69,500 people and 20,260 vehicles crossed the border, which represents a daily average of 2,240 people and 653 vehicles. Upon the inauguration of the bridge, the president of Ukraine promised that Romania would be introduced on the list of countries whose citizens do not need a visa in the context of Romania's accession to EU.

In conclusion the evolution of transportation in Maramureş is a typical situation for the geographic regions that developed according to the unity of their natural frame and later divided because of border between countries.

During a first and very long stage, the Maramureş transport system focused on the Tisa Valley, an axis of gravitational convergence and maximum human concentration of the old County of Maramureş. Turning Tisa into a border fragmented a well consolidated territorial system, and the axis of gravitational concentration turned into a discontinuity and major disfunction line.

Attaching the two Maramureş sectors to two different states, their incorporation into regional territorial-administrative units (Maramureş County – Romania, Zakarpattia Region – Ukraine), placing their central points beyond the Maramureş space emphasized the consequences of the peripheral position. The new situation determines the reorganization the material and human flows towards the organizing centres from every country and the Tisa Valley is accompanied by the appearance of two parallel transport ways which do not intersect. Only after the political changes occurred at the beginning of the 1990's in the two

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countries are there new chances to reconstruct the systemic unity of the Maramureș transport by re-activating railway (1997) and road connections (2007).

The resume of contacts within Maramureș is still hindered by motivations beyond this regional space and which come from the national or the European space. The problems between Romania and Ukraine about the Isle of the Serpents and the continental platform of the Black Sea contributed to a delay in opening the Sighetu Marmatiei Solotvina bridge. For some time the different evolution of the two countries (Romania and Ukraine) concerning NATO and EU accession has slowed down the faster reconstruction of the Maramures transport system because of the restrictions imposed upon Maramureș as an Eastern EU border.

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