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► **To cite this version:**

Jozsef Toth, Zoltan Wilhelm. Regional development in Hungary. REIT annual conference of Pécs, 2004 (Hungary), May 2004, Pécs, Hungary. pp.50-63. halshs-01053275

**HAL Id: halshs-01053275**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01053275v1>**

Submitted on 30 Jul 2014

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# Regional Development in Hungary

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*The professional and political debate on the superficial or in-depth reorganization and reform of Hungary's administrative regions – which has been a constant feature on the agenda, albeit with varying levels of importance since the regime change of 1990 – has today been revived. The reforms carried out in Hungary during the past decade, although affecting area organization at many levels, have failed within the modified conditional system to provide a viable and comprehensive system.*

The internal structure of a state is determined by the state boundaries. To speak of state borders with regard to a uniting Europe is no easy task, since the import of the expression is changing within the framework of this integration. The outer borders of the EU lie along natural boundaries, and therefore may be clearly defined, while serving as protective enclosures for achievements which present inhabitants reached over many decades. In recent decades this produced a predominantly isolating tendency, and its liberalization in relation to penetrability may be mainly interpreted as a result of the expansion process. It seems appropriate to emphasise this notion, since after enlargement in 2004, today's Schengen border will partly become an internal one, and in parallel will be gradually pushed eastwards, creating a wall or barrier in regions where it was traditionally desirable to maintain penetrability.

## BORDERS WITHIN THE EU

The internal borders within the EU, from a legal point of view, are almost equal in status, notwithstanding the fact that they reveal significant variations. The zones defining the legitimate areas of the Benelux states, which have enjoyed completely free penetrability for almost one hundred years, cannot be compared with the German-Austrian, Swedish-Finnish, or for that matter Italian-French borders. In addition to many other factors, the internal borders of the EU differ in their historical roles, in the development of international relations, in their physical existence, policies and time frames, thus reflecting the multiple varieties which the member states represent. Notwithstanding this colorful structure, one international tendency may be noted: *the community which we intend to join aims to derogate its internal borders continuously*. In place of the former isolation, the community intends to accord a unifying role to these areas. These points of juncture, notwithstanding good intentions and democratic fixtures, are not without problems: we need only mention the line that divides the Irish island, or that at the southern end of the continent between the British and the Spanish (Gibraltar). Ethnic and religious segregation, and the numerous conflicts arising from these within states and even settlements, indicate that such problems face countries besides those waiting to join the EU.

The majority of these conflicts arise from the fact that the division of areas – the establishment of borders – has not been satisfactory from any standpoint (*Table 1*). Where regional divisions evolved spontaneously in the course of socio-economic development, and do not or only partly coincide with the area structure desired by power interests, the areas may be administered only with great difficulty, even given the most democratic institutions, and often face serious problems. Below we will counterbalance the system of organically

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developing area units based on a functional basis (from the bottom up) with the area structure serving administrative purposes (from the top down). The overlap between the two views is significant the world over; at the same time, not even the most optimistic can count on complete conformity.

Table 1: Possible area splitting systems

Functional system	Settlement	Jurisdictional area	Region	Country
Administrative system	Village/city	District	County	State

The functional region incorporates the settlement, the surrounding related areas established over centuries, and the region built thereon, which together constitute the country itself. These concepts together constitute a whole. While their internal borders are flexible and may be modified periodically to suit the demands of different ages, viewed from a greater distance, they constitute permanent borders. The contrary structure, which exists alongside the previous, is developed by administrative means, and is an accumulative system. The legal system, administration and power functions are all valid solely within the boundaries of the given state, thus for their exercising and operation multi-level units of similar size are created. The government represents its legal rights through county legislatures, subordinately, through districts whose jurisdiction extends to the villages and cities of the given region. The denomination of the various levels and the distribution of power among them reveal a wide variety of structures throughout Europe; however, a system similar in its essentials can be found everywhere. Below, using the forming map of Europe, we will draw attention to the theoretical and practical differences between these two notions.

The first line of argument is based on secular development. With the development of settlements came the need for some level of insurance that people could work, live and perform some activity within their own habitat. These activities acquired shape and were concentrated in specific institutions whose jurisdiction varied. This occurred because their existence, given the geographical circumstances and scope for utilization thereof, was based on the size of the habitation and the needs of the inhabitants, therefore on the functional construction. *The settlement organizes itself into jurisdictional regions, the definition of which is quite broad within the given related literature.* One thing is certain: long-term coexistence, traditions and a developed scale of shared values unite the people living therein; it also seems correct to say that a region is built up of jurisdictional regions, similar to building blocks. From these regions, between which belt-like areas of lower density may be found, a country is constructed, meaning the coexistence of many regions and their mutual cooperation.

Switching to the other line of argument (the administrative system), we encounter the idea of building from the top downwards; that is, a state is created as a single administrative territory. In establishing area units, we divide the country area; the background to this notion is thus rather different. The other significant difference from the previous concept is that the constituent parts are surrounded by linear borders; that is, there is no single point of space which does not fall under some jurisdiction. The village is declared such by the competent agency, or by legal jurisdiction. This means that one settlement may be designated a village, another simply a populated outer region: if it is declared that this other is more developed, on the basis of some numerically defined aspect, then the settlement may be declared a town or city. The villages group together into a district, whose center, through an administrative system serving specified functions, will administer the settlements under its jurisdiction. We are able to provide similar examples in relation to both districts and counties. We should however

be wary of doing so, at least for the moment. We may see from the above that each of the notions even in this manner produces pairs, *but the question of the county and the region constitutes a lively point of debate in today's administrative reforms, and represents the issue between differing interests*. Many who would not wish to recognize the differences between these two notions attempt to establish regions built up of counties. These units, in our opinion, do not cover the regions actually established through economic processes, whose establishment would not be worth expending energy on. *The real regions already exist: through our everyday use of our surroundings we have already brought them about. We should expose them and on them construct the municipal system*. This may be achieved in parallel with the counties, but it would be more appropriate to replace the counties with the newly developed regions. However, their development is a serious problem, since our electoral system is based on the counties, and would never permit a situation whereby the victorious political power destroyed the basis of its own victory, on which its legitimacy is founded. In order to create the optimal situation, most probably the present four-year cycle stipulated by the present legal system is insufficient for the effective operation of the government. A longer time-span is required to deal with the problem of how we may move forward, and by what method we can establish and shape a new (geo-)political background.

The state is made up of counties, or more precisely, the state area is administratively divided into counties. The country is the outcome of an objective evolutionary process, while the state is the product of a general principle operating in the world, and not an area which is the natural outcome of social and economic processes. *A state border is established by permanent or temporary force and power relations*; the question of forms created by socio-economic arrangements does not arise.

In a broader interpretation of the above as regards our whole continent, we may assert that despite the possibility of lower hierarchy level categorizations, Europe can be divided into states and countries. We are able to do this once we have defined the continent. This in itself is not a simple task, since its political (country-based) and geographical boundaries significantly differ. From a state point of view Europe is present in Africa (e.g. Keota), America (e.g. French Guyana) and Asia (e.g. Turkey). The phrase "Europe of Nations" has appeared periodically in the presentational materials of the integration process; whether actually nation-states or not, the materials certainly refer to the states of Europe. It is sufficient to refer simply to the "nation of Belgium", which as a state is one, though its citizens are strongly attached to more than one nation along linguistic, cultural and other lines. Considered thus, and including even the smallest, there are at least 50 nations in our continent, all significantly different. One need to think only of the 0.44 km<sup>2</sup> Vatican, or of Russia stretching far beyond the confines of Europe.

## EUROPE OF REGIONS

In reference to the "Europe of regions", accepting the assertion that regions are the building units of countries, which may be divided and joined with regions with whom they do not belong, we may see a completely different divisional system. Considered within the limits of this system, only 17 countries may be drawn up, with a divisional system quite different from the customary one. No concrete line border may be drawn, since belt-like less densely textured areas separate the central denser regions of the country.

According to *Diagram 1*, Iberia (as a country) includes the state areas of Spain, Portugal, and Andorra and Gibraltar. France, besides its core area, extends to Belgium and a section of Switzerland, which on a state level would be categorized in different positions. Germany also extends outside its state borders to incorporate the German lowlands, a slice of Switzerland

and Austria; viewed thus it is a country bigger than the state we know. Italy also extends beyond its borders, taking a slice out of Switzerland, which thus as a state has been completely divided between other countries. Switzerland exists as a state but not as a country. Continuing through Europe, Britain and Scandinavia come next. However, in certain regions of Russia similar state boundaries must be drawn, since the Asian region's borders are rather hard to define. The separation of the Ukraine is also only possible with the establishment of rather broad and temporary belts. It is quite a difficult task to draw the correct borders in the densely textured mining and industrial region of the Don valley, and this question is a cause of much dispute. Moving in a southern direction we encounter the Caucasian Peninsula, then Turkey, which extends beyond its borders to the north-eastern regions of Cyprus. Returning to the core regions of Europe, we have the Balkans and the Carpathian region. This latter we intentionally do not refer to as historical Hungary, which would be a false designation, since there have always been "co-tenants" in the region. Poland is hardly larger than the state of the same name; the changes in its state boundaries have had significant effects on its historical development.

The map raises a number of problems. Firstly, the names used could be further refined, since more than once the name used for the state and the country is the same, and those who do not completely understand this perspective would find these categories limited and even offensive. To avoid such misunderstanding it would be more appropriate to use names with historical reference (e.g. Gallia, Germania, Polonia, Bohemia, etc.), with their associations of a common part, language and culture rather than of states engendered by modern power struggles.

Using the map as a draft, we can see that most of the regions within the area of Europe may be clearly separated, and that the resulting regions do not cut across country borders. With the introduction of artificial constructions, however, this takes place, since omnipresent background power struggles have shifted the lines of force and pushed the borders hither and thither. With the building of the "Europe of regions", we must be aware that these regions have since the very beginning constituted international regions, in the political, geographical and state-geological meaning of the term. In reality, confrontation occurred in quite the opposite way, but since the power structure is built upon territory units surrounded by country borders, the viewpoint may be interpreted in this manner. Natural regional cooperation, which can also be international, means cooperation built on an original organic economic and territorial placement basis. At the same time, this also means that state power continues its influence through state institutions.

We can say only theoretically that we should reorganize Europe into a Europe of countries, if in fact we are speaking of a Europe of regions. We are aware of the fact that such regional cooperation must be coordinated at state level. Where the state is sovereign, in the original meaning of the word, it does not actually allow its interests to be infringed, therefore in regional interaction dispute tends to replace cooperation. In favorable situations the state is willing to renounce a portion of its sovereignty when obliged to do so, since the other side offers favorable advantages, which are the regular attributions of regional cooperation, despite the fact that these entail a number of inter-state agreements and compromises.

In an examination of the internal borders and arrangements of states, one of the most critical areas is the Balkans, where a high level of differentiation may be seen in the appearance of the given countries. *Diagram 1* refers to the critical point of splitting, and has a scientific importance, which merits further attention. The drawing of borders is not clear-cut even within the most peaceful regions of Europe. We are unable to decide for instance what should be done with the Czech Republic: all experiments which attempted Polish-Czech construction, including the state-level implemented Czechoslovakia, were built on weak foundations. According to Gyula Prinz, whose state-country dichotomy is used as a starting

point for present-day study, Czechoslovakia is the greatest absurdity in state geography. The situation is similar in the region of the Baltic states, some of which are too small to be considered separate countries; however, to arrive at a decision on the issue we should conduct in-depth research into area organization of state constitutions. Circumstances are similar in Slovenia, a country which probably owes its good fortune to its switch-plate role. We may apply this expression to all regions of Europe whose affiliation is unclear. In previous constellations this could be considered a disadvantage, but in the integrating Europe a switch-plate position has acquired much greater importance as a potentially exploitable bridge; thus accession of these regions to the EU within the near future may be understood in this manner.

In presenting these ideas we aim solely to shed light on the problem raised by borders within Europe, the frequently strange, complex and very complicated appearance of the much-used idea which we must take into account on the eve of our accession to the European Union. Our place of residence may be interpreted within a certain area (Europe), one half of which possesses more developed democratic traditions and institutional systems which we must soon officially adopt. While we will not separate from or leave the area which constitutes the Carpathian Basin, the new circumstances imply several types of border. Our Schengen border is the result of natural surroundings, historical events and conjoining rights. This must be handled in such a way that we are able to ensure the greatest possible level of advantage created by regional cooperation, for not only ourselves but on a reciprocal basis, for our partners as well, while respecting every state and EU border. We will have to maintain, develop and coordinate our relational systems in such a way that we derive advantage from the whole process, from the temporary system to be established and hopefully in the longer term from the system of a united Europe.

## JUSTIFICATION OF REGIONAL EXAMINATIONS

Regional examinations are determined in time. They may only be interpreted from the point when the development process of productive power has reached a phase whereby – in accordance with the viewpoint of workforce area-based distribution – such regions separate from one another as have a particular developmental curve, structure, and future, and which therefore also have developmental problems. Viewed thus these area regions possess a certain cohesion: their texture at the core territory is denser, lessening towards the periphery; they exist in the minds of the population as entities, and have certain complexities. In examining Hungary's regional structure, we will be obliged to open on both a time and space level in comparison to the present situation, since today's state area is an artificial area unit whose historical and economic roots may be found in the part, and lead us back to the historical Hungary. Eastern Central Europe started to approach this phase of regional development in the second half of the 19th century.

The relationship between separate regions is based on whether, as a result of specialization due to division, product and activity exchange occurs not only between the separate branches but between areas embodying territorial allocations (regions). The relationship between independent zones occurs during the preceding phase of the development of productive forces, but we can also speak of definitive inter-regional relations. This can only be considered a reality in Eastern Central Europe since the end of the nineteenth century. In our opinion the regions of a country may be interpreted according to the configuration of the secular socio-economic development of the regions, their area structure, and the changes in the texture thereof, the peripheral borders being also the borders of the country itself. Their existence is not influenced by the fact that the international power setup at times cuts across their fixative borders, therefore even unintentionally they drive together regional

portions with different development timeframes, i.e. different territorial organizational systems. At the same time we consider it natural that the operation areas which may be called international regions existing in such a situation are influenced mainly by the social and economic circumstances of the given state, and furthermore by how the political intention as to cooperation develops between them. The objective cooperation which comes about due to the development of intra- and inter-regional productive forces is therefore a question loaded with political issues, which political instruments may for a time have hindered, but which may also effectively help. Today, based on analysis of the experience of the western part of our continent, encouragement of intra- and inter-regional cooperation independent of state borders is becoming ever more timely within the Eastern Central European region. The fact that all of the states within this region wish to become members of the European Union, and must therefore follow its system of norms, including hierarchical and cooperative order, cannot be said to influence positively the intentions, which may hardly be called unified, existing in each of the states.

### HISTORICAL BASIS OF DEVELOPMENT

When examining the history of the Carpathian Basin, we find many instances of segregation between its entities, which were effective for longer and shorter periods. Interestingly, none of these was built on obvious natural area differences: their occurrence was merely exceptional, occasional, and in most cases partial and temporary. From a purely superficial examination of these periods characterized by segregation, it is clear that in almost all cases military-political reasons lay behind them, thus they cannot be considered as forerunners of regional developments or the development of the regional process.

The secular development processes which split the Carpathian Basin into regions were not felt, and its unity was beyond question. The strongest basis for this, based also on natural circumstance, was the state unity of the historical Hungary, which was reestablished for the modern age within the framework of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with the 1867 Hungarian-Austrian Agreement. Despite the fact that Croatia possessed political autonomy from 1868 and that Transylvania also enjoyed a degree of autonomy, Hungary could be considered an entity. A clear consequence of this, from another viewpoint, was that the basis for further development was an integrated railway system. The density of this decreased towards the outer regions; it was only in the direction of Austria that a transition showing unified development could be seen through a dense network system.

A similarly unified picture can be seen in the settlement system of the Carpathian Basin. This unity should be emphasized despite the fact that in many cases it was achieved through not insignificant deviations (farms, small villages, mining cities, agricultural cities). With the commencement and reinforcement of the urbanization process, this unity was increasingly the trend, hierarchical relations began to stabilize, as did the typical configuration of the settlement system. Within this system the centers with the highest hierarchy system were the integrated centers encircling Budapest, which had become a metropolis.

In the capitalized historical Hungary at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, the outlines of core regions of regional development emerged, and certain regional points may be isolated from which, in the event of undisturbed development, definitive regions could have developed. Among these could be found broader and narrower zones, many-sided and with less intensive relation-systems and lower density, whose "jurisdiction" would be decided on subsequently. In our opinion there were nine such region developments within the territory of Hungary after the turn of the century.

To summarize: the Hungary which existed prior to the First World War, filling the entire Carpathian Basin, could be divided into regional developments with varying levels of maturity; however, these could not yet be deemed definitive regions.

## THE INTER-WAR PERIOD

Following the political reorganization after the First World War, the Carpathian Basin contained many state borders. In certain cases these split regional developments (sometimes into many pieces), while making inter-regional relations impossible. The fact that the Central European region, incorporating the Carpathian region, was “fragmented” became a further hindrance to regional development: a number of new states were formed, and widespread rivalries did not benefit international cross-border regional cooperation. The numerous borders significantly slowed down transportation, made the “execution” of the cooperation system more expensive, and restricted movements which wished to respect state borders but were forced to move around previous relations.

The political borders across the Carpathian Basin made regional relations within the country international. This circumstance does not inevitably hinder social and economic development, since it is possible for neighboring countries with peaceful relations and penetrable – almost virtual – borders to share regional relationships which follow the developed social and economic structure of the area, as in the case of areas free of political borders. Within the Carpathian Basin, however, the borders now found between opposed countries destroyed certain elements of the cooperation systems, and in this way hindered the social and economic development of the regions on either side of the border. This unfortunate and long-term situation only changed where border crossing points were in operation and territorial relations concentrated, bringing the energy necessary for development to the given region (*Diagram 2*).

Political rivalries between the two world wars specifically hindered regional development of the now international Carpathian Basin and continuation of its regional formational processes. This situation remained unchanged by the border modifications, referred to in Hungary as “country-increasing”, during the Second World War.

## AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The peace treaties which ended the Second World War restored the original situation within the Carpathian Basin, with two exceptions: the lesser being the widening of the abutment of Bratislava, the larger the absorption of the lower Carpathian region into the Soviet Union. The presence of the Soviet Union within the Carpathian Basin, along with the imposition of a single political direction onto the entire Eastern-Central European region, had serious consequences for the regional development of the Carpathian Basin region. The states of Eastern Central Europe, directed by the Soviet Union, officially enjoyed friendly, even brotherly relations. However, with the overstressing of non-interference in territorial integrity and internal issues, and the sweeping of ethnic issues under the carpet, the long-term operation of the centralized organizational and operational model created a situation in which borders were fetishized and made difficult to cross. Two regions located on either side of the border, which had for centuries developed in unity, were able to continue cooperation only with the acknowledgement and permission of their state capitals.

The fact that within the framework of the Comecon the smaller member countries had stronger ties to the Soviet Union than to each other increased isolation along the state borders, and thus the effects of branch interrelations could not prevail within the territorial



allocations.

Thus behind the borders, the area structures of individual states were able to develop only within the framework of political barriers, the intensity and texture of the internal relational system becoming greater than in territories located along the border. This also had the consequence that political borders came to resemble and function as regional borders.

## THE PRESENT SITUATION AND OUR POSSIBILITIES

The political turning point in the eastern half of Europe during the 1980s and early 1990s created a new situation within the Carpathian Basin. In place of the Soviet Union which has since collapsed, Ukraine is today present in the region. Slovakia's independence has created another state whose territory is located within the Carpathian Basin, while the Czech Republic has been squeezed out. Furthermore, with the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Hungary now shares borders with three countries which do not always enjoy particularly friendly relations. All these countries' political systems have undergone changes. The removal of the Iron Curtain influenced circumstances, as did Austria's accession in 1995, which brought the EU into the Carpathian Basin. Enlargement processes in the near future may produce new constellations, with the majority of the Carpathian Basin conjoined with the EU, and the majority of the surrounding areas separated by (Schengen-type) borders.

The system change as a whole is beneficial for regional cooperation within the Carpathian Basin, even while our weaknesses – old conflicts, fears and suspicions – have resurfaced; but the realistic and realizable value of secure promises has become evident. While few today would dispute that there is no real alternative to the united European model, the fact remains that the accession process will be quite difficult and long, therefore anything which can assist and accelerate accession is important for all concerned. This is why the issue of regional cooperation has gained significance within the region of Eastern Central Europe.

Hungary, as the centrally located and economically open country of the Carpathian Basin, is concerned at all possible levels of cooperation: small-region cooperation based on central jurisdictional relations spanning regions split by country borders, as much as international regional cooperation, or the synchronized development of the states of the region reaching beyond the Carpathian Basin.

Cross-border attraction is mutual and essentially counterbalancing. This point should be stressed since it reassures those anxious that revitalization of these relations would endanger the status quo. Dynamising central jurisdictional relations, irrespective of country borders, would mean arriving at easier and socially less costly solutions to a number of small-regional problems (undersupply, unemployment, transportation). Good intentions, trust and pursuit of common benefits are sufficient, the rest coming with realistic area processes (*Diagram 3*).

As regards larger-scale regional-type development (which may also be marked by the four points of the compass), four principal strategically important directions may be taken into account, within which may be found 2-3 overlapping regions. These touch all the states of the Carpathian Basin and all possess a number of specifics. It is appropriate to consider them through the example of the centrally-located Hungary (*Diagram 4*).

The most important cooperation direction – the western – functions through two international regional cooperation systems. The first of these is Vienna's, the greatest innovational gate of the entire Basin, with indirect effects beyond the borders of the Carpathian Basin. The other western strategic cooperation direction is the Austrian-Hungarian-Slovenian-Croatian border region, which is today less frequented, but will quickly become an area of increasing importance.

The most important of the regional cooperation systems within the northern strategic coop-

eration direction – through Bratislava – is shared with Vienna. The second is the cross attraction of the Hungarian capital with the central Slovakian region, while the third is that of the region characterized by the centers of Miskolc and Kosice.

The most important of the regional cooperation systems within the eastern strategic cooperation direction is the border region of Slovakia-Ukraine-Romania-Hungary, with its junction of Záhony-Csap-Ágcsernyő. This region already features in the Euro Region document on the Carpathians, but its development is likely to be slowed by border controls. The other international regional cooperation system in the east is taking shape in the Great Plain area of Hungary, along the Romanian-Hungarian border.

The first of the cooperation systems of the southern strategic region coincides with the last, while the second – Hungarian-Romanian-Serb – and third – the Hungarian-Croatian-Serb triple border region – mean cooperation with a significant Balkan system of relations.

These international regional cooperation systems, besides their advantages at regional level, play a very beneficial role in activating the social and economic potential of the given small regions, and enhancing the life-quality of the inhabitants. The continentally interpreted regional cooperation systems spanning all the individual states (CEFTA, the Visegrad countries) may also lend a great level of development energy to the regional cooperation located on the border regions, including those within the Carpathian Basin. Existing cooperation levels help in the accomplishment of greater cooperation and the establishment of an ever higher degree of trust.

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DIAGRAMS:

*Diagram 1*

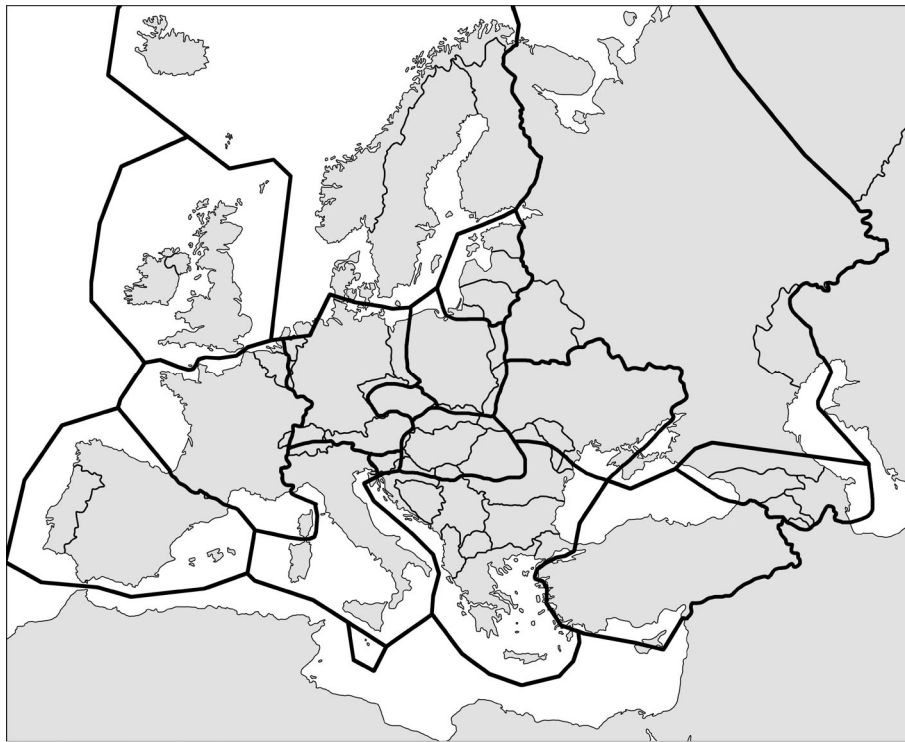


Diagram 1: Europe of countries and switch-plates (Design: J. Tóth – Z. Wilhelm)

Diagram 2

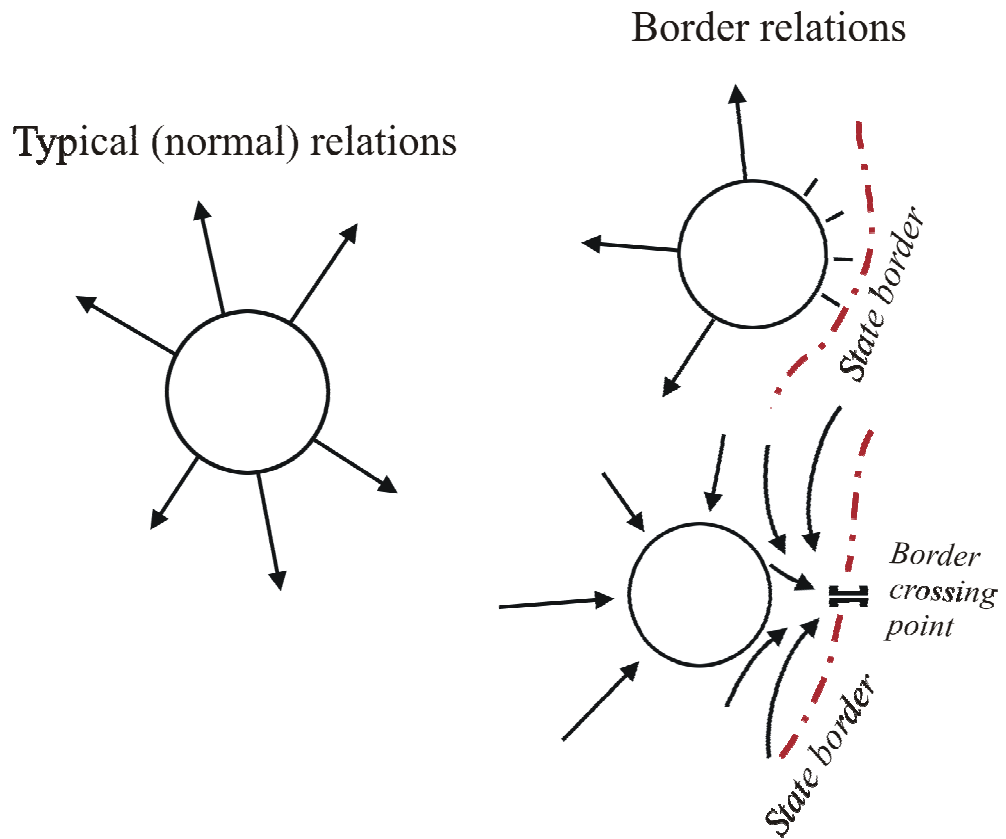


Diagram 2: Possible models of area cooperation (Design: J. Tóth – Z. Wilhelm – G. Kovács)

*Diagram 3*

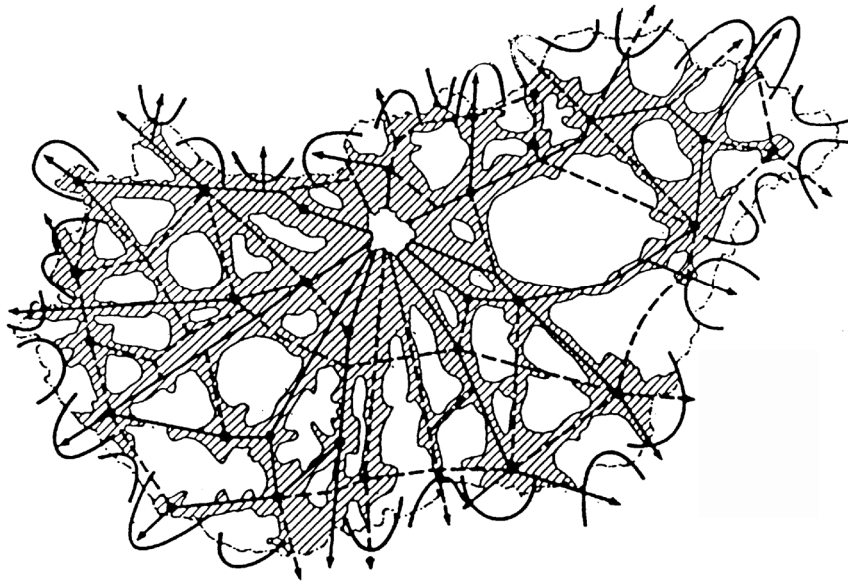


Diagram 3: Area structure of Hungary and cross border attractions (Design: J. Tóth)

Diagram 4

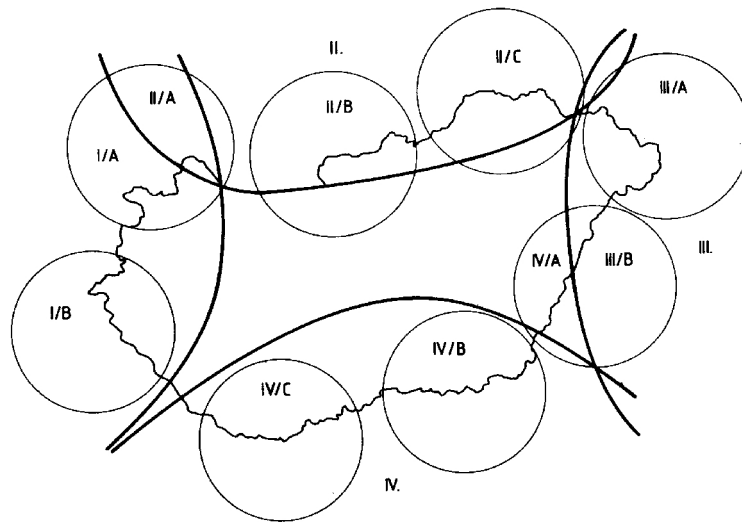


Diagram 4: The international regional cooperation systems of Hungary (Design: J. Tóth – A. Trócsányi – Z. Wilhelm)