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Everyday Life Near State Borders: The Social Effects of the Changing Status of Borders in Central Europe (Romania – Hungary)

Abstract

Various implementation strategies of cross-border territories or specific cross-border cooperation can be identified between Romania and Hungary. Everyday life in a cross-border area implies simultaneously an attempt to relieve the cultural, economic and social barriers and to assert a specific state identity, the identity of "borderman", the cross-border inhabitants and communities located in a "go-between" space. Thence, as a spatial component and no longer a mere border – the border contributes to the differentiation of territories (at all scales). These differentiations entail the designation of new borders, "inner borders" within the state. These "inner borders" are a perception as well as a reality. Precisely as a result of the will to restrict the "border effects" (influence of borders), finer divisions are appearing. Fragmentations can be identified at micro-scales (communes and locations) and meso-scales (micro-regions). Perceptions translate an "intermediary" condition: the border space conceived as a shift from one system to another. The states encompass territories drawing benefit from the proximity of borders to various extents.

Introduction

This article analyses the influence of state borders on cross-border populations' relations to space in Central Europe. The broadest definition of these borders is "the spatial limits fixed by public decision"¹. However, they can become real bridges between the two

¹ Huth P. K., Allee T. L., 2002, *The Democratic Peace and Territorial Conflict in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, "Cambridge Studies in International Relations", p.488.

societies or the two worlds they split². The view adopted is thence an analysis of the consequences of border constraints on the populations.

State borders are slowly losing their functions in the framework of the construction of the European community³. Attempts to homogenize potentials for regional development are undertaken by cross-border cooperation initiatives in Europe⁴ and worldwide⁵. These references are only a few examples of this major issue in human and political sciences today.

Rethinking the notion of "border" has therefore become crucial⁶. It still remains a breaking line insofar as the political distribution cannot be put in the balance again with the unification of Europe within the European Union. However, does this breaking line also mean a closure? In Europe, this does not appear to be the case any longer even if the Balkans constitute a striking counterexample⁷.

This article endeavours to list and analyse the social and spatial consequences of various strategies undertaken by the actors of cross-border development aimed at eradicating the constraints of the border between Romania and Hungary. Locally, the living conditions appear to have improved in some cases. The communities benefiting from such economic or

² Donnan H., Wilson T.-M., 2003, "Territoriality, Anthropology and the Interstitial: Subversion and Support in European Borderlands", *Focaal: European Journal of Anthropology*, 41, 3, pp.9-25.

³ Arbaret-Schulz C. et al., 2004, "La frontière, un objet spatial en mutation", *Espaces-temps*, on internet <http://espacestems.net/document842.html> (29/10/2004).

⁴ Bechev D., 2004, "Contested Borders, Contested Identity: The Case of Regionalism in Southeast Europe", *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 4, 1, pp.77-95; Bufon M., 2002, "Experiences of Cross-Border Cooperation in the Upper Adriatic", *Regional and Federal Studies*, 12, 4, pp.177-196; Rudolph H., 2007, "Die verdrängte Teilung [The Suppressed Division]", *Eurozine*, (first publication in *Merkur*, 1, 2007), on internet <http://eurozine.com/pdf/2007-01-03-rudolph-de.pdf> (01/03/2007).

⁵ Barter P. A., 2006, "Multiple Dimensions in Negotiating the Cross-Border Transport Links that Connect and Divide Singapore and Johor, Malaysia", *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 47, 2, p.287; Newman D., 2006, "The Lines that Continue to Separate Us: Borders in our 'Borderless' World", *Progress in Human Geography*, 30, 2, pp.143-161.

⁶ Newman D., Paasi A., 1998, "Fences and Neighbours in the Post-modern World: Boundary Narratives in Political Geography", *Progress in Human Geography*, 22, 2, pp.186-207.

⁷ The split of Czechoslovakia can be evoked as well as the tensions in the Republic of Moldavia. Our aim here is not to cover all the formations and reforming of European borders: we favour a prospective outlook.

socio-cultural initiatives seem to be different from other communities, whether they are remote from states borders or not.

Our purpose is to highlight the individual or collective conditions and capacities of local mobilization with examples of developments in specific geographical settings. These conditions and capacities appear as many potentials for the formation of new borders, these new borders being located "within" the states. They take shape or remain – according to the cases – "in the minds". Their identification entails inquiring into practices and representations as well as into imaginations. In this view, the arguments developed will be based on the examples of four small Romanian cities at the border of Hungary (between 7.000 and 14.500 inhabitants) in which analyses of public and private strategies of cross-border cooperation can be carried out.

"Open borders": From Borders to Border Regions and Populations

Borders have long been a major topic in political⁸ or historical studies⁹. Since the early 1990s, social sciences have started studying borders¹⁰, no longer considered as mere geographical spaces but as global spaces. Borderlands are thus theorized as a revealing element for political and strategic situations¹¹ ad also for economic and social situations¹². The collapse of communism and the progressive enlargement of the European Union have resulted worldwide in a new conception of borderlands where the populations (residents, citizens) are at the heart of the analyses of interactions.

⁸ Newman D., Paasi A., 1998, *op. cit.*

⁹ Gildea R., 2003 [1987], *Barricades and Borders. Europe, 1800-1914*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁰ Donnan H., 2001, "The Anthropology of Borders", *Elsevier Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, pp.1290-1293; Martinez A.-J., 1994, "The Dynamics of Border Interaction: New approaches to Border Analysis", in Schofield C.-H. (ed.), *Global Boundaries: World Boundaries*, London / New York: Routledge, Chapter 1.

¹¹ Eva F., 1994, "From Boundaries to Borderlands: New Horizons for Geopolitics", in Gallusser W.-A. (ed.), *Political Boundaries and Coexistence*, Bern: Peter Lang.

Borders are progressively losing their splitting function and are becoming elements experienced by cross-border populations in their everyday life, practices and representations, and to a lesser extent by all the population of a region.

Geographers currently consider borders according to two aspects¹³ that are not in conflict but rather complement one another and both equally integrate the human dimension of space. One aspect is rooted in the tradition of political geography and geopolitics, and remains concerned with the role of state borders in the construction of national territories and territorial identities¹⁴. In this approach, global analysis and the strategies of actors prevail and borderlines remain unchanged on the political maps even if they appear less binding than in the past. The other theoretical aspect is more economically oriented whereby the regional dimension of cross-borders cooperation prevails¹⁵. This aspect is not only highlighting the regional and Euroregional construction processes but also enhancing the interest and the need to take the living environment into full consideration.

From the point of view of the region as a semantic and psychological construction linked with representations, any familiar territory can form a region as a spatial, economic and socio-cultural unit. In that way, the scientific discourse on borders – an analytical report of the discourses conveyed by the populations – refers to identities and their construction in a global or local (regional) research perspective. State borders are spatial elements exerting an influence on lives and representations, and they consequently question the human aspects¹⁶. It

¹² Schofield C., Grundy-Warr C., 2005, "Reflections on the Relevance of Classical Approaches and Contemporary Priorities in Boundary Studies", *Geopolitics*, 10, pp.650-652.

¹³ Other approaches can be identified, notably the relief and landscape approaches that are part of the research perspectives mentioned above.

¹⁴ Shapiro M., Alker H. (eds.), 1996, *Challenging Boundaries: Global Flows, Territorial Identities*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Toal G., 1994, "Present at (Dis)Integration: Deterritorialization and Reterritorialization in the New Wor(l)d Order", *Annals of American Geographers*, 84, pp.381-398.

¹⁵ Gorzým-Wilkowski W.-A., 2005, "The Notion of the Transboundary Region versus Basic Geographical Terms – A Synthesis", *Przegląd Geograficzny*, 77, 2, pp.235-252; Perkmann M., Sum N.-L. (eds.), 2002, *Globalization, Regionalization and Cross-Border Regions*, London: Palgrave MacMillan.

¹⁶ Meinhof U.-H. (ed.), 2002, *Living (with) Borders. Identity Discourses on East-West Borders in Europe*, Aldershot: Ashgate; Lunden T., 2004, *On the Boundary: About Humans at the End of Territory*, Stockholm: Sodertorns Hogskola.

then becomes possible to analyse borderlines as determining (and discriminating) elements in social space.

Borders are present in our thinking¹⁷. They are distinct from state borders that are administrative borders in the same way as regional or communal borders operating as true caesuras within state territories. They reflect the ethno-cultural, language and religious references of a part of the population compared to another. They also translate economic performances and exchange capacities between places and between regions in a country. For those who live everyday close to a state, these inner borders become their real everyday boundaries more than the state boundaries. The increasing opening of state borders to economic and social cooperation can also become an element of differentiation between the populations and the territories of a same country.

We will ground our reflection on three major facts accounting for the choice of these laboratory-spaces:

- Since the collapse of communism, the state borders of Central Europe are undergoing a vast process of devolution. They can be considered as test spaces of a developing European geography
- These borders are still shaping space, they remain boundaries of the legitimacy of the state and its power. However, while they open, they also become steps, crossings between two worlds or two distinct state societies that have been parted for a long time.
- New perspectives for action and cooperation are appearing in borderlands. The communes and their populations can therefore cross different phases of differentiation, compared to the rest of the state territory, from confinement due to lack of innovation or change of patterns to modernisation through full innovation and adaptability.

¹⁷ Galtung J., 1994, "Coexistence in Spite Of Borders: On the Borders in the Mind", in Gallusser W.-A. (ed.), *Political Boundaries and Coexistence*, Bern: Peter Lang.

Borders as Spatial Signs of a (Central-European) Geography on the Move

Each state and each region of Central Europe has and means to keep its own characteristics. The discourses promoting regional identities are increasing. However a new trend is shaping with the strong will of the Central European states to gather within the European Union¹⁸. Borders clearly reveal this double tension between opening and remaining confined, a combination of two different processes of fragmentation and reunion. Paradoxically, the communist era has only reinforced the splits between the Central European states. Today, these states share the idea of a common future in the European community, a group of states recommending and encouraging cohesion beyond state borders.

The consequences of this policy are many, one of them being the creation of socio-economic solidarities among and through cross-border associations. This cooperation are opening new perspectives for the analysis of cross-border spaces, even if they are not always rooted in clearly defined territories.

State Borders: An Economic and Financial Caesura or a "Crossing"

Each Central European state intrinsically constitutes a specific space of economic, political and social transition from West to East (to a lesser extent from North to South). It generates a geography made of swings whereby each borderline experiences various stages in economic performances¹⁹. According to this hypothesis, Romania could be disadvantaged because of its Eastern and Southern position. Hungary could be better off. But the geographical location – the proximity of some countries and the remoteness of others – and Western Europe economically successful and providing direct foreign investors, do not account for all.

The origin of these differences is also based on the way border areas are used. This function of borderlines and cross-border areas transform them into crossings, spaces "in-

¹⁸ Daianu D., 2000, *Încotro se îndreaptă țările postcomuniste? Curente economice în pragul secolului* (In Which Direction are the Post-Communist States Going? Economic Trends at the End of the Century), Bucarest: Polirom.

¹⁹ See Document 1.

between" two centres represented by the state territories. Until recently, this transitional character was somehow considered as a disadvantage (including the Western regions in the states: they draw benefit from the border but remain far from the "centre"). They now become a potential for the construction of a new "centre", at a time when borders are opening to exchanges in the context of the enlargement of the European Union to the East. Assemblies of cross-border regions are getting together in view of improving policies and practices between neighbours. Defined as "Euroregions", these transnational territorial units have at least three main interests in the framework of our study:

- A mutual knowledge becomes possible and trust is established for foreign investment (improvements in transport, social stability).
- Economic development can take place in rural areas and in small cross-border cities even though economic transition in Central European states tends to favour the large cities and industrial regions.
- Experiences and techniques can be exchanged and create a framework beneficial to the implementation of local development projects.

State Borders: A Boundary for Cultural Groups?

Central European countries have recently experienced a reaffirmation of "nation-states" following the collapse of communist regimes. However they currently fully participate in the European move in redefining the role of borders. Even though their borders have undergone openings or closures at various degrees and in various ways, the new process is integrated into a long term plan as is explained by Robert Gildea²⁰. The current transformations partly stem from past historical turmoil to be taken into account. Moreover, borders have often been imposed from outside by treaties and agreements on reluctant national authorities and populations. So was the case for the border splitting Hungary and Romania²¹.

²⁰ Gildea R., 2003 [1987], *op. cit.*

²¹ The treaty of Trianon (1920) has been the main one: the current Western borders of Romania were established and Transylvania was given to Romania to the detriment of Hungary.

Central Europe can be defined as a "belt of mixed populations"²², a space of "impossible cartographic adequacy"²³. Thus, its states must find a compromise and coexist with various minorities. Following the collapse of Communism, there was a serious risk that a "conflictual otherness" could appear with the resurgence of minority claims and/or nationalisms following the Yugoslavian pattern. Nevertheless, few conflicts have broken out or been brought to light. In most cases, treaties have been signed or confirmed between the states in neighbourly terms, in an attempt to calm down potential tensions.

The stages and processes characterizing the post-communist period have to be taken into consideration as well as the degrees of border openings, and the various practices operated in cross-border spaces. Borders represent links of technological, financial, socio-cultural, political..., external collaborations. But they can also act as an obstacle (a brake) to regional development as they may imply some spatial limits whether in mentalities or in everyday initiatives.

Our analysis is based on interpreting the perceptions and practices related to the issue of "otherness": a geography analysing shared or repressed ideals and heritages. It appears crucial to focus on the populations' opinions regarding their environment and themselves in order to better understand the specificities prevailing on the borderlands between Romania and Hungary.

Small Cities along Open Borders: A case Study in the West of Romania

It would be unrealistic to believe that all the Romanian-Hungarian border space can be analysed. However a local approach of the Romanian Banat can be undertaken. This historical region is currently fully integrated into the Western Romanian development region as established in the framework of the regionalization program of the State of Romania and according to the adaptation process to European norms. The Banat region is therefore a member of the Danube-Kris-Mures-Tisa Euroregion shared between Hungary, Romania and F.R.Y.

²² Arendt H., 1951, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (3 vol. *Antisemitism, Imperialism, Totalitarianism*), multiple editors.

²³ Fremont A., 1996, *Europe, entre Maastricht et Sarajevo*, Montpellier: "Géographiques" Reclus.

The main characteristics of Banat – its identification records – explain why this region has been selected and how it can be considered as a model for the modernization of Central Europe in the continuation of its history:

- A region with old intercultural traditions that local elites and many collective movements attempt to maintain. As a result, a specific identity and the feeling of being "different" prevail in this region.
- In this region, an unclaimed historical territory overlaps three state borders and nurtures a long-standing contact with the *Other* – the neighbour and the citizen of the third country.
- A region where two big cities – Timisoara and Arad – participate in the economic development and the scientific reputation (Timisoara) and fully contribute to the economic and political transition in Western Romania and in the Danube-Kris-Mures-Tisa Euroregion.

The selection of four small border towns (or close to the border) in Romania appears relevant as they have similar geographical situations in Banat²⁴. Pecica (13.011 inhab.), Sânnicolau Mare (13.938 inhab.) and Jimbolia (11.115 inhab.) have about the same amount of population; Nadlac, less populated (8.140 inhab.), has the legal status of town, like the others, except Pecica²⁵. Their settlements as well as their post-communism evolution are however different. Pecica is a commune with a mixed settlement, Magyars and residents of Romanian descent, while Nadlac has an important Slovak community (48%). Sânnicolau Mare and Jimbolia have residents of many different descents: apart from Romanians, representing the majority in both cases, their settlements are multicultural.

²⁴ See Document 2.

²⁵ The demographic data are taken from the General Census of Romanian Population (I.N.S.S.E., 2002). The question of city or commune status comes from the nomenclature of the Romanian territorial administration. The criteria to define a city are complex. Pecica is not a city (in spite of a request made in 2005 and rejected); most of its working population is agricultural or employed in agricultural services.

By focusing on Banat and on these four small cities, it seems relevant to apply a geographical approach taking into consideration the local/global and the interaction/opposition aspects as well as the regional dimension of identities (or the attachment to a specific area). While the state border under study infers a clear spatial distribution as can be noted in the political, economic, social and cultural fields, it might however appear as a growing link in the framework of the European construction.

State Border, a Spatial Marker and a Link

The individuals and groups living close to borderlines can draw benefit from the double trend, inside the states and at an international level. The ethno-cultural or religious social groups defined as minorities and their members individually can draw benefit from these contacts more easily. Due to their long-standing cultural and language practices, they find supports outside the state borders as they always used to over the last centuries. However the era of communism has temporarily interrupted these practices and they must be reinstated under new forms. Whether these processes reawaken old resentments or not and permit to re-establish old networks or not is not an element to be analysed in this study. However it is worth mentioning as these practices reveal an overlapping of the political, socio-economic, cultural and practical boundaries forced upon them.

In addition to cultural cooperation, economic and private exchanges are established between entrepreneurs, political authorities, etc. Institutions and various associations are developing cross-border exchange programs. We intended, at the beginning of this study, to highlight the renewed relationship with borders in the framework of a reshaping of Romanian population's relations to space. In order to estimate and measure these perceptions, an approach and a reflection by which the individuals are at the core of the process has to be selected and privileged.

However, selecting this type of qualitative approach may face obstacles and/or limits. Re-integrating the data collected into a wider context raises difficulties. Nevertheless, by

taking into consideration only small territories and remaining aware of the particular character of the study, we can give evidences as hypotheses worth being developed and ascertained.

Interstate Fragmentations and Border Overlapping

The post-communist era is related to a particular "identity time" as a reaction to a collective need of not being only "ex": citizens of ex-communist states, ex-Eastern Europeans, etc. Again, national ideals have become safe values, assertion of a minority situation or loss of a collective status. Social fragmentation is operating in the wake of spatial changes in Central Europe.

We must take into account the spatial relationships of the different socio-cultural groups surveyed in our study. Through their cultural practices, their national heritage, their language, some of these groups overlap the border lines. Can better cross-border cohesion be observed? Is it possible to reconstitute societies – in the sense of *living together* – within the territories established on both sides of a state border?

In the course of the 1990s, a new interactive field appeared for Central European citizens in addition to their single state territory. Exchanges became real from an economic point of view and potential from a socio-cultural one. As a result, state borders were infringed to the benefit of common actions carried out by inhabitants coming from various borders in the region, or to the benefit of new economic relations. Can therefore state borders be considered as a means or support for reconstruction?

On the other hand, inside these countries' borders, the inhabitants must come to terms with an increasing inter-regional competition. Moreover, various collective projects develop at the local (communal)²⁶ or sub-regional levels; the same occurs with associations of citizens, groupings of communes on common projects, the quest for better standard of living and modernization. The double phenomenon of territorial confrontation and differentiation corresponds to a similar process of internal fragmentation subsequent to the political opening

²⁶ In Romania as well as Hungary, the commune (unit of territorial administrative structure) gathers in many cases one "centre" village and several "satellite" villages (core and periphery).

up and liberal competition. The situation symbolizes the end of the social, economic and spatial planning developed by communist regimes.

Borders no longer participate in a mere inside/outside relationship. They combine with other spatial elements and various social factors in order to create a framework of actions and initiatives. Closed border lines used to limit the development of life spaces. Their progressive opening increases spatial competitions.

A Different Meaning of Borders: Social Borders

Known as territorial limits, the borders do not only define the lines separating states. They are also significant of a humanized space²⁷ firmly rooted in people's mind. This "social border" marks off the line of daily territories. Considering borders in their largest definition – and not only as state borders – proves to be necessary in a cognitive approach of human societies and their relationship with their everyday space.

A geographical reflection on the functions of borders in relation to their legal and administrative aspects is currently under scrutiny. Through their (potential) opening, borders can infringe on administrative territories to the benefit of the creation of cross-border social entities. At the same time as they lead to economic differentiations between regions, borders offer various spatial perceptions and analyses of social groups.

Borders can be analysed as elements participating in inclusion or exclusion. Taking into consideration the spatial organization and integration of social groups living on borders appears to be essential to understand the role and influence of these borders on local and regional development. In this view, interviews are great assets.

However, this approach deserves to be put into perspective with the analysis of political projects on state borders as their influence result as much from individual and collective daily actions as from their legal status. Since our main analyses bear on Hungary's borders in Romania, we will consider two prevalent analytical entries: the weight of history

²⁷ For Frederik Barth, when analysing the relationships between border ethnic groups, border representations produced by social groups do not vary with historical and cultural differentiations.
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on the borderlines of the two countries and the representations of the inhabitants of the cross-border region.

Beyond State Borders: A New Field of Action between Romania and Hungary

The problem of borders is all the more vivid in Central Europe as it involves the states and populations subjected to the political, social and economic ups and downs following the collapse of communism. The outward – and forced – show of unity of the people during the "Cold War" faded away with the rising of new tensions, particularly at the borders. As the people nurtured revisionism or territorial claims, according to their views or perceptions of outside borders, the fall of the communist regimes resulted in a process of fragmentation (the most recent being the secession of Montenegro from the still existing Federation of Yugoslavia).

The Central European space appears to assert its plurality. Many language and religious differences have been noted, from Latin to Slavonic cultures, from various orthodoxies to Catholicism and Protestantism not to mention other non-Christian churches. This specific Central European geography becomes active again after the "raising of the Europe curtain". It is important to recognize the main identity interdependences and/or projections intervening in this space.

From a Challenged Border to the Normalization of the Romanian-Hungarian Relations

Investigating the question of the relationship between Hungary and Romania leads to examining the space and its organization and evoking the conflictual history. A large number of writers have examined this topic and we have listed them at the end of this article. However, our article focuses more specifically on border relationships between Central

Each group defines its own spatial references. See Barth F., 1969, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, Boston: Little, Brown.

European states and is aimed at analysing the economic, socio-cultural and infrastructural imbalances. What kind of imbalances are there between Romania and Hungary?

Like all borders, the border space between Romania and Hungary generates disruptions. The analysis will focus on Romania, as it appears to represent a better illustration of the current mechanisms of territorial reconstitutions.

The relationship between Romania and Hungary is still dependent upon the consequences of territorial division after the 1st World War. It appears like an "obsessional face-to-face"²⁸. Nevertheless, the period during which each of the two states claimed rights on Transylvania is bygone. The treaties signed between Romania and Hungary on the recognition of their mutual border²⁹ and the bilateral relations (1996) open a new context of exchanges between the two countries³⁰. The relationship between Romanian and Hungarian inhabitants in Romania is improving; at least it is the major expectation of the two countries' authorities.

The debate on the bilateral relations is mainly social and political. It is based on differences in attitudes towards minorities. But the massive presence of Hungarians in Western Romania gives it a regional dimension and refers to the historical event of Transylvania's junction to Romania.

State Borders and Everyday Life in Romania. Case Studies in the Banat Region

The reasons why small cross-border cities have been selected for this study have been described above. The case studies raise interrogations on the everyday life and activities of

²⁸ Foucher M., 1994 [1991], *Fronts et frontières. Un tour du monde géopolitique*, Paris: Fayard.

²⁹ The memory of a "Great Hungary" is still prevailing. Almost two thirds of the Nation-State had been lost after the treaties of Versailles that concluded the 1st World War and carried out the territorial division of the "defeated". In 1920, more than 60% of the whole Hungarian population – including national minorities- is located outside the redrawn State territorial limits. From then onwards, Hungarian language minorities have been present in neighbouring states: Czechoslovakia, Ukraine, Romania and Yugoslavia, as well as Austria. We chose to define these populations as "Hungarians" as opposed to Hungarian citizens.

³⁰ Dunay P., 1997, "Relations Hongrie-Roumanie : un nouveau paradigme ?", *Cahiers de Chaillot*, 26 (Relations bilatérales en Europe centrale et orientale : impact de l'élargissement), pp.6-26.

their populations. For a better understanding of their relationships with space, it appears necessary to take into consideration, in addition to the economic development, the historical and cultural aspects.

The analysis promotes two essential aspects of a border : while it acts as a social discriminating between the space concerned and the rest of the country (and also the populations concerned and the rest of the population), (1) the border can be a bridge between the inside and the outside at the same as a boundary for socio-cultural and economic exchanges, and (2) the border can also be beneficial to local economic development and act as a real springboard and boost when comparing the cross-border region to the rest of the country.

Cultures and Citizenship. The State Border, a Bridge and a Boundary

The town council of Pecica intends to use the border and its local ethno-cultural specificities. In 2004, it presented a project for an industrial area (with Italian private funds) close to the customs station of Turnu (located on the communal territory) recently opened to the road traffic. The presence of many Hungarian-speaking inhabitants enables to observe the settlement of companies in this country (some of the companies listed in this industrial area are subcontractors for Hungarian clients). However, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Szeged in Hungary informed us (February 2006) that this subcontracting offer should be reversed in the months and years to come: Hungarian firms will be selected to carry out some preliminary work useful to Romanian industrial plants (the differences in labour cost in the two countries are to be taken into account).

The example of Pecica shows the will to benefit from the tension on wages through state border crossing. But it is also essential insofar as it partly mobilizes a group of individuals united by their ethno-cultural origins. This last element must be compared with the example of Nadlac, a town close to Pecica, and *a priori* better located. It is an old border post. But it did not know how to benefit from its situation or the specificity of its settlement.

In spite of a marked cultural action, the Slovak presence in Nadlac has not permitted a significant industrial development since 1990; the young people of Slovak descent migrate to Slovakia, though the town council tries to stop this phenomenon. Far away from the nearest

city center (Arad), Nadlac is threatened by a progressive confinement. Its amount of population is lower than its neighbour, and has no proper exit (roads) compared to Hungary, with which it only maintains very few relations. This example shows that state borders can also be a handicap for local development – border is a rather negative daily reality here and the inhabitants of Nadlac undergo the consequences, almost forced to leave the site (however the situation tends to reverse since the end of 2005, but it is still too early to check these data).

The real border perceived by Nadlac's population is a "border within" that distinguishes this city from the other Romanian cities. The Hungarian border is only a step to Slovakia, an area of reference for a part of the population. Distance, economic interests and local identity are combining to constitute an inner border. Perceived and experienced by the residents of the west of Arad county, it distinguishes the city of Nadlac in the region.

The city does not contain new infrastructures. This indicates a dissociation. However, the signs of a defense or protection of the local identity do not reveal any exclusive attitude. The role of local authorities and local or regional actors in establishing and maintaining such representations might be involved. In this way, the defense of local specificities might contribute to isolate more the city from its neighbourhood in a context of territorial and social redevelopment.

Economies: State Borders, from a Boundary at the Core of Europe to a Springboard

The examples of Jimbolia and Sânnicolau Mare are different from the two previous ones. The former has really been and still is affected by the closing off of its industrial sites and the embargo on ex-Yugoslavia during 1990; henceforth, it undergoes some lethargy and is losing its residents. The latter underwent an even more serious crisis at the beginning of the 1990s, by losing almost totally the employment opportunities and due to the absence of a direct border opening (which makes it necessary to crossing the border in Nadlac, located more than 100 km away by road). However, these two cities have carried out many innovations and have now become models.

Sânnicolau Mare managed to attract foreign investments, thanks to the joint action of some local entrepreneurs (managers/founders of micro-companies). Today, the industries settled downtown must set up networks of private buses in order to carry their employees

from the cities close to Timisoara, a city of more than 330.000 inhabitants. Sânnicolau Mare now experiences full employment, has been having a border post with Hungary (opened to the traffic of light vehicles) in the neighbouring commune of Cenad since 2004, and has constituted a micro-(euro)regional association with the Hungarian city of Mako. For the time being, this association is only dealing with sport and school exchanges; but it is greatly to its credit to have permitted the reconstitution of the old *raion* (territorial administrative entity of 1950) in Sânnicolau Mare³¹.

As for Jimbolia, it benefited from the election of a Magyar mayor in 2000, even though the inhabitants of Magyar descent represent only 17% of the town population (taking into account the fact that the vote of communities was still important in 2000 and that this candidate had *a priori* no chance). The reasons of his election are manifold. Among the main ones is the image he enjoys as a popular tradesman in town. He is very close to Hungarian elected officials, with whom he regularly meets. He realized that in Hungary associations in rural communes surrounding middle-sized towns (poles of these associations) were emerging. This system offers many advantages, particularly the opportunity to obtain European funds (PHARE), and attract foreign investments (due to a higher demographic weight than that of remote villages). He used these opportunities for his own city and the surrounding communes (managing to convince his counterparts): the micro-regional association, Banat Ripensis, was born. He managed to attract four PHARE projects between June 2001 and January 2005, which reactivated twinning with Serbian and Hungarian towns. Since its creation, five companies with foreign capital have been created in Jimbolia (more than 100 jobs resulted from these creations in May 2005), and twelve on the whole territory of the association. Even though this success has to be relativized, the experiment of Banat Ripensis is expanding elsewhere in Romania today.

Local Societies: State borders, a Social Discriminant in a Competitive Space

Two comments can be made on these case studies. The first involves a possible weakening of the political and historical disrupture induced by state line borders. If an improvement of cross-border relations and the setting-up of real cooperation are noticeable,

³¹ See Document 2.
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conversely, a great differentiation between the sites studied and the sites located close or inside the official territory can be noted. Opening borders thus leads to spreading (and increasing) internal state micro-disruptures. Furthermore, micro-territories form up again around these towns. Real buffer spaces take shape around these border regions. They certainly result from local or regional initiatives, and are an answer to a European model following the help of the European Union.

The second comment deals with the promoters of innovations and the actors met. Exchanges do not only contribute to reactivate regional identities, they also offer to enhance the image of groups: cross-border entrepreneurs, national groups (minorities or majority situations), religious communities. These same groups act for their own benefit or that of their close relations – families and friends – sharing their living space. A second distinction becomes perceivable between the residents of border areas and their fellow-citizens: there appears to be those who act beyond this border, those who benefit from these actions and finally the others, who are far from the border and unable to act or benefit from the border opening to exchanges. The border must also be understood as a discriminating factor, as it becomes a daily reality for some populations.

The openness of the borderline acts as a discriminating factor in the regional and local development. Companies, communes and individuals take advantage of the opportunities resulting from the evolution of the nature of borders³². Are borders the medium through which social constructions and singular spatial references differentiate border regions (and their inhabitants) from the rest of state territories? These aspects question the inhabitants' understanding of state borders, especially those who live in the border regions. Furthermore, border spaces then require to be considered as active fields: potential territories in the process of formation and project spaces at various levels, from local to international. In this case, borders become a factor of social differentiation between citizens of the same state as well as a political disruption between two states: a mutual confrontation between them and us, between those inside and us, the inhabitants of a space open to the outside world.

From Borders to Cross-border Areas: The Genesis of an Intermediary Space. Discussion

This article proceeds from the assumption that drawing borders is primarily a matter of territorial management targets³³. But defining borders (at least at the level of discourses) currently appears to be subjected to deep changes in Central Europe.

One of these changes is sudden and unexpected and results from the decline and collapse of communist regimes. Is the difficulty to deal with the heritage of political totalitarianism more perceptible at borders than anywhere else? The re-opening of borders necessarily entails a new definition of *otherness*³⁴ and challenges the old divisions.

Another slow and still unachieved change to-date lies in the cohesive policies of the European Union. The idea of a "clear-cut" commonly linked with borders is fading. Paradoxically, the political changes *a priori* meant to foreshadow the "return to Europe" appear to contribute at this stage to the reinforcement of the states within their borders. All forms of cross-border cooperation are currently financed and decided under the authority of the government(s). Going beyond the idea of borders and overcoming them eventually pertain to political choices and stakes, not to civil ones.

When analysing a few cases, a distinction can be established between (1) a process of construction (around the borders) as undertaken in Jimbolia and Sânnicolau Mare, (2) the will to free from political designs such as the ones promoted by some political authorities, the entrepreneurs of Pecica, and (3) the closing of borders as witnessed in Nadlac.

³² Lepasant G., 1998, *Géopolitique des frontières orientales de l'Allemagne. Les implications de l'élargissement de l'Union européenne*, Paris: L'Harmattan.

³³ The idea of a physical limit appears as a consequence linked to adequate territorial defence decided by state authorities and their institutional networks: See Bottin M., 1996, "La frontière de l'Etat. Approche historique et juridique", *Sciences de la Société*, 37 (Territoires frontaliers. Discontinuité et cohésion), pp.15-25. A border theoretically remains a limit that can be crossed and owns a flexible legal status: Foucher M., 1994 [1991], *op. cit.*

³⁴ Kuus M., 2004, "Europe's Eastern Expansion and the Re-inscription of Otherness in East-Central Europe", *Progress in Human Geography*, 28, 4, pp.472-489.

The border as a reality is subjected to attempts for appropriation. These attempts result from distinctions, established on the state territory itself, between various areas and groups of areas liable to draw benefits from their closeness to borders. In this way, the borders – no longer as limits only, but mainly as components of space – contribute to the process of territorial differentiations at every scale. These differentiations give way to the definition of new limits – henceforth within the state territory. These "borders within" result from perceptions and practices. They are not really perceptible by observers from outside, nor through the analyses of maps.

The cutting function of borders, inherited from strict conventional enforcements, becomes more social than spatial and local authorities are therefore in charge of the people's accessibility and appropriation of the borders. The benefits to be expected in return (investments and social mobilizations) are prevalent for the future of these areas. Borders are therefore becoming key stakes for development.

The cross-border areas are perceived as progressive limits by the Hungarians and Romanians. The spatial effects of borders are expanding. They constitute a wide intermediary area, a meeting point for two (or more) communities of citizens exchanging exogenous and endogenous influences. This intermediary area is redefined first by its physical extent. Specific areas are gradually taking shape and can be identified within the state territories. They are either border regions living from their activities at the border, or regions undergoing the influence of outside initiatives. The economic performances of the developing regions of Western Romania testify to these developments.

The expansion of these cross-border areas is proceeding according to steps following the stages of integration into the European system of exchanges. Meanwhile the territorial unity of the states is not challenged. The increase in development potentials is to be read in the expansion of the areas defined as "cross-border" (in relation to the border) previously limited by their closing (national borderlines). The old organizational plans whereby borders were closed areas are currently challenged.

Understood as the limit of a territory, a border does not define only a line of division drawn between two states. It is also a meaningful element of an inhabited space, the setting of an everyday reality rooted in the minds and imaginations. This social function of borders

contributes to ongoing territorial constructions. It should therefore be taken into account in the cognition process of the relationship between human societies and the space they live in.

Social constructions and experiences of border groups are important elements that deserve to be analysed and interpreted as playing a definite role and influencing local and regional development. Our methodological positioning and ambition are deliberately focusing on human societies at the borders of Central European states undergoing deep change, as a will to grasp and interpret human relations and their increasing role for the future of the European community.

At last, the understanding of a difference between what a border is or can be is to be taken into consideration. On one hand, there is the enduring idea that an open state border is a link. On the other hand, the perspective of new spatial differentiations in Romania leads to redefine the role and location of the borders experienced by Romanians. These new inner borders, these new shifts between regions, spatial organisation modes and thinking on space are perceived as borders themselves.

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