

Opening of borders, reconstruction of a Bridge: positive aspects and polymorph multivalent phantom limitations in the region of Štúrovo and Esztergom

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Abstract

Physical reconstruction and opening of the destroyed Mária Valéria bridge and the Schengen framework created a specific political environment, where the borders became less strict and less impermeable between Hungary and the Slovak Republic. Consequently, significant positive aspects of border opening and cross-border cooperation have been performed among the border regions. The borders have disappeared in an explicit and visible way; nevertheless, the borders have profoundly remained in a subliminal and/or implicit way. Borders still limit everyday interactions and cross-border cooperation. These subliminal border structures appear as polymorphous phantom limitations because they operate in a latent way and they can take various forms, like 'cultural phantom limitation', 'phantom limitation of personal relationship', 'pre-financing phantom limitation', 'legislative/administrative/taxing phantom limitation', 'phantom limitation of corruption and lobby' and limitation caused by negative approach towards globalization and European integration.

Keywords: Mária Valéria bridge, borders, border studies, cross-border cooperation, polymorphous phantom limitations

Introduction

Borders and their permeability functions have been altered and shifted several times during the past decades in Europe, especially in the Central and Eastern European space. That means borders between Hungary and Slovakia were characterized by a rigid, strictly controlled and highly impermeable border structure during socialism, hence border crossing and cross-border interactions were profoundly limited, narrowed, planned and they excluded any form of spontaneity. This rigidity of borders was changed by the political and economic earthquake in

Central Europe, when the Socialist form of governance was substituted by liberal democratic governance structures. Furthermore, the Socialist planned economic framework was replaced by liberal economic structure and free market approach, which meant an explicit introduction and advent of globalization in Central Europe. Subsequently, borders got significantly softened and they became permeable, but border-crossing was still administratively limited and controlled.

Hungary and Slovakia became followers of the Euro-Atlantic orientation, they became members of the common defensive military structure of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and they entered the European Union which further modified the role and permeability of borders between nation-states, hence removing and simplifying those burdens which limited the interactions between states. Moreover, the ratification of the Schengen Agreement by Slovakia and Hungary, and their entrance into the Common Schengen Area in 2007 profoundly 'erased' the borders between the two countries, hence allowing free movement without any border restrictions, without border control, thus becoming members of one common space and its mechanisms.

Despite the fact that the restrictive presence of the borders has faded and permeability across the borders has improved between Slovakia and Hungary, the borders still have their limiting and restrictive impacts. The aim of this analysis is to identify the positive aspects of border changes which are seen from the local perspective, but at the same time, the study intends to underline those limiting characteristics of the borders which reduce their permeability.

The analysis is based on the vast interview material and research performed by the European Institute of Cross-Border Studies in 2015 in the region of Štúrovo and Esztergom. A total of 25 interviews with 26 stakeholders were conducted (one interview involved two interviewees). 11 interviews were done on the Hungarian side and 14 were carried out in Slovakia. The interviewed persons were selected on the basis that they are in constant interaction with borders, cross-border issues, or they are employed by the local authorities of the region. Thus, they are those who work and/or meet every day with the border issue, who see the positive impacts of the border opening and Bridge reconstruction; however, they are the ones who are very critical, too. Simply, this paper applies qualitative research, namely face-to-face interviews, study of literature, theoretical analysis, identification of positive attributes, identification of limiting border movements and the reflection on critical opinions toward the EU and contemporary globalization tendencies based on the material gathered during these interviews.

In these interviews, the interviewed subjects were asked about borders and their permeability in everyday life, about cross-border cooperation and ordinary life of citizens of the region; about cross-border partnerships, their effectiveness and performance in their average activities; about the reflection of cross-border movement, commuting across the borders and their changes, modalities; how they see the alterations of cross-border cooperation; about the effects of important historical events on cross-border interactions, like reconstruction and opening of the Mária Valéria Bridge, entrance into the European Union, Schengen Area and Monetary Union; further, they were asked to identify the factors which have the ability and capacity to support or to hinder cross-border interactions; and finally, they were asked to articulate thoughts/ideas about possible future innovations of cross-border relationship and partnerships.

The analysis is divided into five parts. The first part gives a short general insight into border studies, reflecting the changes of its focus, namely the shift of emphasis of border studies from the analysis of borders as strict/fixed lines, to the analysis of borders as societal constructions and ending at the contemporary evolving focus on phantom borders. The second part of the study reflects on the positive aspects and possibilities of the opening of borders and cross-border cooperation between Slovakia and Hungary. This part of the analysis explicitly uses the material gathered through the interviews and the experience of those people who live and/or work in the space which traverses the border between Štúrovo/Slovakia and Esztergom/Hungary. Besides the positive features of the border opening, several cases of so-called phantom limitations with restrictive effect on cross-border interactions could be identified from the interview material. The fourth part of the paper moves away from the positive and negative aspects (limitations) of border opening, and it reflects those critical ideas which were articulated by the interviewees, like criticism toward the EU and globalization. And, finally, the fifth part offers a short conclusion of the main findings.

Change in border studies: a way to phantom borders

Border studies represent a contemporary/actual research focus and trans-disciplinary approach of social sciences. Its centre of attention is the various phenomena of borders, their functions, structure and impact on people, societies, the economy and/or development. Although, it is important to highlight that border studies are in ceaseless and permanent change since their primary object, namely borders, borderlines, borderlands, boundaries, frontiers, edges are in constant change/alteration and they are subjects of historical contingency (Del

Sarto in Green, 2012). In other words, borders and all their components seem to be historically contingent, similarly as sexuality is historically contingent, underlined by Foucault; gender is also historically contingent, emphasized by Butler; or, similarly, like sovereignty is historically contingent in world politics (Gyelnik, 2015; Anghie, 2004; Hobson, 2012). Simply, borders are subject to inevitable internal and/or external changes, thus border studies must reflect these shifts and alterations.

Subsequently, David Newman (2003, 23) highlights that borders can be characterized by shifts and ceaseless changes, James Scott (2012, 84) articulates that borders testify certain processes which cannot be finalized because of their changeability, and/or as James Anderson (2012, 144) notes that a borderless world (within a capitalist mode of production) is only a fantasy; consequently, the research attention of border studies has been moving and capturing the formulation of borders which move and oscillate between relative permeability and impermeability.

During the era of the Cold War and/or during the period of ‘mutually assured destruction’ equipped with nuclear military vehicles, when ideologies, economic structures and exclusive political frameworks represented an impermeable intra-European border structure, border studies concentrated their research attention on demarcation lines and they analyzed heavy/fixed border frameworks. The Berlin Wall became the explicit border signifier of impermeability in Europe. That means it was the era of ‘strong’ borders and the era of conflict between disagreements of systematic approaches and understandings on meta-level.

Nevertheless, the strict understanding of borders as fixed and rigid lines started to change during the 80s, when the economic blocs, especially the Soviet one, started to utilize the benefits and advantages of oil trading with the West (Hobsbawm, 1998). A substantial increase of flows started to emerge which resulted in ceaseless interaction and exchange, what Manuel Castells (1996) identifies in his massive theoretical work as ‘network society’ and ‘information age’. Gabriel Popescu (2012, 47-48) aptly writes about this process, namely that ‘border lines meet global flows’. Thus the global flows do not pass between states, but they rather pass through state territories and borders, thus traversing through their sovereignty. That means state borders have started to lose their strict and fixed limiting power over the territory, and it has resulted in massive debates about the state and its position/role in contemporary times (e.g. Bartelson, 2001; Bauman, 2004; 2014; Bohman, 2010; Bremmer, 2010; Brunkhorst, 2005; Neumann – Sending, 2010; Negri – Hardt, 2001; Rosenau, 2006). Newman (2003, 14) appropriately

describes these border changes as the ‘end of territorial absolutism’. Hence, state borders can no longer effectively control various flows, they are unable to fully control the flow of capital, as Zygmunt Bauman (2000, 58) brilliantly underlines this process, *“nowadays capital travels light with cabin luggage only, which includes no more than a briefcase, a cellular telephone and a portable computer. It can stop-over almost anywhere, and nowhere needs to stay longer than the satisfaction lasts.”* or as Richard Rorty (2000, 223) creatively writes about the penetrating tendency of capital flows over state structures, territories and borders, *“the central fact of globalization is that the economic situation of the citizens of a nation state has passed beyond the control of the laws of that state. It used to be the case that a nation’s laws could control, to an important and socially useful extent, the movement of that nation’s money. But now that the financing of business enterprise is a matter of drawing upon a global pool of capital, so that enterprises in Belo Horizonte or in Chicago are financed by money held in the Cayman Islands by Serbian warlords, Hong Kong gangsters and the kleptocrat presidents of African republics, there is no way in which the laws of Brazil or the US can dictate that money earned in the country will be spent in the country, or money saved in the country invested in the country.”*

Moreover, state borders are no longer able to effectively control the ecological flows/effects, possible disasters (Bohman, 2010; Cunningham 2012; Held, 2003) and ‘self-generated manufactured uncertainties of organized irresponsibility generated by risk society’ (Beck, 1999; 2007; Beck – Grande, 2007). James Bohman (2010) asks a simple question: where are the borders/limits of a sovereign decision, when the effects of a decision influence not only those spaces which were involved within the debate and sovereign power decision, but when they include those spaces whose sovereign power was not involved in the decision? Hence, Ulrich Beck (1992) writes, the ecological effects of risk society do not respect only structures of state borders as such, and they are able to travel through time and space, thus performing a powerful act of ‘compression’. Consequently, borders are no longer able to perform their protective function from ecological destruction that endangers the death of life in its totality’ (see e.g. Dussel, 1998). Furthermore, the next issue is development of information technology and cyberspace versus sovereign borders. Cyberspace of the state has become the hypothetical new borderline, since serious debates have been performed in NATO about the cyber-attack and its connection to the fifth article of the grouping (Bátora, 2010).

Subsequently, border studies have been reflecting these tendencies, they left and/or moved away from the Cold War research of borders and they have turned towards more fluid and constructivist notions of borders (Coplan, 2012). Simply, geopolitical and sovereign borders can no longer be recognized in concepts of

fixity and/or discrete borders (Van Houtum, 2012, 406), thus border studies have started to underline that there is a need to make a shift, to understand and view borders as social constructions and as a bordering process instead of fixed lines and demarcations (Kaiser, 2012; Newman, 2003; Paasi, 1998). Several authors emphasize a changed view on borders and they emphasize the role of narratives/discourses, mainly influenced by Bhabha (Coplan, 2012), by Foucault and/or by Said, thus seeing borders as a certain ‘cognitive project’ where borders represent stories; where borders represent a ‘ritualized spectator sport’ that needs to be studied through performativity (Anderson, 2012); where borders need to be researched through performance signifiers and where borders represent a ‘process of becoming’, i.e. borders and practices testify performative events with direct identification of political signifiers (Kaiser, 2012). Moreover, other authors underlined some further interesting aspects of borders, such as permeability, trans-boundary collaboration, openness (Blake, 2012) and/or the meaning of cities within the contemporary interstate order (O’Dowd, 2012). Simply, in a world which has performed a swing of the political pendulum toward ‘global de-bordering’, the primary attention of border studies has been swinging, too.

In a world of border permeability and porosity, there are still limitations which may perform certain border functions, thus limiting cross-border cooperation and interaction. As Jarosław Jańczak (2015, 126) writes that the latest development of border studies seems to be the concept of phantom borders which widens and enhances the research field of contemporary border studies. Understanding of phantom borders, based on the ‘Phantomgrenzen’ project, represents the former, predominantly political borders that structure today’s world, historical spaces that persist or re-emerge in contemporary structures.

The concept of phantom borders implies former political borders that do not exist politically/legally anymore; however, the notion of political borders and their effects still appear, and they shape social actions and practices in various forms (Hirschhausen, 2015). In other words, cross-border relations and cross-border cooperation/interaction is influenced by the earlier, actually non-existent imperial borders of the Habsburg, Ottoman, Prussian empires. Simply, the notion of phantom borders implies that despite the openness and permeability there are some invisible limits and hindrances that may function as borders.

Positive aspects of border opening and reconstruction of a bridge

This part of the chapter looks at the so called positive sides, attributes and cross-border possibilities which are present between the regions of Štúrovo and Esztergom. Identification and reflection of these positive attributes are based on the material and opinions gathered during the interview process in 2015.

The former closed borders between Hungary and Slovakia prevented deep and comprehensive cross-border interaction across the Danube; although, all the interviews taken about cross-border cooperation unquestionably highlighted that cross-border cooperation and/or border permeability is a positive change in the contemporary political constellation, thus the trans-border interactions may profoundly enrich citizens and the regions on both sides of the Danube River. The positive aspects of open and permeable borders are visible on several levels and in different areas ranging from culture, through diffusion of good practices to the labour market. Subsequently, almost every interviewee explicitly and openly claimed that the reconstruction and opening of the Mária Valéria Bridge between Štúrovo and Esztergom was an exceptionally important moment for the regions because it has helped and generated high added-value in the cultural, economic and/or human dimension of the local people. As one of our interviewee highlighted through a metaphorical analogy, 'a building cannot be built without considering environment which is around the building, i.e. there is a need to consider the capacities of the cities/villages in a wider scale, beyond the border and to plan the development plans through reflecting the already existing and the planned capacities as well in the cross-border area and environment. Moreover, if an effective cooperation is established it opens the possibilities to achieve more successful development than which could be achieved individually'. Simply, the border regions should be seen as an 'organic unity' with their high complementarity.

It is important to underline that cross-border interactions were functioning also during the period when the Bridge was not reconstructed. These forms of cooperation were often triggered by individual cooperation efforts of the citizens and they were functioning outside institutionalised cross-border forms, like the contemporary Euroregions and/or EGTCs. In other words, most of local/small-scale cross-border interactions were initiated by personal contacts and relationships, hence we can claim that cooperation across the borderline is a natural phenomenon.

The achievement of the Schengen Area is a crucial accomplishment of the European Union as it supports free movement without restrictions and/or border controls. As one interviewee underlined, border controls often meant a psychological stress and anxiety for those who wanted to cross the border, but the Schengen framework directly removed these stressing border mechanisms and strains. Furthermore, the Schengen agreement is very useful for the cross-border labour market, because the workers, who cross the border daily to be in their workplace, do not have to wait at the border, hence their commuting is predictable which supports the planning activities of the employer and, at the same time, the willingness of the employee to travel. Besides the labour market, the Schengen Area plays an important role in establishing, maintaining and improving relations in important domains like culture, education and/or tourism.

Fundamental positive aspect of the border/bridge opening was the diffusion and spreading of good practices, ideas and/or inspirations across the borders. One example is the Slovakian city of Želiezovce which plans to launch an alternative nature-friendly development. The inspiration came from beyond the borders, namely from the city of Miskolc which has a functional production for processing biomass, its squeezing, its storage and its sale. Another example of cross-border diffusion of best practices is the market of local producers who sell their locally produced products, thus helping the livelihood of the local people and the spread of their healthy/nature-friendly products. To be specific, the well-functioning market of local producers in the Hungarian city of Nagymaros was an inspiration for the Slovakian settlement of Kravany nad Dunajom to establish a similar activity. This Slovakian village triggered and established a market of local producers from its own resources. The subsequent effect of the local market in Kravany nad Dunajom was the diffusion of idea back to Hungary, namely to the village of Lábatlan. That means open borders support and help the spread and diffusion of good ideas and practices across the borders.

The next important aspect of the bridge opening was in the dimension of labour and labour market. The domain of cross-border labour and labour market was mentioned in numerous interviews in very positive tones. It is important to mention that in the Slovakian region of Štúrovo, unemployment is high due to lack of big companies, lack of investments with substantial labour absorption capacity, especially after the significant reduction and privatisation of the main employer of the region, namely the paper-industrial complex in the city of Štúrovo. That means privatisation and profit speculation around the paper-industry have profoundly hit the existing industrial labour absorption capacity of the region. What is more, one respondent explicitly claimed that the opening of

capital flows and markets caused that certain industrial production was cancelled to facilitate the removal of industrial competition to Western and/or Nordic countries. Consequently, people have very few labour/job possibilities in the Slovakian part of the region and unemployment is high with no real, long-term solutions and prospects in sight.

Although, the opening of the bridge has made it possible that the former impenetrable space (or penetrable with difficulties and complications) was eliminated and people from one side of the border could take and search for jobs on the other side of the border. The impact and importance of the bridge in the domain of labour market was openly articulated by one interviewee in the following way: 'if there were no job possibilities in Hungary and around Esztergom, the Slovakian region of Štúrovo would be in a very unfortunate social, economic and psychological situation'. What is more, another interviewee explicitly underlined that the enhancement of economic industrial activity on the Hungarian side and the widening of economic capacity relied heavily on the bridge opening and on the inflow of new workers, thus relieving labour shortage on the Hungarian side and assuring cross-border labour supply in some industrial areas. To be specific, 'It is sure that the economic situation and industrial activity would be totally different without the reconstruction and opening of the bridge. The industrial production activities would be in serious difficulties of shortage of labour (re)supply'. In other words, the opening of the bridge has made it possible that a lot of people from Slovakia could find a job in Hungary, either in the industrial sector, or in the health care sector, thus 'Hungary has become the biggest employer for the Slovakian citizens in the region of Štúrovo'; consequently, one interviewee has highlighted that the bridge directly functions as a cross-border 'job creator'.

The issue of cross-border workplace and labour market is closely connected to the domain of income and currency. The introduction of the Euro as the "almost" common European currency and the entry of Slovakia into the European Monetary Union has substantially touched the cross-border space, both the domain of cross-border labour and 'cross-border shopping tourism'. In other words, most of the interviewees expressed their very critical, or even negative, opinion about the introduction of the Euro in Slovakia. Specifically, a big majority of the interviewees highlighted that the introduction of the Euro has generated a significant rise in prices and, in general, the cost of living has become more expensive in the Slovak Republic. That means during the period of 'dual pricing', when the prices were indicated both in Slovak korunas and in Euros, the increase of prices was relatively "controlled"; nevertheless, after

the brief period of 'dual pricing' the prices have rapidly grown, hence the Euro has introduced an expensive level of prices that has altered shopping tourism of Hungarians in Slovakia. Simply, Slovakia has become an expensive country for the Hungarians; consequently, instead, the Slovakian citizens go to Hungary because of lower shopping prices.

Interviewees underlined the economic importance of changing directions of this shopping tourism, namely that people from Slovakia who work in Hungary, do not spend their money in Slovakia and in the region because they do not want to lose on currency exchange, therefore they spend it in Hungary; however, this may cause economic difficulties to the region. What is more, one interviewee explicitly noted that the border area profoundly suffered from the introduction of the Euro. To be specific, people from Slovakia work in Hungary, but the currency fluctuation of the Hungarian currency vis-à-vis the Euro reduces the real earnings of the people and, in the end, they lose a significant amount of money on exchange. Simply, the Euro and its introduction function as a sign of the European project, sign of the common monetary union, it supports trading and it offers a stable currency; nevertheless, it has generated considerable negative consequences in the border area, especially in the field of cross-border labour market.

The opening of the bridge and the permeability of the borders have had a huge impact in other areas, especially in education and health care, too. One interviewee explicitly claimed that there are significant achievements in cross-border health care, but there is a need for a harmonised and centralised system in the cross-border region, i.e. a certain division of labour should be formed. Specifically, the hospital in Esztergom would ensure health service for the inpatients and the clinic in Štúrovo would do that for the outpatients. However, there is a need for a hard work to achieve this form of cross-border cooperation and harmonization. Although cross-border harmonization has not been achieved yet, a unique cross-border health care cooperation is visible between Slovakia and Hungary. To be specific, a trans-border agreement was signed about the health care services covered by the Slovak insurance company 'Dôvera zdravotná poisťovňa' in 2009.¹ In other words, this cooperation is built on historical connections, the geographical shape of the region and on the grassroots initiatives where the

1 Prelude of this cooperation was the signed agreement with Sideria Istota in 2004. Later, the insurance company Dôvera zdravotná poisťovňa bought Sideria Istota and the new agreement was signed in 2009.

citizens and the Mayors demanded to trigger this kind of cross-border cooperation in the field of health care.

Cross-border cooperation and its institutionalisation has started in the 50s of the 20th century and in 2007 a new cross-border toolkit, namely European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, was introduced which attempts to professionally manage cross-border interactions. The tasks of the EGTC are seen through a positive prism by the interviewees, i.e. it may support cross-border interactions, initiate new ideas of cooperation, culturally enhance the region and it can develop its economy by linking the regions on the two sides of the border; however, numerous interviewees voiced critical opinions toward the EGTC in the region. Specifically, the tasks of the Ister-Granum EGTC and its mission are protracted; moreover, there is a need to reorient the Ister-Granum EGTC toward the real needs of the citizens of the region, like promotion of cross-border health care, breaking down legal barriers and solving the issue of tax divergence.

To conclude, high and intensive cooperation across the border is visible in the region between Štúrovo and Esztergom and the citizens of the region highly and unanimously appreciate permeability. The interactions across the borders include the domain of best practices, where new functional and good ideas are diffused across the borders; labour market, where the region in Hungary offers job and labour possibilities to the workers of the Slovakian region; education, where students may study in the neighbouring educational institutions; health care; cooperation in the field of culture and national heritage; and finally the Mária Valéria Bridge generates the basic elements of economic cooperation, hence boosting economic capacity on both sides of the border. In other words, the 'old linked world', which disappeared with the World Wars and strict border regimes, is on its return with its deep complementarity of both sides of the border.

Polymorph multivalent phantom limitations in the region of Štúrovo and Esztergom

Next to the huge positive impacts of cross-border cooperation explicitly noted by the interviewees and highlighted in the previous part of the paper, like the issue of trade, labour, education or health care; there are still several important limitations which generate a profound hindrance to cross-border cooperation despite border opening, border permeability and Bridge reconstruction between Štúrovo (Slovakia) and Esztergom (Hungary). Subsequently, this part of the research once again looks at the interview material and it searches those elements

which were identified by the interviewee as obstacles and hindrances of cross-border interaction and cooperation.

These non-visible borders are described and characterized in our analysis as ‘polymorph multivalent phantom limitations’ that often function as covert and/or latent obstacles with a capacity to limit deeper cross-border interactions and cooperation. At this point, our approach of ‘phantom borders’ moves away from the understanding given by Hirschhausen and collective (2015), since they identify phantom borders as the defunct traditional political, territorial borders/structures of the former/non-existing empires, like the Habsburg, Prussian and/or the Ottoman Empire. In other words, the space formerly covered by the administrative, military, institutional structure of the mentioned empires has undergone a huge number of border changes and now the countries established on the territory of these former empires are part of the integrated economic European Union, the military defence organization of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and/or various forms of regional cooperation, like the Visegrád Group. Despite the fact that the imperial institutional structures of the former empires ceased to exist, the defunct imperial frameworks still generate latent border frameworks which continue to shape the region and its states even in contemporary constellations. Simply, the phantom metaphor situates the features and historical conditionality within a new scientific research angle and perception. Nevertheless, our research moves away from the Hirschhausenian understanding of phantom borders.

In other words, our analysis also uses the ‘phantom metaphor’ during the research phase; nevertheless, our identified phantom borders are not generated by the defunct imperial, historical and/or institutionalised border frameworks, but they are rather invisible borders what we call as ‘polymorph multivalent phantom limitations’ which formulate and crystallize themselves in different variations and forms. These phantom limitations were identified and deducted from the interviews about cross-border cooperation and border/Bridge opening between Slovakia and Hungary. These implicit and latent limitations are ‘polymorph multivalent’ because they can take various and different restrictive forms and shapes towards cross-border cooperation.

During the research process of the interview material, we have identified several substantial ‘polymorph multivalent phantom limitations’, namely ‘cultural phantom limitation’, ‘phantom limitation of personal relationships’, ‘pre-financing phantom limitation’, ‘legislative/administrative/taxing phantom limitation’, ‘phantom limitation of corruption and lobbying’. Simply, if we

want to support cross-border cooperation and its development, it is essentially important to understand these polymorph multivalent phantom limitations and to search for possible answers and solutions.

The first polymorph multivalent phantom limitation is the psychological category of Self and Other perception. That means the self and other perception across the border may cause invisible obstruction and it may impede cross-border interaction. One of our interviewee expressed the opinion and experience that a cultural event and reciting competition is traditionally organized in Esztergom/Hungary. This event is open for everybody, hence the Hungarian minority from Slovakia is also welcomed there. That means the event is not limited by age or by citizenship, thus students, adults and/or retired can take part from Hungary and from Slovakia, too. Nevertheless, it is visible that participation from Slovakia is limited by self-understanding. That means people from the older generation and among the retired do not take part at the event; however, the younger generation is present. This may partly be explained by the fact that there is a physical distance that can distract them; nevertheless, the primary reason, explicitly expressed by them, and the main driver of their non-participation is in the linguistic domains. In other words, older people from Slovakia, whose mother tongue is Hungarian, do not take part at the events where they must actively express themselves because they are afraid that they speak in dialect. Consequently, they have a feeling that they can become an object of ridicule, hence they do not participate because they defend their Self against the linguistic Other. Simply, this linguistic dimension functions as a cultural/linguistic phantom limitation where the different dialects activate themselves as cultural frontiers and borders, thus limiting cross-border interaction.

Cross-border cooperation may be hampered also by personal contacts. That means numerous interviewees underlined that the basic precondition of a successful cross-border interaction is the existence of a good personal relationship and trust between the partners. Consequently, the opposite is also true, and it was explicitly highlighted, specifically, the lack of personal relationship, the lack of trust in each other and/or human idiotism of closeness toward other people/cultures function as effective and real phantom limitation of personal relationship.

The most emphasised and underlined phantom limitation in cross-border cooperation, and in the domain of development as well, was the issue of 'pre-financing'. Eight interviewee respondents explicitly highlighted the issue of project pre-financing as a huge problem, a substantial limitation, and/or an obstacle and pressing element in cross-border cooperation. In other words,

this limitation appears at the level of projects which may support cross-border interactions. The existing legal system and implementation practice of the project is that if there is a winner project, investment and/or development, it needs to be financed in advance from own financial resources. Subsequently, a bureaucratic control of the project/investment/development is undertaken, then the financial resources that were paid as pre-financing are paid back to the involved parties within the frameworks of 'after-financing'. However, this process and financial framework was substantially criticized by our interviewees. They expressed that cross-border cooperation and interaction is primarily and profoundly limited and hampered by the issue of 'missing money' at local level. That means it may happen that cross-border cooperation and projects are explicitly cancelled or rejected by the involved partners because of financial reasons and because pre-financing involves huge mid-term financial and/or budgetary risk to them. Hence, cross-border cooperation is not only hampered by pure unwillingness of the involved persons and/or authorities, but interactions are hindered by the related financial burden, too.

Furthermore, the implementation of the winner project must be financed from own financial sources, but if the settlement does not have sufficient financial resources, the only way to implement and finance the project is to take a financial loan. Nevertheless, to take loans and the involvement in loan structures to finance the project is a huge risk because it generates high interest rates which will be a burden in the future. That means the interviewees expressed that the implementation of an unnecessary or inappropriate project may paralyze and/or temporarily terminate further projects and development options of the settlement. Simply, the problem is that projects are 'after-financed'; although, this after-financing is further hampered by slow and complicated bureaucratic frameworks and the flow of money is protracted which generates more and more interests to pay, hence causing problems in the budget. In other words, the most commonly noted limiting factor of cross-border cooperation was 'pre-financing' as cooperative phantom limitation.

Bureaucracy, administrative requirements and tax regulations constitute the next phantom limitation of cross-border cooperation. The legal system is different in Hungary and in Slovakia thus opening space for obstacles; furthermore, the harmonisation of legal tasks and roles of the authorities have not been performed, yet. Numerous interviewees underlined that the bureaucratic burden significantly slows down interaction in the domain of local products, local producers and/or wine-selling/tasting. Grapes and wine are important productive, cultural, societal and economic features of the region, thus

cooperation in these fields would be very positive and with a significant added value. What is more, grape and wine may effectively and excellently function as a cross-border link. Grape/wine production are supported by warm climate and unique soil, supported by underground volcanic activity. However, exporting wine from the Slovakian regions to Hungary is very difficult for the small and medium-sized growers and producers. Consequently, cross-border cooperation at wine-festivals is substantially hampered, hence this limitation profoundly slows down the establishment and development of personal relationships across the border. The Slovak interviewees claim that it is much easier to sell and export wine to the Czech Republic, than to Hungary; consequently, Hungary is a more closed state structure in this domain. Simply, exporting the product by the small/medium-sized growers is substantially hampered by legal, administrative, tax requirements and constraints and it is almost impossible to perform a cross-border action in this sphere.

Besides, several interviewees underlined the problems within the concept of twinning cities/settlement that is enthusiastically promoted by the European Union. The basic aim of twinning relations is to make a bridge between different cultures and nations; subsequently, citizens can receive direct information about the others, they can establish personal friendships, they can visit and see those other people, can speak and/or celebrate with them, thus promoting the idea of European peace and tolerance between different European nations and cultures. That means the European Union supports projects and events; although, it requires that the project and/or event utilizes the framework of twin relations. Nevertheless, the required twinning framework may be profoundly limited by the lack of money and resource input. In other words, there are examples that a settlement in the cross-border region is so small and poor that it cannot allow to undertake twinning relationship since it entails significant financial expenses; consequently, these small settlements fall into the trap of competitive disadvantage vis-à-vis other settlements who have financial resources to implement twinning relationships.

What is more, the issue of cross-border travelling also appears as a significant phantom limitation. The borders are open between Štúrovo and Esztergom, but the cross-border public transport network is limited, especially, it is a very complicated process to get from the Slovakian Štúrovo railway station to the railway station of Esztergom by public transport. Subsequently, the recommendation was to coordinate public transport between the two railway stations, thus improving the effective travelling options of citizens across the borders between Slovakia and Hungary.

The final phantom limitation identified from the interview material was the power of lobbying and corruption around the projects. Corruption and lobbying are negative forms of behaviour that may significantly distort effectiveness, they may disturb the projects and the implementation process, too. Moreover, they have a powerful demotivating aspect, they increase disappointment and delusion in cross-border cooperation.

To conclude, this part of the paper attempted to identify those ‘polymorph multivalent phantom limitations’ which appear in everyday life of the citizens and in the field of cross-border interactions between the regions of Štúrovo and Esztergom. The following limitations were identified: self/other perception in the linguistic sphere; inappropriate personal contacts and human idiotism; the mechanism of pre-financing; administrative, legal, tax requirements; corruption and lobbying; inappropriate public transport possibilities across the borders; twinning requirements for the small villages and settlements.

Criticism towards the European Union and globalization

The interview material and the interviewees expressed their very positive opinions and experience in the domain of border permeability, toward the Schengen Area, the European Union and cross-border cooperation. Nevertheless, they articulated serious criticism toward European integration, too. The final part of the research attempts to collect and appropriately reflect the critical opinions which were mentioned and identified.

One of the most serious criticism was the issue of free-market and its power to overshadow and/or eliminate the weaker participants/competitors in the economic race. It is the theoretical line promoted by Friedrich List, earlier by Daniel Defoe, or by Oscar Wilde; famously popularized by Immanuel Wallerstein in the 80s and 90s, and notably promoted in contemporary economic sciences by Ha-Joon Chang (2002; 2008) and/or by John M. Hobson (1997; 2013). Specifically, these authors underline that the mechanisms of free market undermine economic development of the weaker state; hence one option is to take over the economic competitor (Harvey, 2011) as it was done by the Spanish airline Iberia in the case of several Latin American airlines (Chang, 2008).

The briefly mentioned critical theoretical approach and thinking was reflected in the interview material, as it contained strong criticism towards the introduced and liberalised free market. Specifically, economic speculations, interest-games around the Štúrovo paper-industrial complex and the cancellation of some

production may be explained by the removal of a productive competitor to the Nordic paper-producing companies, thus explicitly underlining that the European Union understands the region and the new member states through market priority and possibilities.

Furthermore, the interviewees criticized the behaviour of the European Union that it supports meetings, conferences, eating and advertisement instead of real and necessary investments, like reconstruction in the living space of the ordinary people. Simply, they see that the European Union often supports issues of 'secondary category' instead of the issues with primary importance. What is more, a crucial area of criticism was the domain of agriculture and the European Union horizontal policy. Namely, the 'new member-states' are at a profound competitive disadvantage through different subsidization mechanism in the Common Agricultural Policy, hence Central and Eastern European agricultural producers receive less support and subsidy as other, richer parts of the European Union.

The next important critical opinion was the question of development policies and the European projects. To be specific, the settlements could and should invest a substantial part of their budget into investments and development, thus performing the primary settlement development that would be supported by additional financing through the EU structures and projects. Nevertheless, the contemporary economic and budgetary condition of the settlements has worsened at such a depth that they cannot afford any primary individual development from their own resources, hence a substantial majority of implemented developments and projects are financed from EU funds. Subsequently, the additional financing through European projects has occupied the position of primary investments that may cause substantial problems in the future.

The final important criticism, which appeared in the interviews, was on globalization, specifically, it took the shape of 'globalization versus local patriotism'. That means opening of the borders, free trade and free movement of goods substantially may deteriorate the prospects of local products, local productive methods, local producers and/or globalisation may seriously undermine the local productive capacities. Simply, this flow of products and capital may overshadow the local productive mechanisms, it may weaken the welfare structure of the local citizens, and it may endanger the local environment, too.

Conclusion

The aim of the analysis was to process and analyze the interview material that compiled in the Štúrovo and Esztergom cross-border region by the European Institute of Cross-Border Studies in 2015. The interview material significantly demonstrated and highlighted the positive attributes of cross-border cooperation, reconstruction and opening of the Mária Valéria Bridge, which was destroyed in both World Wars. Reconstruction of the Bridge and the opening of the borders have generated significant positive attributes in the domains of employment possibilities in the cross-border labor market; it has supported the diffusion of ideas and good practices; it has promoted significant possibilities in the domains of education and/or health care; it has substantially supported the foundation of institutional frameworks, like the Euroregion and the EGTC, with an explicit and professional aim to deepen and to enhance cross-border interactions and cooperation.

However, it is also important not to fall into the trap of self-praise of the existing possibilities and positives of cross-border cooperation, but there is a need to investigate also those polymorph multivalent phantom limitations which cause obstacles in cross-border cooperation and which profoundly limit interactions across the borders between Esztergom/Hungary and Štúrovo/Slovakia.

In other words, the study of the interviewed material showed that significant progress has been achieved in the domain of cross-border cooperation, and this progress is explicitly noted by the ordinary people and local authorities of the cross-border region. Beyond all the mentioned positive aspects and polymorph multivalent phantom limitations, the most important element of any cross-border cooperation is the willingness and enthusiasm of the involved partners to remove the obstacles and to establish effective and functional cross-border cooperation. If that enthusiasm, eagerness, willingness for cross-border cooperation and interaction exists among the partners, almost any obstacles can be eliminated and/or their negative impacts can significantly be limited.

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