

2 General determinations of the Carpathians project area: geographical location, spatial structure, borders

2.1 Introduction

For all research and development processes, the designation of the area in question is a vital element. When defining research objectives and tasks we concentrate on a region (treated as a single unit from some aspects) and as a final result we wish to influence or set on a new track the processes taking place in the given region.

The area of the Carpathians Project (project region) is “only” a tendering space in the strictest sense of the word. The objectives, research tasks etc. defined in the tender refer to or are based upon the designated geographical region.

On the other hand, the designation of the region is not accidental, it is concrete task-based, considering that we primarily wish to explore the processes taking place in the mountainous areas of the Carpathians Range. Accordingly, the basic starting point had to be the orographic and physical geographical unit of the Carpathians during the designation.

The actual project region is much bigger than the Carpathian Mountains; it also includes sub-Carpathian areas and even some plains at the foothills. The designation of the region also took environmental, historical, economic etc. aspects into consideration.

The project area actually demonstrates the structures and issues of almost the whole of the European continent, except the seaside regions. The project region can be taken as a junction of the continental issues.

2.2 The Carpathians

The starting points that seem to be evident are only partially evident: the definite core of the Carpathians Project Region is the Carpathian Mountain Range. The conceptual definition and spatial designation of the Carpathians by the professionals of the countries concerned and not concerned was very much different throughout history, and there is still no single designation that meets a public consensus in all respects.

In the European geology literature, the exact structural, evolutionary etc. separation of the Alps and the Carpathians is almost an “evergreen” issue, but the issue of the designation of the precise separating line between the Carpathians and the Balkans Mountains is almost just as problematic.

Specific national schools evolved in the physical geographical designation of the Carpathians. In almost all national geographies concerned, the issue of exact designation appeared, but in most cases not even a “national public consensus on the scientific designation” was reached. There were no basically opposite views; it is just minor amendments that have continuously been on the agenda. (This is the reason why we can see slightly different spatial designations and sizes of the designated area in the different geological and geographical maps and encyclopaedia).

According to the Hungarian geographical and geological concepts before 1918, the Carpathians ranged “from the Danube to the Danube”, from Pozsony – the Hungarian name of Bratislava – to Báziaás [Baziaş]. The distance between the two end points is just over 500 kilometres as the crow flies, however, the arch of the mountain range is somewhat longer than 1,500 kilometres.

These days we can come across designations ranging from 190,000 km² to 250,000 km², even if we look at the territory of the mountain range in the narrower sense. The question is whether we only consider the orographically contiguous areas as parts of the mountain range or integrate the basins in between as parts, as well.

If the definition of the “most simple” physical geographical concept or object is burdened with uncertainties, we must take it natural that the structures connected to the Carpathians, defined in accordance to much more complex social, political, development policy etc. interests, are even more complex and changeable.

2.3 The Carpathian Convention

At the definition of territory of competence, intervention and influence of the “Carpathian Convention”, national concepts, interests and long-term objectives clearly appeared and influenced the direct activities as well. We consider this as absolutely natural, as no organisations and designations are free from the influence of interests.

For the states participating in the Carpathian Convention, the Carpathians are a joint asset; the countries work out new forms of co-operation across their areas “brought in as assets” and create a new system of mutual responsibilities in the region of the Convention.

2.4 The Carpathians project space

The territory of the Carpathians project space is not a functional unit but a “tendering spatial unit” defined and created in accordance with given criteria and objectives. Starting from this basic statement, we do not have to justify what a perfect unit the project region makes; we continuously have to indicate that the region designated meets the longer term interests and development needs, co-operation capacities etc.

Looking at its position within Europe, the larger part of the project region belongs to Central Europe in the traditional geographical sense, whereas the Ukrainian areas are often referred to as Eastern Europe, Romania and Serbia as parts of the Balkans. This makes the project region (irrespective of whether we actually accept the traditional macro-regional geographical designations of the respective states or not) a real macro-regional encounter and interaction zone within Europe, and it has often been a conflict region as well in course of history.

The major part of the region belongs to the catchment area of the Black Sea; only minor parts are in the catchment area of the Baltic Sea. The dominant hydrological axis of the project region is the River Danube that has determined, together with the Carpathians, a significant part of the physical geographical processes of the region.

The first determination of the project region, integrating (uniting) areas from eight countries (Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, the Ukraine, Romania, Serbia and Hungary) is the inter-state fragmentation. The inter-state fragmentation requires a serious co-operation willingness of all stakeholders for any successful activity.

The total of the respective areas of the eight countries concerned makes 1,547,939 km², the total population in these areas is over 153 million inhabitants. The respective countries have extremely different interests and involvements in the spatial, population, economic, settlement network etc. issues of the project region. The one common feature is the “bringing in” of their respective Carpathians areas as assets into the joint project.

The territory of the project space is 459,141 km² according to the territorial data of the national statistical yearbooks, i.e. it is bigger than many large European countries. Its population reaches approximately 55,828 million, which also exceeds the number of population in several large European member states.

The project space is extremely mixed in ethnic, linguistic and religious respects. For each element, factor of this complicated structure it is true that any given community makes the homogeneous majority in some areas, a significant part in some other areas and a minority in yet another area. The large European language families (Germanic, Slavic, Roman, Finno-Ugric) are all present in the project space. On the whole, the languages of the Slavic language family prevail.

Before 1945 German language was a sort of community mediating language in the larger part of the region, replaced by Russian in the same role until 1990. Nowadays English is becoming most popular mediating language in the region.

The religious fragmentation is also a serious issue; in fact, in religious matters the region is even more mixed than in the matter of languages. Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and the different Protestant Churches are all present and active in the region.

Austria basically considers itself an Alpine country, so its participation in the project space is more based on intentions than on determining physical geographical considerations. In this country the areas belonging to the Carpathian project space include the least developed province (Burgenland), the province most advanced economically (Vienna), and the historically most eastward-looking Lower Austria. The presence of the capital city, Vienna in the project space may be an indication of the special attention of the state organs to the cooperation, and the solution of the issues arising.

The participating Austrian provinces (Burgenland 3,965.5 km², 277,400 inhabitants; Lower Austria 19,177.8 km², 1,563.3 thousand inhabitants and Vienna 414.7 km², 1,612.5 thousand inhabitants) have significant administrative competencies, by which they may have a considerable positive impact on the cooperation processes. It is an open question from the aspect of functional relations to what extent Vienna will regain or reshape its macro-regional system of relations.

The Czech Republic is present in the project space with the larger part of the historical Moravia and its Silesian areas. The capital city, Prague is not concerned directly, but the presence of three large cities in the eastern part of country (Brno, Olomuc and Ostrava) can be a great help to the cooperation. In the case of the Czech Republic, the participating territory does not precisely cover the statistical division (NUTS division) of the country in effect, neither the regional units of spatial development. This is not evidently positive for the formal and real cooperations and for the potential feasibility of projects in the future.

Slovakia is part of the project space with its total territory. Slovakia is actually a predominantly Carpathian country, with a (potential) central and integrating role in the project, as it has borders to the Carpathian areas of five different countries.

For Slovakia, the Carpathians and the processes occurring in the region raise issues of strategic importance. The country has a vested interest in the rational use of the mountain range, the sustainable management of the environment and the development of tourism.

Poland has a smaller part in the project, but its total southern, Carpathian area is in the project space. The economic development level in the three southern voivodships of Poland is rather different, gradually changing from west to east as a result of industrialisation. Kraków has an in-between position and not only in the topographic sense of the word.

Kraków, coming from its historical past, special social, economic and cultural positions, cannot only be a centre for the south Polish areas but may expand its system of connections to the whole northern part of the Carpathian Mountains.

The Ukraine is represented in the project space by a smaller part of the country (both in territory and population), but with its total Carpathian region. The Ukrainian rayons (districts) cover the narrower area of the Carpathian Mountains in a “two-slope” way: the Transcarpathian area towards the inner areas of the Carpathian Basin, and Lvív, Ivanovo-Frankivsk and Cernivci towards the outer slopes of the mountain range.

The four rayons in the project space cover the western part of the Ukraine, creating links towards four countries. They are neither among the most nor among the least developed regions of the country. Their common feature is the close historical relations that they have to several regions of the countries involved in the Carpathian project space. (Which does not mean definitely positive relations in all cases, however.)

The rayons have a considerable administrative autonomy, although the Ukraine can be taken as a significantly centralised country because of the continuous inner political crises. The rayons have the capacity and the possibility for cross-border cooperations.

Romania has most of its territory and population (including the capital city) in the project space. The Carpathians are of vital importance for Romania not only for international cooperations but also have a great influence on the development of the internal processes. The participating Romanian counties embrace the Romanian part of the Carpathians in a double ring, in a “two-slope” way.

Serbia has a minor part of its territory and population in the project space, but the capital city and the West Banat region, as well as the city of Nis and its region have been a link in many respects towards the neighbouring countries.

Hungary is basically a country in the bottom of the Carpathian Basin, its regions in the Carpathian project space are only partially mountainous (Carpathian) areas, most of them have a plain character. The designation of the area is based on the boundaries of counties, so several of the present statistical and development regions have been split which will not assist cooperation in the future.

Hungary is situated at the lower reaches of the rivers of the Carpathian Basin, accordingly has a vested interest in what land use processes take place along the upper reaches of the rivers. For sustainable environmental management, the prudent management of forests is of special importance.

The project region is not only divided by state borders; also from an administrative point of view it is a very much varied (heterogeneous) region. Besides the necessary involvement of the respective countries, the competencies of the designated administrative units are rather different, even across the EU members we see

considerable discrepancies. The individual administrative units have interests in several levels, so their interests in the cooperation are necessarily different.

In the whole of the Carpathian project space, not only the EU, the respective states and the participating administrative units but also the local social actors have a significant role. It is especially the reconsideration of the formerly applied methods management of the hilly and mountainous areas that can contribute to the sustainable use of the whole of the mountain range.