

REGIONAL PLANNING AND CO-OPERATION IN PRACTICE IN THE DANUBE–CRIS–MAROS–TISA EUROREGION

GÁBOR NAGY

Main characteristics of the border region

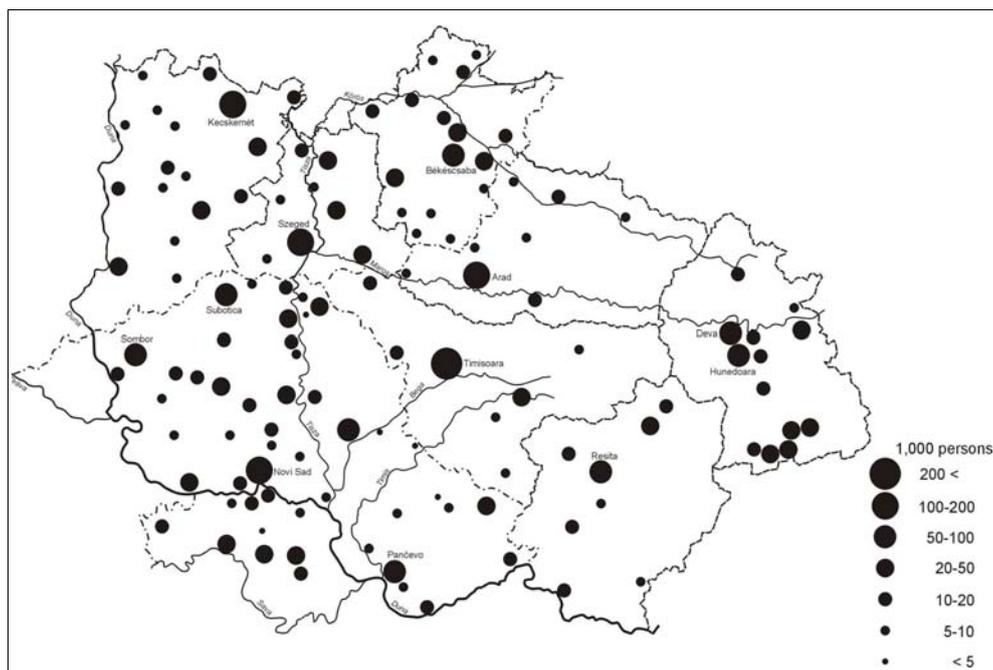
The historically defined meso-region of so-called Délvidék (the area among and along the four main rivers: Duna-Danube, Körös-Cris, Maros-Mures, Tisza-Tisa) formed a specific border region of Europe. Two of the NUTS2 regions of the DKMT Euroregion belongs to countries which are members of the EU (from 2004 – Hungary, from 2007 – Romania) and one is inside the Schengen-system (Dél-Alföld from Hungary, after 2007). The Hungarian part of the Euroregion seems a periphery inside its country with less developed areas and structural crisis (agriculture and wider agri-business, textile industries etc.) (Nagy – Kugler, 2004). The West region (Romania) had experienced one of the most impressive paths of economic development and restructuring inside Romania, thanks to the growth poles of Timișoara and Arad as the bases of new wave of industrialisation. The Vojvodina [Vajdaság] is one of the most developed regions of the remaining Serbia, but after the five civic wars and the economic blockade, the whole country and even Vojvodina became one of the poorest territories in Europe. After the agony of Yugoslavia (the declaration and *de jure* independence of Montenegro – Crna Gora and Kosovo in 2006 and 2007) the Serbian integration into European political and economic space fastened (Csatári – Timár, 2002).

This border region is one of the most important areas of the EU, with a specific role in Trans-European and Pan-European corridors, and as a crucial area in the modernisation of the West-Balkans. There are similarities and differences compared to the Austrian, Slovakian, Hungarian tri-border region. In that case, the moderately developed region of Austria (Burgenland) tried to find common interests with the well developed regions of Hungary (Nyugat-Dunántúl – West Transdanubia) and Slovakia (region around Bratislava, the capital city). The difference is rooted in the specific urban structure (Figure 1) of Délvidék, where no dominant centres exist *vis-à-vis* the role of Wien and even Bratislava in the West Pannonian Euroregion (Nárai – Rechnitzer, 1999). In the DKMT Euroregion a more balanced city network exists, without national capitals but with NUTS2 and NUTS3 level centres. The other difference is rooted in the possibility of crossing borders. From Hungary and Slovakia to Austria, a person only had one crossing per 3 years before

1985 and 1989, because of the ‘Cold War’ opposition of East and West. In the Southern border region from Hungary to the other two countries, there existed a system of border zone movements after 1975, as a result of the vigorous *Ostpolitik* of the Social-Democratic Party in Germany.

Figure 1

The balanced urban structure of DKMT Euroregion



Source: Strategic Plan and Operative Programmes of DKMT Euroregion, 2005. Békéscsaba–Timișoara–Subotica.

The specific feature of the Délvidék region is that the flow of persons, goods and services, and after the transition, capital was fluid under the rule of Communism¹ and the transition period, as well. The level of personal and economic connections was relative high, particularly between Yugoslavia and Hungary after 1975, when an agreement made cross-border movements easier.

This kind of co-operation was the basis of creating an organisational background (DKMT Euroregion) in 1997, with the participation of 4 Romanian counties (Timiș, Arad, Hunedoara, Caraș-Severin), 3 Hungarian *megye* (Bács-Kiskun,

¹Except two, relative short periods between 1948–1955, when Yugoslavia was the declared enemy of the Soviet bloc, and 1999–2000, when NATO troops bombed Vojvodina in the Kosovo War.

Békés, Csongrád – one of 4 units had to leave it because of the NUTS2 reform in 1999) and Vojvodina, as an autonomous part of Serbia. The first wave of collaboration (1997–1999) was broken by the Kosovo War, but after that process, a new level of common thinking emerged in parallel with increasing resources for cross-border development (Nagy – Kugler, 2004; Nagy in Timár, 2007).

The theories and aims of regional planning

The basic goal of regional planning in all the three regions of the DKMT Euroregion is to channel as much development funds into local and regional projects as possible. The ‘success’ in regional development seems to use all the resources coming from national and international levels (particularly from the EU). From this point of view, it is reasonable to form a regional policy framework, administrative system etc., fits for the regulations and recommendations of the European Union. In the earlier steps of improving regional political capacity, all the actors tried to find a way to identify the formal parts of EU regulations and use them inside the ‘traditional’ national channels of regional development. After a short period, the end of this approach became clear, so the revised versions of the legal background, organisational structures and monitoring systems turned more ‘European’. The risk of low-level adaptability is stopping some sources of development from the EU budget (see Bulgaria in 2008), the elimination of possibility to apply for Community programmes (Rechnitzer – Lados, 2004).

The planning process is very sensitive to the changing priorities of EU regional policies, mirroring the ESDP, Lisbon Agenda, Gothenburg Strategy, Territorial Agenda and Leipzig Charter. The ‘first generation’ of regional planning documents concentrated on alleviating regional inequalities,² rather than global competitiveness and ecological aspects. In the ‘new generation’ of documents, particularly after 2000, long-term competitiveness became the major goal of development and the role of development of ecological, architectural, cultural values was emerging (Rechnitzer, 1998). The meaning of the term ‘cohesion’ became richer; instead of eliminating regional differences, cohesion concentrates on the particular combination of local/regional resources as a basis of faster development with broader connections to global processes.

It is important to see that all the three national regional policies (Hungarian after 1996, Romanian after 1998, Serbian after 2000) strengthened in a phase, when ‘the Europe of Regions’ concept had lost its swing (Benedek, 2006). While these countries concentrated on establishing the frame of regional administrative capacities and organisations, the most developed parts of Europe entered the ‘renais-

² As a reaction to the highly increased regional imbalances after the change of regime in the 1990s.

sance' of functional urban areas. FUA's were defined as the key actors of innovative capacity, knowledge transfer and global competitiveness.

The system of Hungarian regional planning divided the planning documents into two parts: one is regional physical planning, and the other group contains the regional concepts, strategies, operative programmes and action plans. This division results in a disharmony among planning documents. The lack of coordination among sectoral and regional planning is the second weak point of the system. The third problem is rooted in the missing harmonisation of different levels of planning documents (local – LAU1 and 2; regional NUTS3 and 2, and national – NUTS0).

There are two different theories of regional planning inside and around the EU. The 'bottom-up' method uses all the documents in the lower administrative levels to outline the regional development concept, or strategy. The condition of a successful planning process is that all the local and regional plans had to contain a wide-range perspective in all the examined areas and strategic priorities. The existing practice shows that the planning process is more 'autarchic' rather than open to outside actors. In this case the aggregation process of regional planning is hardly working. The major advantage of a bottom-up system is the consensual, participatory planning, all the priorities and programming based on the real needs of local units (Farágó, 2005).

The other possible technique of regional planning is the 'top-down' method, based on national-level (regional and sectoral) documents. All the regional and local actors try to find their place and role in this system via the des-aggregation of higher level priorities and development strategies. It has some advantage, too, because of the high level of harmonisation and overlapping among planning documents. The major weak point of the system is the absence of local strengths and needs, the unique combination of local resources (Rechnitzer, 1998). This process makes the planning period more accurate and faster. The application process for development resources is simpler; the use of sources seems more effective. However, the lack of participatory planning may result in the less coordinated use of money, the lack of synergies among development actions, increasing competition among actors for resources. The technique of eliminating local needs is a limitation of consulting partners, and time limits for consensual planning (Farágó, 2005; Benedek, 2006).

The third major question in regional planning is choosing the philosophy of the process. In transitioning countries the dominant economic and even planning school became neo-liberalism, with minimising the role of planning in the first part of the 1990s and then using neo-liberal principles in the new planning phase (after 1995). Thanks to this change of paradigm, the major priority in regional plans was

competitiveness (whatever it means), but there are several problems with sustainability,³ equal opportunities; not in the documents, but in practice.

The process of regional planning and the work of the DKMT Euroregion

In this part of the paper we take a closer look at two parallel processes of regional planning, the Dél-Alföld (NUTS2) region and the DKMT Euroregion. It would be interesting to see the results of different backgrounds on the processes and the similarities in the documents and development steps.

Regional planning has begun in Hungary in 1996, after the acceptance of the 21/1996 Act on Regional Planning and Development. (To be more accurate, between 1994–1996 there were some planning experiments on different administrative levels, mainly in the Western part of Hungary, using the newly opened sources of INTERREG programmes, in parallel with the EU-accession of Austria.) This legal framework defined all the major areas, competencies and roles in regional development, and created a special source of development, financing only the regional programmes.

The newly founded Regional Development Agency (DARFÜ) and Council (DARFT) were set up in 1996, but the planning process had begun only in 1998, by formulating the long-term development concept, and later the mid-term strategic plan. After this phase of development, 14 operational programmes were made in 2000–2001, covering a certain part of the strategic priorities. The first wave of regional planning was over in 2001, when the actors (developers) and planners saw that resources for regional development were marginal, compared to the sectoral policies. The lack of development funds resulted in an increasingly passive behaviour in regional development. The realisation of documents could hardly begin in that period; synergy among the development steps was missing, large-scaled development was completely independent from regional sources.

The new wave of regional development planning emerged in 2003, thanks to the successful conclusion of the accession period (1997–2002), and new sources of regional development opened for the 2004–2006 period. Formulating the National Development Plan, the needs of local and regional actors were articulating through the PEA programme (Pre-Application Programme) in 2003, with a first circle selection of good ideas for regional development. EU-accession in 2004 initiated a new phase of the regional planning process, through half-time revision of Regional Development Concept and defining a new Strategic Plan in 2005. After the accep-

³In Hungary, the planners sometimes use the term sustainability as ‘long-term, fast economic development’, without any hint of the original meaning of the phrase.

tance of the basic documents, the Regional Operative Programme (as a part of the new National Development Plan – ÚMFT) was created in 2006 for the new financing period of the EU to channel Structural Funds into regional development projects.

The DKMT Euroregion was founded in 1997 as a consultancy forum of the Presidents Council (Presidents of the member NUTS3 regions and Vojvodina). The Agency was missing, the formation of a stable Secretariat in Szeged was a longer process. However, the lack of organisation was the weak point of the structure however, several thematic workgroups were established with the external expertise of certain development areas from the business sector, civil society organisations and local governments. These groups of experts developed the strategic priorities of the major areas in 1998, but the realisation of plans was crashed by the Kosovo War in 1999–2000. After this period, the frame of the co-operation stabilised with the formation of Romanian NUTS2 regions, the operative network of the Secretariat and national co-ordinators in 2003. The first Development Concept was established in 1999 without any result and the changing situation involved the need for a new basic document. In 2005, the Development Concept, Strategy and Operative Programmes were accepted by the leaders. In this document, the planners used all the existing materials from the three member regions in different administrative levels and conducted parallel planning in three working groups with experts from Hungary, Romania and Serbia. Compared to the previous phase of planning, the new elements were: the wider harmonisation process in member regions, the more precise links to national and regional development plans, and the existence of possible funds for regional development.

The weak points of planning were similar in the two parallel processes: the lack of participatory planning. The collation phase of planning was limited, the circle of the partners was moderate, and there were no new actors in the scene between the two phases. The delegation system of Councils, the key actors and lobbying for development actions had great influence to define priorities and programmes. There was a major problem that needs were far stronger than opportunities because of the lack of resources and missing borders between regional and sectoral competencies (see ÚMFT). Policy was not effective enough in the division of funds; the major goal was to support a larger number of small projects all around the region instead of the ‘concentration’ of resources (see EU Regional Policy documents) in larger development programmes with measurable territorial effects.

In the second planning process of the DKMT Euroregion, the bottom-up lobby was weaker and the planners got a broader role in forming priorities and defining programmes. The major problem of the process was the lack of a unified legal background; Hungary was the member of the EU, Romania had applicant status and Serbia began the convergence process at that time. The missing own sources for regional development on the level of the Euroregion highlighted the need of

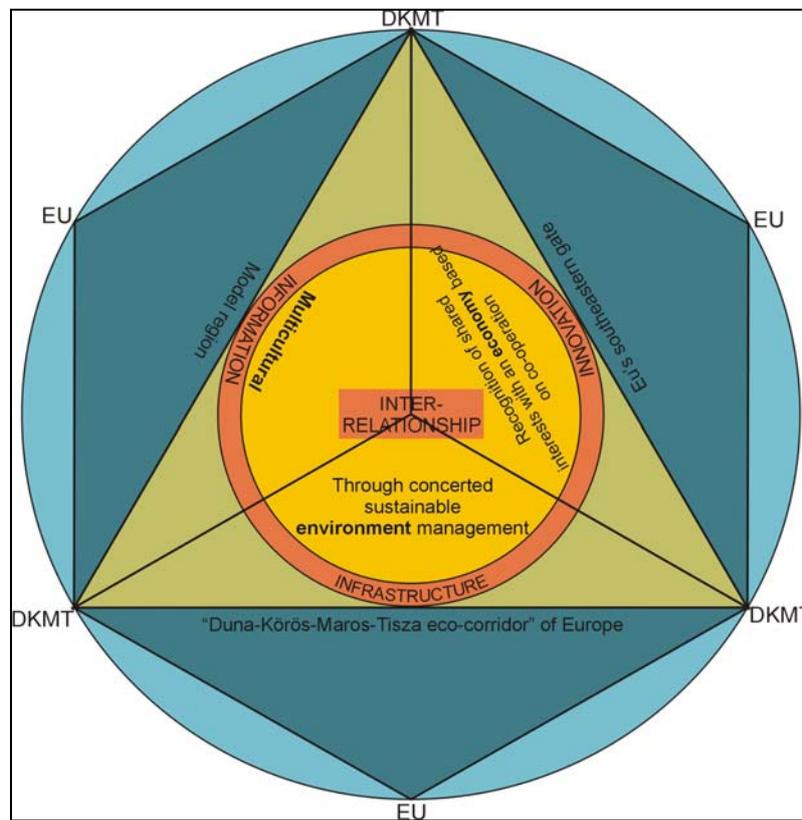
consensual development actions among the members. There will be an increasing problem to monitor the results of the actions, to point out the synergies, particularly the cross-border ones. We see this framework (Euroregion) as too large – there are existing paired counties, as well as town and city networks forming stronger alliances and becoming the engines of co-operation (Pálné, 1999; Illés, 2002).

The overall success of the planning process goes back to the common theoretical background, the similar problems and moderate differences among regions (Figure 2).

The external effects, particularly EU regulations, forced the actors into a more unified development framework, structure and technique, for the more effective use of development sources to solve the existing problems.

Figure 2

The Strategic vision of the DKMT Euroregion



Source: Strategic Plan and Operative Programmes of DKMT Euroregion, 2005. Békéscsaba–Timișoara–Subotica.

Sources of regional planning and the new phase of regional development, after 2007

In the 2007–2013 financing period, Hungary has a chance to use 22.5 billion Euros for regional development. The Dél-Alföld region may apply for appr. 3 Billion Euros, including the large-scale programmes in sectoral chapters of ÚMFT. The decentralised part of the sources is appr. 800 million Euros, ten times higher than the sources were in the 2004–2006 financing period. Romania's share from Structural Funds accounts for appr. 32 billion Euros, while the West region will apply for 2–2,2 Billion. The level of INTERREG and CARDS (for Serbia) sources seems minimal. However, the planning, application and monitoring is decentralised into the NUTS2 level, and the competencies of regions are increasing in both Hungary and Romania, and the legal frame of Vojvodina has strengthened inside Serbia. While the regional level's importance is rising, the Euroregion's playground is rather limited. They have no own resources, no opportunity to apply for development sources, creating application for local agents, which means a high level of risk in the implementation of planning documents (Nagy in *Timár*, 2007).

References

Planning documents

- Békés megye területfejlesztési koncepciója* [Regional development plan of Békés County]. MTA RKK ATI Békéscsabai Osztály, 1997.
- Csongrád megye területfejlesztési koncepciója* [Regional development plan of Csongrád County]. MTA RKK ATI Békéscsabai Osztály, 1998.
- A Dél-alföldi régió területfejlesztési koncepciója* [Regional development plan of Dél-Alföld Region]. MTA RKK ATI Békéscsabai Osztály, 1999.
- Csongrád megye területfejlesztési programja* [Strategic development plan of Csongrád County]. MTA RKK ATI Békéscsabai Osztály, 2001.
- A Dél-alföldi régió területfejlesztési koncepciója – felülvizsgálat* [Regional development plan of Dél-Alföld Region – Revised]. MTA RKK ATI, 2003.
- A Dél-alföldi régió területfejlesztési stratégiája – felülvizsgálat* [Strategic development plan of Dél-Alföld Region – Revised]. MTA RKK ATI, 2003.
- Csongrád megye területfejlesztési koncepciója – felülvizsgálat* [Regional development plan of Csongrád County – Revised]. MTA RKK ATI Békéscsabai Osztály, 2006.
- A Magyar–román határtérség fejlesztési stratégiája* [Regional development plan of Hungarian-Romanian border zone]. Budapest, Terra Kft. 2000.
- A DKMT eurorégió fejlesztési stratégiája* [Regional development plan of DKMT-Euroregion]. MTA RKK ATI Békéscsabai Osztály, 2005.
- Dél-Alföld fejlesztési regionális operatív program (ÚMFP 2007–2013) Egyeztetési változat* [Regional Operative Program for Dél-Alföld Region – 'New Hungary' Development Plan for 2007–2013 period]. Szeged, DARFÜ. 2006.
- Szeged Biopolisz Fejlesztési Pólus Program. Egyeztetési változat* [Szeged city – Biopolisz Development Programme]. Szeged, Biopolisz Kht. 2006.

- Új Magyarország Fejlesztési Terv. Foglalkoztatás és Növekedés – 2007–2013. MEH, NFÜ. Egyeztetési változat* [‘New Hungary’ Development Plan for 2007–2013 period – Employment and Economic Growth]. Budapest, A Magyar Köztársaság Kormánya 2006.
- Országos Fejlesztéspolitikai Konceptió (2007–2020).* MEH, NFH. A Magyar Köztársaság Kormánya, Budapest, 2005. (National Concept for Development Policy – 2007–2020)
- Országos Területfejlesztési Konceptió* [National Concept for Regional Development]. Budapest, VÁTI Kht. 1997.
- Országos Területfejlesztési Konceptió* [National Concept for Regional Development – Revised version]. Budapest, VÁTI STI. 2005.
- Békéscsaba Városfejlesztési Konceptiója és Stratégiája.* MTA RKK ATI, Békéscsabai Osztály, 2004. (Békéscsaba Development Plan and Strategy)
- Békéscsabai Kistérség Fejlesztési Konceptiója és Programja* [Development Concept and Plan of Békéscsaba Small Region]. MTA RKK ATI, Békéscsabai Osztály, 2005.
- Orosházi Kistérség Gazdaságfejlesztési Stratégiája.* MTA RKK ATI, Békéscsaba, 1999. (Economic Development Strategy of Orosháza Small Region)
- Békés Megye Gazdaságfejlesztési Programja* [Economic Development Strategy of Békés County]. MTA RKK ATI, Békéscsaba, 2001.

Scientific literature

- Benedek, J. 2006: *Területfejlesztés és regionális fejlődés* [Regional development and its effect on spatial processes]. Cluj Napoca, Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai, Presa Universitara Clujeana.
- Csatári, B. – Timár, J. (ed.) 2002: *Területfejlesztés, rendszerváltás és az Alföld* [Budapest. (Regional development, transition and the Alföld – Hungarian Great Plain). Budapest, MTA Társadalomkutató Központ, pp. 29–58. (Magyarország az ezredfordulón. Stratégiai kutatások a Magyar Tudományos Akadémián. IV. A területfejlesztési program tudományos megalapozása).
- Faragó, L. 2005: *A jövőalkotás társadalomtechnikája. A közösségi tervezés elmélete* [Social techniques for creating the future. The theory of participatory planning]. Budapest–Pécs, Dialóg Campus Kiadó.
- Illés, I. 2002: *Közép- és Délkelet-Európa az ezredfordulón. Átalakulás, integráció, régiók* [Central- and Southeast-Europe in the New Millenium. Transformation, integration, regions]. Budapest–Pécs, Dialóg Campus Kiadó.
- Nagy, I. – Kugler, J. (ed.) 2004: *Lehet-e három arca e tájnak? Tanulmányok a délkeleti határregió újjászerveződő kapcsolatairól* [Is it possible to be three faces of one region? Essays on newly forming connections along the Southeast border region]. Békéscsaba–Pécs, MTA Regionális Kutatások Központja.
- Nárai, M. – Rechnitzer, J. (eds.) 1999: *Elválaszt és összeköt – A határ. Társadalmi-gazdasági változások az osztrák-magyar határ menti térségben* [The border – divide and connect]. Győr–Pécs, MTA Regionális Kutatások Központja.
- Pálné Kovács, I. 1999: *Regionális politika és közigazgatás* [Regional policy and public administration]. Budapest–Pécs, Dialóg Campus Kiadó.
- Rechnitzer J. 1998: *A területi stratégiák* [Regional strategic plans]. Budapest–Pécs, Dialóg Campus Kiadó.
- Rechnitzer, J. – Lados, M. 2004: *A területi stratégiáktól a monitoringig. (Módszertan, gyakorlati praktikumok)* [From regional strategies to monitoring process – Methods and practice]. Budapest–Pécs, Dialóg Campus Kiadó.
- Timár, J. 2007: *Határkonstrukciók magyar–szerb vizsgálatok tükrében* [Border-constructions – results of a Hungarian-Serbian research project]. MTA RKK ATI Békéscsabai Osztály.