

**CENTRE FOR REGIONAL STUDIES
OF HUNGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES**

DISCUSSION PAPERS

No. 31

**Borderland Situation and
Periferality in the North-Eastern
Part of the Great Hungarian Plain**

by

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Series editor

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**Pécs
1999**

Publishing of this paper is supported by the
Research Fund of the Centre for Regional Studies, Hungary

This work was supported by the *Strategic Great Plain Research Programme II of HAS*. The survey was made in the framework of the “*North-Eastern Great Plain Borderlands Reserach*” directed by Béla Baranyi

ISSN 0238–2008

© 1999 by Centre for Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences
Technical editor: Dorottya Frick, Zoltán Gál
Typeset by Centre for Regional Studies of HAS
Printed in Hungary by Sümegei Nyomdaipari, Kereskedelmi és Szolgáltató Ltd., Pécs

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1 Introduction

The study of the *questions* of borders and *borderlands*, *the separating and connecting role of political state borders* has special importance nowadays, especially regarding the current *European integration processes*. Spatial-ethnic problems of the past make the European *co-operation and integration* more difficult along the borders of the Central-Eastern European countries, particularly in the post-socialist countries like Hungary. The borders where unsettled socio-economic-ethnic questions accumulate and still exist mean *considerable obstacles to globalisation and integration tendencies*. The borderlands and settlements of North-Eastern Hungary – “peripheries of the periphery” – can be considered such a problematic territory. These extended borderlands comprise the most typical features of the especially disadvantageous peripheries.

In the recent years it has been widely quoted that the by the political changes in Central-Eastern Europe and the democratisation process, the *rigid separating role of state borders will dissolve* in the region. The spiritualisation of the Central European borders is a basic national interest of Hungary, especially in the problematic territories of North-Eastern Hungary where three political state borders meet (Hungarian-Slovakian, Hungarian-Ukrainian and Hungarian-Romanian). A crucial precondition for this is to study the features of the especially disadvantaged peripheries in depth and to reduce the disadvantageous consequences, *to facilitate the socio-economic development of the borderlands*.

Depending on *the Euro-Atlantic processes*, *the international transit role of the Great Plain is expected to be appreciated* in the near future. *The renewal abilities* of the Eastern Hungarian, mostly peripheral borderlands territories – *including the North-Eastern borderlands of the Great Plain* – will be of a decisive importance influencing how the region can become a *modern transit area*, able to exploit its opportunities and interests at the same time, *of the European economic and integration processes expanding to the East*.

The research of the Great Plain has always meant an exciting challenge for the regional development experts. The systemic change shed new light on the regional differences of the development taking place under *peripheral circumstances* and influenced by the *centre-periphery* effects. The large-scale Research Programme of the Great Plain was launched partly because of increased interests and partly because of the political will that considers the study of the “Great Plain symptoms” an important and current issue, which was emphasised in parliament and government resolutions as well. The scientific results of this programme

accumulated between 1991 and 1993 has been published in 14 volumes (B. Csátári, 1995).

Many signs hint at the tendency that the societal-economic processes of today do not facilitate the catching up with the more developed regions. Regional differences existing for a long time tend to increase or remain at least preserved. *The danger of becoming a periphery threatens extensive territories of the Great Plain and also the borderland settlements.* This fact has also played a role when the studies focusing on the region became part of the three-year (1997-1998) Strategic Research Programme of the HAS. The *Great Plain Research Programme II.* was launched in the framework of an academic project in 1998 with an academic team within the Debrecen Group of Great Plain Research Institute of the Centre for Regional Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Its task was *to carry out complex research in the borderlands of the North-Eastern Great Plain*, including 119 settlements of Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties. The first phase of the so-called *borderland programme* was finished in the middle of 1999. The results of the research are included in the academic report called *“The situation of the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands – the choices of catching up”* (B. Baranyi ed., 1999).

The academic studies of the borderland started from the idea that a significant part of the Great Plain still remained peripheral due to the intensified socio-economic deconcentration processes after the changes in 1989. Certain territories within the region, *borderlands* at the first place became the *“peripheries of the periphery”* according to the proper expression of József Tóth and partly Ferenc Erdősi. Although there were previous academic studies regarding the borderlands, however, they remained rather neutral after the national academic discussions – pointing out thoroughly the directions and tasks of domestic research – in 1986 organised by the Centre for Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Szombathely (J. Tóth 1985, 1988, F. Erdősi 1988, F. Erdősi – J. Tóth ed. 1988).

The fact that the borderlands are becoming the *“peripheries of the periphery”* does not attract either foreign or Hungarian investments. The partly *historical* (e.g. late development, Trianon), partly *poor* natural economic and geographical characteristics, also the former *disadvantageous macro- and micro-economic factors* and effects, *the distance from the market, one-sided economy* based on the production of agricultural raw materials, *the low income-producing ability of the economy, the backward infrastructure, the lack of a significant industrial production capacity, the proximity of borders* meaning mostly disadvantages today, *the lack of cities, the continuous lack of capital, the current employment crisis* all force the development of marginal territories and settlements. Under these circumstances, regional sciences must consider the possibilities of the socio-

economic catching up of the borderlands, *preparing for the challenge of the EU-integration and managing the problem of the Schengen-borders* at the level of regional research as well.

Finally it is important to note that the research completed in the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands – considering all the choices and advantages, success and failure connected to the new task – means only the first and initial step of this kind of studies. *Carrying on the research on the transformation and choices of all the Great Plain borderlands, the complete and detailed analysis of the borderlands gaining crucial importance after the EU accession would be possible in a few years. The analysis would contain the different possibilities of the peripheries and questions like the shaping gate and mediator role, the cross-border territorial integration relations and the ethnic and societal relations.* Without too much self-conceit, it can be stated that the yet incomplete studies that have already been carried out in the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands may secure a sufficient basis for the continuation and success of such a current issue.

As the *most important mid-term objective of the country is the accession to the EU*, it is of special importance that the resolutions, measures taken to reduce the current problems and tensions regarding rural areas should contribute to the fulfilment of accession requirements. Hopefully the studies on the North-Eastern Great Plain (Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties) borderlands will facilitate the *objective evaluation of the situation, promoting the choices and possibilities of a catching up process, enriching cross-border connections along spiritualising borders with the means of science.* In our opinion, the *complex evaluation of the situation*, by its limited means, may contribute to the success of catching up programmes for the “peripheries of the periphery”, the development of cross-border relationships and last but not least, the success of EU accession. The borderland studies are also important because without an overall examination, the regional inequalities and especially *disadvantageous situation may become stable and the borderlands will not be able to move forward quickly and effectively from the current situation, and the micro-region will continue to fall behind and lose its population.* This evaluation tries to promote the change of the current situation by its limited means.

2 “At the periphery of the periphery” – the results and conclusions of a questionnaire survey in the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands

2.1 The method of investigation

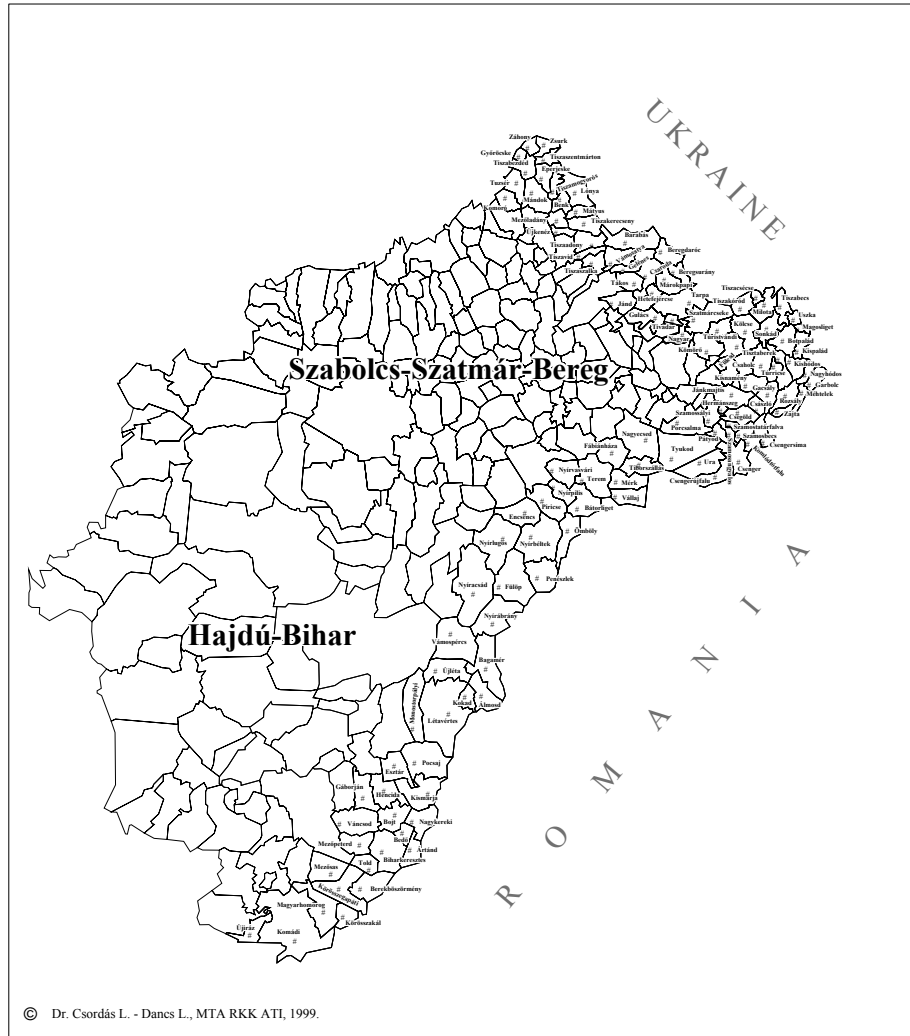
The first step was to define the *North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands geographically* as the subject of the study. Besides historical, geographical – natural, economic, societal and transportation aspects, spatial structure, etc. – factors, certain effects of the proximity of the state borders played an important role (F. Erdősi, 1988).

The definition of borderland settlements was followed by drawing up a questionnaire able to measure the demographic, socio-economic, employment, infrastructural, environmental, touristic and education characteristics of these settlements in a complex way. The questionnaires – containing 61 questions and question groups – were sent to 119 mayors of borderlands settlements as self-answering questionnaires. Out of the settlements in the sample, 30 are situated in Hajdú-Bihar and 89 in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county. The sampling concerned 36,6% of the total 82 settlements in Hajdú-Bihar and 39,0% of the total 228 settlements in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg.

During the investigation we had to use sampling methods different from the ones used in sociology, as the basement was “only” 119 in our case. The choice was given: to choose between asking the inhabitants or the leaders of the settlements (mayor, notary or bodies). Finally, a number of arguments made us choose to ask the chief officers or experts of the mayor’s office. The decision was also simplified by the fact that making and evaluating questionnaires and interviews was only one aspect in the work of the academic team investigating the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands. The research task and the complexity of the chosen method meant that besides the questionnaires and interviews the results of other resources, data and methods (e.g. factor-analysis) had to be built in the evaluations. In this respect *the examination itself can only partially be regarded as a sociological kind of analysis and mostly in formal respect*. Asking the 119 local authorities rather meant the basis for the completion of the survey with the help of self-answering questionnaires, and creating a resource basis. Also, it had the advantage that the answers given by the local authorities not only reflected an individual opinion, but the opinion of the majority of the population. Regarding the questions demanding authentic information, the latest official municipality data came to daylight this way. (Figure 1).

Figure 1

The position of borderland settlements in Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties



A number of different methodical viewpoints had to be considered when the questionnaire was created. For this reason – and for the sake of better processing – the use of open questions had to be reduced on one hand. On the other hand, the need emerged to obtain new kind of information – regarding the *characteristics of cross-border relations of the borderlands, the existence and strength of inter-ethnic*

relations, the presence and activities of foreign owned companies – which had not been examined in this context and in such a complex way in the region. Accordingly, *a certain number of questions could only have been phrased and put in an open way.*

Out of the 119 questionnaires sent to the settlements, 95 arrived in time, 29 representing Hajdú-Bihar and 66 Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county. The 95 fulfilled questionnaires mean that 79,8% arrived, which can be regarded as a very high percentage when using self-answering questionnaires (two others arrived after closing the processing, which could not be considered as relevant data). *The questionnaire was completed by a series of interviews made with the mayors of three borderland cities (Létavértes, Csenger and Záhony), the mayor of an “almost city” (Komádi), the mayor of a settlement heading for large-scale development, being transformed into an international border crossing (Csengersima), the leader of the first special business area in Hungary – Záhony and Surroundings Business Area and the chief experts of the chambers of agriculture, industry and commerce of Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties. These were important supplementary resources for the research and the questionnaires and also the preparation of this study, just like the different databases correcting incomplete or false statements.*

2.2 The results of the investigation

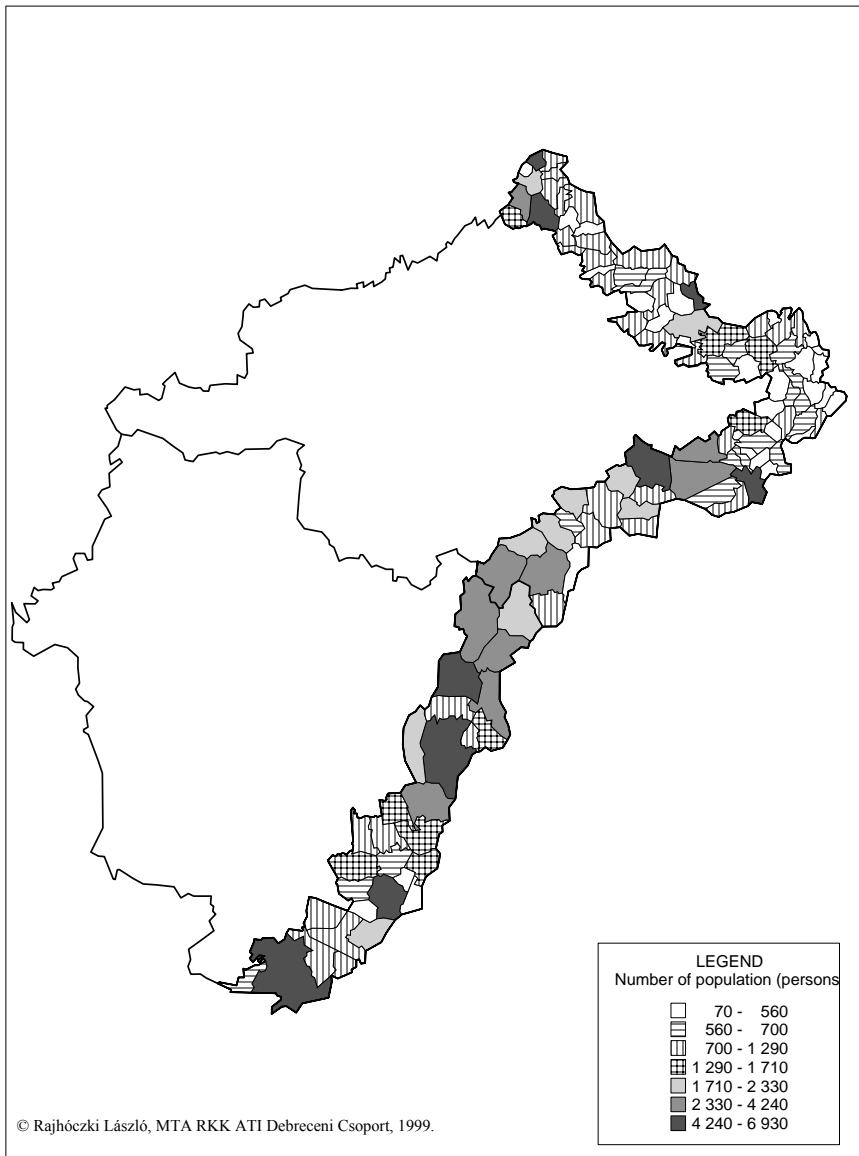
2.2.1 Characteristics of population and settlement geography

The *total population* of the 119 settlements of the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands amounts to *156 714 persons*, which is 14.0% of the total population of the two counties. 58 239 people (10.7% of the population, 1 941 people per settlement on the average) live in the 30 settlements in the Hajdú-Bihar sample, while 98 475 people (17.2% of the population, people per settlement on the average) live in the 89 settlements belonging to the Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg sample. Consequently, among the settlements in the sample, the *average number of inhabitants is almost twice as high in Hajdú-Bihar as in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county*. This also implies that the borderland settlements have longer borders and are more densely populated in Hajdú-Bihar, whereas they have shorter borders and are less populated in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (*Figure 2*).

In the borderland settlements filling out the questionnaire, the average number of live births per 1000 inhabitants was 11.1 people, the mortality was 13.8 people in the beginning of 1999. The birth ratio on the average of the 30 settlements in Hajdú-Bihar was 12.2 per thousand, whereas in the 89 borderland settlements of

Figure 2

The size of borderland settlements by the size of population



Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg it was 10.4 per thousand. On the contrary, the death ratio in Hajdú-Bihar was 14.8 and 13.2 in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg. The difference regarding the total number of live births and deaths is not significant in either county's borderlands examined. However, the natural migration figures are unfavourable both regarding the 95 settlements and also the 119 settlements in the borderlands, compared to the total average of the two counties. With regard to the average of the borderland settlements, the natural decrease (-2.6 for Hajdú-Bihar and -2.8 per thousand for Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg) deriving from the difference of births and deaths significantly exceeds the ratio of Hajdú-Bihar (1.2) and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (1.0).

Despite of the significant natural loss of the ageing population (whose ageing is widely known), *real loss is hardly shown due to the positive migration balance*. For example, the loss of 422 persons in 1998 was balanced by the 700 surplus of the migration balance. This also implies that due to the shrinking possibilities of moving out and due to the movings in or resettlings for social and other reasons, the population is more likely to increase continuously in most of the settlements. The process can be explained by *the positive migration balance*, which is a rather contradictory phenomenon in the case of an especially disadvantageous region. This strange tendency is probably caused by the forced resettlement of the urban unemployed, the settlement of those coming from the other side of the border and the stronger immigration of the Gypsy population. As a result, according to the reports of the local authorities, the 3 473 people leaving the 95 borderland settlements was compensated by the 4 182 people moving in, showing a surplus of 710 people in 1998.

Because of the latter, the migration of the population deserves a distinguished attention. According to the 95 questionnaires sent back, the total number of *move-ins* was 4 183 (26.7 persons/thousand) in the borderlands, making up for 3% of the total population choosing a new residence. Examining the move-in ratio by counties, it can be stated that in the 29 borderland settlements of Hajdú-Bihar there were 2 158 move-ins (37.2 persons/thousand), 3.7% of the residents. On the other side, 2 025 people moved in the 66 settlements in the sample, which is 20.6 people per thousand inhabitants. In this case only 2.1% of the population can be considered as movers-ins. *Accordingly, the ratio of move-ins is much higher in Hajdú-Bihar compared to the neighbouring county*. The higher settlement function that is a regular consequence of the *higher population* makes the borderlands belonging to Hajdú-Bihar more attractive than Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, more typically dominated by small villages. Further explanations can be found in the differences in spatial structure, transportation infrastructure and the poor accessibility, and great distances between the county seat as a centre and the settlements in the borderlands of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg.

As regards the *nationality* of in-movers, the settlements that sent their answers (N=95) indicated 4 030 as *Hungarian* and only 153 people as *foreign* from the total 4 183 move-ins during 1998. The number of foreigners was 3.7% of the total move-ins. Although the ratio of move-ins from the other side of the border is not very high compared to the number of total move-ins, however, the amount of 153 per year itself, according to the nature of the issue, should not be disregarded 10 years after the changes. Out of the 4 030 Hungarian move-ins to the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands, 53.0% (2 134 people) moved to Hajdú-Bihar and 47.0% (1 896 people) to Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county. Out of the 153 foreign move-ins, 24 people (15.7%) became resident in Hajdú-Bihar, while 129 people (84.3%) settled down in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg.

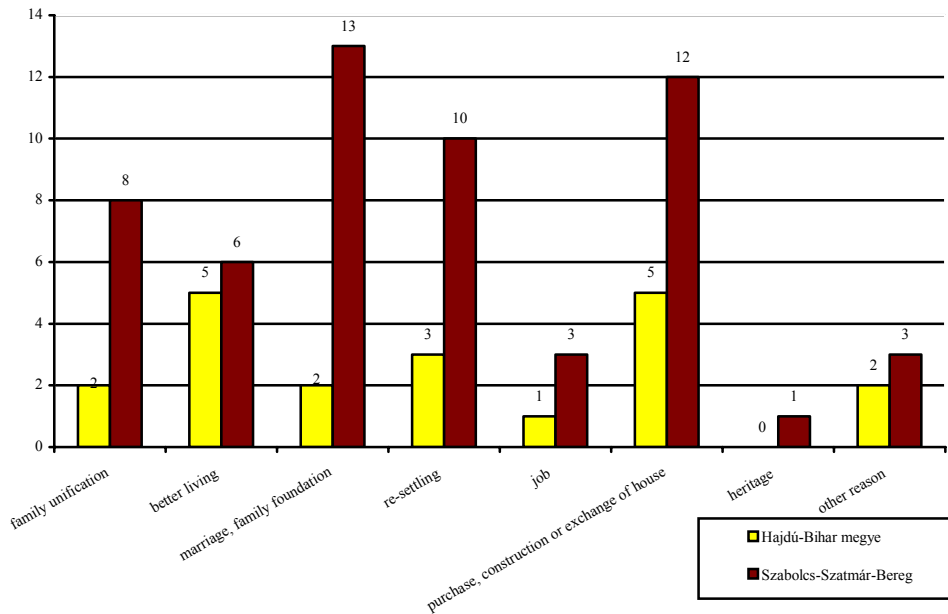
Examining the *distribution by nationality*, out of the 153 foreign move-ins into the borderlands, 55.6% (85 people) were Hungarian and 44.4% (68 people) non-Hungarian. Out of the latter, the number of Ukrainians was the highest (44 people), followed by the Romanians (22 people), Serbs and Slovaks (1 person each). Out of the 24 people who became residents in Hajdú-Bihar, 1 was Ukrainian, 6 Romanian, 1 Serb and 16 Hungarian. Out of the 153 people moving in the Northern Great Plain borderlands, 129 people (84.3%) of all foreign immigrants found new home in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, 43 of whom were of Ukrainian, 16 of Romanian, 1 of Slovakian and 69 of Hungarian nationality. Comparing the data of the two counties, it is striking that the number and ratio of move-ins was much higher in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg in 1998 than in its Southern neighbour. However, it is a common characteristic that the majority of immigrants are Hungarian in both counties.

The reason and motivation of foreign move-ins was also a subject of examination regarding the assessable answers. As the *territorial differences are spectacular*, we preferred a breakdown by counties. In Hajdú-Bihar the reason for moving in was rather the *better standard of living and the possibility of getting an apartment*, and not so much the *heritage, family foundation or workplace*. As it comes from the data, those who moved to Hungary found their former living standards and the conditions of their environment unsatisfactory and expected better perspectives in our country, where they can get an apartment cheaper and are close to their former domestic or foreign home. Most of the foreigners moving in already have families and they did not have family relations in these territories formerly. They do not envisage their future in the borderlands but would rather settle down permanently in the central areas inside the country. They already arrived with the purpose to move on after their naturalisation and as they have stronger financial background and more self-confidence. In the motives of the foreign immigrants to the borderlands of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, *marriage and founding a family* are especially important, followed by *buying an apartment and resettling* which also play an important role. However, *heritage and workplace* do not play a special role. It is interesting that the *better standard of living* does not

play such a big role as in Hajdú-Bihar county. On the other hand, *the family reunion* is indicated as a strong motive, which shows stronger family ties among the people living in the borderlands of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg than those of Hajdú-Bihar (Figure 3).

Figure 3

The motives for foreign immigrations in the border region (1998)

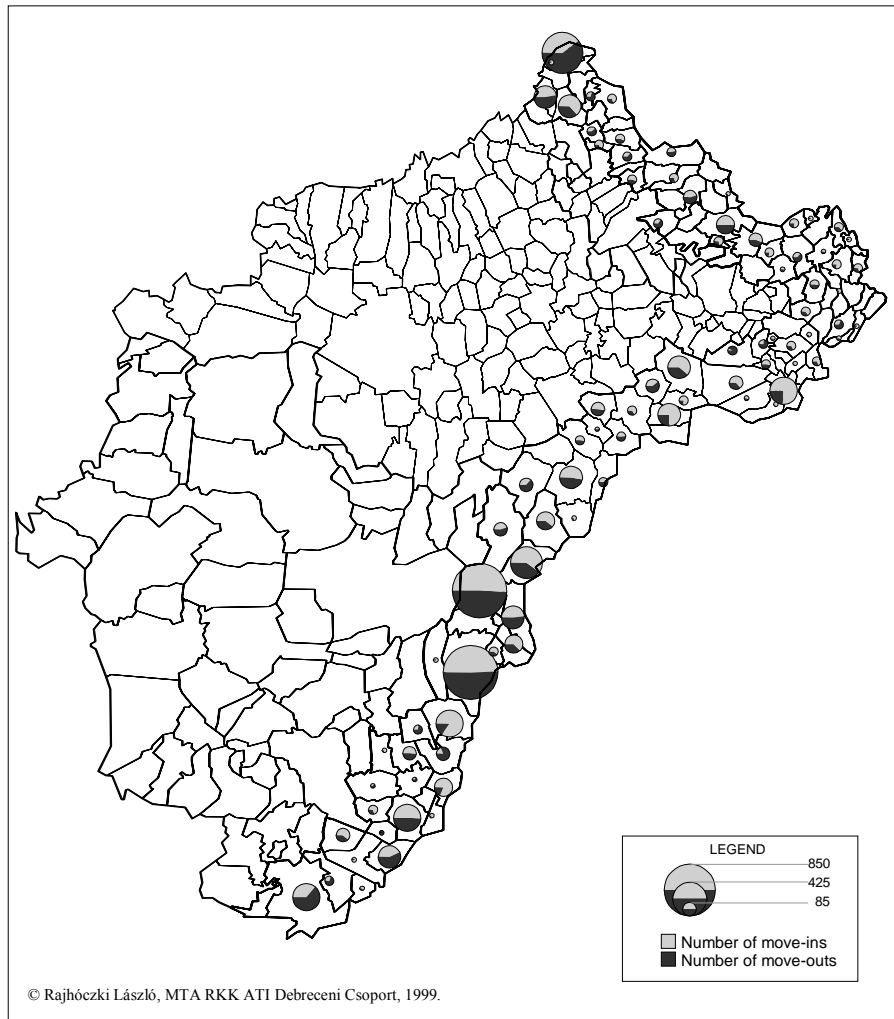


The total number of those *moving away from the borderland settlements* (N=95) of the two counties was 3 473 in 1998. Out of this, 1 870 people (53.8%) stand for Hajdú-Bihar and 1 603 (46.2%) for Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg. The *comparison of the move-in and move-out ratios* leads to an interesting conclusion. The number of move-ins in Hajdú-Bihar was 37.2 people per thousand in 1998, the number of move-outs was only 32.2, which is 3.7 and 3.2% of the total population examined. If we do not accept the possibility that the same population moves out and moves in – which has a very low chance –, adding up the ratios of moving in and out, it can be seen that 6.9% of the population has changed in the borderland settlements of Hajdú-Bihar that have sent the questionnaire back. The ratio of *move-ins* per thousand was 20.6 people in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, the number of *move-outs* was 16.3 people, which means 2.1 and 1.6% of the total borderland population

considered. This implies that 3.7% of the population has changed continuously. The ratio calculated this way is approximately half as high as in the case of Hajdú-Bihar, *showing the considerable, sometimes total immobility of the Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg borderlands population*, however, the inhabitants usually do not experience this in such a conscious way but rather on an emotional ground and under pressure (Figure 4).

Figure 4

The number of people moving in and out



Out of the total number of *move-outs* from the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands, 50 was of *foreign nationality* in 1998. According to the territorial

division, out of the 50 move-outs 5 – formerly settled foreigners – moved on from Hajdú-Bihar and 45 from the neighbouring county. Regarding the motive, reason and destination of moving away, except for one case (Ukraine), 47 was another Hungarian city and 19 was another village. The former statement, which implies that the borderlands are considered only as a temporary station for the foreign move-ins, and the destination is another city in the central part, a county seat or other bigger prosperous city and Budapest above all, seems to be justified. Due to the unfavourable societal and economic conditions, the borderlands can only be attractive for foreign citizens as a chance to get cheap apartments these days. In the socio-economic sense the area is not able to be influential and attractive enough for the neighbouring countries, as it is able to guarantee only a limited living standard for its own residents. This can be tracked in the reasons listed in the questionnaire regarding *the motives of foreign (and Hungarian) move-outs from the borderlands*, among which the *opportunity to work and the better living standards* are indicated in the first and second place.

Finally, if we sum up the figures of the *natural mobility of the population* per thousand inhabitants with the *total number of move-ins and move-outs* per thousand inhabitants, the *real surplus* was 7.5 people in the Hajdú-Bihar part of the borderlands, whereas this number was 1.5 in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg in 1998. Accordingly, the *amount of the population has increased* in both counties in the borderland settlements in the sample, however – although in a smaller amount compared to the national tendencies – a *natural loss* is mostly typical for the borderlands. *The origin of the real population gain* is mostly the *migration surplus*.

In the recent years, the *Gypsies have been moving in and are concentrated at certain territories*, in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg for the most. This seems to be verified as according to the *1997 empirical studies on the Gypsy groups in the borderlands*, the increase of the Gypsy population was significant compared to the 1990 census. This is a large-scale change even if we consider that the comparison between the 1990 census and the rather accurate results of the *report of the Economic Geography Department of József Attila University prepared in summer and autumn of 1997 in 88 North-Eastern Great Plain borderland settlements regarding the Gypsy ethnic group* leads to inevitable distortions. In the case of the numeric comparison it is clear that the indicated amount of increase could not take place as in 1990 evidently much less people defined themselves Gypsy as they are in reality. In more than the half, 48 of the settlements the number of Gypsies is less than 50 and there are no Gypsies in 10 settlements. The situation is different if we do not consider the population but the ratio of Gypsies among the population. According to 1990 data, the ratio of Gypsies is over 10% in only 22 settlements and is higher than 25% in only 5 settlements. Looking back to the 1997 situation, it can be stated that the ratio of Gypsies exceeds 10% in 55 settlements, 25% in 22 settlements and 50% in 2 settlements. The majority of settlements where the Gypsy population is over 100 people belong to the group of more than 25% (*Tuzsér*,

Nagyecsed, Csenger, Létavértes, etc.) reaching the one-third ratio in a number of cases (*Tiszaszentmárton, Tiszabездéd, Encsencs, Berekbőszörmény*). It is the small settlements, however, that are the most spectacular with their high ratio. 80% of the less than 300 people in *Uszka*, 59% of the less than 500 people in *Kispalád*, 50% of the 700 people of *Nyírpilis* is Gypsy, and among those with a population less than 1000 the ratio is higher than 25% in another 8 settlements. It appears that the small settlements becoming even more unfavourable because of their population give home to more and more underprivileged ethnic population, which further increases their unfavourable conditions (*Cs. Kovács 1999*).

The study includes the *examination of breakdown by religion*, too. On the basis of the 95 questionnaires sent back, it was possible to get information about the religion of 122 836 people out of the 156 714 living in the borderlands. Accordingly, the majority traditionally belongs to the Calvinists in the borderland settlements of the two counties, which can be explained by the situation after the reformation and the religious influence of Debrecen in the neighbourhood. The number of Greek Catholics is also significant in both counties. The difference is spectacular in the number and ratio of Roman Catholics, who are present in a higher number in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg than in Hajdú-Bihar. Because of the more significant Romanian population in Hajdú-Bihar, the number and ratio of Orthodox people is higher than in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (*Table 1*).

Table 1

Division of the population of the border region by religion, 1998

Congregation	Hajdú-Bihar		Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg		Total	
	persons	%	persons	%	persons	%
Evangelic	28 097	63.32	49 333	62.87	77 430	63.03
Roman catholic	3 565	8.04	12 686	16.17	16 251	13.23
Greek catholic	10 313	23.24	14 239	18.15	24 552	19.99
Orthodox	1 137	2.56	27	0.03	1 164	0.95
Baptist	785	1.78	75	0.09	860	0.70
Other	469	1.06	2 110	2.69	2 579	2.10
Total	44 366	100.0	78 470	100.0	122 836	100.0

Source: Data from a questionnaire survey. Debrecen Group of the Great Plain Research Institute of the CRS, HAS, 1999

Note: N=95, i.e. 122 836 persons, 78.1% of the total population of the border region.

In accordance with their ratio, it is the Calvinist, the Roman Catholic and the Greek Catholic church that have the most widespread cross-border relations in the

region. *According to the unanimous opinion of the authorised bishops in the area – Calvinist Episcopacy of the Trans-Tisza Region, Roman Catholic Episcopacy, Greek Catholic Episcopacy of Hajdúdorog – the churches keep the closest relationship with the Hungarian churches beyond the frontier.* This co-operation is concentrated on the pastors' training, religious education and culture, and charities regardless of religion (*L. Dancs 1999*).

The *breakdown by nationality* among the population of the borderlands has also been examined in the questionnaires. The data are based on the information published by the local mayors' offices. Out of the local authorities sending back the questionnaires, *only four settlements have referred to ethnic minorities.* Accordingly, 55% of the population of Bedő is Romanian, 1% of the population in *Körösszakáll and Létavértes* is Romanian and 7% of *Körösszegapáti* is Romanian. In all the other settlements the population is only of Hungarian nationality. Not underestimating the importance of the issue, and being aware of the fact that *in reality, the number and ratio of ethnic inhabitants may be higher as is seemed from the data given by the local authorities based on the usage of mother tongue,* it must be seen that the assimilation of the borderlands ethnic minority – mostly those using their mother tongue as well – is rather advanced. As the population on both sides of the border can be considered homogeneous and Hungarian as a majority – not considering the Gypsy ethnic group as a nationality – the *inter-ethnic relations* between the two sides of the borders operate as “*Hungarian-Hungarian*” relations in reality.

Like it or not, in the regions and settlements of Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg along the state borders, the only minority represented is almost only the Gypsy group, with a much higher ratio compared to the national average. It should also be added that the ethnic group of Gypsies live in a very much unfavourable situation regarding economic, societal and geographical conditions. This makes the situation of the examined territory even worse, as if we talk about the *problems of North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands, we should not forget about the role of the Gypsy minority and the choice to reduce the conflicts given.* The ratio of the Gypsy minority is about 10% of the total population on the average (exact and reliable data are not available from any source), but in some settlements this number reaches 30-40%. For this reason, their role is not a subsidiary question, especially regarding the labour market pressed by serious difficulties (*I. Balcsók, 1999*).

2.2.2 Socio-economic conditions

With the help of the questionnaires and the related analyses, the *breakdown by occupations of the working population* of the borderlands could be specified rather accurately in 1998. The number of employed based on the data of registered employees is 30 328 people, if we add the number of commuters (5 741 people) it is found that *65.3% of the working population is employed at the examined territory, i.e. the ratio of the registered unemployed and those who got out of the registration system and those who are able to work but do not have a job is 34.7%*. However, the latter percentage includes a certain distortion, as housewives, mothers on maternity grant, soldiers and imprisoned are also included, these data show serious employment difficulties (Table 2).

As it is pointed out in Table 2., most people are employed in the service sector. Although the number of service sector employees is almost the same in both counties' borderlands, considering the population which is much smaller (30 thousand people less) in Hajdú-Bihar, the role of the service sector is much stronger in this county, besides similar ratios. Because of the characteristics of the settlement network, the quality and quantity standard of services is higher in larger villages and in settlements with a larger population in Hajdú-Bihar. From the demand side this could also mean that people living in a more urbanised environment follow and copy the urban lifestyle more than those living in isolated small villages.

Table 2

*Distribution of the active earners in the border region
by economic sectors, 1998*

Sector	Hajdú-Bihar county		Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county		Total	
	persons	%	persons	%	persons	%
Agriculture	3 608	24.66	4 977	31.70	8 585	28.31
Industry	3 121	21.33	1 811	11.54	4 932	16.26
Trade	1 018	6.96	1 056	6.74	2 074	6.84
Services (catering, transportation, tourism, other)	5 127	35.05	5 018	31.96	10 145	33.45
Public services (public administration, education, health)	1 756	12.00	2 836	18.06	4 592	15.14
Total	14 630	100.00	15 698	100.00	30 328	100.00

Source: Data from a questionnaire survey. Debrecen Group of the Great Plain Research Institute of the CRS, HAS, 1999

The importance of agriculture is huge in the strongly agricultural borderlands, both regarding *employment and the production of income*. The number and ratio of people employed in agriculture in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, mostly due to pressing economic constraints, is much higher than in its Southern neighbour. However, the real socio-economic role of the sector is much smaller due to the differences in the state of development and certain other particularities. Besides the large number of constrained businesses, this can also be explained by the low quality of soil, the unfavourable natural conditions and the constant danger of floods and inland waters.

The ratio of people employed in *industry* is very modest with its 16.3%, which refers to the fact that this branch of the economy plays a less important role in the borderlands. The figure is especially low in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, only 11.5%, and it is 21.3% in Hajdú-Bihar. It is typical of the situation that 40 of the 95 local authorities asked (42.1%) stated that there was some kind of industrial activity at the particular place. Nevertheless, the number of considerable industrial companies is rather small. The ratio of people employed in the *industry and services sector* is higher in Hajdú-Bihar, whereas the ratio of the *public administration sector* is lower than in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg. It is an interesting but also evident aspect under the given circumstances that the ratio of the *active earners in commerce*, due to the “breakout” character of these businesses, is almost the same in both counties. However, the *sectoral data – even though with significant differences by counties – prove the contradictory, rather low state of socio-economic development in the borderlands*.

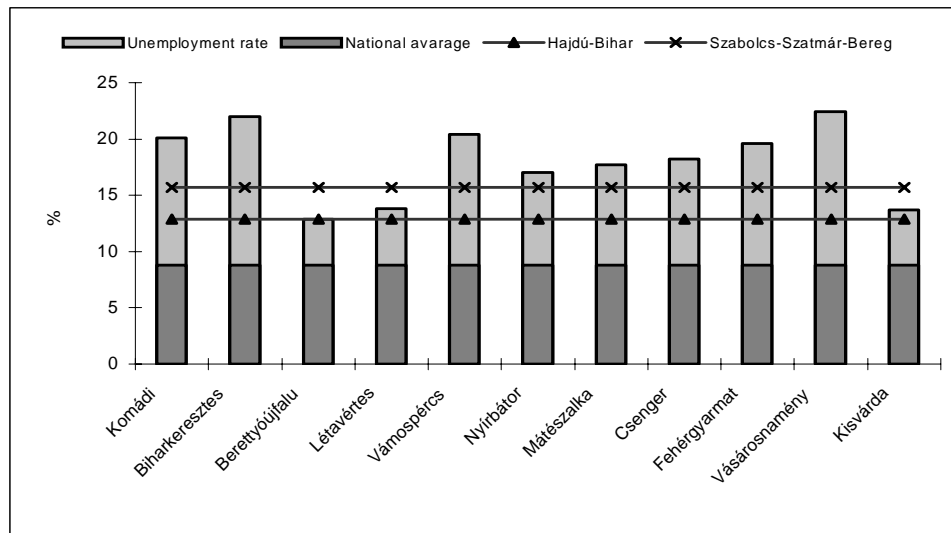
It appears of the whole economy that the borderlands’ settlements separated from their original natural centres (*Ungvár, Munkács, Beregszász, Szatmárnémeti, Nagykároly and Nagyvárada*) are usually in a more favourable economic situation in Hajdú-Bihar than in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg. The question of unemployed looking for work is solved in more cases than in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, however the figures compared to the county average, the county seat or the capital city reveal a rather unfavourable picture, which proves that the region is on “*the periphery of the periphery*” regarding employment as well.

The questionnaire also paid attention to the issues concerning *the labour market*. On the basis of the given answers it was found that the most serious problem of the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands is the *constant lack of jobs*. It often occurs – mostly in the winter months – that in most of the settlements the number of free work places does not reach 1 for 100 unemployed. Comparing data of the 11 employment districts in the borderlands, it is revealed that the nature of unemployment is extraordinarily serious here. The unemployment rate is absolutely higher than the national average in both counties and except for the two districts in

a relatively better situation (*Berettyóújfalú and Kisvárdá*), the other nine seriously exceed their own county's average. In general, the labour market can be characterised as the ratio of unemployed and the long-term unemployed is far higher in the borderland settlements, in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg for the most, than in the inner territories of the counties concerned (*Figure 5*).

Figure 5

The rate of unemployment in October 1998



The former large businesses have closed and the “employment gap” in their place them has not been filled yet. The local businesses are small and are in a lack of capital and the modest conditions do not attract foreign capital, which could make larger investments. Employment and the state of economy are closely connected. Without the development of the latter no significant job creation can be supposed, which, given *the lack of local capital can only be assumed with significant government support. Above all, the construction and development of road networks would be necessary.*

It is characteristic of the labour market of the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands that the *tertiary sector was not able to absorb the surplus in agriculture and industry originating from the changes in 1989.* Most of the businesses in the tertiary sector employ one or two people, thus their role played on the labour market is not significant. Catering and accommodation services – except for a few examples – do not play an important role. The area does not attract domestic tourism, either, and due to the closed borders the number of people

coming from the neighbouring countries is negligible. Demand is reduced in both cases because of the underdeveloped infrastructure: despite the developments there is no sufficient background for high level services. It is trade that suffers the most from the closed borders, because their turnover could be helped a lot by appropriately built crossing points and connected roads of better quality.

The huge unemployment experienced among the Gypsies means an especially serious socio-economic problem for the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands. In general, 70-80% of this ethnic group is constantly out of the legal labour market and as it is estimated that they make the majority of hidden unemployment. Their chances to enter the labour market again are very limited (*I. Balcsók 1999*).

The dramatic situation that has developed in connection with the ethnic group of Gypsies is even more emphasised by the size of the Gypsy population living in the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands. After Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county at the first place, *Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg is the second and Hajdú-Bihar is the third in Hungary* regarding the absolute number of the Gypsies compared to the whole population. The ratio of the Gypsies within the total population makes 8.9% in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and 8.2% in Hajdú-Bihar, which means the third and fourth place for the two Great Plain counties, after Nógrád. The average ratio of the Gypsies in comparison with the total population is 16.3% in the examined borderlands, which is 3.5-4 times more than the national average (*Cs. Kovács 1999*).

As regards the already quoted survey, *Nagyecsed, Csenger, Létavértes and Tuzsér* were the settlements in 1997 with a considerable Gypsy population, more than 1000 people in absolute numbers. These have all acquired the city status, except for Tuzsér. Accordingly, three out of the five cities of the borderlands have significant Gypsy population, whereas the other two “gates” to Ukraine and Romania – *Záhony and Biharkeresztes* –, which have approximately the same size of Gypsy population, give residence to less Gypsy people. The reason for this is their stronger economic potential due to their favourable settlement geographic and transportation situation and their better conditions for job creation. The Gypsy population of Záhony amounts to 20 people only, and only 300 Gypsies live in Biharkeresztes as well, whereas in the neighbouring settlements there is a considerable Gypsy population. The connection between the size of the settlement, its economic potential, the number of workplaces and the size of Gypsy population cannot be a coincidence. The settlements with an unfavourable economic situation and few workplaces usually have larger Gypsy population compared to the settlements with more favourable conditions. In those places where the purchasing power of the population is stronger, the Gypsies with less favourable financial conditions are pushed out step by step and so they settle down at the neighbouring places. This way the neighbourhood of richer areas gradually becomes “*Gypsy-dominated*”. Consequently, parallel with poverty goes the *settlement and concentration of the Gypsies*, their segregation and social marginalisation, as it has

happened in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, in the Mid-Tisza area and the extensive areas of South and South-Western Transdanubia (*T. Vuics 1993, 1995*).

As most of the larger Gypsy populations live in isolated “dead-end settlements” in the peripheries of borderlands, far from traffic, the Gypsies living here are on the peripheries both in the societal and the geographical sense, which is aggravated by the *rather low education level that they have*. The extremely unfavourable situation of the Gypsies becomes evident this way, especially as regards their employment. This is proved by the following data: according to a 1971 survey concerning the Gypsies, the ratio of working population was almost equal regarding both Gypsy and non-Gypsy men (85.2 and 87.7%). As a result of the changes in 1989, today the ratio of unemployed Gypsy men in active age is 48.6%. In addition there is 20% who are disabled pensioners but can be regarded as hidden unemployed. Altogether more than two thirds of the Gypsy population, according to our own surveys possibly 70-80%, sometimes 90-100% is unemployed (*Cs. Kovács 1999, B. Baranyi – B. Mező 1999*).

Within the Gypsy population there is no significant difference between the employment of men and women today. The traditionally lower employment ratio of the women is almost the same as men’s today. The situation – if it can be any worse – is even more unfavourable for the young Gypsies. The real danger for their near and far future is building their lives on unemployment and on the benefits from social redistribution.

Being aware of the serious socio-economic situation and problems of the borderlands, the interpretation of information regarding *the possibilities to work* and the employment conditions was essential during the preparation of the questionnaire. The serious decrease in the number of workplaces forces many people to choose *commuting* as the only solution, however, the economic recession reduces these possibilities significantly. For this reason the questionnaire paid attention to define the number of *commuters*. It was found that the 5 741 people commute from the 95 sample settlements to other places, which makes 10.4% of the working population, taking the total population (122 836 people) and the *ratio of working people* compared to the whole population (45%, 55 276 people) into consideration. (It can be another point that from the working population it is 33-36 thousand together with commuters who perform regular paid activities in any branch of the economy. Most of the others belong to the large group of unemployed, earn wages in other ways or have a share of social benefits.)

Commuting is more significant close to cities and larger settlements and it is less important in the small-village-no-city Szatmár-Bereg area bordered by the Szamos and Tisza rivers and the two frontiers. The volume and possibility of commuting is of course strongly dependent on the job opportunities and the conditions of traffic. There is an extremely important connection between the number of commuters and how the particular place can be reached. Beyond immobility, the life of the population living in villages of the “periphery of the

periphery” is influenced also by *isolation, decrease of workplaces, being pushed out from the labour market and market processes, current and long-term employment crisis and segregation*. It is also not a coincident that the number of commuters was 2 599 people in the places examined in Hajdú-Bihar and 3 142 in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, much less compared to any figures of the recent decades. Most of the commuters turn to those cities that offer the most workplaces, are easy to reach and have an upward trend in their economy (*Záhony, some settlements in the Záhony and Surroundings Business Area, Kisvárdá, Mátészalka, Nyírbátor, Debrecen, Berettyóújfalu and the Business Area of Bihar*).

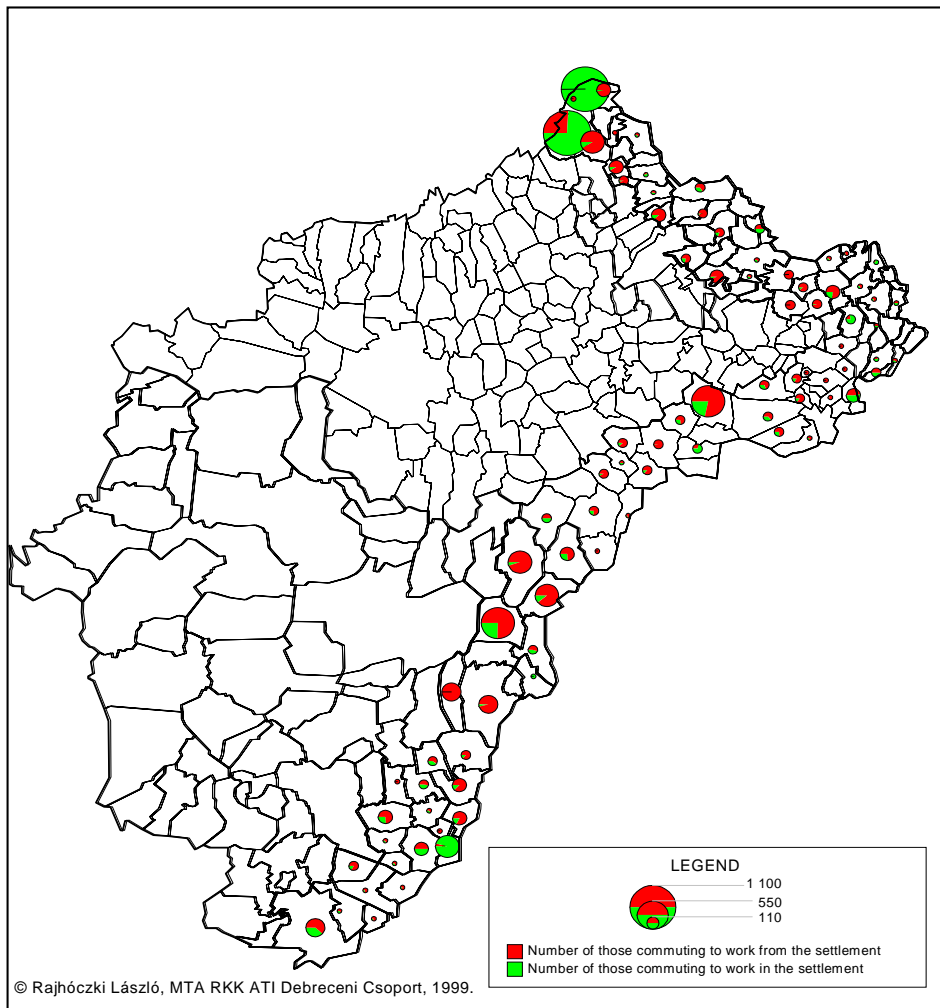
Regarding the *number of commuters going to work in the neighbouring settlements*, the process seems to be rather one-way, based on the outcome of the questionnaire. The commuters prefer going to work in the larger cities or places in the neighbourhood, that are in a more favourable situation due to the functions they perform or the proximity of borders, where the number of workplaces is usually higher. The long-distance commuting that was widespread in the 1970s and 1980s, the “black trains” connecting the capital city or the neighbouring counties and distant destinations have absolutely lost their importance by today. The formerly attractive centres and decentres need much less uneducated workforce. For this reason, the job opportunities that existed in the capital city or other distant large cities have been mostly diminished or have disappeared for the residents of the small villages of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county.

The number of people commuting to the North-Eastern Great Plain borderland settlements amounts to 3 725 people in 1998, which is 6.7% of the working population. Their number and ratio is 2 000 people (9.7%) less than the number of people commuting from here. If we presume that most (about two-thirds) of those commuting to the settlements come from the neighbouring settlements and it is only one-third that comes from more distant settlements, and if we consider that the ratio of commuters is 10.4% of the working population, it is likely that 5% of the working population in the borderlands commute to the neighbouring settlement. Approximately this is the migration inside the examined borderlands, which is rather low. As a destination for commuters the most popular settlements within the borderlands are the following, from the North to the South: Záhony, Tuzsér, Csenger, Nagyecsed, Mérk, Vámospércs, Biharkeresztes, Ártánd and Komádi (Figure 6). It was also examined if there were typical settlements that absorb or emit workforce, the information from the questionnaire confirm that besides the above mentioned settlements that employ a lot of workforce, the following are significant emissaries of workforce: Tuzsér, Mándok, Nagyecsed, Nyíracsad, Nyírbátor, Nyírábrány, Vámospércs, Létavértes, Monostorpályi, Kismarja, Nagykereki and Komádi. Nevertheless, in the villages between the Szamos and Tisza rivers and the Ukrainian-Romanian border, the migration both in and out from the territory is negligible. It is also not surprising or contradictory – as it has appeared from the former list – that due to the relatively more favourable

conditions, more settlements perform an *absorbing and emissive function* in the same time (*Tuzsér, Csenger, Nagyecsed, Mérk, Vámospércs and Komádi*). The residents of those settlements that are easy to reach and have better infrastructure, for example *Vámospércs, Monostorpályi, Létavértes and Nagyecsed*, are in a more favourable position on the labour market as it will be easier for them to reach their workplace compared to the dwellers of the isolated settlements.

Figure 6

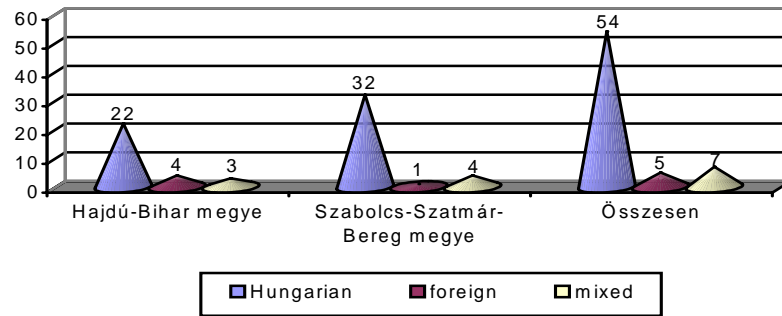
The distribution of people commuting from and to the region



In order to characterise the economic situation in a realistic and detailed way, *the role of businesses was also examined in the questionnaire*. Specific questions asked about the *form of undertakings, their ownership and the breakdown of private businesses by activities and economic branches*. On the basis of the answers we arrived at a surprising conclusion regarding the number of only *foreign owned* businesses, as there were only five of them in the examined territory. The number of joint ventures – businesses that are owned by both Hungarians and foreigners – was also only seven in the borderlands. It appears that the foreign capital is present only to a very limited amount in the examined 95 settlements. The reason can be found in the very unfavourable economic, societal and infrastructural conditions at the “periphery of the periphery” situation. Foreign capital is not invested – and Hungarian either – to places that are permanently in recession and segregation. Most of the North-Eastern Great Plain borderland settlements are in this situation (Figure 7).

Figure 7

The number of operating businesses by the type of ownership in the beginning of 1999



As the answers given by the local authorities have been rather contradictory, incomplete and difficult to interpret, the method used by *László Csordás* seemed more appropriate to characterise the state of economy. This was based on the 1994 and 1997 databases of the Central Statistical Office called TSTAR (System of Regional Statistical Data), illustration of the value of 13 variables per 1000 residents on a map, with the help of *rank calculation and factor analysis*, taking the data of 119 borderland settlements into consideration. This method allowed the evaluation of the changes compared to 1994. One of his conclusions was that *the number of private undertakings per 1000 residents is higher in the cities above all, in Nyíregyháza and Fehérgyarmat and in Biharkeresztes and Hajdúszoboszló it exceeds 67*. Figures higher than 35 are found in Hajdú-Bihar and sporadically in

the borderlands also. Compared to some cities of the county, the number of private undertakings is negligible in the borderlands, in one-eighth of the settlements it does not reach 20 per 1000 residents. The figure is between 20 and 35 in two-thirds of the settlements and exceeds 50 in only *Biharkeresztes and Nagyhódos*, as it has already been mentioned.

Between 1994 and 1997 the number of private undertakings increased only in 60 settlements in the two counties, 60% of these concerns the examined borderlands and the Northern part first of all. Out of the most increasing (50-850%) and the most decreasing (40-86%) settlements three-quarters of them are found in the borderlands, the ones with good or bad figures are often neighbours (*Hencida-Bojt, Kishódos-Nagyhódos and others*).

From the first 18 settlements in the national rank of the settlements, the most are cities, from the borderlands only *Biharkeresztes and Tákos* could qualify. On the *Csaroda-Csenger line* more settlements could reach a better position compared to the settlements mostly in the last category or the one before the last.

In the recent three years nearly half of the settlements of the two counties have lost their positions in the national hierarchy, the other half have improved. The latter amounts to 58% in the borderlands. It can be stated that the two most extreme cases concern two neighbouring villages: *Kishódos* has lost 2 640 positions, *Nagyhódos* has improved by 2 380 positions in the national hierarchy of 3 125 settlements. Most of the 14 settlements (12) that have improved their positions significantly (by 800-1600 places) can be found also in the borderlands. Out of those North-Eastern Great Plain settlements whose situation worsened to a small extent, more than 30% is found in the examined borderlands, whereas 40% is found at the same place as the ones that have improved a little.

The number of businesses with a legal entity per 1000 residents remains below 5 in two-thirds of the settlements, namely 57% of the borderland settlements. It is more interesting that in 39 settlements there was no businesses with a legal entity at all and 60% of these is to be found in the territory examined. It was only *Bakonszeg* in Hajdú-Bihar where the figure exceeded 15, whereas in the second category – between 5 and 15 – there are several villages apart from *Záhony (Ártánd, Tizzaszalka, Barabás and Csaroda)*.

Between 1994 and 1997, in two-thirds of all the settlements of the two counties the number of businesses with a legal entity increased, in 35 settlements it decreased by 0-25 and in 11 settlements decreased by 25-80%. In 55 places in either 1994 or 1997 there was no such undertaking at all (this way the division resulted in a zero sum). The situation was absolutely different in the neighbouring settlements in the borderlands: in 17 cases there was a decrease, in 72 cases an increase and in 30 other cases no such business in either of the two years. From the most increasing (2.5-9.6-fold) places, 22 are in the borderlands, whereas from the decreasing only one-third is to be found there.

Besides a certain group of cities and the already mentioned *Ártánd, Tizzaszalka, Barabás, Csaroda*, it was *Tarpa, Tlvadar and Tiszaberek* that could get into the best 20 settlements in the national hierarchy. At the same time it can be observed that *half of the 66 settlements in the worst category can be found in the borderlands*, first of all in the Northern part, many times surrounded by the above-mentioned settlements. On the line from Csenger to Újíráz, the settlements in the fourth category (1 875-2 500) in the rank of the 3 125 Hungarian settlements, divided into five equal units, can be found along the borders, sometimes on the inside, sometimes the outside row of settlements.

During the years between 1994 and 1997, the position of 77-78% of the settlements in both counties worsened in the national hierarchy. Out of the 16 settlements that lost the most (695-1380) only 6, out of the 14 that significantly improved (450-1340), 10 settlements are in the borderlands. From those whose situation worsened only a little, 37%, namely 86 settlements, from those that improved somewhat, only one-third are in the examined territories. *The factor analysis performed regarding the settlements in the borderlands, completed by and in accordance with the results of the questionnaire concerning the state of economy, shows a more unfavourable picture compared to the inner territories of the two counties concerned. However, it also implies that the most improved settlements of the borderlands are the ones in a "special traffic position" and the ones with a larger population (L. Csordás 1999).*

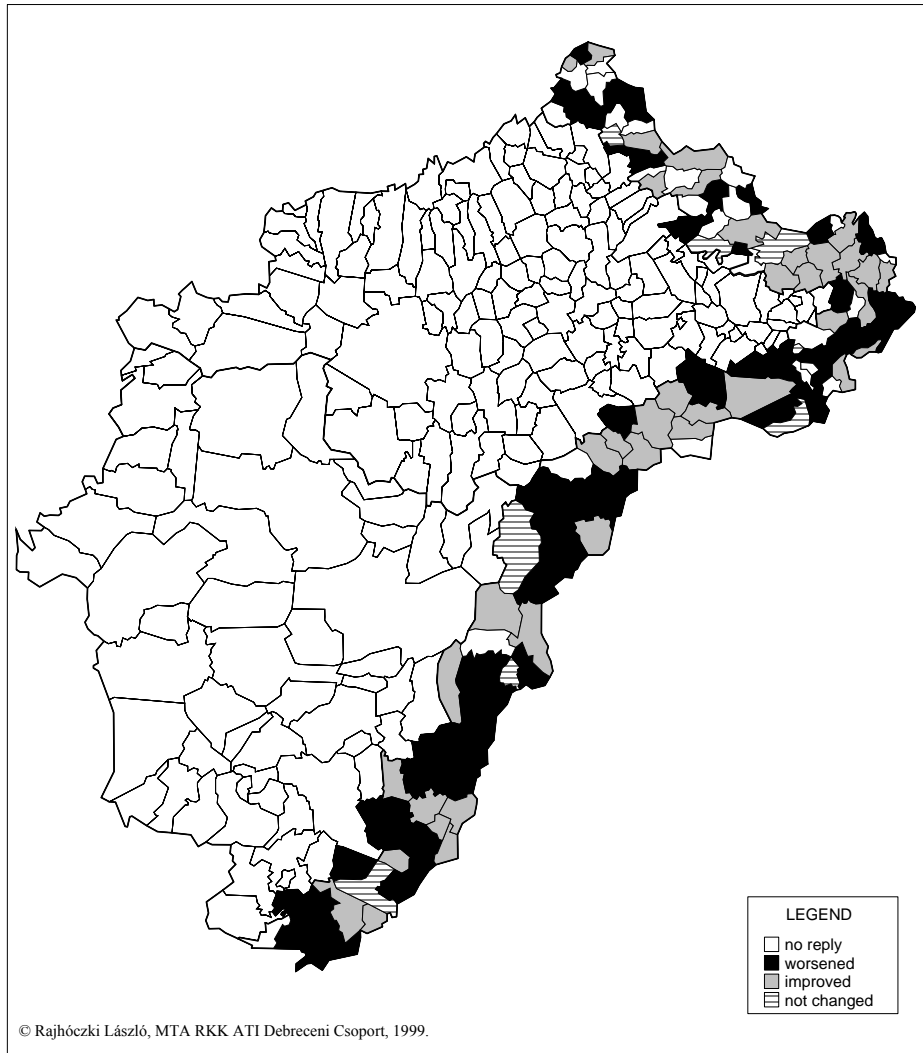
The questionnaire also made an attempt *to evaluate the socio-economic modifications through subjective opinions* in the decade following the systemic change. The question was put like: *"Has the situation of the settlement improved or worsened in the recent ten years?"* Three groups were made from the answers: *worsened, improved, not changed*. Out of the 95 (=100%) local authorities that sent the questionnaire back, 48 (50.%) thought that the situation was *worse* than it had been, 39 (40%) said that it had *improved* and 8 (8.5%) thought that it *had not changed*. However, the evaluation by counties leads to interesting conclusions. It appears from the comparison that from the two most typical opinions (*worse, improved*) more settlements indicated "worse" among the 28 settlements of Hajdú-Bihar in the sample than in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, where 34 out of 67 settlements gave the same answer. In other words, in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg – which is usually referred to as the most lagging behind county regarding socio-economic conditions – relatively less people considered the recent ten years as bad as in the Southern neighbouring county.

Among the ones saying *"the situation has improved"*, there was an inverse situation, as compared to the ratio of settlements, more people judged their situation being better in Hajdú-Bihar (11 from 28) than in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (28 from 67) county. Regarding the *"not changed"* answers, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg is in the first place again, however, this cannot be considered significant according to the small size of the basis (3 settlements in Hajdú-Bihar and 8 in

Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg). Whatever way is chosen to analyse the question, the essence can be summarised as *in both counties of the borderlands the opinions “worse” and “not changed” seem to dominate over “improved”* (Figure 8).

Figure 8

Has the situation of the settlement improved or worsened in the last ten years?



The following question created a rather interesting and strange situation as it intended to find an answer to the following: “*In your opinion, on which side of the border do people live better?*”. In this context it was rather strange to read the unanimous, accurate and self-confident answer of the 95 settlements phrased briefly stating life was better on the Hungarian side, whereas in the former question nearly 60% of the answers declared a worsening or stagnating situation.

The economic, region-making role of the settlements in the sample is also indicated by the fact *whether they have a mart and if yes, how often*. Within the multi-functional opportunities of the mark, the role played in the socio-economic life of the neighbourhood and the settlement itself should be highlighted, mostly because the society and the economy of the territory examined shows lots of archaic and premodern elements. Among the 95 settlements sending the questionnaire back, 22 have a regular mart, usually twice or once a week and only two of them have the mart every day (*Csenger and Tyukod*). As it regards the breakdown by counties, 14 market settlements are found in Hajdú-Bihar and 8 in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg. The reason for that is the size of the settlements, as in Hajdú-Bihar – as it has already been mentioned – larger settlements are found in the borderlands, where it is worth having a market because of the larger population and the stronger purchasing power. On the other side, the borderland settlements of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg are smaller, which makes it useless to have regular marts, due to the weaker purchasing power.

The questionnaire also contained the question “*Which settlements have a mart?*” A positive answer was given by ten borderland settlements. However, it is only one, Létavértes, the centre of the so-called Erdőspuszták (“Woodlands”) group of settlements, which has a regular weekly market, the other 9 settlements give place to a market every month, three months or only once a year. As it regards the type of the markets, one only co-ordinates the trade of animals, the other is only a fair and the other 8 deal with both. As it concerns the location, 7 out of the 10 are found in Hajdú-Bihar, just because of the larger population in the settlements, and 3 of them are in the neighbouring county.

Among the questions referring to market activities, there was one closely connected to the borderland situation, asking the mayors to estimate *the number of people dealing with cross-border trade in their settlements* (cigarettes, fuel, etc.). The total number given for cross-border traders was 101 in Hajdú-Bihar and 330 in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, altogether 431 people in the case of the 95 borderland settlements. Nevertheless, without any personal experience, it is easy to realise that this number might be much higher in reality.

2.2.3 The assessment of cross-border relations

The importance of questions regarding the state and opportunities of *cross-border relations* has significantly increased nowadays, due to the Euro-Atlantic accession process. With the accession to the EU, the *Hungarian-Romanian and the Hungarian-Ukrainian borders will be the borderline of the EU in the near future*. The chance of the neighbouring countries to join the EU in the same round is slight today. This way the *dividing role* of the borders is likely to become *stronger temporarily* as the *Schengen criteria* must be kept at the crossing points that belong to the currently examined territory. The free movement of people and goods will rather be hindered than facilitated by this new situation. The chance for the borderlands to improve and become strong enough in the near future to play an integrative role before the accession, like Burgenland in Austria and *Vas and Győr-Moson-Sopron*, is also limited.

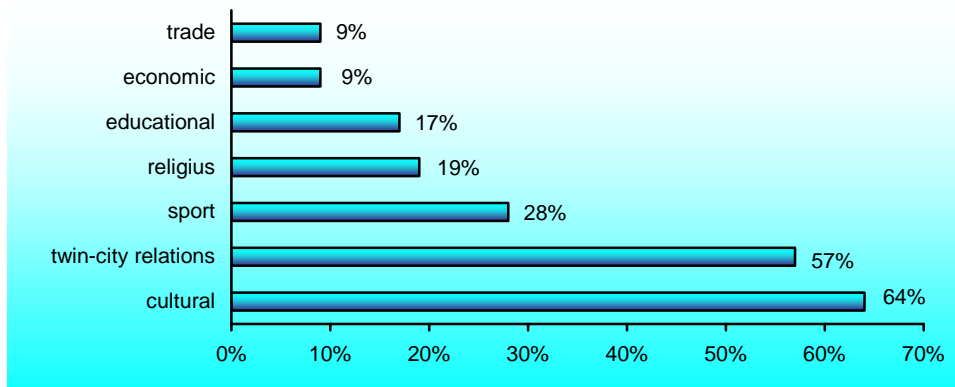
Because of these reasons it was very important to study in depth *the cross-border relations of the local authorities in the borderland*. As it appeared from the answers given to questions regarding the establishment and type of relations, it is only 30 (31%) of the 95 settlements that maintains relations with 53 settlements over the borders, which lags behind the ideal state that could be expected from the borderlands status. Most of the settlements and cities on the border stay in contact with the nearest – usually Hungarian – settlement on the other side of the border, whereas there are exceptions, too. Nyíraczád, for example, co-operates with Tallin in Estonia besides the Romanian settlements. The relations of the 53 settlements in other countries are *cultural first of all* (in 34 cases), *twin-cities* in 30 cases and *sports connections* in 19 cases. *There are much less relations in education, religion, business and trade*. The low ratio of business, trade and educational relations is especially disadvantageous (*Figure 9*).

The efficiency of cross-border relations is considered good by 40%, fair by 34% and acceptable by 28% of the 30 settlements co-operating with others. Among the answering settlements, 67 (71%) did not do anything to improve the insufficient relations or to create relations in general, 17 (18%) were looking for a solution or attempted to create relations. In only 11 cases was there an effort taken to improve by organising common programmes (*e.g. Nagyecsed, Nyíraczád, Körösszegapáti*) and submitting projects (*e.g. Barabás and Csenger*).

To the question *“In which fields should the relations be improved the most?”*, based on the 58 answers, the most frequent answer was *in trade (25 cases) and business (18 cases)*, *culture* was much less common (7 cases). Improvement in the field of sports (4 cases), tourism (2 cases) and settlement development and environmental protection (1 case each) was not regarded very important. By the

Figure 9

The characteristics of cross-border relations of the borderland settlements



improvement of trade and business relations, the local economy is expected to be modernised rapidly. To achieve this, the settlements try to rebuild the relations with those economic, societal, cultural and health care centres with whom they had their natural relations before and from which they were separated by Trianon (*these are Nagyvárad, Nagykároly, Szatmárnémeti, Beregszász and Ungvár*).

One of the questions asked “*What do the settlements do to establish (improve) relations with cross-border settlements?*” This question was important considering future prospects and the possibility to create co-operation. 18% answered (N=95) that they were studying the possibilities to create connections. The majority, 67 settlements, 71% of the local authorities answered that *they did not do anything to establish co-operation*. It is for sure that most of the borderland settlements on the Hungarian side do not see the time adequate to create co-operation with cross-border settlements in the neighbouring countries. The background for this is the lack of receiving capability on the other side of the border, the lack of possibilities and the lack of intention to co-operate. The opening of new crossing points as a possibility to get in contact or to improve the relations was indicated by 3.2% of the answers. The small number of border crossings means a serious difficulty for Hajdú-Bihar, as only one operates on the public road and two on the railways along the 100 km long frontier. It is a promising sign that there are accepted plans to open new crossing points at *Létavértes* and *Komádi* and to prepare one at *Nyírábrány*.

Only *one settlement*, 1% sees the chance to broaden co-operation by *submitting common projects*, which includes the intention from the Hungarian side to apply for programmes facilitating the closing up of the underdeveloped, peripheral territories and acquire financial resources to which the settlements of neighbouring

countries could join as partners. The organisation of common programmes was considered by 3.2% as a means to broaden co-operation. These kind of programmes do exist, but they are hindered by the small number of crossing points and this way the relatively large distance among the settlements.

To the question “*How many of the borderland settlements participate in cross-border programmes and whether they have a share in some kind of financial support?*”, seven answered yes. Two of them are found in Hajdú-Bihar (*Bagamér and Körösszegapáti*) and five in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (*Barabás, Csenger, Mérk, Nagyecsed and Tiszaabony*). The programmes partly intend to facilitate *inter-ethnic relations*, partly to *improve the local infrastructure* and partly to *support environmental investments*.

The proximity of borders was found advantageous by 14% of the local authorities mostly because of shopping tourism and lively trade (*e.g. Záhony, Körösszegapáti, Mándok, Gelénes*) and broadening of job opportunities (*Biharkeresztes, Beregsurány, Csengersima*). On the other side, 23% considered the proximity of the borders an unambiguous disadvantage because of isolation (*Hermánszeg, Csengerújfalu, Ura*), bad public security caused by the increased transit traffic (*Tiszacsécse, Tizsakerecseny, Barabás, Tivadar*) and the lack of jobs (*Tyukod, Nyírpilis*). Because of the above mentioned reasons, the situation was found both advantageous and disadvantageous by 11%, while 52% did not answer the question (*L. Dancs 1999*).

All in all, the results of the questionnaire verified our former presumption that *the cross-border relations of the local authorities in the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands are not significant today either in quantity or in quality. The small amount of official relations that exist are usually formal and protocol twin city and sports relations*. However, their improvement would be important especially in the field of business and trade, even if the peripheral situation and underdevelopment of the territory makes it more difficult for both partners to build new relations.

What possibilities does the *Carpathian Euroregion Interregional Association*, founded on 14. February 1993, including the borderlands of five countries, offer? The answers given to the two referring questions (What is the settlement’s opinion of the Carpathian Euroregion initiative? How much are the municipality and the population familiar with the aims and function of the Carpathian Euroregion?) do not give us a reason to be optimistic. It appears that the borderlands population is not informed enough about this organisation. Many do not even know that it exists, and those who do know are not familiar with its aims and functions. If the Carpathian Euroregion wants to be a successful interregional organisation, it has to go beyond the formal frames of its activities and has to facilitate the issue of interregional co-operation by giving a content to it. It also has to let people know about the aims, opportunities and results of the organisation, as 57% *does not know* the Carpathian Euroregion at all, 40% thinks that it operates *well*, whereas three settlements (*Nagykereki, Nyírlugos and Tuzsér*) – as its activity cannot be

perceived in the area above all – think that the initiatives of the organisation are *unfavourable*. To the question how much the leaders of the local authorities familiar are with the aims of the Carpathian Euroregion, only 15% answered “well” and 2% answered “perfectly” (*Tizakerecseny and Pocsaj*). The situation is even worse if we examine the whole population in general, as 60% of the mayors are not familiar with the aims of the Euroregion.

Despite the arising problems, the activities of the Carpathian Euroregion – if it succeeds to draw co-operation interests nearer and overcome the hindering difficulties of normal operation – can secure an outbreak opportunity for the economy of the area, it can also help to solve minority problems and facilitate the improvement of cross-border relations. In the meantime, co-operations of borderland areas at different levels mean the most important form of cross-border initiatives (*L. Dancs 1999*).

The questions of the survey inform us about the additional – but not secondary – fields of cross-border relations as well. They also refer to the relations of the population, which are directed in only one way, namely, the Hungarian settlements along the border. Whereas from the other side of the border, *nobody from any of the settlements inhabited by Hungarians comes to Hungary to use health care services, they do not cross the border in order to purchase medicine*, 9 (9.5%) out of the 95 borderlands settlements stated that people come to use *medical services* on a regular basis and according to 21 (22.1%) of them, they come to *purchase medicines*. Because of the delicate manner of the question it is likely that the frequency is much higher in reality, as it was presumed regarding cross-border trade.

The questions regarding *the forms, character, conditions, circumstances, turnover, economic efficiency of tourism directed to and beyond the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands – including the situation of the development and the opportunities of rural tourism* – referred to the cross-border relations as well. The majority opinion formed on the basis of the analysis and evaluation of the answers to these questions can be summarised as follows:

The significance of tourism in the examined part of the borderlands is still small today, which is verified by the data of the accommodations, the interviews and the answers given to the questionnaire. The significance of the borderlands decreased regarding the turnover of the accommodations in the two counties, despite the fact that the check-points are crossed more than 10 million times a year. Availability and the difficulties of accessibility should be regarded as the main reasons, however, the level of education and the knowledge of foreign languages also lag behind, if we consider that this area would like to profit more from tourism. (One-day tourism, the so-called shopping tourism increases significantly the frequency of crossing the border, which has no real relevance to tourism of course.)

The majority of settlements that see a choice in tourism believe in rural tourism. This process has already started in several settlements of the Upper-Tisza region.

The countryside holidays can be enriched and prolonged by hunting, ecotourism, fitness programmes and wellness programmes as additional elements, which can also contribute to the diversification of the economy and increasing the living conditions of the population in the settlements offering them. Ten per cent of the borderland settlements count on twin city, cross-border relations in connection with cultural and sports programmes. This way tourism can contribute to the improvement in the relations of the neighbouring countries. To sum up the *most important conclusions* that can be drawn from the results of the questionnaire, it can be stated that *without the improvement of technical and human infrastructure* at the North-Eastern Great Plain, no significant achievements can be expected in the field of tourism either (L. Csordás 1999).

Several questions referred to *environmental protection* as well, from which two should be considered above all. To the question “*Is there a waste disposal site in the settlement?*” 76 out of 95 said yes. 28 of them are in Hajdú-Bihar, 48 in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg. Figures show that the simplest way to treat and dump waste, namely to establish waste disposal sites works in 80 % of the settlements, the others use common waste disposal sites or they do not deal with garbage at all, as they have such a small amount of it. As the modern technology of collection, dumping and managing waste is not too widespread in the whole country, the borderlands are not much more backward than the country in general.

It is worth considering that *none of the borderland settlements* sending back the questionnaire *co-operate with settlements beyond the frontier in the field of environmental protection*. This can imply two things, one is that the problem of pollution is not significant and the environmental protection is very effective at both sides; the other is that for co-operation in this field – like for the others – there is no will and there are no partners. It is true that except for some small and medium size businesses there are no large sources of pollution on the Hungarian side, most of the pollution originates from the big borderland cities of Romania and Ukraine (I. Nagy 1999).

Finally, some questions referred to *education*, which can be connected to cross-border relations from the *human resource aspect*, can foster or hinder their development. It was revealed by the answers how many of the students living in the borderlands (primary, secondary and higher education) commute between their homes and the chosen school. Of course there is a primary school in most of the settlements, this way commuting concerns secondary school students the most. Many higher education students do not choose commuting because it is very difficult to reach the institution, this way many of them have fallen out of the sample. Accordingly, we call commuters those who leave their settlement every schoolday and go to school to another settlement. From those who sent back the

questionnaire in Hajdú-Bihar, 2 570 students go to study to another neighbouring or distant settlement. This figure is 2 919, altogether 5 489 students in the borderlands.

As it regards *commuting students from other settlements*, firstly it implies those who commute to borderland secondary schools from other borderland settlements or other part of the county. This is 304 people in Hajdú-Bihar, whereas it is 918 in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, 1222 people altogether. To the Hajdú-Bihar part of the borderlands no foreign student commutes, whereas 37 students study temporarily, mostly from Ukraine. This implies that the schools on the Hungarian side are very attractive for Hungarian students of a foreign citizenship.

The human potential living in the borderlands is a determining factor regarding the future of the settlements. *White-collar workers* are represented exclusively by *teachers*, with a significant ratio of *commuters*. In the settlements sending back the questionnaire, there are 300 commuting teachers, from which 111 work in Hajdú-Bihar and 189 in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg. The number of commuters is 126 in the borderlands, 61 in Hajdú-Bihar and 65 in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg. These figures imply that the numbers of commuters to the borderlands is much higher than the number of commuters from there. This is in accordance with the tendency that intellectuals concentrate at bigger settlements, do not prefer moving to small villages and rather choose commuting there.

Because of the borderland character of the settlements and the role played by the *quality of human capital* in the improvement of cross-border relations, it was important to know *which foreign languages are considered important in general and at the regional level* by the different local authorities. Out of the 95 answers in the sample, *in general English* was at the first place in 87, *German* in 74, *French* in 9 and *Russian* in 4 replies (besides these, 2 preferred either Italian, Ukrainian or Romanian). *Regarding the regional level, the answers were more specific*. In this case also English and German were the most preferred (49 and 34 answers at the regional level). However, it is especially important that 32 (4 in Hajdú-Bihar and 28 in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg) have chosen Russian. Of course it is not a coincidence that they were exactly the settlements on the Ukrainian border choosing Russian. Many preferred the Romanian language, 22 local authorities in the whole region (11 in both two examined counties) think that it is important to know the language of the neighbouring country which is also natural as both counties have a long border with the Republic of Romania. Accordingly, the six local authorities on the Ukrainian border consider the knowledge of Ukrainian to be important. It appears from the answers that the utility and necessity to know foreign languages is more and more acknowledged by the residents of the borderlands.

2.3. Conclusions

The region of the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands with a depressed agriculture has traditionally been lagging behind the more improved regions (Budapest and North-Western Hungary). This underdevelopment visible in socio-economic development continued to increase after the changes in 1989, in fact, the process became more intensive. The data of the population changes show a moderate increase, however, a restructuring and change in the ethnic composition of the population can be perceived.

In the light of the results regarding the questionnaire about the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands, it is important to note again that most of the borderlands *are still underdeveloped regions, especially in North-Eastern Hungary*. There are no viable economic programmes, the situation of infrastructure is very unfavourable and the traffic conditions have not improved, either, for these reasons the number of entrepreneurs is small. It is vital for Hungary that its borders are open. Its geographic situation and the relations to Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries demand this.

The danger in the current situation – beyond the economy remaining archaic – is that the premodern elements intensify and the population deteriorates in the mental and moral sense of the word. This way the opportunity originating from the crisis in agriculture, i.e. to introduce different, new production technologies like bio-production, is lost. Nevertheless, the latter has only obstacles in the borderland area as bio-production is a typical “urban” activity requiring advanced production technology, significant investment of capital and a stable market, none of which is present in the area. The borderland settlements should effectively exploit their own inner resources and the advantages of the borderlands in both the economic and societal sense in order to find the way to accelerate development, to catch up and eliminate isolation. *However, the success of finding the way out from the “periphery of the periphery” situation by own resources is rather doubtful without support external from (state or other capital inflow) even in the long run.*

Nowadays it is obvious that the role of the Eastern borders of the country is increasing, since in case of accession these territories will be the Eastern borders of the Union as well. For this reason surveys fostering the development of the “periphery of the periphery” are distinguished in order to avoid serious difficulties in the economy of the region deriving from the falling behind the European level. This is essential to enable the Eastern border to fulfil the role of the *connecting bridge* to the neighbouring countries in the business and cultural relations. This way the improvement of the borderlands is not only the interest of this area but it is also a profitable investment for the whole country. *The results and conclusions of the questionnaire draw the attention to this fact.*

3 The situation and development chances of cross-border relations

3.1 Characteristics of the current situation

The regions taking shape by the end of the 19th, beginning of the 20th century were broken into pieces by the new political borders set in Trianon, dividing the Carpathian basin. Around the turn of the century, the centres of regional development were about to emerge in the same time when Hungary was on the way to become a capitalist country. They could have become real regions in course of time if they could have developed in the normal way. Due to the way the north-eastern borders of the country were marked in the peace treaty, the railway running along with the fair towns was annexed to Czechoslovakia and Romania. The hostile relations between the neighbours made business relations impossible among the cities (Kassa, Ungvár, Beregszász, Szatmárnémeti, Nagykároly and Nagyvárad) and the agglomerations which lost their centres and still belonged to Hungary (*J. Tóth – P. Golobics 1996*).

Besides ruining regional initiatives, the new borders made interregional relations also impossible. In the case of peaceful neighbouring countries with open borders, setting new borders does not automatically hinder development, regional relations can be the same as without borders in theory. However, the hostile atmosphere between the countries during the years between the two World Wars was not very favourable for regional co-operation in the Carpathian basin. The Hungarian leaders regarded this only a temporary situation and for this reason they did not take the necessary steps to catch up these territories. This situation was not changed by the territorial corrections in World War II, in fact, with the Soviet influence getting stronger after the war, it became even more complicated to cross the frontier.

The political changes taking place at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s opened new prospects in the Carpathian basin as well. As the iron curtain disappeared, the strict dividing role of the state borders seemed to decrease and the prospect of cross-border relations seemed to broaden. These expectations did not come true everywhere along the Hungarian borders, especially not in the north-eastern part of the Great Plain. Crossing the frontier here became even more difficult compared to the former situation. The number of border crossings that are able to check enough people is small and the border control is hindered by unnecessary, bureaucratic steps.

Hungary is one of the countries in Central-Eastern Europe with the most open economy. The central position it holds in the Carpathian basin and the national economic targets demand general openness of the borders. In spite of this, the

borders around the north-eastern Great Plain – unlike the Austrian and Slovenian “open border” – are absolutely not open. Despite their borderland position, the peripheral North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands hardly ever get in contact with the international economy. The opening of the north-eastern borders is Hungary’s basic interest considering its NATO-membership and the forthcoming EU-membership. It should be also taken into account that the co-operation of the neighbouring countries is also necessary for the creation of open borders. Unfortunately, the large number of Hungarian minorities in the territories annexed to the neighbouring countries by the border corrections of Trianon, arises problems for the solution of this issue. Some of the leaders of the neighbouring countries regard closer co-operation between Hungary and the Hungarians beyond the borders as dangerous and so they try to hinder the process of the border opening.

3.2 Cross-border relations in the North-Eastern Great Plain

Besides literature, data from the questionnaire (concerning 119 settlements in the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands) created and processed by the Debrecen group of the Great Plain Research Institute of the Centre for Regional Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, interviews made with local churches, local chambers of commerce and agriculture and also the leaders of business zones, served as resources to examine the cross-border relations of the region. The results of the diversified research in the north-eastern Great Plain borderlands, completed as a part of the HAS Strategic Research Great Plain Programme II., are summarised by an academic interim report ready for publication (*B. Baranyi ed. 1999*). Cross-border co-operations operate at different levels at the same time in the North-Eastern Great Plain. *Formal* (co-operation between the county and settlement local authorities), *cultural, business, religious, inter-ethnic* and others can be differentiated.

3.2.1 Cross-border relations at the level of local authorities

Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties have far-reaching relations both to the East and the West. Besides the twin-relations between the cities and villages, in accordance with their interests, the county offices established co-operation in their own professional fields with offices of similar profile in other counties. As regards cross-border relations, the local authorities search the opportunity to get closer to the European Union and also to renew the former relations to similar offices in the ex-socialist countries, to create partnership according to the new conditions.

Both county authorities participate in the work of different international organisations. With the forthcoming EU-membership, the participation in the *Committee of European Regions (CER)* becomes more important for Hungarian counties as the main objective of CER is to unite the regions and counties of Europe, to represent its regions and to facilitate preparations to the “Europe of Regions”. Hungarian members participate in the annual meetings (last time held in Linz, 1998) and in the work of various committees (Regionalism, EU Enlargement, East-West Committee, Regional Development, Infrastructure, Environmental Protection, Tourism).

Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county, Debrecen and Nyíregyháza county towns are the founders of the *Carpathian Euroregion Interregional Association*. The size of the area (132 000 square kilometres), the ethnic diversity and the different socio-economic conditions raise a lot of questions for the organisation that celebrated the 6th anniversary of its foundation on 14th February 1999. Finding the solutions to these questions is slow and difficult, whereas it also offers a good opportunity to the five member countries (Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine) and their member regions to deepen their cross-border relations (*Helsinki P. 1998*).

The Commission of Regions created five workgroups – Tourism and Ecology, Regional Development, Education, Culture and Sports, Trade and Financial Control – which work continuously. Although the half decade that has passed has mostly been a period for the stabilisation efforts and for the definition of the directions, there are certain results, too. For example, building the television and media network within the Carpathian Euroregion is under way. In order to foster interpersonal relations, certain programmes were organised (Professional Study Competition of Travelling Apprentices, Festival of Disabled and Handicapped, Tradition Preserving Folklore and Sports Games etc.). Although it is expensive to participate in the Carpathian Euroregion, according to the northern regions of the Great Plain it is worth maintaining the membership, despite the difficulties.

Hajdú-Bihar is a member of the *European Youth Activity (PLATFORM)* international organisation. The local government supports youth exchanges and language camps from the County Youth Fund in the form of applications on a regular basis. In accordance with the annual programme of the PLATFORM, German, Finnish, Slovenian, Ukrainian and Luxembourg children spent almost ten days in Debrecen in 1998. The children got familiar with ancient Hungarian crafts and local folklore traditions, visited historic sights of the region and met children from the region several times. In 1998 the representatives of the county authority participated in the annual meeting of the organisation, where the programme schedule of 1999 was accepted and Bihor (Romania) was accepted as a new member (B. Baranyi 1998).

Both Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Hajdú-Bihar have widespread twin-county relations. This expression cannot fully be identified with the formerly used twin-county relations, as these are not always confirmed by official co-operation agreements. These relations are cultural and educational, above all. When the twin-county relations were being formed, the counties tried to get in contact with regions as diversified as possible. As a result, besides the regions of the neighbouring countries, regions of Japan and the United States are also members of the co-operation (*Table 3*).

Table 3

Twin county relations of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Hajdú-Bihar counties

Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg		Hajdú-Bihar	
Twin county	Country	Twin county	Country
Kárpátalja (Subcarpathia)	Ukraine	Lublin	Poland
Hargita	Romania	Skierniewice	Poland
Radom	Poland	Bihor	Romania
Havlickuv Brod	Czech Republic	Caras-Severin	Romania
Perm	Russia	Kárpátalja (Subcarpathia)	Ukraine
Niznegorod	Russia	Cernovci	Ukraine
Kurgan	Russia	Vorarlberg	Austria
Burgenland	Austria	Limburg	The Netherlands
Gelderland	The Netherlands	Split	Croatia
Ribe	Denmark	Toyama	Japan
North-Rhine-Westfalia	Germany	Ryazan	Russia
Friuli-Venezia-Giulia	Italy	St.Gallen	Switzerland
Lusnja	Albania		
Heilongjiang	China		
Wayne (Michigan)	USA		

Source: Database of the Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county governments.

It can be stated about the cross-border relations of the local authorities that they intended to draw attention to the county and the region more than in the years before. The local authorities participate in international organisations regularly, which helps to join European business and cultural processes and it is a good chance to get experience about the tasks of local authorities which can be expected at the accession to the EU. Although co-operation in the field of business has broadened in the twin-county relations, the relations among entrepreneurs and businessmen have improved, the co-operations in the field of education, culture and youth are the most successful. In the case of some twin-county relations

(Japan, USA and China) the big distance and the high costs hinder further improvement. The co-operations that operate the best and are the most active are the ones with the neighbouring and nearer counties. The co-operations are by no means perfect, but they are relatively satisfactory regarding the co-operation between Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Sub-Carpathia and Hargita county, and also the co-operation between Hajdú-Bihar, Lublin and Bihor. Unfortunately certain co-operations (Hajdú-Bihar – Csernovci and Sub-Carpathia, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg – Lusnja) practically do not work, which is partly due to the lack of interest of the foreign partners and partly their deteriorating economic situation.

There is a good reason to develop the cross-county co-operations anyway, as it is not only a precondition for partnership and good relations to the neighbourhood but it also secures the ground for deepening business relations, to attract investors and to find market for the products of the region.

3.2.2 Cross-border relations of the local authorities

After the changes in 1989, more and more settlements in the North-Eastern Great Plain discovered the advantages of having twin-cities regarding cross-border relations. It is only *Máriapócs, Nagyecsed and Tiszalök* in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and *Balmazújváros, Nádudvar, Nyíradony and Polgár* in Hajdú-Bihar that do not have a twin-city. From the 1999 survey conducted by the Debrecen Group of Great Plain Research Institute of the Centre for Regional Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences (concerning 119 settlements), certain conclusions can be drawn regarding the foreign relations of the local authorities in the borderlands. Out of the 95 settlements that answered, only 30 (31%) are in contact with 53 settlements beyond the borders. Most of the borderland settlements are in contact with the nearest settlements – mostly with a large Hungarian minority – in the nearest country. There are also exceptions, for example Nyíracsad co-operates with Tallin (Estonia), in addition to Romanian settlements (*Figure 10*).

The co-operation established with the 53 foreign settlements is mostly twin-relation (30 cases), cultural (34 cases) and sport (19 cases), while the educational, religious and economic-trade relations are much less frequent (see *Figure 9*).

The efficiency of foreign relations is regarded good by 11, medium by 10, acceptable by 8 out of 30 settlements and, excellent by the mayor of *Vámospércs*. From the answering settlements, 67 (71%) did nothing either in order to improve their unsatisfactory relations or to establish non-existent co-operations, 17 settlements (18%) are looking for the solution or the way to create new relations now. Only 11 settlements (11%) tried to do something to improve the co-operation by organising common programmes (*e.g. Nagyecsed, Nyíracsad, Körösszegapáti*)

and by the submission of common applications (*Barabás and Csenger*) (Figure 11).

Figure 10

Cross-border relations of the borderland settlements in the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands

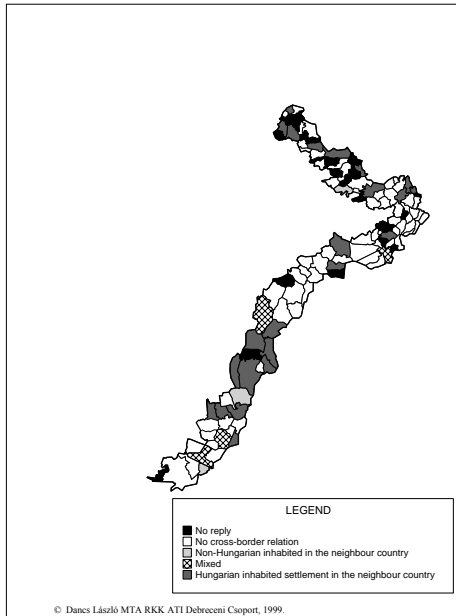
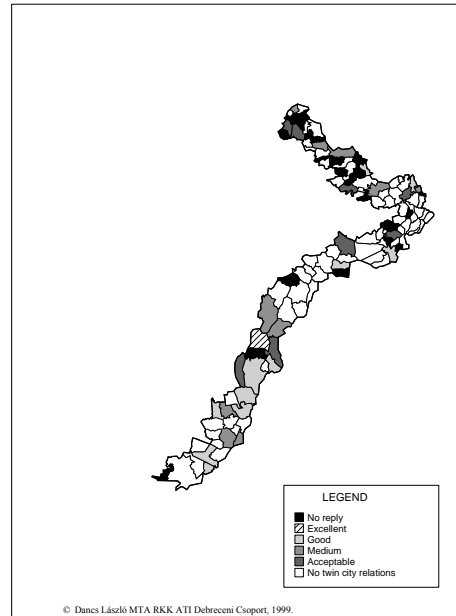


Figure 11

The effectiveness of foreign relations in the borderland settlements of the North-Eastern Great Plain as seen by the mayors



The proximity of borders was found advantageous by 14% of the local authorities, mostly because of *shopping tourism and lively trade* (e.g. *Záhony, Körösszegapáti, Mándok, Gelénes*) and the *broadening of job opportunities* (*Biharkeresztes, Beregsurány, Csengersima*). On the other side, 23% considered the proximity of the borders as an unambiguous disadvantage because of isolation (*Hermánszeg, Csengerújfalu, Ura*), *bad public security* caused by the increased transit traffic (*Tiszacsécse, Tizsakerecseny, Barabás, Tivadar*) and the *lack of jobs* (*Tyukod, Nyírpilis*). Because of the above mentioned reasons, the situation was found both advantageous and disadvantageous by 11%, while 52% did not answer the question.

As regards the cross-border relations of local authorities, it can be said that – like the county co-operations – these mostly concern culture, education and sports, many times only protocol. There is a good reason for their improvement, even if

the peripheral situation of the region and its economic underdevelopment hinder the creation of co-operation.

3.2.3 Cultural co-operation

It is cultural co-operation that represents the most active and most diversified form of cross-border relations in the North-Eastern Great Plain. These go back to a long history, as in the former regime it was only cultural co-operation that was legitimate because of the closed borders. The period after the changes was also characterised by cultural co-operation above all, with the increasing role of civil organisations besides the county and municipal authorities. The various international cultural programmes – besides the cultural co-operation agreements of local authorities – are important scenes of cultural relations (such as folk dance and choir festivals, different music and folklore programmes etc.) as well as programmes of civil organisations (photo clubs, art groups).

There are numerous cultural programmes with a long past in the northern part of the Great Plain which became famous abroad, as well. These programmes attracting many people are organised mainly by two organisations – the Kölcsey Educational Centre in Hajdú-Bihar and Váci Mihály City Educational and Children's Centre (the former county educational centre as well) in Nyíregyháza, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county.

The most significant programmes in Hajdú-Bihar are the *Flower Parade*, the *Spring Festival of Debrecen* and the *Bartók Béla International Choir Festival*. The most important cultural programmes in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg are organised as a part of the *Nyírség Autumn (International Folk Dance festival of Nyíregyháza, International Brass Band and Majorette Ensemble etc.)*. These festivals are visited by performers and guests from Central Europe to Japan and the USA. The *Hungarian Borderland Theatres' Festival* organised every year in Kisvárda is also remarkable as it was the first programme of this kind in the country.

Besides the large-scale international programmes, the cross-border cultural relations take shape in the form of *smaller or larger exhibitions, colonies of artists, creative camps, guest performances of art groups of the region and invitation of foreign art groups*.

The cultural relations of the North-Eastern Great Plain thus work at different levels. The most popular ones are the series of cultural events organised for the broad public, but the mutual guest performances of art groups, cultural relations of civil organisations and local authorities represent a great value also. Cultural co-operations connecting the Hungarian territories beyond the borders – Sub-Carpathia and Transylvania above all – to the region of the North-Eastern Great Plain are especially important. These help to preserve the cultural heritage and identity of the Hungarian minority. The improvement of cultural relations makes it possible for the people of Central-Eastern Europe to get familiar with each other's traditions and customs, which may contribute to the development of the regional

identity. The recognition of regional belonging is one of the important factors in order to develop intensive business relations.

3.2.4 Religious and clerical cross-border relations

Clerical relations are an interesting kind of cross-border co-operations. In the north-eastern part of the Great Plain, 95% of the population belong to three historic religions – Roman Catholic (22%), Calvinist (59%) and Greek Catholic (14%). However, it is the 1949 census that reports official data, according to the locally authorised churches, the situation of these days is almost the same as at the end of the 1940s.

In accordance with their share, *the Roman Catholic, the Calvinist and the Greek Catholic church have the most widespread cross-border relations in the region.* According to the unanimous opinion of the locally authorised episcopacies – Calvinist Episcopacy of the Trans-Tisza Region, Roman Catholic Episcopacy of Debrecen-Nyíregyháza, Greek Catholic Episcopacy of Hajdúdorog – these churches are in closest contact with the Hungarian churches beyond the borders.

The most important field of foreign church relations may be *education, priest training* above all. The roots for this should be found in the socialist era, as due to the border corrections in Trianon the possibilities of priest training decreased in the Hungarian-speaking territories abroad. The Roman Catholic Diocese in Debrecen-Nyíregyháza does not have theology (the training takes place in Eger), but the Calvinist and Greek Catholic churches do. The Greek Catholic Saint Atanase Theological College in Nyíregyháza has currently 53 Hungarian novices and also 30 Hungarians from other countries. There is a correspondent course for RE teachers (5 years) which also has participants from beyond the borders. The Theological College of Debrecen offers Calvinist priest training. Novices come from Sub-Carpathia mostly, as there is Calvinist theology education in Transylvania (Kolozsvár) and also in the former Upper Northern Hungary (Komárom).

All the three historic churches offer *religious secondary school education* in the region. The Calvinist church supports three (*Debrecen, Kisvárd, Nagyecséd*), the Greek Catholic one (*Hajdúdorog*) and the Roman Catholic supports also three (*Debrecen, Kisvárd and Nyíregyháza*) religious secondary schools in the north-eastern part of the Great Plain. It is the Greek Catholic Secondary School and Vocational School in Hajdúdorog where the most students study from other countries (20-30 students). There are only a few foreign students in Calvinist secondary schools, as with the support of the Calvinist Episcopacy of the Trans-Tisza Region, Calvinist secondary schools were established in Sub-Carpathia in the recent few years (*Calvinist Secondary schools in Nagydobrony and Nagyberég*).

The Roman Catholic and the Calvinist churches have courses on the spot for *RE teachers* in Sub-Carpathia with the assistance of priests from Hungary (Theology Course in Munkács, RE Education in Beregszász). Besides these, all three churches

organise further training courses for Hungarian church personalities from beyond the border (priests, teachers), the Calvinist Church District of The Trans-Tisza Region has twin-congregation relations, too.

The churches also have cross-border relations *of cultural character*. The most significant event of this kind is the World Festival of Hungarian Calvinists. The last event like this in 1996 was organised in Debrecen, where choirs from Sub-Carpathia, the former Upper Northern Hungary, Transylvania and Voivodina participated in the Festival of Calvinist Choirs of the Carpathian Basin. The Greek Catholic Diocese in Hajdúdorog organises Greek Catholic Church Choirs' International Festival every second year with participants from Kassa, Munkács, Ungvár, Eperjes and Brassó. Tens of thousands of visitors from territories beyond the borders came to see the visit of the Pope in 1991, and many visit the Patronal Festival of Ethnic Groups Beyond the Borders in Máriapócs from year to year.

Charity is a particular form of cross-border relations of the churches. This support tries to help the ones in need, regardless of their religion. A good example for this is the several million Forint aid collected for the victims of the floods in Sub-Carpathia in November 1998.

The support of the north-eastern Great Plain dioceses has been essential in the *reorganisation of churches beyond the borders* after the changes. The congregations of the neighbouring territories inhabited by Hungarians were supplied with bibles, hymn-books and religious textbooks, priest clothes and relics from Hungary. The Roman Catholic church did a lot to revitalise Sub-Carpathian – Franciscan (Nagyszőlős), Jesuit (Ungvár) and Dominican (Munkács) – monasteries.

The authorised church leaders reckon their cross-border relations to the churches of their religion as appropriate. Besides this, the co-operation with other churches is insignificant and is rather diplomatic, if it exists at all. Relations are significantly hindered by the difficulties in crossing the borders – between Hungary and Ukrainian first of all –, which hinders the delivery of relief packages many times. The cross-border relations foster Hungarian-Hungarian co-operation and this way also facilitate to preserve the identity of ethnic Hungarians beyond our borders.

3.2.5 *Economic relations*

According to its geographic situation, the region of the North-Eastern Great Plain is a natural meeting point of *eastern and western trade*, and Western European goods cross it as a *gate* to reach the enormous Eastern markets. Agriculture and food processing are the most typical for the economy of the region, however, with continuous restructuring, the ratio of industry and services gradually increases. On

the basis of data concerning businesses with foreign interest, Hajdú-Bihar was the 14th, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg the 10th in the rank of counties in 1997. This meant a step backwards in the first case and a step forward in the second one, compared to former places in the hierarchy.

The number of business with a foreign interest has been dynamically increasing since 1997. On the other hand, the figure in Hajdú-Bihar increased a little in the beginning but has started to slow down since 1997. On the basis of capital assets, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg is among the very last counties (16th), whereas Hajdú-Bihar had the very favourable 3rd and 5th position in 1995 and 1997. The background of these nice positions had been the successful privatisation of large companies in Hajdú-Bihar (e.g. *Biogal, MGM, Tobacco Factory of Debrecen*) (Table 4).

Table 4

*Number and capital assets of the foreign-owned enterprises,
and their rank in the hierarchy of the counties*

County	Number of businesses /position/				Capital assets in billion HUF /position/			
	1994	1995	1996	1997	1994	1995	1996	1997
Hajdú-Bihar	364/13/	389/12/	407/12/	350/14/	22.1/8/	849/3/	839/4/	840/5/
Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg	290/14/	304/14/	339/14/	587/10/	13.7/15/	10.1/18/	16.0/17/	19.6/16/

Source: Regional Statistical Yearbook, Central Statistical Office, 1998.

The main fields of activity of most businesses with a foreign interest are trade and repairing road vehicles and consumer goods. Industry is at the second place, whereas real estate and renting are at the third. Capital assets, and also the share of foreign capital – in accordance with the national average – is the highest in industry. Businesses with foreign interest active in the primary sector – which plays a very important role in economy of both counties – have a smaller share of foreign investors than the weight of the sector.

Based on the analysis of data from 1997 and 1998, the foreign trade relations of the region – in accordance with national figures – are the strongest with the EU. However, in the foreign trade of the region, Romania and Ukraine play a more important role. Among the most important ex-partners of Hungary, Romania was the 10th (12th in 1997) and Ukraine the 18th (15th in 1997). In case of Hajdú-Bihar, this figure was 6th for Romania (7th in 1997) and 8th for Ukraine. The situation is similar if we examine imports, with the difference that ex-socialist countries play a much less important role. Looking at the product structure of exports, agricultural and food products are dominant in the export of the region, but the share of chemical products (medicines, plastic and packing materials) and machinery has also increased. Within the products of industry, machinery, raw

materials of the textile industry and vehicles and vehicle parts represent the largest part.

The conditions and development possibilities of infrastructure are dominant for the development of the region's foreign economic relations. A significant step forward has been taken in the development of public services and telecommunications, however, there is still a lot to improve regarding the conditions of traffic, road infrastructure above all, which are especially important for successful cross-border economic relations. A motorway has not been built yet in the region, whereas passenger and freight traffic growing at a fast pace makes its construction urgent. The construction of the whole M3 motorway will mean a significant step forward, regarding accessibility, but in itself it is not enough to solve the problems of road traffic in the region. There is a lack of freeways to connect county towns and cities, although they would make it possible to pass faster but avoiding the central areas of the settlements. Some settlements in Szatmár and Bereg are in an extremely disadvantageous situation, as they cannot be reached within two hours from the county town. Magosliget, Méhtelek, Garbolc, Kishódos and Nagyhódos belong to this group, but it also takes almost two hours to reach the international border crossing at Csengersima (*Figure 12*).

The axis of *railway traffic* is the Budapest-Szolnok-Debrecen main line leading to Ukraine. Besides this one, it is only the Nyíregyháza-Miskolc line that is an electrified line in the area. The distance in time has decreased in the last few years – Euro City, Inter City and Inter Pici services –, however, some settlements (e.g. Csenger, Gacsály, Jánkmajtis, Zajta) can be reached in almost two and a half hours from the county town. To get to Komádi (170 minutes) and Körösszakáll (191 minutes) takes about three hours, which results from the fact that there is no direct railway connection between these settlements and Debrecen, they can only be reached through Püspökladány and Szeghalom. There are 37 (45%) settlements in Hajdú-Bihar and 146 (64%) in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg without railway connection (*Figure 13a-b*).

One of the obstacles of broadening cross-border relations in the region is *the small number of border crossings* available for freight traffic also. Passenger and freight traffic can use four railway border stations. There is only limited crossing at Ágerdőmajor, but Záhony, Nyírábrány and Ártánd are open for international traffic as well. Because of the broad-gauge railways used in CIS countries, a reloading area of 21 million tonnes capacity was built in Záhony and its surroundings, which has a bright prospective to become the meeting point of east-west trade. Eight road border crossings operate in the area – three on the Romanian and five on the Ukrainian borderline –, from these three can be used for the purpose of passenger

traffic (Záhony, Csengersima and Ártánd), whereas for freight traffic only two can be used (Záhony and Ártánd). The border crossing at Csengersima is being built with the support of PHARE CBC, from 2000 it will also be possible for freight traffic to pass.

Figure 12

The accessibility of the county seat from the other settlements of the county in Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties

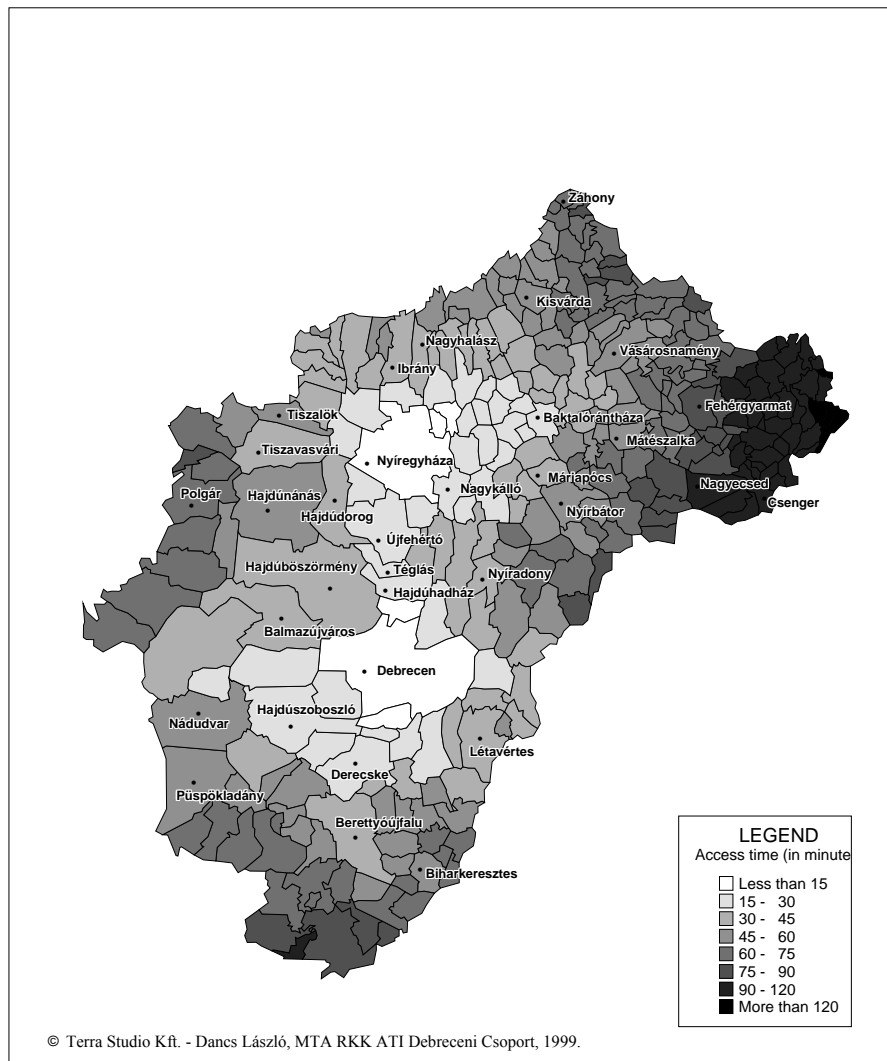


Figure 13a

The accessibility of the county seats by railway in Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties

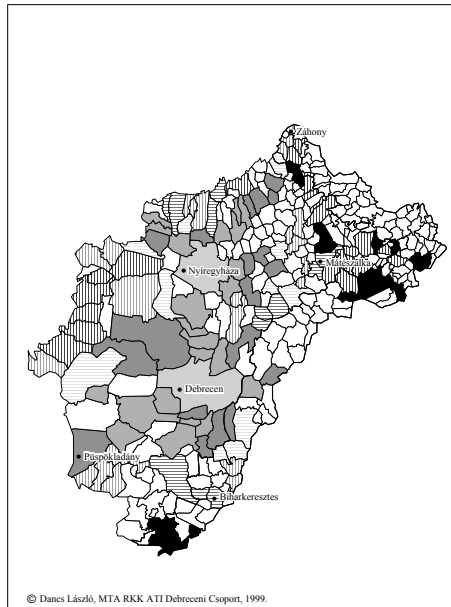
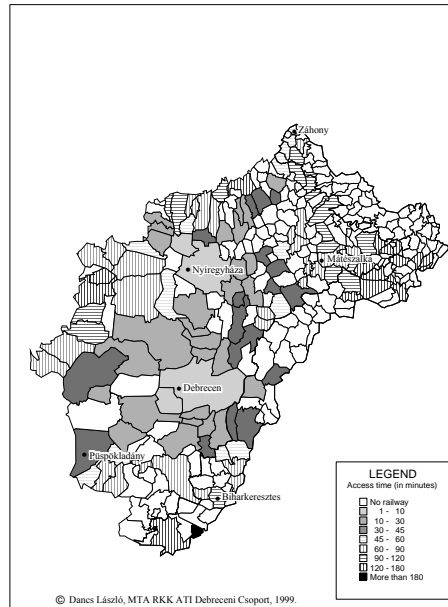


Figure 13b

The accessibility of the county seats by railway in Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties by the shortest time of accessibility



The improvement of cross-border business relations is promoted by business development foundations and companies, exhibitions, fairs and meetings for businessmen, organised by different chambers and local governments. The East-West Expo in Nyíregyháza has been organised from 1997 on, it is the biggest event of this kind in the countryside. The other important fair to attract foreign visitors is the Szatmár Expo General Exhibition and Fair, organised in Mátészalka. The most significant even of this kind in Hajdú-Bihar should be the Farmer Expo International Agricultural and Food Processing Exhibition. Hungarian-Romanian and Hungarian-Ukrainian business meetings are also frequently organised in the region.

As regards *cross-border economic relations, borderland settlements are in the worst position* in the northern Great Plain area. According to the 95 local governments who answered the questionnaire sent to 119 borderland settlements, the number of business co-operations is very low. Only four Hungarian settlements have economic-trade contacts to six settlements beyond the border: Záhony – Ágcsernyő and Csap, Körösszakáll – Meresti, Körösszegapáti – Vascau, Nyíracsád – Küküllődombó and Szék. Only a few businesses with foreign interest (16)

operate in the examined group of settlements (5 of them are German, 4 Ukrainian, 2 Romanian and 2 Italian, 1 Chinese, 1 French and 1 English).

The visits to fairs and markets of the settlements can also be regarded as *trade relations*. Although none of the Hungarian settlements interviewed visit fairs or markets on the other side of the border, many from there come to visit the Hungarian programmes of this kind. For example, fairs organised by Pocsaj, Váncsod, Záhony, Porcsalma, Nyírlugos and Csenger are often visited by Romanian and Ukrainian sellers, however, not in a great number.

As it appears from the figures of the questionnaire, *economic relations of the borderlands are not very lively*. However, the same does not stand for cross-border trade (illegal trade, smuggling of fuel, tobacco and others). 450 residents in 29 settlements out of 95 answering the questionnaire deal with such activities, not to speak about Ukrainians and Romanians forced to make living from illegal trade by the deteriorating economic conditions.

More serious co-operations in economy are hindered by unfavourable economic conditions in the neighbouring countries, which are worsened by the effects of economic and financial crisis in Russia. It is widely quoted that the lack of stable legal environment, underdevelopment of payment practice and the bank sector do not attract investments to Ukraine and Romania, not to mention the difficulties to cross the borders.

Similar to economic relations, co-operation in the labour market is also not typical in the region. It hardly occurs that Hungarians work in the neighbouring countries, whereas Romanian and Ukrainian illegal work is typical for seasonal work in agriculture on the Hungarian side of the border (*I. Balcsók 1999*).

In order to develop the economy of the region and to promote cross-border economic relations, the government decided to establish the *Záhony and Surroundings Business Area* in 1996 and the *Bihar Business Area* in 1998. There are signs of initial results and the first large foreign investors (e.g. General Electric and Interspan) are present in the region, but there is no real change in relation to the neighbouring countries. Ukrainian and Romanian investors of relatively small capital are still interested in retail outlets close to border crossings, which serve the strong shopping tourism. No miracle can be expected from the business areas, they should rather be regarded as an opportunity to promote the economy of the region and to facilitate cross-border economic relations in the long run, possibly in the course of several decades.

3.2.6 *Inter-ethnic cross-border relations*

The expression “inter-ethnic relations” covers the relations between different nationalities of a settlement or a certain territory of the country. The examination of cross-border inter-ethnic relations of a region refers to the co-operation between

nationalities, with the difference that relations between groups of the same nationalities living on two different sides of the border can also be regarded inter-ethnic.

The Northern Great Plain is almost homogeneous regarding nationalities. If the ethnic group of Gypsies is not regarded as a minority, it is only the Romanian ethnic group that represents a considerable minority in some settlements in Hajdú-Bihar besides the Hungarian population in the region. In the 1990 census we find similar data regarding mother tongues, it is only Bedő, Körösszakáll and Körösszegapáti that have a Romanian speaking population over 1%. Many times a parallel can be drawn between nationality and religion, for this reason these two should be studied together. The well-known connection between the Greek Catholic and orthodox religion and the Romanians appears from this analysis. Unfortunately censuses do not refer to the religion of the population, however, data from the 1949 census and estimations of the local governments concerned verify the Romanian character of Bedő, Körösszakáll and Körösszegapáti.

According to the data regarding mother tongue, in the 1900 and 1910 censuses there were much larger Romanian populations in the area. These were situated in a transitory area on the Hungarian side of the Hungarian-Romanian border. The settlements that belonged here were Vekerd (Romanians: 96.1%-1900, 36.5%-1910), Pocsaj (Romanians: 48.3%-1900, 41.8%-1910), Körösszegapáti (Romanians: 43.7%-1900, 36.2%-1910), Körösszakáll (Romanians: 66.3%-1900, 63.5%-1910), Nagyléta (Romanians: 26.9%-1900, 15.6%-1910), Bedő (Romanians: 84.4%-1900, 89.5%-1910) and Mezőpeterd (Romanians: 66.3%-1900, 59.8%-1910). From these, in Bedő, Pocsaj and Nagyléta there is a Greek Catholic ethnic group of Romanians, in the others they are Orthodox. The ethnic group of Romanians has significantly decreased due to the border corrections following World War I. Due to the Trianon decision of 1920, the ethnic group of Romanians were isolated from the millions of Romanian population in Transylvania, and remained as a small community without intellectuals.

Besides the language specifications, a new concept was introduced in the 1940 census, the population was also asked about the nationality. The fact that the 1941 figures showed an insignificant ratio of Romanians (e.g. 97.3% of Bedő is Hungarian, the ratio of Romanians is only 2.6%) cannot be explained with assimilation in such a short time. The background for this should be the new concept of nationality and also the fact that a small part of the Romanian ethnic group dared to declare its nationality within the new frames of the state. For this reason, instead of the language, people indicated that they belonged to the majority nationality of the country (E. Tamás 1998) (*Table 5*).

The geographic situation of the Romanians is favourable for the preservation of their identity, which makes it easier for Romanians living in the borderlands next to

the border to Romania to keep in touch with the Romanian language and culture

Table 5

Proportion of the Romanian ethnic population in those Hajdú-Bihar county settlements with a significant Romanian ethnic group

Settlement	Proportion of the Romanian ethnic population (in per cent)		
	By mother tongue		By ethnic breakdown
	1910	1941	1941
Bedő	89.5	77.1	2.7
Körösszakál	63.5	56.6	56.6
Körösszegapáti	36.2	24.4	19.3
Mezőpeterd	59.8	0.4	0.4
Nagyléta	15.6	1.0	1.2
Pocsaj	41.8	1.0	0.1
Vekerd	36.5	6.9	6.9

Source: Central Statistical Office, data from the censuses taken in 1910 and 1941

Since the transition, within the expansion of relations, Romania supports Romanian young people living in Hungary with scholarships for their training in Romania and also sends missionaries to orthodox Romanian communities. Romania organises summer trainings for teachers (in the junior faculty of the primary school there is language education and in senior school there is education in Romanian language in Bedő) and also supports holidays in Romania for Romanian children.

Besides *Bedő, Körösszakáll and Körösszegapáti*, ethnic groups of Romanians live in other settlements in Hajdú-Bihar – e.g. *Létavértes, Rozsály, Vámospércs, Gacsály, Esztár and Debrecen* –, however, their ratio does not reach 1% according to the 1990 census. Cross-border inter-ethnic relations of Romanian ethnic groups living in the north-eastern Great Plain are connected to the Romanians living in the motherland. In the “cultural policies” of these settlements, the preservation, cultivation and passing on the Romanian folklore is of special importance. Besides the local representatives of interest, cultural groups (e.g. folk dance groups, Romanian Community of Bedő) events (Romanian Days in Bihar – Körösszegapáti), cross-border inter-ethnic (Romanian-Romanian) relations are also important means to preserve the traditions, which can foster the preservation of the cultural heritage and identity of ethnic Romanian communities living in Hungary.

Besides ethnic groups of Romanians, a very small group of Slovaks, Germans and Ukrainians live in the region, however, their population does not reach 1% in one settlement. These ethnic groups live scattered and do not form blocks in the north-eastern part of the Great Plain. Their cross-border relations are mostly connected to their relatives.

As the north-eastern part of the Great Plain is almost homogeneous regarding ethnic groups and the borderlands of the neighbouring countries is usually inhabited by Hungarians, it is not surprising at all that Hungarian-Hungarian relations are dominant in cross-border inter-ethnic relations. On the other side of the border of the North-Eastern Great Plain a significant ethnic groups of Hungarians live. The number of the Hungarian minority was 155 711 people according to the last census, whereas the estimation of Hungarian minority organisations stated 200 000. The same figure for the whole of Romania – not just concentrated in the borderlands – is 1 624 959 people, whereas some estimates say 2 000 000 people (*Government Office for Hungarian Minorities Abroad 1998*).

The importance of Hungarian-Hungarian relations appears in each field of the cross-border co-operation. The Hungarian nature of co-operations is reflected in the field of institutionalised relations, regarding both the county governments' partner county relations (Bihar, Sub-Carpathia, Hargita) and twin and partner relations of county seats (Ungvár, Nagyvárad, Kassa, Szatmárnémeti) and of municipal governments. The cross-border relations of the historical churches in the region are mostly realised with the churches of the Hungarian inhabited neighbouring territories and the Hungarian-Hungarian character is also strong in the cultural co-operation. It may only be the field of economics that does not follow this tendency, which is no wonder considering the unstable economies of Ukraine and Romania, struggling with very serious problems.

3.3 The future of cross-border relations

3.3.1 PHARE as an opportunity for the development of the neighbouring borderlands

PHARE is the assistance programme of the European Union to support the socio-economic restructuring in the countries of Central-Eastern Europe. It also facilitates preparations for the EU accession by financing different programmes. The PHARE programme was launched in the autumn of 1989, currently the following 13 countries are involved: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Check Republic, Estonia, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. The individual countries can receive PHARE grants in different forms: national programmes, cross-border co-operations, multi-country programmes, horizontal programmes (initiated by Brussels). From 1998, a new form of programme was introduced to replace the last two, it is the multi-beneficiary programme, which supports several countries at the same time. From the above-mentioned programmes, PHARE CBC and CREDO are available for the development of cross-border relations (*Pénzforrás 1998, Volume 4, Number 3.*).

PHARE CBC Programme concerns four Hungarian and four Romanian counties on the Hungarian-Romanian borderline (Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Hajdú-Bihar, Békés and Csongrád on the Hungarian side, Szatmár, Bihar, Arad and Temes on the Romanian side). The Hungarian-Ukrainian borderline cannot participate in this kind of programme. 5 million ECU for 1996 (ZZ 9622 programme) and 4 million ECU for 1997 (HU 9705-04 programme) was approved for the Hungarian-Romanian PHARE CBC programme.

Twenty projects won grants in Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg from the 1996 and 1997 funds available. Many co-operation programmes were presented among the projects, from the development of the border crossing at Csengersima through the “10th Festival of Hungarian Theatres Beyond the Borders” to the construction of euro-conform consulting systems in agriculture for the borderlands (*PHARE Programme Office of the Ministry of Agriculture Békéscsaba, 1999*).

CREDO is the new element in the multi-country programme of PHARE, supporting cross-border co-operation in PHARE partner countries. Hungarian-Slovenian, Hungarian-Slovak, Hungarian-Ukrainian and Hungarian-Romanian border regions are the pilot territories in Hungary. The programme was launched in 1996 when applications could be submitted in the experimental and in the first phase. Although the Hungarian-Ukrainian borderland regions were also target areas of the programme, the projects were concentrated on the Hungarian-Romanian borderline in the first round.

3.3.2 The Carpathian Euroregion – an opportunity

Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Debrecen and Nyíregyháza county seats are founders of the organisation, this way they have a strong interest in its success from the very beginning. Since the organisation was founded, successful steps have been taken in order to develop the borderland infrastructure (e.g. nine new border crossings have been opened in the region, a special business zone has been established in the region of Záhony and Csap, etc.), permanent cross-border programmes have been launched (e.g. conferences are organised for the university rectors in the Carpathian Euroregion, Carpathian Cultural Festival, Touristic Forum of Krosno, etc.), the information exchange has improved (Carpathian Euroregion Newsletter, the university libraries of the region have been connected through Internet).

With the support of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the *Foundation for the Development of Carpathian Euroregion* was established in 1994. The aim of

this foundation – separated from the aims of the Euroregion – is to provide financial and technical support for programmes assisted by local authorities and civil organisations in order to improve the quality of life for people living in the villages of the Carpathians. The foundation facilitates programmes in connection with economic growth and cross-border activities above all (e.g. trainings for local government representatives and leaders of civil organisations, exchange programmes for twin cities and inter-ethnic cultural events, etc.). Among the grants – which are available for non-profit organisations only – those are privileged which promote co-operation among sectors and motivate co-operation between borderland regions (*V. Hudak 1998*).

The development of the Carpathian Euroregion is hindered by the fact that its residents are not informed accurately about its aims and the way it operates. If the Carpathian Euroregion aims to be a successful interregional organisation, it has to pay much more attention to its management, to raise the quality of its organs (Council, Secretariat and workgroups) and to inform the population properly about the aims, opportunities and results of the Euroregion.

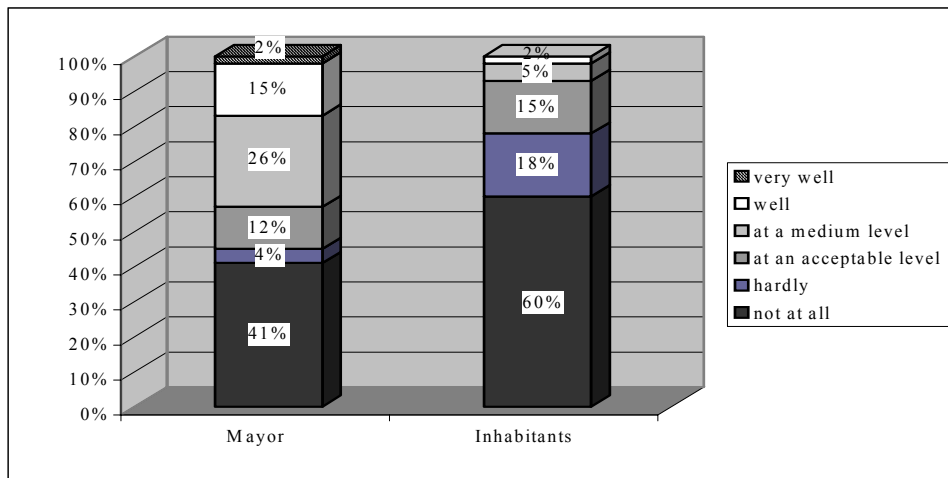
According to the answers to the questionnaire sent to 119 settlements, 57% does not even know the Carpathian Euroregion, 40% reckons the initiative as a good one, whereas *three settlements (Nagykereki, Nyírlugos and Tuzsér)* – because its activity is not visible in the region – think that it is *unfavourable*.

To the question *how much the leaders of the settlements are familiar with the aims of Carpathian Euroregion*, only 15% answered good, 2% (*Tizsakerecseny and Pocsaj*) answered perfectly. The situation is even worse if the population is examined, as – according to the opinion of the mayors – 60% does not know about the aims of the Euroregion (*Figure 14*).

The development of cross-border relations regarding the North-Eastern Great Plain cannot be promoted by means of the PHARE and the Carpathian Euroregion exclusively. The government, county and municipal governments and civil organisations should also take the responsibility. With holding borderland regions together at different levels and with the recognition of common interests, a much higher level of co-operation can be reached. This is an inevitable condition of good relations with our neighbours and a successful and efficient participation in the “Europe of Regions”.

Figure 14

How much are the borderland settlements familiar with the objectives of the Carpathian Euroregion?



Source: Data from a questionnaire survey. Debrecen Group of the Great Plain Research Institute of the CRS, HAS, 1999.

4 Report on the labour market of the borderlands

4.1 Borderland location – an advantage or a disadvantage?

The territory examined belongs to two counties – Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg – where unemployment has been far higher than the national average since 1987, when was admitted officially. This causes an enormous problem both for the economy and the society, and significantly decreases the future prospects of development. We tried to draw up the most important problems of the labour market on the basis of the answers given to the questionnaire and the interviews conducted with the leaders of local offices and their colleagues. Instead of drawing up an overall picture, we concentrated on highlighting the biggest problems that concern all the labour districts (*B. Baranyi 1998*).

As regards the question phrased in the subheading, being familiar with the general situation of the eastern part of the country, the answer is unambiguous: *most of the people living along our eastern borders could only tell us about disadvantages*. The same stands for the labour market as well, as from the 11 local offices of the region it is only the neighbourhood of Kisvárda that enjoys the positive effects of the proximity of the border.

The most influential factor regarding job opportunities is the *extremely unfavourable accessibility* of all the settlements along the borderline. This negative condition further increases the geographical distance from the centres and makes employment impossible in many cases. Volán (the Hungarian bus company) has cancelled many lines from the schedule because the low volume of passenger traffic. This way only “school buses” remained in some settlements, by which it is impossible to be on time for the beginning of the shift. Finding a job is a reality only for those who have a car, which is not a cheap solution, either, and for most families living in the borderlands having a car is rather a dream.

Many places are in a bad situation from traffic aspect, e.g. *Komádi* is situated 14 km away from the main road number 47. The extremely bad condition of roads and railways, due to the lack of maintenance, should also be considered (many roads still do not have a solid surface). The example of Nyírbátor speaks for itself: although this is the meeting point for railways from the direction of Debrecen and Nyíregyháza, the tracks are in such a bad condition that the half an hour running time has increased to one hour and a half recently. However, it is impossible to find a solution from own resources, as the money for reconstruction is not available without the support of the government.

Nevertheless, this problem is not a new one, the only choice for residents has always been *long-distance commuting*. The processes of the 1990s were not favourable for this kind of lifestyle and for this reason the number of commuters

has significantly decreased. Due to the constant rise of travel costs, employers have reduced travel contracts almost everywhere. In order to reduce costs, they got rid of the commuters in the first place. This way it is easy to understand that unemployment has increased in the borderlands of the two counties first and except for some cases, unemployment rate is the highest here up to now. What makes the situation even more difficult is that the economic figures in the two neighbouring countries are very much unfavourable, limiting the chances of the Hungarian side as well. In addition, the relations to the neighbouring countries are very limited and they are not free from difficulties, either (*L. Dancs 1999*).

The relation between the people living here and on the other side of the border is dominantly determined by the fact whether there is a relation with the other side of the border at all or not. From this aspect *three types can be separated. The first group* is represented by those territories which *do not have an official border crossing*. Compared to the length of borders, many territories belong to this group (*Komádi, Vámospércs, Létavértes, Nyírbátor*).

The situation is similar in all the districts concerned: the Romanian partner has made a promise in each case to build and open a border crossing (the Hungarian partner has been ready for a long time), but these remained only plans and no breakthrough is expected in the near future. In Vámospércs even a restaurant was built to serve transit traffic, but due to the closed border, it could not have a bright future. Opinions differ in the question whether opening new border crossings would be of any use for these territories, especially as the labour market is concerned. It can be stated regarding each territory that opening the borders would have an effect on the employment only in the neighbourhood of the border and the road leading there, however, the need for workforce would not be large-scale.

The second type of the relations is when *the territory has a border crossing but its effect is contradictory or regarded as negative*. In the area of *Csengersima and Vásárosnamény*, the existence of border crossings has rather led to the strengthening of harmful processes over the recent years and it is only black economy that profits from the open borders. Only trade businesses with a few employees operate legally, the establishment of joint ventures is not a frequent phenomenon in the region. The latter can be found mostly in the capital city, so the eastern border plays the role of a distant bridge.

As regards legal employment, Hungarian workforce is hardly ever employed on the other side of the border, whereas many come to Hungary in search of work from the neighbouring countries. The number of foreign citizens having labour permit is some ten people per each local office. Most of these people are qualified and have a degree (engineers, physicians, language teachers). The main reason for this is that according to the Hungarian regulations, labour permit can be issued only if there is no Hungarian workforce available for the particular job and in these territories there is a lack of workforce with a degree.

The number of those taking jobs without an official labour permit is much higher. In the time of seasonal works in agriculture, hundreds of Ukrainian and Romanian people appear in the area. Another successful kind of black “business” in the neighbourhood of each border crossing is fuel smuggling. The time of “rucksack trade” is over (it was typical in the beginning of the 1990s), still there is a lot of bad quality Ukrainian and Romanian goods on the market. It is a general experience that crime has increased due to the open borders, and not only smuggling and illegal work.

The case of *Biharkeresztes* is a particular one. The large capacity border crossing is insignificant regarding the demand for labour force, as transit traffic is dominant here. This is typical for traffic and Romanian shopping tourism as well. Those Romanians who come to buy household devices or telecommunication products prefer going to *Berettyóújfalu* or *Debrecen*, which have a much larger supply of goods. For this reason a lively demand typical for border crossings does not occur here, as profits go to other places. Because of the large-scale poverty and few job opportunities, black employment is not as significant as in the areas mentioned above. As a result no sudden increase of crime has taken place, either, and considering the conditions and transit character of the area, this is not likely to happen in the future.

In the neighbourhood of *Fehérgyarmat*, the effect of the border crossing at Tiszabecs is complex, too. The situation of *Tiszabecs* can be regarded satisfactory, in spite of the large unemployment, as black economy provides some additional sources of income (fuel smuggling, illegal trade and warehouses serving this). However, these phenomena are characteristic in the nearest surroundings of the border crossing and not for the whole region. It also plays an important role that foreign citizens cannot sell their goods in the fair of Fehérgyarmat and this way they are forced to go to some other places. As a result, transit traffic has increased and the role of crime and black economy has decreased.

Only one territory belongs to the third type: the district of Kisvárda. This is an area where despite the negative phenomena, the impact of the border crossing on the area is positive. There is no doubt that the reason for this is the enormous capacity and appropriate construction of the “Záhony-gate”. This is indicated by the fact that unemployment rate in the county is the lowest in Záhony (about 5%), it does not even reach the national average. The positive impact is due to the large – although decreasing – demand for workforce, the established business area, the relatively developed infrastructure and the favourable traffic connections. Because of the favourable conditions, business relations to the other side of the border are much stronger and the higher level of investments is not surprising, either. The number of (Ukrainian) workforce legally living here is higher compared to the former figures and it is not only qualified workforce that could obtain labour permit here, but also dressmakers (there were requirements that were impossible for Hungarian workforce to fulfil...).

All in all, except for central places, the job opportunities for people living in borderland settlements are very limited, due to the general isolation and the bad traffic connections. Employers often specify as a condition that those who live far from the centres are out of question in matters of jobs offered, as they cannot be on time for the start of the shift or it is expensive to pay for commuting. This way it is black work that provides that most general source of living, as the chance to re-enter the labour market is minimal. The role of border crossings as employers is insignificant and the connected trade and catering network is also minimal, as their chances are very limited.

4.2 High unemployment – few job opportunities

The general problems mentioned before, arising from geographical location, are dominant factors regarding the conditions under which the labour market operates. The disadvantageous situation of the borderline areas is apparent on *Figure 5*, showing unemployment rate. Districts of Berettyóújfalu and Kisvárdá are exceptions, as the rate is equal to the county average there or lower than that (Hajdú-Bihar: 12.9%, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg: 15.7%). The high unemployment does not only stand for October 1998, it has been similar for a long time. The conditions of commuting, typical for a large number of employees in the previous years, are not better nowadays, either. In addition, there are plenty of unemployed in the central areas, so there is a supply of local labour force there, as well. Commuting has been the only way to get a job for numerous settlements up to now, as job opportunities are very scarce (*Figure 5*).

The lack of workplaces is the most important reason for the level of unemployment permanently exceeding the national average. The former large employers disappeared after the systemic change or reduced the original staff significantly. The vacancy created by the reduction of big enterprises is still not filled up. The number of private companies has favourably increased over the recent years, although most of them are private firms or have less than ten employees, so they are not able to give work for the large amount of unemployed workforce. Local entrepreneurs have no chance to establish a big firm, owing to the general lack of capital, and the rate of foreign capital still strongly falls behind the national average.

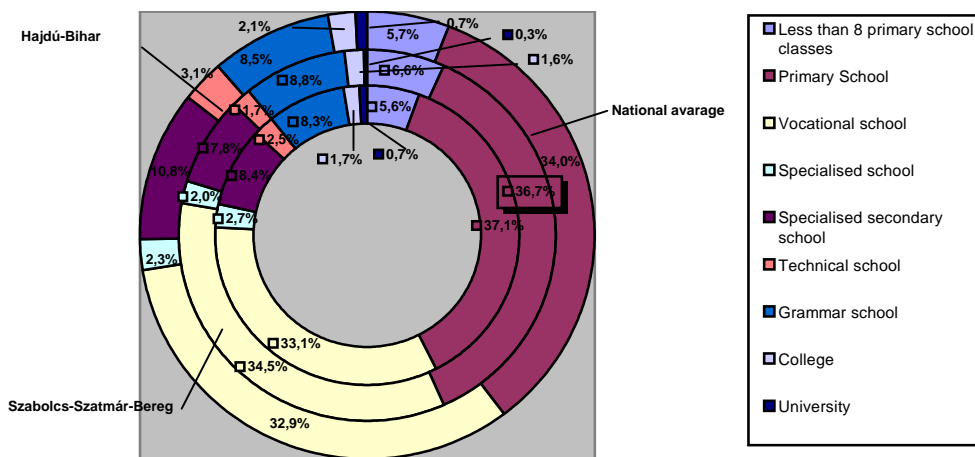
There are many reasons for the low interest of foreign firms. The geographical location of this region is unfavourable for foreign capital inflow. Following the changes in market orientation, the borderlands of the eastern part of the country got far from the target countries of Hungarian external trade and also the investors of those countries. The chances are reduced by the fact that the level of infrastructural supply, although it is getting better in the last few years, still leaves much to be

desired and this stage is not likely to change, knowing the financial conditions of local governments. These conditions are already enough for the area to fall beyond the interests of multinational firms. For this reason an insignificant part of the active capital inflow reaches the analysed area, since the investments of the small firms interested cannot be compared to the opportunities of big firms.

Beyond the factors mentioned above, the human conditions also hinder the establishment of industries that employ modern, qualified workforce. *The level of qualification among unemployed at county level also lags behind the national average* both in Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties. This statement especially applies to the territories along the border. The rate of unskilled workforce is extremely high everywhere and the proportion of workers with (or even without) basic qualifications is especially significant. All of the districts exceed the county averages (Hajdú-Bihar: 42.7%, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg: 43.3%) except for *Berettyóújfalú* (40.8%) and three other districts – *Biharkeresztes*, *Létavértes*, *Vámospercs* –, where the rate is higher than 50% (Figure 15).

Figure 15

The level of education regarding the registered unemployed (October 1998)



Most of the employees with a degree leave the area because of the worse conditions and low salaries, in many cases they have to be replaced from neighbouring countries. If we examine the rate of unemployed with a degree in the borderland districts, it appears that they are less than in the counties in general.

Vámospércs has the lowest figure (0.3%) compared to the average (Hajdú-Bihar: 2.4%, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg: 1.9%), the highest figure can be observed in the district of Csenger (1.8%). This figure could be favourable, as according to this the chance to find a job is better for employees with degree compared to the county average. This is true, but the main reason is that the rate of employees with a degree is rather low compared to the total population and not because there are so many jobs demanding a degree.

There is no solution for the problems of skilled workers, as most of them have metal worker qualification, which is an oversupplied field. Most of them would not get a job even if a factory suitable for their qualification were established in this area, since lots of them have been unemployed for a long time, their professional knowledge is outdated and their work moral is also getting worse with time. The only chance for them to survive in borderland villages is to start business within their profession in a legal or illegal way. However, enterprises do not have traditions yet and there are lots of uncertain factors.

There have been attempts to increase the qualification level of unemployed workers from the beginning and it is also common *to send workers* with skills not in demand on the labour market *to retraining courses*. The success of retraining courses is hampered by numerous factors. One of these is exactly the low level of qualification itself, as in many cases there is no basis to build on. The main target of the “catching up” courses is the ethnic group of Gypsies, the main goal is to help them finish primary school and enable to continue their studies and become a skilled worker. As it is often experienced, the target group does not realise the advantages of the training – or they regard it as a burden –, therefore it is hard to get a group together. This is especially true in the regions where the low qualification is combined with older age, since the learning ability and will decrease with age.

The success of retraining courses is strongly limited by the difficulties in defining the fields of training and assessing the demand of certain professions in the following years. Mátészalka is a proper example for this, where the technical school of engineering has launched the training of wood workers based on the demand of the furniture factory. After the bankruptcy of the furniture factory and the supplying workshops, the training of workers doomed to unemployment still continues, since the change of profile has extremely high costs and it would be very risky to introduce any other new fields of training. In Berettyóújfalu there are four secondary schools, which provide a wide range of training but demand does not always meet the qualifications available. The organisers of retraining courses also have to face similar difficulties. The trainings offering customs administrator or shop assistant qualifications started in borderland regions resulted in oversupply in many places, this way, attending the retraining courses is in vain, as the unemployed do not have a better chance to find a job. In this region it also causes a lot of problems that many settlements are very far from training centres (e.g.

Komádi and its environment) and commuting is sometimes impossible. To sum up, much more money should be spent on the courses than is spent today, because the chance for unemployed to find a job might increase by completing the courses – which does not apply for the spontaneous actions, communal work done for want of anything better or the use of passive tools.

As regards the branches of national economy, considering the number of employees agriculture is the second after industry in both of the counties. Considering the geographic location of the counties it is not a surprise that the share of agriculture exceeds the county average by 2-4%, and there are even regions in the analysed area where the proportion of people living from agriculture comes close to 60%. For this reason it is a serious problem that agriculture has to cope with bigger difficulties than industry (B. Mező 1999).

Besides the permanently present problems, in 1998 the branch of agriculture was basically concerned by sales difficulties and the buying-up crisis in several fields. Agriculture has not been profitable for smallholders so far, but these days even the profitability of large estates is getting doubtful. The situation of the co-operatives that still operate becomes also uncertain, since the incomes not realised because of the crisis question the launch of next year's agricultural works. In some of the borderland villages this means that the last considerable employer could be closed down, by which the chance to find a job decreases to zero.

It could be perceived on the labour market for years that the co-operatives are struggling to survive, since the number of seasonal workers they can employ has been decreasing, and they gradually have to reduce the number of full-time workers. Some of the co-operatives which have survived chose the transformation into an Ltd., whereas some of them exist only on paper (in Lövöpetri there is only one member of the local co-operative, the director himself). The breakdown of the workers of the co-operatives pursuing agricultural activities in the past (e.g. animal tenders, etc.) by education and age is even worse compared to that of the unemployed in industry. Most of them belong to the older age group, and their qualification is usually not higher than primary school. For this reason, the chance to find a new job is minimal in their case. There is a significant lack of agrarian experts with a high level, up-to-date qualification in the territories examined, although at the regions of bad natural conditions (which represent the majority) there is a great need for their knowledge.

Consequently, industry and agriculture are still struggling with a lot of problems, and this is not very promising for the current situation of employment. The service sector could not take the place of the other two as a large employer, as its conditions are not very favourable, either. Most of the firms operating in the service sector are private ones, and most of them have less than ten employees. The group of owners changes rapidly (firms are closed down and established almost every day), but this does not have a considerable effect on the labour market, due to the small number of employees. There are some reserves in the borderland

counties in the agricultural sector, but due to the lack of capital and the bad state of infrastructure, it is difficult to exploit them.

As a result of the reasons mentioned above, the current distressing situation, i.e. the fact that the *local authorities became the biggest employers* in the analysed region, especially in the isolated borderland villages, occurred inevitably. After the liquidation of co-operatives, which used to provide the sole possibility to work, only local governments can give a job to people in the form of communal work. The communal work programmes launched – since they target the unemployed – are only spontaneous actions, but still represent the best possible solution at the moment.

Besides providing jobs, the main goal is to assure the opportunity to be employed for 180 days, which is needed to apply for income substitution benefits, since practically this is the only chance to acquire further benefits. Due to the *large number of long term unemployment*, the resources available always prove to be very limited, and the possibilities to work are also restricted by the weather (this is shown very well by the fact that the number of vacancies decreases rapidly in winter-time: in the area of Biharkeresztes and Vámospércs there was only 0.8 (!!!) vacant job for 100 unemployed in the last month of 1998). The communal work programmes lasting for a longer time (generally several years) are not very popular, although some of them do function (like road-building or protection against inland water). There are several reasons to explain the moderate interest. The most important one is that the local governments, who launch communal work programmes have to provide their own share of the cost, besides the assistance of the state. Further retaining forces are the difficulties regarding applications and the fact that a larger number of workers have to be employed in communal work programmes. This is impossible to be carried out in small settlements, the only opportunity for them is to co-operate. However, in many cases co-operation does not take place even if there are real common interests. There is a great need for co-operation, as it is still insufficient in itself to solve the serious problems of the lack of jobs.

4.3 Prejudices or reality? – The role and opportunities of the Gypsy ethnic group on the labour market

If we talk about the problems of the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands, the role of *Gypsy ethnic group* in this area and the chance to eliminate the present conflicts should be considered. The proportion of the ethnic group of Gypsies is about 10% (there is no accurate data available from any sources), but there are settlements where this rate reaches 30-40%.

For this reason, it is not a question of secondary importance what kind of role they have on the labour market in the region. The general situation is that 70-80% of the ethnic group of Gypsies is permanently pushed out from the legal labour market and there is extremely low chance for them to get back. *They represent 70-80% of the long term unemployed, and according to estimations they represent the majority among hidden unemployed as well.*

The current situation has many reasons. The most evident reason becomes clear immediately as we *analyse the qualification of the ethnic group of Gypsies*. The level of their qualification showed by the data is distressing, and mostly this is the reason why both countries have worse figures compared to the national average, if we look at the rate of people having completed 8 years of primary school (or less than that). The situation is not different in the analysed area, either, moreover, it is even worse according to the data. For these reason, the catching up courses for the ethnic group of Gypsies are of vital importance, providing the chance to finish primary school and to continue their studies and become a skilled worker.

However, experiences are very contradictory. The Gypsies are generally not very happy about going to school. In Berettyóújfalu almost all these efforts ended up in failure, and in the region of Mátészalka it was hard to keep the four groups together. In Vámospércs the catching up courses were supposed to be organised together with the minority government. The training should have been connected with communal work (four days of work, one day training) to provide the opportunity for participants to earn some money. The programme, however, did not even start, due to the lack of interest, since none of the possible participants undertook to complete the basic knowledge test. In 1996, HAJDÚBÉT organised a course for 250 people in Kisvárdá, which was supposed to provide a job for the participants. 60% of them belonged to the ethnic group of Gypsies. Only a few people gave up during the training, but 70 of them have already left the company until now. However, in other cases a positive attitude can be observed. In the region of Csenger, numerous courses have been completed successfully and some participants have received excellent vocational school reports. To sum up the facts, there is still a lot to do, since it is difficult to mobilise the Gypsy ethnic group because of the rather insufficient level of qualification.

The success regarding the general level of qualification is strongly questioned by the fact that large masses of Gypsies live in miserable conditions, often in unbelievable housing and hygienic circumstances. In addition, practically all these families are concerned by unemployment, so in many cases they cannot finance the education of their children even if there is a will. Accordingly, it is extremely important to continue the catching up courses for Gypsies, because the successfully completed training can provide a positive motivation for those who have not participated yet, especially in the case of small villages. It is worth to support initiatives that seem useless at this moment (in Fehérgyarmat agricultural subjects

are included in the courses), since this is one way to find other job opportunities for Gypsies besides communal work.

The other problem that is often debated is connected to the *working moral of the Gypsy ethnic group* and the prejudices related to that. There is no correct answer in this question either, since the experiences are diverse among the areas, however, negative examples represent the greater part. In almost all areas there are problems with the quality and the speed of work they complete. In Vámospércs it was almost impossible to find anybody for an afforestation programme, since it was “easier to find an excuse”. It was also typical that even those people stayed away, whose title for the income substitution benefit has almost expired, and they still did not have the necessary period of employment to get the assistance for the next two years. On the other hand, during the 1998 flood of the River Tisza, the Gypsy ethnic group took a definitely larger part in the fortification of the dams compared to the other residents who showed their medical excuses, and there was no problem with the quality of the work, either.

The question could be raised why they stay away from the communal work after they completed the obligatory 180 days of employment. This is the attitude everywhere, moreover, it has happened that they arbitrarily left work in progress as soon as they had completed the obligatory period. The answer is very simple: “extra” work is not their own interest. The minimum wage and the period of employment are not attractive enough in comparison to the social and child care benefits that can be acquired without any work (this is also shown by the fact that they prefer taking part in communal work programmes to public utility work, as the first pays better). It can be observed everywhere that they count on these benefits. The same can be stated about the continuous calculations that they make, according to which they would lose much if they took minimum wage jobs. That is why they rather undertake to bring up as many children as possible (usually three or four), since they can live on the child care benefit this way (nevertheless, it is another question how much money will be left for the education of these children).

For this reason, many people see the question of providing support for the Gypsy ethnic group like a never-ending problem that just takes a lot of money and always returns. On the other hand, we must not forget about the *negative preconception and discrimination against them that does occur on the labour market* (although it is true that this is only expressed in words by employers towards the labour agencies). All the talented and diligent Gypsies are confronted with the same difficulties because of this generalisation, and in most cases only communal and public utility works give the chance to find a job for them. It is not their fault in all cases when they leave these jobs immediately after they have worked for 180 days. The sources available are limited so much that in many cases there is no chance to work any longer, since the local authorities would like to employ as many people as they can who are threatened by getting out of the

income substitution network. Accordingly, *there is no chance to break through in a lot of settlements, and it becomes obvious to base the everyday living on benefits.*

The picture outlined above is very complex and is not without contradictions, either. The main reason for this is that the Gypsies have the same characteristics themselves: *there is a difference between Gypsy and Gypsy.* Their attitude to work is basically influenced by the social background that strongly depends on geographical location, historical traditions and the intelligence of Gypsies living in that region. There is a huge difference between hovel and Wallachian Gypsies. While the former do not pay too much attention to their housing conditions, hygiene and their children's education, the latter, on the other hand, live in tidy circumstances and considering the distant future they send their children to vocational or secondary school. They certainly do not rely only on social benefits and they are not in the need, either. They run businesses and have no aversion to agriculture. Consequently, they can easily adapt to the local society (in many settlements mixed marriages occur), they do not increase crime at all, and the danger of ethnic conflicts is not too high, either. The only problem is that their example has a positive influence on the whole Gypsy ethnic group only in a few cases.

4.4 Is it hopeless? – The case of the long-term unemployed

The large number and share of long term unemployed causes similarly serious problems in the area examined. The current situation is a natural consequence of the fact that the number of unemployed significantly increased very early all along the eastern borderline and high unemployment became stable, despite some cases of decrease (the reasons have been mentioned before several times). According to the time passed since the first registration, the share of those being unemployed for more than two years is extremely high even compared to the county average, and this is especially true for isolated borderland settlements without job opportunities. *The share of this group exceeds the rather unfavourable figures of the counties in all the districts (Hajdú-Bihar: 68.2%, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg: 73.8). The most favourable figure refers to Berettyóújfalu (68.7%) and the least favourable to Nyírbátor (78.3).* Even more striking is the fact that regarding 8 out of 11 local offices, the ratio is 75% or more. The serious nature of the problem is reflected by the answer given by local office leader to the question how much the share of the long term unemployment could be: "Why, are there any unemployed who are not long term unemployed?" The basic reason for such an answer could be that the notion that the criterion of long term unemployment is not continuity above all, as the unemployed sent to do communal work from time to time does not return to the labour market in reality – he remains the same as he was.

Currently it seems that in the case of long term unemployed – although there are special programmes and supports to for them to find a job – the actions taken are rather spontaneous and the real solution is yet to be found. *The most long term unemployed* (having exhausted the period of being entitled for unemployment benefit) *can only receive income substitution* if the relevant conditions are given. *The longer the period of unemployment is, the higher the ratio of unemployed entitled for income substitution will be* and it is no wonder that the figures of the borderlands exceed the average of the counties (Hajdú-Bihar: 49%, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg: 48.3%). However, the most important problem is not this one, but the one that the ratio of unemployed entitled for income substitution is lower than the ratio of long term unemployed. At the same time, the benefit is only paid after the two-year-long period of entitlement if the unemployed was officially employed for 180 days during the period of entitlement. Due to their unfavourable education – more than the half of the unemployed belong to the group of Gypsies, the ratio of those of low education exceeds the county averages (Hajdú-Bihar: 49%, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg: 49.8%) and the situation is very much unfavourable compared to all the registered unemployed – and their age characteristics (the ratio of older generations unable to get a job is higher), the employment required can only be obtained in the form of communal work, as the demand for them is very low, despite the supports. Nevertheless, these programmes can employ less people than the demand for jobs is. This way it is likely that many people are excluded from the supply system, however, the local employment offices and the local governments try to employ the most critical unemployed. Women are still in a disadvantageous situation, as because of the features of communal work it is more difficult to find a solution for their unemployment.

Many have written about the negative impact of long term unemployment on the individual and on the society many times. In this study only the most serious effects on the individual will be analysed. *The sense of being neglected and redundant* leads to abnormal introvertality in many cases and carry many towards some kind of addiction. As a result of long-term unemployment, *the deterioration of the person begins – both in the mental and the physical sense*. The professional skills acquired become outdated in a short time and for this reason the creation of new workplaces does not solve the problem, as the professional skills of these people would not be competitive any more. Accordingly, they do not have a chance to find a job and do not have prospects, either. Their only goal can be to stay in the supply system, which provides some means of subsistence for them.

The *“frameworks of survival”* are very limited in most of the cases. The broadest opportunities are provided by the summer and autumn months, because one those who are physically fit for the job can work in the whole season as a day-

worker. Nevertheless even this chance is limited in the area of Komádi, due to poverty and the lack of capital. Day-work is usually done illegally in general, but the employees identity card just introduced is expected to help to legalise this. Besides casual work, it is household farming that provides some means to survive, but in itself it is not enough for subsistence. In addition, this form does not exist among the Gypsy population as it has no traditions (although there are attempts to introduce it).

In addition, fuel smuggling and rucksack trade have traditions along the border to supplement incomes, but these opportunities are not available for all the long term unemployed – partly as it is impossible to cross the borders in many places. The most general tool to survive is to reduce the level of demand and to adjust the living standard to the income everywhere. Nevertheless, this is a harmful tendency for the whole society as it spreads the lack of quality demand and poverty further in the areas most affected by these problems.

There is no answer to the question that refers to the *ratio of hidden unemployment in the area examined*, however, it is not a negligible issue. These are the people who got out of the databases of local employment offices (and from the supply system also) or have never been part of it. Due to the lack of registration it is basically hopeless to find a job for them and it is unknown if they have ever been employed (housewives, people with reduced ability to work, etc.). Their number cannot be properly estimated and only cautious estimates can be given, based on surveys concerning this question. Based on the estimates of the local offices, they would increase the unemployment rate by 5-20%. Their ratio is especially high in isolated settlements with large Gypsy population and it is low (Nyírbátor) where job opportunities can only be reached through the employment offices – and people are aware of this. Some even question if they can be regarded as unemployed as in their case, besides registration, the search for job opportunities is also missing from the criteria. The problem still exists even if these narrow-minded people are not aware of it.

To sum up, the large number of long term unemployed and the connected problems are not smaller problems than the above mentioned problems of the Gypsies. The chances to solve them are just as much limited. It is generally known that the actions taken are enough to maintain the current situation in the best case, but they are unable to improve it. The problems of the long term unemployed can be hardly solved until the present tensions of the labour market are decreased to a satisfactory level. Nevertheless, long term unemployed can only expect more serious chances to find a job if they change their attitude significantly – concerning the search for jobs above all.

4.5 An uncertain vision of the future – chances and limits of development

The results of the survey do not provide a reason to be satisfied. *If the current tendencies remain unchanged, the whole area examined is threatened by dropping even more behind from the more developed regions of the country.* To avoid this, immediate action should be taken, because the permanent crisis of the eastern part questions the development of the whole country. There is a lot to do. However, it appeared in the last decade that chances are very limited, as the problems have not been solved and they have not even been significantly reduced. A reason for this can partially be the approach which treated unemployment as the problem of a certain group of the society (namely the problem of unemployed) and did not consider the broader context. This way of thinking has not changed much until now and the labour organisation does not have the adequate means at its disposal.

Nevertheless, the problems are so complex and far-reaching that that even a labour organisation with enough workforce would not be able to treat them properly. It is the elimination of the unfavourable conditions first of all that leads to the reduction of unemployment to the satisfactory level, which demands large-scale co-operation, government support and financial resources to develop the region. *For any kind of step forward, so as to reduce the current unemployment, it is inevitable to prepare a complex development programme for the borderland area, to create the academic basis for possible directions of development, to identify the points to break through and to define the chances to catch up (B. Baranyi 1999).*

5 Possible directions to develop the borderlands and the chances of catching up

5.1 Development of the borderlands in the regional context

The most important condition for all kinds of development concepts regarding the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands is to enable the North-Eastern Great Plain planning-statistical region in the broad sense (or the self-organising six counties in the north-east) to catch up with the more developed regions of the country and enable the area to play the role of an international bridge. The development objectives to be prepared and accepted and the development programmes based on these should comply with this double endeavour. It is obvious now that the own resources of the region are not enough either to eliminate the serious economic and societal problems of the region including the borderlands or to improve the region. For this reason, development should be based on the mobilisation of own resources to the maximum and on external support (government and EU) at the same time. According to the heterogeneous features of the region, development is possible only in a differentiated way. The territories with different conditions should set different goals for themselves, as the need for crisis management and dynamisation of the economy occur simultaneously.

The most developed cities should draw nearer to other cities in the country, whereas the peripheral, rural areas and their population should strive to reach the living standard of other rural areas of the country, and the first step for the borderlands should be to catch up with the inner, more developed areas and settlements of the counties concerned. The main objective for the areas in a permanent crisis is *to stop the socio-economic erosion and create the conditions for catching up*. These differentiated development needs demand special programmes. With the achievement of these goals, the differences in development may be reduced within the region of the northern Great Plain and possibly in not so long time the “periphery of the periphery” situation can be eliminated in the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands.

The development of the region cannot be based on preserving the current socio-economic structures. The basic condition for development is the *qualitative restructuring of the economy*, as drawing nearer to the national average is only possible by exceeding the average growth. The conditions for qualitative change and for gradual catching up can be provided by a stable economic growth strengthened by external support. This economic growth should be based on exploiting the most important features of the region, namely *the advantages of the borderlands and the chances of improving cross-border relations above all*.

Accordingly, the main focus of all development activities is *the improvement of conditions for economic development*, the creation of an internationally *competitive regional economy*, *exploitation of the opportunities deriving from the international transit role of the area*. Besides these, it is also a very important condition that more emphasis should be put on the development of rural, “periphery of the periphery” areas.

No doubt that the development of the northern Great Plain would be hindered in the future if the crisis of these areas deepened. For this reason, besides the actions fostering economic growth, the more efficient crisis management regarding the extremely disadvantageous regions should be in the focus. This should be considered especially in the case of borderland settlements, where further crisis management actions should be prepared to treat the problems of the long term unemployed population with low education.

Beyond the importance of finding a solution to the problems of the population living in extremely disadvantageous areas, *the main focus of mid-term and long term objectives should be setting the economy on the growth path* instead of crisis management. Parallel with the development of the economy, the growing own resources make more effective crisis management possible. The development of the region and improvement of the living standards should take place *by preserving the complex environmental potential of the area*. The North-Eastern Great Plain borderline still has natural values in large amounts, most of which are already absent in the developed countries. Developments should contribute to the preservation and improvement of the environment, in accordance with the reduction of exhausting the environmental potential, elimination of former damages and prevention of future damages to the environment.

Accordingly, the following development priorities can be specified for the region of the Northern Great Plain:

- To foster the competitiveness of the economy.
- To strengthen and to exploit the east-west bridge role, to develop the so-called gate function (Záhony, Berettyóújfalu-Biharkeresztes).
- Qualitative, market economy oriented development of the present knowledge basis.
- To create job opportunities.
- To implement an environmentally conscious rural development.
- To provide the conditions for a quality life for the residents of the region.

For the development of the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands it is the second objective from the priorities for the whole region that is especially

important, namely the one that refers to *strengthening and exploiting the east-west bridge role of the region*. To comply with this objective, the following should be considered:

- To develop the international and national traffic network and infrastructure in order to make it easier to reach the region both from inside and outside.
- To improve the business infrastructure of international (transit) trade.
- To improve the training background of international economic relations, to initiate international training co-operation.
- To foster cross-border business co-operation.
- To initiate interregional co-operation and organisations.
- To prepare the region for EU accession.
- To preserve and develop the Regional Ecology Network.

Cross-border co-operations are of special importance for regions with such a long borderline and directly bordering two countries. The connecting function of the borderlands is not only definitive for the economy and the transit traffic but also for cultural, civil and inter-ethnic relations, although the territories beyond the border are mostly inhabited by Hungarians, the daily contact with whom is also a significant task. Not to mention that before the EU accession and rather following that, Hungary has to take responsibility to initiate and finance cross-border socio-economic relations, as *the moral and financial support of cross-border relations enjoy priority in the EU*.

Following the EU accession, the bridge role of Hungary and especially *North-Eastern Hungary* towards the neighbouring countries in the field of information flow, capital movements and cultural relations is expected to increase. The transfer role – beyond responsibility – includes serious market and business opportunities. To exploit business opportunities deriving from the transit role, the region itself has to develop in the fields of traffic conditions and other infrastructure responsible for business relations, first of all as regards *internal and external accessibility, international, national and connected local traffic networks and infrastructure*.

In order to exploit efficiently the opportunities provided by *economic and other transit roles, the development* and building of interregional relations is *needed*, within the *frames of the Carpathian Euroregion* above all, which operates rather formally nowadays.

Finally, it is also an important short term and mid-term task that the organisations of the region become familiar with the completion and finance of cross-border co-operations, this way they will be able to obtain and utilise the current PHARE CBC and the forthcoming EU funds in the most efficient way and to utilise these funds for the benefit of their own region and the partner regions as well. The following forms are the possibilities to promote interregional co-operation.

5.2 Future chances for the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands

The following SWOT analysis includes a systematic summary from a strategic viewpoint, based on the information acquired from the survey on the Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg borderlands. Within the SWOT analysis, the characteristics of the micro-region of the borderlands, including *strengths and weaknesses*, as well as the present and future effects of external factors (macro-economic trends, relations between countries, measures on the national scale) have been considered, together with *opportunities and threats*. The outcome of the SWOT analysis represents a basis for any kind of further development concept. The SWOT analysis supports the classification, selection and maintenance of the large amount of information coming from the original analysis, and on the other hand, it can help the concept making process, as it helps to choose the right directions of strategic development.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Borderland situation, favourable geo-political position. • Border crossings already exist. • Significant transfer capacity of the Záhony Business Zone. • Existing East-West international bridge role. • The regional influence of Debrecen and Nyíregyháza strengthens. • The establishment of the Bihar Business Zone (and Industrial Park). • Certain territories of the region have favourable natural and tourism conditions (eco-tourism). • Unpolluted environment. • The region has diverse conditions regarding agricultural production and numerous unique products of agriculture connected to the region. • The broader region has considerable free capacities of (traditional) energy. Important main national and international pipelines cross the region. • Large number of cheap workforce, low wage costs. • Rich natural and ecological conditions. • The region is rich in ethnographic and historic traditions, values and sights of interest. • A relatively balanced demographic situation. • Present and developing Hungarian-Hungarian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unfavourable soil conditions. • Danger of floods and inland waters, drought. • Unfavourable age composition of the population. • Fragmented settlement network. • Weak integration of the former stump counties. • “Periphery of the peripheries”, extended internal and external peripheral territories. • Underdeveloped public infrastructure, traffic isolation. • Lack of capital, low interest of western capital. • Innovation waves stop in the centres. • Small amount of business capital for starting new businesses and for new investments. • Lack of entrepreneurial attitude. • Lack of modern traffic infrastructure, bad conditions of present connections. • Unemployment rate is critical. • High rate of Gypsy ethnic group under extremely disadvantageous conditions. • Low ability to keep the population in the region, experts with high qualification move away. • No economic, societal and cultural traditions of regional co-operation are given, weak intention to co-operate. • Generally low standard of technology.

inter-ethnic relations.	
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small cities and their close neighbourhood find each other and co-operate. • Open borders. • Eastern markets become more lively. • Raw materials from the East are processed. • The bridge role is realised and logistic centres are built. • Accession to the EU (PHARE, CBC, EU and other resources). • Considerate, well-prepared central development. • Carpathian Euroregion. • EURO-ATLANTIC accession of the country (Schengen border protection, EU border region, NATO membership, etc.). • Pre-accession funds available from 2000, Structural Funds available from the accession for regional and economic development. • Enlargement and modernisation of existent border crossings, opening of new ones. • Growing demand for national and international tourism. • Increasing demand for unique, region-specific products of agriculture (so called Hungaricums). • Increasing international transit trade and transport of goods. • Rich natural, historic, ethnographic and inter-ethnic traditions. • Increasing interest of investors towards north-eastern Hungary as a target region of investments. • Stronger socio-economic relations to Romania and Ukraine. • Stronger role of business zones (Záhony, Berettyóújfalu-Biharkeresztes). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The dividing role of borders is preserved (international relations stiffen). • Underdeveloped infrastructural conditions are conserved. • Territories unable to connect to traffic corridors fall behind. • Population moves away permanently. • Low education, marginalisation of a part of society. • Deepening unemployment crisis. • Strong degradation of the natural environment. • Logistic centres leading to the South and the East are built in neighbouring countries. • Low lobby power of the region. • Further falling behind of the borderlands, “periphery of the peripheries” situation worsens. • Due to inappropriate preparations for EU accession and establishment of a broader region, the area might get into an unfavourable competition position regarding applications for domestic and EU development grants. • Utilisation of government and EU grants directed to the region in the future (financial resources) will not be concentrated and efficient. • Social crisis deepens, unemployment increases. • Development of the highway number 4 will not be realised. • After the accession, the implementation of EU agriculture policies will result in a crisis in the region. • Socio-economic crisis deepens continuously and becomes permanent in CIS countries.

When a development strategy is being outlined for extremely disadvantageous, peripheral areas, including the *North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands*, the starting point should be that on one hand, the *elimination of spatial disadvantages* depends on the *performance* (the ability for regeneration and to create public consensus) of *the local market economy and society* organised by the local governments. On the other hand, it depends on the ability to mobilise the local potentials and mostly it is influenced by the changes of macro-societal and macro-economic conditions. For

the most important *infrastructural developments* (telecommunications, traffic, energy, development of communal services), which are inevitable for the self-development of the region, as well as *to support job creating enterprises, financial resources* (capital) and *additional resources are necessary*. To raise funds like these, different state funds, resources won by applications, programmes of the EU, PHARE CBC, SAPARD, ISPA, the resources available with the help of regional development councils of the counties, etc., can be of help.

It is impossible influence macro-economic conditions from the micro-regional level. The national economic environment is created by the changes of the economy, the legal conditions and the institutions of market economy have mostly been developed (privatisation, restructuring of land ownership, taxation system, the large-scale independence in financing the maintenance of settlements and the new role of local governments, the organisational and structural changes of economy, etc.).

When *the local and additional* (external, state and other programmes, won by applications), development resources are utilised, the following should be taken into consideration *both in the short and the long run*:

- *creation of jobs*, restructuring of employment conditions, retraining courses, with special regard to unemployed caused by the restructuring of industry and agriculture, in order to increase the employment chances of young people;
- *operation of targeted employment programmes* on the labour market for *backward groups*, in co-operation with local labour organisations;
- *complex activities to support entrepreneurs*, mostly by supporting small businesses in agriculture and family businesses;
- *restructuring of the production structure*, with special regard to the establishment of local and regional agricultural processing industries;
- *development of the technical infrastructure* at least up to the level of the national average, first of all in the fields of *energy supply, telecommunications, traffic network, canalisation and sewage treatment*, the development of quality and quantity figures;
- *development of road networks in the central areas and at the outskirts*, to remove dust, construct new junctions, introduce modern, energy-saving street lighting and other communal investments (e.g. to construct the drinking water network of the outskirts);
- *establishment of waste dumps for household and communal waste* and waste processing;
- *supplementation of human infrastructure*, provision of the operational conditions of the basic supply regarding health care, first of all for the small places, improvement of their technical conditions, launching of social crisis management programmes and enlargement of old age homes;

- completion of classroom construction programmes in order to improve human resources, the creation and development of the *basis for secondary education* (secondary schools and/or vocational schools);
- exploitation of the local characteristics in order *to improve tourism, to develop countryside (eco) tourism*;
- *development of cross-border relations* and improvement of the conditions in the regions bordering Ukraine and Romania – e.g. by the enlargement of the already existing border crossings (Csengersima, Ártánd, Nyírábrány) and by the modernisation and opening of new ones (Létavértes, Nyírbátor, maybe Komádi).

The most important objective for the borderland settlements – considering the demand they have phrased – *is the intensive development of local and network infrastructure*. This would facilitate large-scale economic development in itself, which would result in a significant demand for workforce in the region. The development of *network and local infrastructure* should be considered in the first place in the future by managers of separated state funds, by experts making decisions about *targeted and addressed support* and the county regional development support supplementing the own resources. From the pressing tasks in these fields, *the improvement of infrastructure and supporting entrepreneurship* cannot be postponed in the borderland settlements in the long, medium and short run.

The development of the disadvantageous region, rather left to its own devices, can only be successful with the appropriate programmes, the increased utilisation of local resources and the financial support of the government and the regional development councils of the counties. *The prosperity of businesses and the reduction of unemployment can only be expected if the appropriate infrastructure is built and the appropriate system of regional preferences are set in order to attract external (Hungarian and foreign) capital*. Still it is impossible to realise a large-scale development plan immediately even if the financial conditions are given. It is inevitable to classify tasks by their *importance* and prepare a *time schedule of improvements*.

During the search for strategic points of break through in rural or regional development, the directions and tasks of development can be classified in the following four groups:

- a) *infrastructural supply*, overall improvement of technical and human infrastructure, reconstruction, modernisation and development, in order to increase investors' and entrepreneurs' activities above all (gas, road, telephone, sewage, public lighting, transport and storage of communal waste, secondary education and special training in micro-regions, creation and enlargement of social homes for old-aged, elimination of traffic isolation,

improvement of road networks in micro-regions and central areas, creation of new junctions, development and opening of new border crossings, etc.). The geo-political isolation of the micro-region would be much reduced by opening the border crossing at Létavértes.

- b) *Investments facilitating businesses and reducing employment problems*, with special regard to businesses in agriculture, the promotion of quality co-operations, establishment of local or regional processing industry (processing horse-radish, fruits, vegetables, tobacco, pickling firms, dairy and meat processing, etc.), creation and development of the conditions for *rural tourism* considering *special natural features* of deserted, forested, grove lands of the Upper-Tisza region. Besides increasing the number of businesses in agriculture and food processing industry, divisions of the *manufacturing industry* should be attracted to the region as well.
- c) The future of a settlement or a region is strongly determined by the scale and quality of *local human resources*. For this reason, the creation, stabilisation and modernisation of the conditions required for secondary education should be targeted.
- d) *Cross-border economic relations should be promoted* by improving the *Záhony Region Business Zone, Bihar Business Zone* and the connected industrial and innovation centres and other projects, also, the possibility to establish a new business zone should be studied (e.g. in Csenger).

As it appears from the above mentioned, given the current economic conditions, the *linking of the actors of the market within the region* and the *building of economic relations outside the region* should be the main focus of all actors of the economy. The most serious socio-economic problem of the region is the *employment crisis*, almost out of control and the chronic *long term unemployment*. As traditionally the *dominance of agriculture* was typical for the region, and it is agriculture that made borderland settlements face difficulties after the “restructuring” of ownership and production, the solution should be found in this same field. It implies that *besides economic interests, agriculture*, the local agricultural sector, together with the local government should *take certain social responsibility*, should play a *social role* within the field of social policy. The solution is only possible if *micro-regions join complex national and regional programmes*. *Local governments should find a solution* considering social responsibility, they *have to co-operate in national programmes* and *have to utilise support to the maximum*. It is a significant reserve of the employment policies of local governments in the agricultural areas in the borderlands that agriculture can play a significant role *in finding a job for undereducated, immobile workforce, also for a certain part of the populous group of Gypsies*.

Due to the general economic recession, permanent lack of capital, and the connected lack of information, knowledge, market and assets, the economic development and employment expansion activities of the borderland local authorities cannot be limited to the territory of the given micro-region or settlement. The precondition for more effective actions is a strong and continuous co-operation of local authorities at micro- and macro-regional, association, planning-statistical district and regional level. The basis for the economic, employment and regional development of a region can be that the associated local authorities "share" the sectors to be developed and development potentials among each other, considering the characteristics and limits of the given settlement. The core idea is that plans and projects should be worked out built on and facilitating each other, giving up local interests in some cases, so that the development of other, extremely disadvantageous settlements in the closer or distant neighbourhood can take place.

A possible form of co-operation among regional and micro-regional authorities can be setting up *business development agencies* in the regional centres, with the main tasks to *organise markets* (internal, external market), to *organise co-operations* (among individual farmers, among production and sales co-operatives and individual farmers, among co-operatives, producers of similar products, supplier possibilities inside and outside the region, etc.), to *manage applications and subsidies* (application consulting, in order to increase mobility of domestic, EU, PHARE, SAPARD, and lately ISPA development resources and to exploit CBC-connections better), to *build relations between entrepreneurs of the region and local authorities*, to *build out an active regional marketing*, and last but not least to *improve cross-border, multilateral relations and co-operations* among settlements on both sides of the border.

Finally, it is clear that *agriculture* with its low demand of capital investment *can be a break through possibility* to eliminate unemployment difficulties in the large agricultural areas of Hungary, including the strongly rural territories of the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands. However, it should be pointed out that *agriculture in itself cannot be the sole force to dynamise the economy of the region, its role is stabilisation and bearing the burdens in the sense that it provides market for the local workforce, raw materials for the regional processing industry and cheap food for the population. It takes a proportionate share from social burdens (e.g. protection of the environment) and the solution of social difficulties.* The definition of the distinguished role and responsibility of agriculture in itself is not enough. All the initiatives starting from here can be efficient only if the regional industrial and service sector will be able to improve their *insufficient role* of today. An increase in any sector implies development in the others as well, which has a *generating effect on the whole economy.*

A regional development programme assisting catching up can only be successful with the *appropriate subsidies.* Considering the current situation, it is

absolutely sure that without the appropriate central (government) or other external *subsidies*, the situation of the North-Eastern Great Plain borderlands is hopeless, and the falling behind of the borderlands can be even more serious compared to the central and western parts of Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties. Accordingly, it should also be considered that if *the majority of the neighbouring countries do not become members of the EU at the same time or not so much after the accession of Hungary, the division role of the borders will become stronger again – at least temporarily – due to the Schengen Agreement, as if the “iron curtain” was pulled to the East. This would be very harmful for Central-Europe and the Hungarians living there. For this reason, the objective should be set to achieve favourable terms with the EU, reducing the negative effects on ethnic Hungarians living beyond the borders of the mother country to the possible minimum. For this the historic reconciliation quoted so many times would be necessary, so that the past should not poison the present and the future of Central Eastern Europe any more. In this case the presence of the borders would not be important and the Scandinavian model of living together could also work here.*

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