The Boundaries of the Carpathian Basin – Frontiers and Regions

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Abstract. The Carpathian Basin (or Pannonian Basin) is the south-eastern part of Central Europe, its geopolitical place being defined by geography (it is placed between the Eastern Alps, the Dinaric Alps, and the Carpathian Mountains) and from historical point of view by the fact that its core region was ruled for many centuries by the Hungarian Kingdom and the Habsburg Monarchy, and the neighbouring states aimed to extend their territories in the basin reducing the central role of the basin from the margins. The changes of the spatial domination in the Carpathian Basin created several centre–periphery relations, which established, through a *longue durée*, specific social features in some border regions of the Carpathian Basin. This paper examines from the viewpoint of limology (border studies) three frontier regions of the basin, Spiš, Székely Land, and Banat, and investigates the historical process of the regional construction in order to ascertain what circumstances helped or blocked these periphery constructions.

Keywords: frontiers, regions in the Carpathian Basin, historical peripheries, Spiš, Székely Land, Banat.

1. Introduction

The following paper examines the border regions of the Carpathian (or Pannonian) Basin and its regional structure from some points of view provided by limology (border studies) and geopolitics. The main interpretive framework in this study is provided by (1) frontier research (part of border studies) and (2) the socio-geographical process of region formation modelled by Anssi Paasi.

My initial hypotheses are:

(a) The Carpathian Basin is a kind of geopolitically meaningful 'unit' within Central and Eastern Europe, the boundaries of which can be examined as frontiers.

(b) One of the characteristic features of this 'unit' is that its adaptability is given by the regions that have been created by institutionalizing the frontier.

The analysis compares the process of individualization and institutionalization of three border regions in the Carpathian/Pannonian Basin (Spiš/Szepesség, Székely Land/Székelyföld, and Banat/Bánság) and tries to formulate some conclusions based on it.

2. Boundary Productions, Conceptions of the Frontier and the Borderland

2.1. Concepts and Frames in Limology

The issue of borders has long been addressed in political geography. From the 1990s, *border studies* (limology) became an independent field of research on the interface between geography (including human geography) and regional sciences. As a result of these research studies, the *political border* (of which the demarcating, line-like concept used to be decisive) was transformed, expanded, and supplemented by the examination of cross-borderness and border areas (see Hardi 2015: 34–36). At this turning point, the issue became related to another research tradition that kept the *frontiers* of civilization in focus.

The interdisciplinary study of the frontiers dates back to the mid-1970s, when the study of the frontiers began to reflect in the social sciences, political sciences, and the theory of international relations alike. From all these emerged a 'new political geography, renovated and more analytically rigorous than its predecessor' (Kolossov 2005: 607).

The examination of the historical dimension became more and more important – Kolossov (2005: 619) quoted French philosopher O. Marcard in this regard, who said that borders are 'scars of history'.

As a result, the question of the border was linked more and more to the question of identity, or, as Kolossov stated (2005: 615): 'Territorial boundaries are one of the major elements of ethnic and political identity.' What is more, cultural boundaries (based on identity) can preserve themselves for a *longue durée*, and so 'boundaries which existed in the remote past can usually be easily found in the cultural and political landscape, and sometimes even remain quite visible in the physical landscape' (Kolossov 2005: 619–620).

From the 1980s onwards, we can also talk about a postmodern turn in border studies (limology). The essence of this turn: the concept of the border was extended to several issues examined by sociology and anthropology, such as the dynamics of

social groups and the transformation of identity communities (see Ilyés 2004). Thus, for example, the 'sociology of flow' has emerged, which examines the flow of people, goods, capital, knowledge, information, or ideas based on a *new frontier paradigm*, providing entirely new, fruitful thematic opportunities for social science research.

The new frontier/boundary paradigm could have – according to Böröcz (2002) – a good starting point in Georg Simmel's 1909 essay *Bridge and Door*. As Simmel (1909) stated, the metaphor of 'bridge' signifies the 'will to be connected', and its supplement is the metaphor of 'door'. The door 'demonstrates in a decisive fashion how separating and connecting are only two faces of one and the same action'.

Interpreting Simmel, the social meaning of the bridge metaphor is 'attraction, connection, unification', and its complement, the 'door', has two states on the bridge, closed or open, by which a power controls the flows between 'outside' and 'inside'.

The boundary is thus – as Böröcz (2002: 135) resumed – 'a bridge equipped with doors', which makes a wide range of conditional social exclusion and admission mechanisms interpretable in this way.

Projecting all this back to the notion of the classical political boundary, it can also be defined as 'the totality of points where a society introduces and/or relaxes the technologies of disjoining which are disposable for state sovereignty'[1] (Böröcz 2002: 134).

Around this extended interpretation of the concept of state border, a diverse field for scientific research emerged in the 1990s. Although the state-centric conception of the state border has remained, questions have also emerged that examine the participation of other non-state actors in 'boundary producing', which means the related practices and discourse of these actors. In this line, 'boundaries [are] not merely static lines but as sets of practices and discourses which are "spread" into the whole society, not merely to the border areas' (Paasi 1999: 676–678).

In political geography, two boundary concepts have become commonly known: a) the notion of *boundary* focuses on the line-like concept of classical political geography (emphasizing the separating function); b) the concept of *frontier*, somehow on the contrary, means a moving edge zone, a buffer zone, a moving lane of spatially advancing processes. The anthropological-sociological turn outlined above has rewritten these two concepts/types and presents them as complementary.

2.2. Frontier and Region

According to Kocsis (2004: 23), the *frontier* is 'a political-geographical zone that lies behind the integrated territory of a political unit (state) and separates it from other, non-integrated, non-civilized territories. It is also called the edge of a civilization where that civilization comes into contact with an area not yet influenced by it.'[2]

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1   Translated by the author.
2   Translated by the author

Kristof (1959: 270) and then Houtum and Lacy (2017: 1) considered that while the boundary is a manifestation of the state's 'centripetal forces', the frontier is not 'the imprint of a political project's claim over space but a phenomenon of the "facts of life"', that is an indicator of the social changes.

Consequently, the changes described by the *frontier* as the move, the drift of a geographical edge can be very diverse.

The first, 'founding' sense of this term was given by Turner (1893), who describes the 'American frontier' as the shaping effect of the expansion of American society to the west, at the 'meeting point between savagery and civilization'. According to Turner, 'the American frontier lies at the hither edge of free land (…) in the census reports it is treated as the margin of that settlement which has a density of two or more to the square mile'. This frontier belt includes the Indian country and the outer margin of the settled area, shown by the census reports. Concluding the importance of this edge, he considered that 'the true point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West' (Turner 1893).

So, the western front of the United States was an uninhabited, westward-moving lane whose way of social possession defined American identity and the model of American democracy.

There are three defining features of the movement of this edge: a) egalitarianism; b) lack of interest in high culture (a 'practical, inventive turn of mind', a 'masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic'); c) violence (Turner 1893).

Consequently, American democracy was not formed as a dream (ideology) of theorizing philosophers but deep in the American forests, shaped not by some higher culture but by 'rugged individualism' (Houtum–Lacy 2017: 3). The 'frontier' – in its Turnerian understanding – can thus create a specific social structure and a kind of community identity.

From this point, the term *frontier* has been applied to very different civilizational situations. In the case of the Brazilian Amazonas Basin of Rondônia (member state of Brazil), the Turner model was used as a basis for examining the difference between the first and second generations of pioneers by examining on the basis of three thesis the generational change (Browder et al. 2008). These are: a) the thesis of capitalist penetration, b) the thesis of intersectoral articulation, and c) the thesis of the household life cycle.

With regard to the Central and Eastern European region, Karácsonyi (2008) compared the American 'frontier' with the Great Hungarian Plain and the Ukrainian steppe; the peculiarity of the latter two is given by the fact that here the concept of frontier is connected with the question of peripheries. It was recognized here that the border regions from the age of feudalism also functioned as *frontiers*, but – unlike the frontiers of classical (essentially capitalist) colonization – integration took place slowly, less spectacularly (Beluszki 2001, Karácsonyi 2008: 187). The historical *longue durée*, on the other hand, conserved and institutionalized specific

life forms in frontier areas, where these forms get stuck. Among these, we find, for example, the Székely Land, institutionalized as a territorial-political unit following the frontier March system of the Árpád dynasty era or the Cossack border region along the Dnieper.

According to O'Reilly (2018), the Central and Eastern European frontier, which developed in the Habsburg Empire and then survived in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy for some time, looks back on historical antecedents that lead to a different interpretation from Turner's thesis.

The Austrian *Militärgrenze* was established after the liberation of Hungary from the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century, and it consisted of the territorial edge connecting the border guard regions, which represented the defensive line from the Adriatic to Transylvania between the Habsburg Empire and the Ottoman Empire. The Croatian, Slavonian, Banat (German, Romanian, and Serbian), and Transylvanian (Szekler and Romanian) border guards were part of this defence zone. This is typologically a 'borderland' that, according to O'Reilly (2018: 29), differs from Turner's frontier because it is not a moving lane, but it contains 'contact zones' (regions) that have persisted for a long time and within which cultures meet, collide with each other, often in an asymmetric system of power relations. 'Borderlands' became 'borders' only with the emergence of new nation-states (O'Reilly 2018: 9), which rewrote the older centre–periphery relationship.

The question of the historical frontiers of Central and Eastern Europe thus transformed (expanded) the *frontier* conception of Turner. Knowing the different historical frontiers also made it possible to generalize the concept; and examining this enlarged concept, Houtum and Lacy (2017) distinguish four types of frontiers.

The first type is the *imperial frontier* (Houtum–Lacy 2017, 3); this is Turner's classic American frontier. It usually designates the enemy as a geopolitical boundary, and its 'dark side' is that it creates a buffer zone in which ethnic cleansing and genocide could take place (e.g. the case of the Indians in the US). The *frontier of imagination* is not 'material' but the product of the geographical imagination; however, it does have political and/or cultural causes and then consequences (Houtum–Lacy 2017: 4). A good example of this is Edward Said's concept of orientalism (Said 1979), according to which the concept of the East was shaped by the approach, interests, and colonization practices of the developed West. A similar intention can be discovered in Western scholarly interest in the *Militärgrenze*: the interest in developing a conceptual framework for the *Balkans* and *Balkanism* (O'Reilly 2018: 14). The *frontier of exploration* is usually observed in cartographic development; this also includes political interests, so political plans have projected 'zones of transition' and areas of 'uncertain sovereignty' on the map (on ancient maps: *terra nullius*, *terra incognita*, *hic sunt dracones*, *hic sunt leones*) (Houtum–Lacy 2017: 5–6). Finally, the type of *frontier of integration*

highlights that the borderlands not only separate but also create receptive contexts in which way unforeseen compatibilities could be created.

These frontier types, of course, characterize the different, historically formed boundary belts and borderlands in a complementary way.

In connection with the above presented notions and typologies must be mentioned Anssi Paasi's conception of boundaries. In his proposed view, boundaries are not merely static lines but act as 'sets of practices and discourses which are "spread" into the whole society, not merely to the border areas. The production and reproduction of boundaries is part of the institutionalization of territories' (Paasi 1999: 669–670).

The questions of boundary production and of the institutionalization of territories are tightly connected to another conception of Paasi. He considers the regions as 'time- and space-specific' entities, and 'in that sense that they have their beginning and end in the perpetual regional transformation. The institutionalization of each "concrete" region is a manifestation of numerous institutional practices and discourses related to governance, politics, culture and economy that are constitutive of and constituted by the institutionalization of the region – this is a dialectical process' (Paasi 2011: 11).

This perpetual construction of the regions has four dimensions, stages (Paasi 2011: 12–13) as follows:

1) *territorial shaping* (making of 'soft'/'hard' boundaries), which takes place by an interaction between internal and external actors;
2) *symbolic shaping* (naming/other symbols); the symbols could be: flags, coats of arms, traditional names of territories, a.s.o.;
3) *institutional shaping* (institutions producing/reproducing other shapes), including political actors, representative bodies, planning institutions, a.s.o.;
4) *the establishment of the region as part of the regional system* and social consciousness.

Paasi made a very important distinction between the *identity of the region* and *regional identity*. The *identity of a region* consists of 'such features of nature, culture and inhabitants that distinguish a region from others'. And in practice these identities are 'typically discourses of scientists, politicians, administrators, cultural activists or entrepreneurs that aim to distinguish a region from some others' (Paasi 2011: 14). On other hand, regional identity is the inhabitants' identity – their *regional consciousness* is a 'hierarchical phenomenon but not inevitably fixed with certain existing regional levels and this can be based on natural or cultural elements that have been classified, often stereotypically, by regional activists, institutions or organizations as the constituents of the identity of a region' (Paasi 2011: 14).

3. Border Regions, Border Areas in the Carpathian Basin

3.1. The Carpathian Basin between Frontiers

The Carpathian/Pannonian Basin is a part of Central Europe that is, at first glance, geographically defined: it is a basin surrounded by the Carpathians, the Alps, and the Dinaric Mountains, which includes the drainage basin of the middle course of the Danube. Today, its territory is shared by several countries: Hungary and Slovakia are in their entirety part of the basin, while Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, and Ukraine cover only greater or lesser parts of it. If we examine the spatial domination of this basin in a historical dimension, it can be seen that the spatial governance issues of the Carpathian Basin were primarily central issues from the perspective of historical Hungary. One of the consequences of this was that from the period of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 (which restored territorial integrity to Hungary) Hungarian geographical research on the state was shaped by a kind of 'imperial consciousness' (Hajdú 2008: 75).

The 14th-15th-century larger Central European region was divided into two geopolitically clearly demarcated subregions. From the reign of Louis I. (the Great) (1308–1342) to Matthias Corvinus (1458–1490), a Hungarian imperial concept emerged in the Carpathian Basin, which saw the idea of the 'Holy Crown' institutionalized through Werbőczy (by his corpus juris of the Hungarian Customary Law, named *Tripartitum* and published in 1517) as an empire with joined provinces and the 'subdued parts' (Hajdú 2008: 83). Frontier-type boundary belt changes and drifts took place on the fringes of this empire.

North of the Carpathian Basin, in the northern part of the larger Eastern-Central European region, the Polish state had a state-territorial organizing performance, which was decisive for the northern half of this larger region. The Polish–Hungarian border, i.e. the north-eastern border of the Carpathian Basin (Carpathian border line), became a very stable border. The natural boundary, through its many river valleys and passes, allowed for intense contact, which resulted in mutual migration and settlements in the 16th-17th centuries. Sometimes conflict situations emerged, but measures were taken for their resolution in the 16th century by setting up border committees (Brzeziński 2014: 16). The history of the cities of Spiš/Szepesség also proves the agreed border maintenance. Here, the integrative function of the frontier came to the fore, although the formation of Spiš/Szepesség was also done for security reasons.

In the eastern and south-eastern parts of the Carpathian Basin, the Carpathian passes were important geographical objects primarily from a protection point of view. Protecting the basin against the Tatars from the east and then against the Turkish armies invading from the southeast was an important task. At the same

time, earlier, the religious missionary tasks of the Hungarian 'empire' made these passes the occasional routes of 'imperial' expansion.

The geopolitical situation changed from the year 1526: the period up to 1699 was defined by the 'problems of the shared state rule of the space in the Carpathian Basin'[3] (Hajdú 2008: 83–84), and then followed a period of the 'Hungarian state space integrated into the Habsburg power space (1699–1918)'[4] (ibid.). From the 20th century, however, the new nation-state logic also involved great power interests in the political spatial organization of the Carpathian Basin. The new nation-states then wanted to increase their part in the basin area at the expense of Hungary.

In the following, we will examine the historical regional institutionalization of the frontier-type border areas (edges) of the Carpathian Basin, outlining three examples. These three regions are Spiš (Szepesség, Zips), Székely Land (Székelyföld/Secuime/Szeklerland), and Banat (Bánság). Our study follows Paasi's model of regional formation, suggesting that here the subject of the study is a historical border area (edge) of the Central and Eastern European type, within which regions were formed from 'frozen' frontier sections or sectors. In the case of regions, we keep in mind the four stages of the Paasi-conception – the four stages of region formation – as well as the typological nature of the border belt.

3.2. Spiš/Szepesség/Zips

Territorial Shaping

The Spiš (in Hungarian: *Szepesség* or *Szepes*, German: *Zips*) territory today lies in the north-eastern part of Slovakia, with a very little area in the south-eastern part of Poland.

The territorial unit of Spiš/Szepesség was not clear; in the course of time, two territorial concepts emerged: a) Spiš/Szepesség as a geographical space, historical-geographical concept and b) Spiš/Szepes County as a territorial-administrative conglomerate, which reached its maximum extent only in 1876.

The uncertain territorial definition of Spiš was also formulated as a historical issue. The western half of today's Spiš belonged to Gömör County (county in the Hungarian Kingdom) in the earliest times, and two positions were developed regarding the county's character: according to some historians (e.g. Gyula Kristó), it was a royal county, while others (for example, Jenő Szücs) considered a change from royal lordship to special forestry district (see Zsoldos 2001: 23–25). We can even consider the area as 'an aggregation of several counties' (Zsoldos 2001: 30), which has at least four historical components. The so-called 'Little County'

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3   Translated by the author

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(in Hungarian: *Kisvármegye*), or 'Sedes of the Ten Lance Bearers' (in Hungarian: *Tízlándzsás szék*) was the territory of the Gömör guards (Kabar/Hungarian border guards) in the 11th century and became extinct during the Tartar invasion, so later only ten lance bearers could be delegated as it was needed (this gave the name of this territory after the Tartar invasion). In the 16th century, the number of so-called 'lance bearer villages' had decreased so much that in 1803 the representatives of the 'Sedes of the Ten Lance Bearers' in Levoča (in Hungarian: *Lőcse*) announced their unification with the 'Great County' (in Hungarian: *Nagyvármegye*). The area of the 'Great County' was constantly changing; until the 14th century, not even its borders could be defined. The third territorial-legal component consists of the Saxon (zipser) cities: their inhabitants are German, Flemish, and 'Latin' settlers, who received a charter of privilege in 1271 from the Hungarian king, including the right to elect their own counts (*ispáns*) and judges. From the 24 Saxon (zipser) cities in Spiš, Sigismund of Luxembourg pawned 13 to Poland (but these still belonged to the diocese of Esztergom), and 11 remained in Hungary. The pawned cities belonged to Poland between 1412 and 1772 (until the partition of Poland), but they managed to retain their privileges, to which their *hungarus* consciousness[5] of belonging to the 'Holy Crown' (Hungarian Kingdom) was also connected. Finally, the fourth component consists of the *mining towns*, which also arose from royal settlements but with the immigration of German settlers who differed in their dialect as well as in their rights from the other Saxon inhabitants of the county.

From this conglomerate, Spiš/Szepes County was established and existed between 1876 and 1919 as a unified modern administrative area.

Spiš/Szepesség as a territorial framework was thus not consolidated, and there are historical reasons for this. The need for border control towards Poland did not prove to be an intertemporal task across several historical periods, as in the case of Székely Land (for example), wherefore the intraregional development of the region did not receive an appropriate institutional framework. The peculiarities of the internal territorial units and city groups with the status of particular law were dissolved in a common civil administrative framework only by the 19th century, which appeared through the modern county of Spiš/Szepes. In this framework, the common history of the 'small world' of Spiš crystallized only later, by the end of the 19th century (Fried 2008: 82), and was tied to a mentality rather than a territorial framework.

Symbolic Shaping

The complexity of the territorial framework, and then the perpetual change of territorial fragmentation, suggest that the concept of Spiš/Szepesség as a territorial-political unit could not develop. The late formation of Spiš/Szepes County (1876)

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5   Mediaeval non-ethnic identity of several social groups in the Hungarian Kingdom.

could not favour the canonization of common symbols either: the distance between the individual historical territorial fragments (mediaeval counties, city groups) was too great, and there was too little cooperation. This is also reflected in the late creation of the coat of arms of Spiš, which was donated by King Rudolf of Habsburg in 1593, and it – in the four quarters of the coat of arms – unites the coats of arms of the four greatest noble families in the county. The only element of collective privilege in it was the heart of the shield, which symbolized the 'Ten Lance Bearers' district, while the Saxon cities had separate coats of arms.

Institutional Shaping

There were very different spheres and jurisdictions in the area of Spiš/Szepesség. These made this region special. However, a higher-level institutional framework integrating these different institutions has not developed (see Zsoldos 2009: 419).

Establishment of the Region as Part of the Regional System

The 13 pawned cities of Spiš/Szepesség formed a municipal unit, which, paradoxically, represented the acceptance of at least part of Spiš/Szepesség within Poland. The municipalities of the thirteen cities (Grafenstuhl) also operated under the Polish government, and the Polish *starosta* did not interfere in their internal life. This meant that the 13 cities (and following them Hniezdne/Gnézda/Kniesen, Podolinec/Podolin/Pudlein, and Stará Ľubovna/Ólubló/Altlublau) joined Poland as independent territorial units, members of the Hungarian Holy Crown. After the partition of Poland, Maria Theresa (1740–1780) also treated the 13 + 3 cities as a unit and returned them to Hungary 'free of charge and without pay,' without paying the 360-year loan. The pawned cities did not represent the whole of Spiš/Szepesség, but they represented a local government unit between Hungary, Poland, and the Habsburg monarchy, to which some mediating role can also be attributed.

Mono-/Multiethnic Feature

Spiš/Szepesség is a multiethnic region in the mediaeval sense of the word: ethnic differentiation was determined not only by language but also by social status. From this diversity of statuses, crowded into a small area, a common 'zipser identity' emerged by the 18th and 19th centuries. It unfolded from the ethnicities associated with initial social status and led to an everyday multilingualism of the modern era. This was prepared by the *hungarus* patriotism, which developed mainly in the Saxon environment of the region. However, harmonious multilingualism, discovered in the 20th century and projected back to the context of the 19th-century civilization, was more of a 'backward utopia' (Fried 2008: 85).

3.3. Székely Land/Secuime/Székelyföld

Territorial Shaping

The *Székely Land* or *Szeklerland* (Hungarian: *Székelyföld*, Romanian: *Secuimea* or *Ținutul Secuiesc*, German: *Szeklerland*, Latin: *Terra Siculorum*) is a historical and ethnographic area in Transylvania (Romania), inhabited mainly by the Hungarian-speaking Szeklers.

The question of the origin and settlement of the Szeklers has long been debated in Hungarian history (Györffy 1941, Benkő et al. 2016). Their settlement began in the present-day Szeklerland in the 12th century (when the Szeklers of Telegd/Udvarhely could reach the Harghita mountain range), and then continued in the 13th century (when the Szeklers of Kézdi, Sepsi, and Aranyos seats occupied all their present-day settlements). The area inhabited by them was initially marked with the terms *terra* (land), *districtus* (district); we can certainly speak of *seats* (Hungarian: *szék*, Latin: *sedes*) only from the second half of the 14th century (Györffy 1942: 69). Although no historical source has survived mentioning that the Szeklers were settled by the Hungarian Kingdom in their present-day residential area, most historians today believe that settlements served as frontier guards.

The territory of Szeklerland, its settlements were divided into stems (war groups) by establishing a *tízes*[6] system of settlements serving 'immediate warfare' (Egyed 2006, Elekes 2011: 418, Ambrus 2017). The system of Szekler seats only consolidated in the second half of the 14th century, when the seven main seats were formed (Telegdi/Udvarhely, Maros, Csík, Kézdi, Sepsi, Orbai, Aranyos), and from then on we can talk about *a stable territorial framework*. Stable territoriality was given by the clear boundaries of the seats and their own internal legal order, which also mapped the territorial boundaries onto the character of society. This is also portrayed by the *tízes* units in the Szekler villages, which are landscape structural elements that evolved from the military technical necessities of defence (Ambrus 2009), necessities which became 'socially imprinted'. These village structural units still visible in Csík and Kászon (20–80 houses and families, each 100–500 meters apart from one another, which have grown into a single village over time) are 'community entities that still exist today' and define the internal functioning of villages (Ambrus 2009: 73). So, due to the Szekler border protection task, a certain borderline lifestyle shaped by the defence duties was preserved in a region with a clear demarcation.

Symbolic Shaping

The descriptive concept of Terra Siculorum, which represents the totality of the seats, became a cartographic designation after the ensemble of seats had also

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6   *Tízes*: organization in structures by ten in the settlements, as space-specific elements.

gained political role. At the same time, the symbols of Szeklerland developed into Szekler heraldry. The so-called old Szekler coat of arms (the armoured sword pierces a golden crown, a heart, and the head of a bear) has been documented to exist since the beginning of the 1500s (in villages as Csíkcsobotfalva, Székelydálya, Csíkmenaság, Székelyderzs, a.s.o.) (Szekeres 2013: 9–13). This coat of arms has become a heraldic tradition: it is still present in the coats of arms of Covasna County and of the towns Târgu-Mureş/Marosvásárhely and Odorheiu Secuiesc/ Székelyudvarhely (Szekeres 2013: 3). The *sun and the moon* as a symbol of Szeklerland appeared around 1580, and it was legalized by the Diet (regional parliament) of the Principality of Transylvania in 1659 as a symbol of Szeklers. It was included in the coat of arms of Transylvania in 1765 (following the order of Maria Theresa), but its external legitimacy can eventually be traced back to the *Unio Trium Nationum.*

Institutional Shaping

The system of Szekler seats served not only the organization of territorial rule, it was also the maintainer of the system of rules determining a social order and social practices. The seats were institutions of public law (the term *seat* appeared first in charters in 1366) that evolved from the power of the judiciary, the privilege of free choice of judges, and became self-governments with comprehensive powers. They performed jurisdiction and provided a record of military conscripts. Judging was provided both at the primary level and as a forum for appeal. The judiciary body consisted of the chief captain of the seat (in Hungarian: *székkapitány*), the chief judge of the seat (in Hungarian: *székbíró*, first mentioned in 1381), the royal judge, and 12 jurymen of the seat (in Hungarian: *székülők*, *széktartók*). The first stage of the appeal was the 'National Assembly' of the Szeklers in Udvarhely (today: Odorheiu Secuiesc), after which the Szekler *ispán* (count, in Latin: *comes*) could be approached (the Szekler *ispán* was appointed by the king). All these also 'prevailed' in the Szekler village communities, which organized their self-administrative order on the model of the seats, through an annually elected village judge, village council (in Hungarian: *faluszék*), and jurymen. The *tízes* units elected their own judges, and the common affairs of the village were decided by the village assembly, which adopted local home rules, the so-called 'village laws' (Hungarian: *falutörvények*) (Veress 2018: 136–140). For the administration of all these institutions and for the affairs of the Szeklers, the 'National Assembly' was organized as the supreme body of the Szekler self-government, which most often gathered in one of the settlements of Udvarhely Seat (Pál-Antal 2013: 26–28).

Establishment of the Region as Part of the Regional System

The system of Szekler seats was integrated into the administration of the Kingdom of Hungary, represented in Transylvania by the voivode. The voivode was the link between the royal court and the Szekler count (comes, ispán) and Szekler seats. The *Unio Trium Nationum* (Latin for Union of the Three Nations) was a codified pact for mutual aid, which in 1438 created an alliance of the three 'nations' (the Hungarian nobility, the Szeklers, and the Saxons). Later this became the constitutional basis of the Transylvanian Principality. The formation of the 'state-building peoples' of Transylvania began with the Parliament of Debrecen convened by György Fráter in 1541, the significance of which lies in the fact that the estates of the later independent state of Transylvania met here for the first time. The union of the three 'nations' (estates) was renewed by the Diet of Torda (in Romanian: Turda) in December 1542, now under the leadership of Queen Isabella and her son, John Sigismund (János Zsigmond) from the House of Zápolya, who had been invited to the country (Veress 2018: 187).

The Transylvanian constitution raised the constitutional status of Szeklerland to a higher level, making it part of the internal – territorial and estate-based – confederalism of Transylvania. This public recognition of Szeklerland preserved its status quo in Transylvania, which came under Habsburg rule following the Diploma Leopoldinum (1691), but this was slowly abolished by the Austrian absolutism of the 1760s. The Habsburg reorganization of the Szekler Border Guard, which removed the Szekler privileges (leading up to the Siculicidium of 1764), and the territorial-administrative reform of 1783, which abolished the seats, were the two most important moments in this process. They also abolished the system of nations (Veress 2018: 269).

Although the system of seats was restored after 1790 (upon the death of Joseph II), the weakened system of the 'Three Nations' was finally abolished by the 1848 revolution. The Szekler seats survived as territorial particularism until the 1876 administrative-territorial reform. Meanwhile – from the end of the 18th century to the administrative modernization of the age of dualism –, the integration of Szeklers into the modern Hungarian nation was completed.

Mono-/Multiethnic Feature

Szeklerland is a mono-ethnic region. According to the modern concept of ethnicity, this cannot be stated since from the 19th century ethnicity means a population that can be defined by 'linguistic race' (Ernest Renan) or cultural peculiarities (possibly traditions), and in this sense other linguistic-ethnic groups in Szeklerland also existed (Slavs in the early period and Romanians from the 16th century). The mono-ethnic nature of Szeklerland in the relational system of feudalism means that the institutionalization of the region was aligned with a single 'ethnic estate'

in which other 'ethnicities' did not appear in a legal sense. The other ethnic groups (as linguistic-cultural groups) had to accommodate to this and had to remain on the edge of this 'estate', in smaller social inclusions, without a group status.

3.4. The Banat

Territorial Shaping

The Banat region was established in the early 18th century, separated from the southern part of Hungary, which was considered earlier a broader historical concept. The geographical boundaries of the Banat are the Maros/Mureş River in the north, the Tisza/Tisa River in the west, and the Danube/Duna/Dunărea in the south, while the border in the east can be drawn along the perpendicular line connecting the *Iron Gates* on the Danube (Hungarian: *Vaskapu*, Romanian: *Porţile de Fier*, Serbian: *Ðerdapska klisura*) with the River Maros. The Austrian military administration introduced in this territory after the Peace Treaty of Passarowitz (1718) made the foundations for a special development in this region, so the Banat was 'a historical, political, and economic region whose development in the 18th-19th centuries gave this region a specific socio-settlement, ethnic, ethnographic, and cultural image'[7] (Kókai 2010: 14). The administration led directly by the imperial court of the Habsburgs provided a clear territorial framework.

Symbolic Shaping

From the 11th century onwards, several unspecified spatial power structures were formed in the Banat region, which, over time, seemed to prove that this region was a buffer zone: a kind of floodgate, collector and distribution node, a cultural buffer (Kókai 2010: 6). This appeared in several historical variants, which meant different territorial-political formations under various names. After the formation of the first counties (Temes, Krassó, Csanád, Arad, Keve), the Duchy of Temes was established, which was abolished in 1106 during the reign of King Kálmán. The Szörényi Banat (Romanian: *Banatul de Severin*) was established for defence tasks in 1228, covering part of the territories of Oltenia and Krassó County, thus resulting in conflicts between the voivodes of Havasalföld (Romanian: earlier *Muntenia*, later *Ţara Românească*) and the Hungarian Kingdom. It ceased to exist in 1524 after the Turks occupied Orsova and Sörényvár. The Banat of Karánsebes-Lugos (Romanian: *Banatul de Lugoj-Caransebeş*) lasted from 1536 to 1658.

The present-day name Banat covers the above-defined geographical region, which was under direct Austrian rule between 1718 and 1779. The Hungarian name Bánság comes from the German name Banat, which originated from the

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7   Translated by the author.

Latin form *Banatus Temesiensis.* The German name Banat became established in Hungarian writing from the year 1748, and then it was transferred to the Romanian and Serbian languages as a landscape name (Kókai 2010: 13). These name variants cover the territorial framework described above. The region did not have provincial symbols, nor a coat of arms, although the coat of arms of Temesvár/Timişoara was sometimes used as the coat of arms of the Banat.

Institutional Shaping

The administrative institutionalization of the region was initially based on the *border protection function* arising from the geopolitical situation. This border defence function of the Banat from 1779 – after the restoration of the counties of the Hungarian Kingdom following the measures of Joseph II of Habsburg – remained as a triple territorial division of the southern edge of this region (until 1876), namely in a narrower border zone divided between the Romanian, Illyrian, and German border guard regiments. In the Banat, above the border defence zone of the area, the economic and administrative interventions of the Viennese court created a densely textured spatial structure (Kókai 2010: 53).

This was the basis for the extraordinary development of the Banat, which elevated the multiethnic (16 nationalities) area, created as a result of colonized settlements, in one century to be one of the dynamic regions of Europe with a high potential for modernization (Kókai 2010: 68, Bodó 2018).

Establishment of the Region as Part of the Regional System

As can be seen from the historical overview, the existence of the organized border region was initially justified by the defence needs of the Habsburg Empire, the strategy of the *Militärgrenze* (military frontier). Later, the upthrust of the established modernization model, as well as its cultural model, legitimated the separation of the region, which could only be partially eliminated by the nation-state logic.

Mono-/Multiethnic Feature

The peculiarity of the institutionalization of the Banat region is that, although having been created as a defence zone for military reasons, it created an interculturality, the survival of which was determined by two sociological – identity-creating – factors: 1) a 'civilizing pressure' (Kókai 2010: 189), which was mediated by the development of the economy but also appeared in the interaction of cultures in the early 19th century and which 2) replaced the 'community memory' of nationalities with a 'home consciousness' that could withstand the nationalizing processes (which, in turn, began to break down the interculturality of the region with different

hegemonies from the mid-19th century on). Despite these processes, until 1945, no dominant group had reached the hegemony that suppressed 'otherness' (Kókai 2010: 103). This was the regional consciousness that functioned for a very long time as a remnant of the discontinued administrative institutional framework.

3.5. Secondary Integrating Spaces, Renewed Regional Constructions

The border regions of the Carpathian Basin found themselves in a new situation after the disintegration of the historical Hungarian Kingdom, being part of the nationalizing space of the newly established and expanded peripheral states. The new situation also offered new conditions for building the region. One of the essential conditions became whether the former region was mono-ethnic or multiethnic in nature. In the case of the three examined regions, we saw that Székely Land was a mono-ethnic region, while Spiš/Szepesség and Banat/Bánság were multiethnic regions. Being the most obvious model for mono-ethnic regions is 21st-century ethnoregionalism, the question here (in the case of Székely Land) is under what internal and external conditions this type of region building is possible (also according to the pattern of the Paasi stages). For multiethnic regions, the 'new regionalism' (Keating 1998) outlined in the age of globalization calls for opportunities to create a secondary integration space (cross-borderness,[8] regional marketing, etc.).

3.6. The Border Regions of the Carpathian Basin – A Comparative Outline

Table 1. *Comparing the characteristics of the three regions*

The region	Characteristics	Spiš/Szepesség	Szeklerland/ Székelyföld	Banat/Bánság
As frontier	defence	yes	yes	yes
	mediatory	yes		yes
	imperial		yes	yes
	of integration	yes		yes
As region in construction	Territorial shaping	Uncertain borders	Clear borders	Clear borders
	Symbolic shaping	Without canonized symbols	With canonized symbols	Without canonized symbols

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8   Cross-border cooperation is an important 'agent' of the regional construction, but per se cannot substitute the weakness of other conditions. From this viewpoint, it is interesting to study the regional construction process in western Romania regarding the historical region of Partium (see Szilágyi 2019).

The region	Characteristics	Spiš/Szepesség	Szeklerland/ Székelyföld	Banat/Bánság
As region in construction	Institutional shaping	More peculiar institutions; an integrated, unified institutional framework does not exist	Specific institutions, proper jurisdiction, integrated territorial self-government	Habsburg military administration (1698–1779); after 1779, only the southern *Militärgrenze* remained under military authority
	Establishment of the region as part of the regional system	does not exist	According to the unwritten constitution of Transylvania (1437–1848)	First by military jurisdiction, later legitimacy by modernization success
	– Identity of the region	does not exist	yes	does not exist
	– Regional identity	late formation, blurry	yes	yes
	Mono-ethnic/ Multiethnic	Multiethnic	Mono-ethnic	Multiethnic
Reconstruction/reshaping of the region		Cultural marketing	Movement, political project	Movement

4. Conclusions

The peripheral regions of the Carpathian Basin were shaped due to the geopolitical features of the basin (imperialistic institutionalization of spatial rule of the Hungarian Kingdom and then the Habsburg Monarchy). The duration and legitimation of the expansion of the Hungarian and Habsburg frontiers were decisive and were followed by the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the entry of the peripheral territories under the rule of the new nationalizing peripheral states of the Carpathian Basin emerging after WWI.

The following circumstances were not conducive to the construction of the regions: a) the uncertainty of the territorial framework, b) the short duration of regional construction, and c) the excessive (ethnic-institutional) fragmentation of regional society. Furthermore, two other interrelated circumstances were important: the historically inherited mono- and multiethnic nature of the region and how this feature fit into the 18th-19th-century prehistory of the area's modernization.

At the same time, certain conditions were attached to the 'new start' of regional construction. Among these, the current situations of cross-borderness and the inherited strategies of the nationalizing states are decisive. One of the potential possibilities of the current regional construction efforts of Spiš/Szepesség and the Banat/Bánság may be the exploitation of cross-borderness. This may be decisive, especially in the case of the Banat, as it may even play the role of a modernization buffer zone in the process of European integration (but there are also geopolitical conditions for this). Cross-borderness seems to be a less significant option in the case of Spiš/Szepesség, on the Polish–Slovak border. Here, from the point of view of regional construction, there is a deceleration factor, that is, the blurring of regional consciousness.

In the case of Szeklerland, several conditions were given for the reconstruction of the region. The territorial framework still exists although the Hungarian administrative reform of 1876 and the Romanian administrative counties rewrote this somewhat (see Elekes–Szilágyi 2020). The institutionalization of the Szekler region started within the current administrative framework with the help of local self-governments and the local public policies. The regional consciousness of the Szeklers is also strong, but this was channelled in the 19th century towards the modern Hungarian national identity and, as a result, today towards the minority nation building in the political framework of the Romanian state. Thus, a strong confrontation has developed between the region and the Romanian nationalizing state, which is currently the biggest obstacle to achieving the fourth stage (the establishment of the region as part of the regional system) according to Paasi's model.

As a geopolitical consequence, it can be noted that the way in which the border regions of the Carpathian Basin are institutionalized is one of the most important factors shaping the transformation of the Central European region within the European integration process.

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