

Transboundary Symbiosis over the Danube: III

Re-thinking the meaning
of Symbiosis -Past,
Present and Future

Edited by

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and

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Waseda University Press

Transboundary Symbiosis over the Danube: III
Re-thinking the meaning of Symbiosis—Past, Present and Future

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	5
----------------	-------	---

I. Investigating the Past

Chapter 1

Propaganda and “Realpolitik.” T. G. Masaryk and His Attitude towards Hungary and the Magyars during and after World War I.

Dušan KOVÁČ	7
-------------	-------	---

Chapter 2

Upheaval of 1918/1919 in Pressburg/Bratislava

–An example of differing representations of a common past in Historiography

Gabriela DUDEKOVÁ KOVÁČOVÁ	21
----------------------------	-------	----

Chapter 3

The Aftermath of Renaming Bratislava after 1919

–A Reflection on the Name of a City in the Borderlands(Part III)

Susumu NAGAYO	37
---------------	-------	----

II. Viewing the Present

Chapter 4

Memory of the First World War

–A “resurrection” of a Prisoners of War Cemetery 59

Barnabás VAJDA		
----------------	--	--

Chapter 5*National Identity as Future Aspirations**–Analysing the Results of Questionnaires of Hungarian Students at Selye János University in Komárno, Slovakia, in 2011 and 2014*

Tatsuya NAKAZAWA 69

Chapter 6*Interdisciplinary Approaches in the Research of the Slovak-Hungarian Relationships in History**–Possibilities of Cooperation in the Humanities and Social Sciences*

Štefan ŠUTAJ 77

III. Sounding the Future**Chapter 7***Hungarian “Minority” Networks and Borderland Community under Political Influences of the Slovak-Hungarian Cross-border Cooperation*

Yuko KAMBARA 93

Chapter 8*Another Referendum in 2016 on Migration in Hungary**–A New Europe from East?*

Osamu IEDA 113

Record on our panel at the IX ICCEES World Congress, Makuhari, 2015 131*Report of the joint project “Road to a Multidimensional Ethnic Symbiosis: The Mid-Danube Region and EU Integration” (2013-2018)* 143

Hungarian “Minority” Networks and Borderland Community under Political Influences of the Slovak-Hungarian Cross-border Cooperation

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Introduction

European cross-border cooperation emerged as the member states of the European Union (EU) integrated. The EU has supported the establishment of borderlands, because the fact that national boundaries might prevent such areas from being developed goes against the ideal model of a “borderless Europe.” Since the end of the 1990s, former socialist Central European countries have formed organizations for cross-border cooperation in order to prepare to join the EU as acceding countries. Compared to the borders that Slovakia share with other countries, the Slovak-Hungarian frontier is a significant region where further cross-border cooperation (such as within various Euroregions and the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, or EGTCs) has been planned. A Euroregion is a formalized, cross-border cooperation body in the EU (i.e., part of the EU); the concept started along the German-Dutch border in the 1950s¹. Initially, “*Euregio*” and other local terms represented the concept, then gradually evolved and integrated into the now widely used “Euroregion.” In 2006, the EGTC was established by a regulation of the European Parliament and the Council in order to facilitate more effective cross-border regional development.

1 The following sources explain the general characteristics and concept of the Euroregion: Association of European Border Regions and European Commission 2000: 5-34; O’Dowd 2003: 18-19; Svensson 2013: 14-15.

According to an EU regulation, EGTCs aim to “contribute positively to reducing barriers to territorial cooperation between regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps.”² An EGTC has its own legal personality with authorized functions guaranteed by related countries’ national laws, which tend to be seen as following notions similar to that of the Euroregion (Jankai 2016; Törzsök and Majoros 2015: 7-9; Medeiros 2011). Since 2008, EGTCs have been set up along the Slovak-Hungarian border, and some Euroregions have been reformed as new parts of an EGTC.

Those involved in cross-border cooperation need counterparts that transcend geographic boundaries. Furthermore, linguistic differences sometimes prevent people from communicating smoothly in terms of sustainable regional development. For example, along the Slovak-Austrian border, although a certain number of Slovak residents speak German, the language barrier makes it difficult to continue or expand development projects (Fal’án 2003; Kambara 2015a). This means that areas where inhabitants speak the same language—as is the case along the Slovak-Hungarian border—have great potential to grow efficiently and form regions that stretch beyond national boundaries (Svensson 2013, 2014). The Slovak-Hungarian frontier was finally established in 1946; historically, most inhabitants in this zone were citizens of the same county. Moreover, many are also ethnic Hungarians, who currently comprise Slovakia’s biggest minority ethnic group. We can thus expect that fewer language barriers will facilitate practical contact between communities with regards to developing the borderland.

However, fewer language barriers do not always mean closer cooperation over the border. During my previous cultural anthropological research on Slovakia’s Hungarian minority (Kambara 2015b; 2017), interviewees tended to emphasize that they are Slovak citizens as well as ethnic Hungarians, and do not usually refer to their connections with Hungary. When I asked about possible relationships with other regions or countries as ethnic Hungarians, they acknowledged having links with some partners in Hungary. However, they explained that these partners were only parts of their networks, which included ethnic Hungarians in Romania, Serbia, and other regions in Slovakia. Moreover, several informants remarked: “We are different from Hungarians in Hungary.” Some of them stressed the difference in their position as a minority, while others

2 Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 of the European Parliament and the Council.

explained that Hungarians in Hungary regarded them as the “Other” (Kambara 2017). Needless to say, research bias could be involved here. Ethnic Hungarians whom I interviewed may have felt pressure to fulfill an ideal of being a peaceful Slovak citizen when I asked questions about the “minority” issue, because Slovak citizens are aware of the common narrative of political conflict between Slovak nationalists and ethnic Hungarian politicians. The very process of interviewing may have provoked feelings of loyalty to Slovakia because I spoke Slovak in the interviews; most informants spoke perfect Slovak. Current minority elites in Slovakia, who were the main targets of my previous research, might be the only ones who have decided to stay in Slovakia.³ Indeed, a lower language barrier is useful for cross-border cooperation, however, ethnic minorities’ political and social conditions could influence cross-border cooperation. In this paper, I am exploring the possibility of anthropological research on how cross-border cooperation as part of EU policy influences Hungarian minority networks and the borderland community from the viewpoint of the ethnic minority issue.

Anthropological research and border studies around the world have often focused on issues facing ethnic groups separated by national borders. Compared with general national boundaries, internal EU borders have striking characteristics that attempt to invalidate the power of national frontiers. Therefore, EU border policies led to the implementation of cross-border EU cooperation. Given this context, most research on cross-border cooperation has been approached via political science (Anderson, O’Dowd and Wilson 2003; Hall 2008; Perkmann 2007; Scott 1999). Meanwhile, anthropological studies on EU borderlands have still focused on issues of identity or nationalism (cf. Kisskenen 2012; Stacul, Moutsou and Kopnina 2006). Green and Wilson pointed out this tendency in previous investigations and suggested that the future possibility of research focus has shifted to matters related to EU border politics (Green 2013; Wilson 2010). Their arguments have inspired my research.

Cross-border cooperation in Central Eastern European countries tend to be characterized by severe economic conditions and difficulty in transforming political institutions. However, these regions have been involved in the EU integration process and have undergone recent changes (Balogh 2014; Grix and Knowles 2002; Medve-Bálint and Svensson 2013). To approach my research

3 Some ethnic Hungarians decide to live as Slovaks and not as the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, while others have decided to move to Hungary. Therefore, minority elites emerge as a result of their decision to live as minorities in Slovakia.

aim, I analyzed previous studies on cross-border cooperation and then compared them with the findings from my research on the Hungarian minority in southern Slovakia. I have conducted my fieldwork from 2013 to 2016 in southern Slovakia, where the highest concentration of ethnic Hungarians lives. My research mainly consisted of interviews with community elites (political representatives, teachers, and leaders of non-governmental organizations, or NGOs) in ethnically Hungarian cities⁴ and participant observation at community events. I conducted the interviews in Slovak; Hungarian minorities speak Slovak fluently and can switch naturally between the two languages, depending on the occasion. With the aim of investigating minority networks, I examined the more informal levels of politics in communities, which include relationships between NGOs and associations, in addition to politics at the local government level. Minority NGOs and associations play important roles in minority society and operate independently from (while also sometimes collaborating with) local governments.

I. Slovak-Hungarian cross-border cooperation

Slovak-Hungarian cross-border cooperation was able to resume after socialism. During the socialist period, inhabitants were not able to cross the border freely in comparison to the post-socialist era and the period of the Hungarian monarchy, even though both Czechoslovakia and Hungary adopted socialist regimes.⁵ To recreate cross-border connections, Slovakia and Hungary agreed on regional planning and promotion to foster mutual understanding and collaboration in the 1990s, as well as with other neighboring countries in Central Europe (Association of European Border Regions 2008: 42-43). Based on agreements at the national level, cross-border cooperation made progress in 11 Euroregions, and 13 EGTCs were established between 1993 and 2015 (Table 1⁶).

4 I mostly carried out my research in Dunajská Streda and Komárno. In addition, I conducted interviews in Bratislava, Šamorín, Šturovo, and Košice where famous Hungarian institutions and associations are located.

5 However, even in the period of socialism, the restriction of cross-bordering was not complete. Tourists travel across borders for holidays especially since the 1960s (Vajda 2014: 57-59).

6 While creating Table 1, I referred to each organization's official website and the following sources: Association of European Border Regions (2008: 45-48); Svensson

Table 1: List of Euroregions and EGTCs related to Slovakia and Hungary (2015)

	Euroregion	EGTC
Slovakia with others	Euroregion Tatry (1994) PL/SK Euroregion Weinviertel-Jižní Morava-Záhorie (1999) AT/CZ/SK Euroregion Bílé-Biele Karpaty (2000) CZ/ SK Euroregion Beskidy-Beskydy (2000) CZ/PL/SK	Tritia (2013) SK/CZ/PL Tatry (2013) PL/SK Spoločný region, limited (2013) CZ/SK
Slovakia-Hungary	Carpathian Euroregion (1993) HU/PL/RO/ SK/UA Euroregion Vagus-Danubius-Ipolia (1999) HU/SK Ipeľ-Ipoly Euroregion (1999) HU/SK Euroregion Neogradiensis (2000) HU/SK Euroregion Slaná-Rimava (2000) HU/SK Košice-Miskolc Euroregion (2000) HU/SK Euroregion Kras Euroregion (2001) HU/SK Euroregion Podunajský Trojspolok (2001) HU/SK Euroregion Ister-Granum (2003) HU/SK Euroregion Dunabe (2003) HU/SK Zemplén Euroregion (2004) HU/SK	Ister-Granum (2008) HU/SK Karst-Bódva (2009) HU/SK Ung-Tisza-Túr-Sajó (2009) HU/SK Pons Danubii (2010) HU/SK Abaúj-Abaújban (2010) HU/SK Arrabona (2011) HU/SK Rába-Duna-Vág (2011) HU/SK Novohrad-Nógrád (2011) HU/SK Bodrogekői (2012) HU/SK Sajó Rima (2013) HU/SK Via Carpatia (2013) HU/SK Svinka (2013) HU/SK Torysa (2013) HU/SK
Hungary with others	Slovenian-Hungarian Cross-border Development Council (1996) HU/SL Euroregion Danube-Kris-Mures-Tisa (1997) HU/RO/RS Euroregion West/Nyugat Pannonia (1998) AT/HU Euroregion Danube-Drava-Sava (1998) BH/HR/HU Interrégió (2000) HU/UA Hajdú-Bihar-Bihar Euroregion (2002) HU/RO Mura-Dráva Euroregion (2004) 2005 HR/HU Muránia Euroregion (2004) AT/HR/ HU/SL	Bánát-Triplex Confinium (2011) HU/RO/RS Pannon (2012) HU/ HR/SL Gate to Europe (2012) HU/RO European Common Future Building (2012) HU/RO European border cities (2014) HU/RO Central European Transport Corridor (2014) HR/HU/PL/SW Mura region (2015) HR/HU MASH (2015) HU/SL Tisza (2015) HU/UA

AT: Austria, BH: Bosnia and Herzegovina, CZ: The Czech Republic, HR: Croatia, HU: Hungary, PL: Poland, SL: Slovenia, RO: Romania, RS: Serbia, SK: Slovak Republic, SW: Sweden, UA: Ukraine

and Ocskay (2016: 50-51); Törzsök and Majoros (2015); Gyelnik, Ocskay, and Pete (2016: 19-24). In case the information differed based on the source, I stated this prior to providing the respective organization’s official information. However, in case the organization did not have (or had already closed down) a website, or did not declare the year in which it was founded, I selected the most relevant information.

Some cross-border cooperation bodies have worked together for more than a decade; the Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives (CESCI), a successful think-tank for cross-border cooperation that was established in 2009 in Hungary, has reported on their results. According to CESCI's 2012 publications,⁷ many kinds of projects for regional development have been managed in border regions. These include building cross-border cycling roads and tourist information centers, organizing jointly held events with borderland municipalities, establishing bilingual web TV, planning common health services, and protecting the natural environment. Cross-border cooperation aims to promote the efficient regional development of neighboring municipalities that goes beyond geographic boundaries, therefore, communication between the members of the cooperating bodies is important. Furthermore, cross-border cooperation is sustained by frequent communication among the political representatives of related local governments for cooperation projects (Svensson, 2015).



Figure 1: An information board about cross-border tourism of lords' houses along the eastern Slovak-Hungarian border. (Photo by the author)

7 In 2012, CESCI published two reports (*Frontier Value Magazine* and *Snapshot of EGTCs with Hungarian participation*) on the activities of cross-border cooperation related to Hungary on their website. <http://www.cesci-net.eu/publication> (last accessed on 12/21/2016).

According to a survey on EGTCs in the Slovak-Hungarian borderland, which was carried out in 2015 by the Civitas Europica Centralis Foundation (Törzsök and Majoros 2015), those who are concerned about EGTCs tend to emphasize the following points as the motivating factors for joining EGTCs:⁸ (1) Exploitation of opportunities of cooperation in tourism (also Figure 1); (2) Strengthening Hungarian-Slovakian ethnic relations; (3) Strengthening Hungarian-Hungarian ethnic relations; (4) Strengthening environmental and nature protection cooperation; (5) Exploitation of common development opportunities in transport infrastructure. Slovak respondents tended to underscore the Slovak-Hungarian ethnic relationship more than Hungarians, while Hungarians are relatively more interested in environmental cooperation. Both respondents scored higher points in terms of developing transport infrastructure as the satisfaction factor in the questionnaire about satisfaction of the EGTC’s activities. Concerning transport infrastructure, as part of cross-border cooperation, roads and former border control buildings were renovated around 2008 when Slovakia and Hungary joined the Schengen Area (Mezei, 2009: 64). In addition, EGTC members are more satisfied with strengthening Hungarian-Hungarian ethnic relationships than Hungarian-Slovak connections (Törzsök and Majoros, 2015: 61-62). EGTCs are usually supported through membership fees, subsidies from the operating funds, and grant projects. It could be difficult to realize large-scale infrastructure projects without obtaining any grants from external organizations such as the EU. Both the southern part of Slovakia and the northern part of Hungary cannot afford to solve economic problems alone. Some EGTCs can be characterized as “grant hunters” for regional development (Törzsök and Majoros, 2015: 14-16). The framework of EGTCs could be an attractive opportunity for regional development. To communicate and consult with members about cross-border cooperation, a less significant language barrier becomes an advantage in the Slovak-Hungarian borderland. In this context, it is natural that EGTC participants tend to be satisfied with Hungarian-Hungarian ethnic relationships, as shown in the survey results.

In addition to solidarity among local governments, grassroots voluntary associations often collaborate to rebuild inhabitants’ communication in the borderland after socialism (Mezei 2009: 64). A Euroregion essentially consists of initiatives from local governments, therefore, cross-border cooperation inevita-

8 This questionnaire asked the respondents to weigh 10 factors on a scale of 1 to 5.

bly leads to collaboration among local inhabitants, who are motivated by the prospect of regional growth. Some local Slovak representatives actually evaluate cross-border events to maintain their Hungarian identity (Medve-Bálint and Svensson 2013: 229). It means cross-border cooperation has developed by involving those who want to work as the Hungarian minority, since ethnic minorities have enough incentives to engage in voluntary community activities to promote their culture. If ethnic attachments or a less significant barrier were to become key factors in successful cross-border cooperation, then the Slovak-Hungarian frontier would become a more prosperous region. However, just as domestic regional differences stretch from east to west, the same direction of disparity can be still seen in regional development along the border (Svensson and Ocskay 2016: 61-63). Although certain levels of community activities that correspond with cross-border cooperation have influenced local communities, not all cross-border initiatives are successful. Some newly established and smaller bodies could not find enough information about their activities (Törzsök and Majoros 2015). In the next chapter, I will focus on Hungarian minority networks in Slovakia.

II. Hungarian minority networks

As I mentioned in the introduction, not all ethnic Hungarians are strongly aware of their connection to Hungary as a state. Teachers in Hungarian minority schools and politicians are the exception as they maintain a relatively high level of contact with Hungary. For instance, ethnic Hungarian teachers can attend study programs in both Hungary and Slovakia, and Hungarian minority schools often have partnerships with schools in Hungary.

According to my interviews⁹ with a member of the Hungarian minority Party, the party of the Hungarian Community¹⁰ (*Strana Maďarskej Komunity*, or SMK), its connections with Hungarian politicians were strengthened when the party was a member of the government (1998-2006). SMK is the only party to have been invited to regular meetings (organized by Hungary's politicians) with Hungarian and ethnic Hungarian politicians, even after it lost seats in the Slovak

9 Interviews with the former chair of SMK (9/13/2013, 9/8/2014).

10 Originally, the name of the party was “the party of the Hungarian Coalition” because they are a collective of Hungarian minority parties. They have since renamed the party.

parliament.¹¹ SMK retains opportunities to exchange opinions as a representative of the Hungarian minority from Slovakia. The new party, *Most-Híd*, which separated from SMK and accepted more Slovak politicians and members, has a weaker relationship with Hungary than SMK, despite the fact that *Most-Híd* became a member of the government and that its political priorities include economic development and protecting minority rights¹².

Local associations such as folk dance and artists’ groups have often collaborated with Hungarians from Hungary. Such groups have made a broad range of contacts through their activities, not only with ethnic Hungarians in neighboring countries, but also with Slovaks.¹³ The minority research institute *Fórum* said that their relationships with other minorities in neighboring countries is strong since the name of their institute contains the word “minority,” while they have worked with CЕСCI across geographic boundaries.

*We often collaborate with Hungarian, Slovak, and Czech academies. However, our best partners are Slovak minorities in Hungary. We can more easily understand each other’s circumstances. Needless to say, we also work with Hungarians in Romania and Serbia.*¹⁴

Famous Hungarian cultural institutions like *Fórum* and *Csemadok*¹⁵ are currently working as NGOs. After socialism ended, *Csemadok* had to transform from an association supported by the government to an NGO, as did many other associations in Slovakia. The members of *Fórum*, established by Hungarian minority volunteers, were thankful for their new freedom to form an association not controlled by politics after socialism. For both institutions, fundraising is

11 However, the interviewee added the explanation that their relationship is not that strong and does not have quite as much influential meaning. This seems to also be his emphasis as a minority politician in Slovakia.

12 Interview with the advisor of *Most-Híd* (9/7/2015)

13 Interviews with a folk dance group in Dunajská Streda (9/17/2013) and a Hungarian artists’ association in Košice (3/16/2016), respectively.

14 Interview with the founder of *Fórum* (9/9/2014).

15 The name *Csemadok* was originally an abbreviation of *Csehszlovákiai Magyar Dolgozók Kultúregyesülete* (Czechoslovakia’s Hungarian Employee Cultural Association). However, the abbreviation is currently used as the name of the association. *Csemadok* mainly deals with traditional culture, while *Fórum* deals with widespread social and cultural matters.

one of the most important issues they face because both depend on competitive grant projects. In terms of reliable supporters, they mentioned a grant for minority or regional cultures with backing from Slovakia's Ministry of Culture. Furthermore, both organizations have observed other chances to gain support from Hungary and other international foundations for ethnic minorities.¹⁶ They explained to me that grant projects in both Slovakia and Hungary are highly competitive.

Hungarian minority NGOs have created their own networks through the process of developing. Their relationships are not always directly linked to Hungary. Hungarians and ethnic Hungarians were relatively isolated from each other during socialism; following this period, they needed to rebuild cross-border relationships with each other. As Bárdi remarked, Hungary was only able to become an information hub for Hungarian minorities after socialism, and helped revitalize Hungarian minority communities in neighboring countries (Bárdi 2013: 539-540). In terms of minority media, Hungarian media in Hungary played an important role as the center of information. Hungarian minorities do not have a common Hungarian TV broadcaster throughout southern Slovakia, although there are several small local Hungarian TV broadcasters. Ethnic Hungarian journalists and entrepreneurs tried to build a Hungarian TV broadcaster for the entirety of southern Slovakia, but failed due to regulations on broadcast licenses and the Slovak language law, which requires the broadcaster to prepare translations. Some journalists produce Hungarian programs for TV stations based in Hungary to share information, because many ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia watch Hungarian TV.¹⁷ Such networks, which are based on specific demands, could constitute "cross-border cooperation," however they have not been promoted as a form of regional cross-border cooperation at the political level.

In this context, efforts to foster cross-border cooperation attempt to recreate relationships between Hungarians and ethnic Hungarians. Such initiatives started at the local government level, which is in a different sphere of existing minority networks. However, ethnically Hungarian cities have their own con-

16 Interviews with the spokesperson of *Fórum* (9/16/2013) and the head of a local association of *Csemadok* (9/6/2013), respectively.

17 The information about minority TV broadcasters came from interviews with a journalist and a minority activist in Dunajská Streda, respectively (9/6/2013, 9/25/2013).

nections in addition to cross-border cooperation. Table 2 shows a list of partnerships of cities whose majority populations consist of ethnic Hungarians (Dunajská Streda, Komárno, and Štúrovo). The table indicates that each city has its own vision of a relationship with other cities. Although all three cities have partnerships with Győr, Komárom, and Esztergom (which are partners in the same cross-border cooperation), these cities have many other partnerships as well. Dunajská Streda tends to establish contact with ethnic Hungarian cities¹⁸ outside Hungary, while Komárno and Štúrovo have signed agreements with many non-Hungarian cities in neighboring countries or other European nations. Cross-border cooperation has provided them with a new opportunity for regional development and the chance to build relationships with Hungary, however, the connection to Hungary is a part of their wider networks.

Table 2: Twin city partnerships of ethnically Hungarian cities

	Dunajská Streda	Komárno	Štúrovo
Cross-border region	Győr (Hungary)	Komárom (Hungary)	Esztergom (Hungary)
Ethnically Hungarian cities (outside Hungary)	Berehove-Beregszász (Ukraine) Jimbolia-Zsombolya (Romania) Odorheiu Secuiesc -Székelyudvarhely (Romania) Subotica-Szabadka (Serbia) Zenta-Község (Serbia)		Baraolt-Bárot, (Romania) Novi Bečej (Serbia)
Other	Gödöllő (Hungary) Dalaman (Turkey) Jindřichuv Hradec (The Czech Republic)	Blansko (The Czech Republic) Kralupy nad Vltavou (The Czech Republic) Lieto (Finland) Sebes (Romania) Terezín (The Czech Republic) Wiessenfels (Germany)	Bruntál (The Czech Republic) Castellarano (Italy) Klobuck (Poland)

Source: The official websites of each respective city.

18 An ethnically Hungarian city is not easily defined, however, I classified such urban centers based on the fact that their official websites are offered in Hungarian. However, I classified Novi Bečej whose website is not Hungarian as an ethnic Hungarian city, because this city has a Hungarian population [Knežev 2013].

III. The politics of cross-border cooperation and the Hungarian minority

Cross-border cooperation has expanded due to municipalities working together, however, such top-down cooperation does not always progress within local inhabitants' networks. Existing Hungarian minorities network with Hungarians should indicate the potential for the borderland's development, but they are not always useful for this purpose because their networks are used to widespread beyond the territory of Euroregion. Considering the cross-border cooperation between Slovakia and Hungary, their international relationship deserves attention because political conditions directly affect cross-border cooperation (compared to NGOs that can act more independently).

After socialism ended and Slovakia gained independence, Slovak politics were often criticized due to their nationalistic orientation. When the Slovak National Party (*Slovenská Národná Strana*, SNS) was in power, their policies often caused diplomatic estrangement with Hungary. The enactment and revision of the Slovak language law (1995 and 2009, respectively) and the revision of the Civil Act (2010) sparked arguments within the Hungarian minority (Table 3). Many Slovak Euroregions, including those along the Slovak-Hungarian border, were led by their respective governments and supported by national budgets, especially from 1999-2001 after the end of Mečiar politics (Halás 2007), when SMK joined the Slovak government. In this sense, the national elections of 1998 represented a significant turning point in Slovak politics. As Table 3 shows, cross-border cooperation mainly progressed when ethnic Hungarian parties (SMK or *Most-Híd*) were in power. Nevertheless, the Slovak decree on EGTCs was established when minority parties comprised the political opposition.

Despite a closer relationship between ethnic Hungarian parties and the development of Slovak-Hungarian cross-border cooperation, paradoxically, Slovak inhabitants explained the importance of cross-border cooperation to me more than members of the Hungarian minority during my research since 2013. Hungarian community elites did not refer so much to their connections to Hungary.¹⁹ In Štúrovo, one of the central cities of the Ister-Granum EGTC, the may-

19 As additional information to the context, I have included an incident from my fieldwork. An ethnic Hungarian informant criticized the local Hungarian nationalist group for always staying in contact with Hungarian nationalists in Hungary.

Table 3: Chronology of minority and nationalistic politics and the number of ERs/EGTCs in Slovakia

	The number of formed ERs/EGTCs in Slovakia	The Hungarian minority parties	The Slovak National party (SNS)
1989	Political regime change		
1990		The party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK) is formed	SNS is formed
	Parliamentary election	Seats in the parliament	Seats in the parliament
1992	Parliamentary election	Seats in the parliament	Member of the government
1993	Slovakia gains independence 1 ER		
1994	Parliamentary election	Seats in the parliament	Member of the government
1995	The language law is passed		
1998	Parliamentary election	Member of the government	Seats in the parliament
1999	2 ERs		
2000	3 ERs		
2001	Bridge in Štúrovo 2 ERs		
2002	Parliamentary election	Member of the government	No seats in the parliament
2003	2 ERs		
2004	Joins to EU 1 ER Selye János Univerzity is founded (students are taught in Hungarian)		
2006	Parliamentary election	Seats in the parliament	Member of the government
2007	Joins the Schengen Area		
2008	EGTC government decree 1 EGTC		
2009	The language law is revised	Most-Híd separates from the SMK	
2010	The Civil Act is revised Parliamentary election 2 EGTCs	Most-Híd: Member of the government SMK: No seats in the parliament	Seats in the parliament
2011	3 EGTCs		
2012	Parliamentary election 1 EGTC	Most-Híd: Seats in the parliament SMK: No seats in the parliament	No seats in the parliament
2013	4 EGTCs		
2014	The new law of EGTC is passed		
2016	Parliamentary election	Most-Híd: Member of the government SMK: No seats in the parliament	Member of the government

ER: Euroregion

This perspective may be grounded in a negative image of emphasizing the connections between Slovakia's Hungarian minority and Hungary; most members of the Hungarian minority wish to live peacefully in Slovakia and avoid conflict (Kambara 2014, 2015b).

or and vice mayor were both Slovaks who spoke Hungarian. The vice mayor criticized the former government and said that until 1998 they ignored the need for a bridge to Hungary, in other words, a bridge between Štúrovo and Esztergom, and she understood that the bridge was only successfully built after the Hungarian party entered the government. The vice mayor also represented the Slovak-Hungarian friendship cultural association *Slovenského Maďarského Priateľstva/Szlovák-Magyar Baráti Társaság*, which was formed based on demand to build a bridge to Hungary. Later, this association started to carry out bilingual and cross-cultural projects.

*Our city not only has Csemadok and Matica Slovenská, but also Slovenského Maďarského Priateľstva; in Hungarian, it is called Szlovák-Magyar Baráti Társaság. This association represents Štúrovo's characteristics. Such a case is rare in Slovakia... For example, we organized a concert with music by Hungarian and Slovak composers. We also prepared a bilingual memorial plate for Zahovay, a bilingual musician from here. We had to make it bilingual; we wanted to.*²⁰

Some Slovaks who grew up in southern Slovakia speak Hungarian while other Slovaks, especially newcomers, do not always speak Hungarian. However, the director of the regional cultural center in Dunajská Streda, who arrived there as a Slovak newcomer, managed to greet people in Hungarian at the ceremony of the cross-border cooperation event in Győr.²¹ In the eastern part of the Slovak borderland, Slovaks who speak Hungarian also join in projects as part of cross-border cooperation. The eastern borderland is less densely populated with ethnic Hungarians and there are fewer active minority associations than in the western borderland. However, many people who are indeed ethnically descended from Hungarians identify as “Slovaks” and have a potential to be involved in the projects²².

20 Interview with the vice mayor of Štúrovo (9/11/2014).

21 Interview with the director of the regional cultural center in Dunajská Streda (9/19/2014).

22 I have to remark that some Slovaks who do not speak Hungarian also work for Slovak- Hungary cross-border cooperation. In this case, the cooperation projects tend to become in large scale and often involve other neighboring countries. Their working language is English.

The Hungarian minority is key to navigating collaborative projects, however, Slovaks have also established a certain role for themselves in recent Slovak-Hungarian cross-border cooperation. Cross-border cooperation policies have caused economic, social, political, and cultural changes to borderland areas, yet cultural shifts do not simply mean developing a common European identity (Wilson 2010). Every inhabitant identifies with Hungary or Slovakia differently. In addition, some ethnic Hungarians have a hybrid identity between Hungarian and Slovak (Árendás 2011), which tends not to appear in minorities’ associational networks. This is a limitation of this study, because I focused on networks of minority associations that are joined by those who want to act as the Hungarian minority. However, as long as cross-border cooperation aims for regional development in the borderland, inhabitants are able to share the same goal without considering each inhabitant’s ethnic origins.

Conclusion

Cross-border cooperation is a method of regional development, as well as a policy to help local inhabitants transcend the differences between Hungarians in Hungary and Slovakia’s Hungarian minority. Therefore, less significant language barriers seem to promote cross-border cooperation, however, ethnic Hungarian inhabitants in borderland areas do not always share an attachment to the “motherland.” This is because the Hungarian minority in Slovakia amounts to around 500,000 people; it is not so big, but not so small as to be unified under one group. Cross-border cooperation creates new relationships in the borderland consisting of minority networks. Some “Slovaks” who engage in cross-border cooperation have the potential to make up the new Slovak-Hungarian borderland community.

In conclusion, I would like to mention two points about the influence of cross-border cooperation on the Hungarian minority community. Firstly, cross-border cooperation and Hungarian minority networks developed in different realms. Cross-border cooperation is based on collaboration between municipalities, which are created independently of existing minority networks. Secondly, regional cross-border cooperation has the potential to help local inhabitants overcome ethnic differences. At a smaller level of cooperation, only Hungarian villages might be involved. However, more influential cooperation tends to include Slovaks because ethnically Hungarian cities have a certain

amount of Slovak inhabitants. In this case, Slovaks play a part in representing a positive image of cross-border cooperation that goes beyond ethnic groups.

My research has been limited not only by the language I chose to conduct it in, but also by the research area, since the zones where members of the Hungarian minority live have regional variety. Slovaks play a big role in cross-border cooperation in some areas, while other places contain more ethnic Hungarians. It is difficult to generalize the features of each local cross-border zone. Future research design should depend on the characteristics of specific borderlands.

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 Komárno (Slovakia) <http://www.komarno.sk/start.html>

Novi Bečej (Serbia) <http://www.novibecej.rs/>

Odorheiu Secuiesc (Romania) <http://www.varoshaza.ro/>

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