

# Transboundary Symbiosis over the Danube: III

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

Edited by

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

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## Record on our panel at the IX ICCEES World Congress, Makuhari, 2015

The 9<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the International Council for Central and East European Studies (ICCEES) took place on 3 - 8 August, 2015, in Makuhari (Chiba Prefecture, Japan). It was a big event with over 1500 participants from around the world. On this occasion we organized a panel titled “Transboundary Symbiosis over the Danube: EU Integration between Slovakia and Hungary from a Local Border Perspective” on 4 August.

Based on several years of cooperative research supported by the Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research (Japan Society for the Promotion of Science), we prepared for this occasion three presentations. Our speakers were Prof. Barnabás VAJDA (Selye János University, Slovakia), Prof. Tatsuya NAKAZAWA (Tokai University, Japan), and Dr. Yuko KAMBARA (University of Kitakyushu, Japan). The discussants were Prof. Tadaki IIO (Josai University, Japan) and Prof. Hiroshi FUKUDA (Aichi University of Education, Japan). Prof. Susumu NAGAYO (Waseda University, Japan) took the chair.

Each speaker had a 15 minute presentation then two discussants gave brief comments. Afterward we had a Question and Answer session from the audience. We had over 20 people in the audience. The discussion was lively so we had to extend our session by 10 minutes. Here are the summaries and reproduction of the Q and A session:

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Transboundary Symbiosis over the River Danube during the Cold War Era  
Barnabás VAJDA

*Transboundary Symbiosis over the Danube: III  
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IEDA, Osamu, NAGAYO, Susumu (eds.) 2018. Waseda University Press.

There are four major issues that have been carefully examined in the *Komárom / Komárno* case: the state border regime; ethnic relations; border checkpoint; lieux de memoires.

At the congress, the lecture dealt with the first one, i.e. the state border regime between Hungary and Czecho/Slovakia, including the forms and limits of the state border (e.g. smuggling), and the phenomenon of the 'fake' Iron Curtain. It researched the border regime between Komárno (until 1993 in Czecho/Slovakia, present-day Slovakia) and Komárom (Hungary) within the time-span from the 1950s to the 1980s.

In Komárno and Komárom we can observe the phenomenon of a gradually thawing border regime in Eastern Europe. The historical context of the study is the era of the Cold War, and the specific phenomenon is the extent of freedom when crossing the state border or when migrating.

The further context of the Hungarian - Czechoslovak border relations is what we see from the historical sources, a consequence of European migration. Through the phenomenon of migration, we can see the true nature of the East European state regimes as well as the process of thawing of the state border regime. In the 1950s any trip across the Iron Curtain was strictly limited, however in the 1960s there was already a variety of cross-border connections and migrations. Looking at the Cold War from this perspective, we see here the events not on a state level, but on the level of everyday experiences, which can be very different from state policy, and certainly very different from the military policy of the period.

The lecture surveyed the phenomenon of a strictly guarded, or even lethal state border. Adding together all limitations and border restrictions, it would still be unfair to say that East European citizens were completely isolated from each other or from West Europe. With many meaningless restrictions involved, there were undoubtedly some signs of movement both within the communist countries as well as the West.

This was particularly true when tourism came into the picture. Travelling within the Communist bloc is definitely increasing. In 1964, for example, some 140, 000 people from Czechoslovakia travelled to the West as tourists, while a tenfold number, some 1, 460, 000 made visits to other block countries. Tourist groups were organized by the Czechoslovak state tourist agency Čedok, and each participant received some 30 shillings (approximately 1.5 dollar) per day.

Despite all organizational difficulties and unpleasant checking procedures,

the process seemed steady and unstoppable. Though it was still more typical for sportsmen and intellectuals to travel, including physicians, architects, pharmacists, etc., official reports show evidence about a change of the general mood around 1965, noting that “Today, the flow of travelers from East European states is made up of people from all walks of life”.

The state border in Komárno/Komárom between Hungary and Czechoslovakia was practically sealed off in the period of 1946 to 1960. During this period crossing the border was almost completely prohibited for local people, therefore the state border was an impermeable obstacle for the locals of the two towns for some 15 years. It is not surprising that during our oral history interviews interviewees told the most horrible border stories from the 1950s.

Question by Prof. Tadaki IIO:

Were there any problems with visiting graveyards on the ‘other side’ of the state border? Have there been any progressive efforts made by Slovak and Hungarian churches regarding the historical reconciliation between Slovaks and Hungarians?

Answer by the speaker:

I have not heard about any problems concerning visiting graveyards neither in Komárno, nor in Komárom. During Communist times, religious networks were strictly forbidden in both countries. As for the present day situation, I wish the church elites in both countries were more active in contributing to the historical reconciliation of Slovaks and Hungarians. I wish, for instance, that we had more Christian youth exchange programmes.

Comment/question by Prof. Hiroshi FUKUDA:

There may have been a discrepancy between the state border regime of Hungary and (Czecho) Slovakia during Communism. Was this the case?

Answer by the speaker:

Yes, there were some significant differences between the border regime of Hungary and Slovakia, basically in two major ways. (Czecho) Slovakia was less willing to relax its strict border regime, especially in the early period of the Cold War. Secondly, the Kádár János era in Hungary used a more relaxed and more benevolent state border regime which from the early 1980s was more flexible

than that of (Czecho) Slovakia.

Question by Dr. Hansjörg Brey, Südosteuropa Gesellschaft, München:

What do you think about the free border regime today? Has the perception of the free border regime changed since your research?

Answer by the speaker:

Yes, it has changed. One historical lesson we learned from our field research is that the common perception of the state border can easily and rapidly change. Our oral history interviews were made in 2008 and 2009, when the free Schengen system was not introduced yet, but was well under preparation, and was expected to come into effect within a short time. At that time, the majority of people on both sides of the state border regarded freedom of movement as a great value. Today, however, under the influence of modern mass migration, we can see more and more people turning to the idea of a preferred strictly controlled state border system.

Question by Prof. Hiroshi, TANAKA , Ritsumeikan University:

What is the situation in the field of EU sponsored regional cooperation between Slovakia and Hungary?

Answer by the speaker:

I do not know. What I know is that there has been an increasing number of Slovak-Hungarian cross-border cooperation, e.g. between the Győr County (Hungary) and Trnavský samosprávny kraj (Trnava Self-governing Region) (Slovakia), for instance bus links connecting spa-bathes were set up, or local small and medium size businesses were financially stimulated.

Comment by Prof. M. M. Stolárik, University of Ottawa:

Komárno used to be a proud “city” since it had royal freedom rights since medieval times. We should not degrade Komárno to the status of a “town”.

Answer by the speaker:

I agree, however, we must not forget that during the 45-year-long period of Communist rule in Komárno, the city (as most cities in Czechoslovakia) lost almost all its independent privileges, in fact they were degraded to obedient



administrative entities, and Komárno was also a settlement which had to follow state/central directives on the one hand, and had to neglect its own urban interests on the other.

Question from the audience:

What stories did you hear during your oral history interviews about peoples' everyday experiences?

Answer by the speaker:

We heard very exciting human stories during our oral history interviews. Let me give you two examples. A man, desperate to flee Czechoslovakia, dug himself into a pile of coal on a train in order to get to Austria; since it was winter, he had some 3-cm-thick ice on his face when he was discovered by border guards. The other typical case: a 15-year-old girl missed the border guards right on the bridge linking Komárno and Komárom. She said that "the bridge is so long and so dark when we come back home from the disco at night, I wish there were border guards there".

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Boundary Mechanisms in the Formulation of National Identity: A Case Study of the Students at Selye János University in Komárno, Slovakia: Analysing the Results of Questionnaires in 2011 and 2014

Tatsuya NAKAZAWA

This paper consists of an analysis of the results of a questionnaire survey given to students at the Faculty of Education at Selye János University in Komárno in Slovakia, first from March 16-21, 2011, with the aid of a grant from the Toyota Foundation and then again from March 1-5, 2014, with a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research in Japan. This university was founded in 2004 to serve students from the Hungarian minority in Slovakia and is the first Hungarian-language university in Slovakia. The subjects represent an excellent resource for gaining an understanding of one facet of the attitudes of Slovakia's young Hungarian population that is receiving higher education. Before the survey, I created an English-language questionnaire comprising 53 items. The same questionnaire was distributed to 271 second- and third- year students in

five humanities departments at the Faculty of Education at Selye János University in 2011 and 2014. A total of 223 samples were collected, constituting a response rate of 82.2 percent.

The identities of all students conform largely to 5 types. Type 1: Exclusive identity of ‘Hungarian’ (9%; 20 students). Type 2: Composite identity of ‘Hungarian + Hungarian in Slovakia +  $\alpha$ ’ (29%; 65 students). Type 3: Exclusive identity of ‘Hungarian in Slovakia’ (29%; 65 students). Type 4: Composite identity of ‘Hungarian in Slovakia +  $\alpha$ ’ (17%; 38 students). Type 5: Composite identity of ‘Citizen of the Slovak Republic +  $\alpha$ ’ (6%; 13 students). Others: (10%; 22 students). We found that a definite boundary exists between type 2 and 3. About 60% of all students are concentrated in these types, so they seem to represent typical identities of the majority of students in this faculty. It is important that political convenience / inconvenience, economic advantage / disadvantage, cultural oppression / non-oppression, and future employment aspirations, i.e., the perception of one’s social environment, mainly form boundary mechanisms between Type 2 and 3.

Type 2 differs completely from Type 3. Students in Type 2 have grown up in relatively low-income households, and they even now lack a sense of political, economic, or cultural fulfillment. This type is also characteristically concentrated in the Hungarian language department in 2011 (however, in 2014, the number of Type 2 students increased in all departments). What is interesting is the fact that Type 2 does not tend to embrace the ‘bilingualism of official multiculturalism’, and has antipathy towards the globalism of the global elite.

In contrast, the Type 3 identity was common among students who sought to build a relatively stable space for themselves within the Slovak Republic. These students were concentrated in the English department, where students have a comparatively higher degree of linguistic fluency than in other departments. Type 3 students held positive views toward both the Slovak Republic and the EU, and in that sense had an element of civic nationalism and were ‘pro official multiculturalism’. In fact, Type 3 identity does not require ethnic ties in its interactions or personal connections, but is developing in a direction consistent with that of the so-called global elite compatible with globalism. Conversely, this is not the case with Type 2.

In addition, we notice that both types of students’ aspirations for future employment differ quite significantly. Most Type 2 students desire to become teachers or officials in their hometowns or other cities in Slovakia or Hungary;

however, many Type 3 students wish to become business-men/women in Slovakia or Hungary or the EU region. From this perspective, Type 2 pursues symbiosis with Slovaks, being more conscious of the “existence of conflict” or “social difference between them”. Conversely, while Type 3 pursues symbiosis with Slovaks, they are more conscious of “avoiding conflict or social difference between them”. In this sense, their current national identity may be said to be a sort of “projection of an ideal future condition”. For Type 2, the more acutely a lack of sense of fulfillment is felt with the present situation around them, the more plural and complex their identity will become in their quest for various future living spaces. Conversely, for Type 3, where there is a greater sense of fulfillment with the status quo in a space of stability, this will often result in a singular identity.

What has become clear from the 2011 and 2014 surveys described above is that the national identity of the young Hungarian minority is shaped referentially with respect to the nature of the perceived social environment in which an individual is placed, and, particularly, the nature of communication and daily interactions with one’s neighbours (including Slovak neighbours), and then by one’s own political, economic, and cultural experiences, or future employment aspirations. As such, national identity is by no means immutable, and could potentially be altered in any number of ways by future changes in social environment or the accumulation of individual experiences. That said, these findings should best be characterised as a hypothesis in need of further future explanation through a close investigation based on longitudinal research to be continued over the next few years.

Question by Prof. Tadaki IIO:

About the categories applied in your research, I think that the religious affiliation (Catholic, Calvinist, etc.) of the high schools from where the students from each categorical group graduated should also be considered as an important influential factor.

Answer by the speaker:

Yes, you are right. In the categories of national-ethnic identities of the students, I did not consider the Catholic, Calvinist etc. affiliation as an important factor. So, I would like to add a religious question to my next questionnaire survey of 2017.

Question from the audience:

Regarding the students' language identity, which languages they choose to learn, which language they use and what kind of career path they have in mind, I think it is crucial to examine their career prospects. For example, we should consider not just the problematics of nationalism and ethnic identity but also where the students choose to do job-hunting in the future (e.g., if students want to work for the European Union, Hungarian as a language is not necessary to learn, and students who choose to learn Hungarian might be considering going to Budapest for work). In addition, we should also consider why students choose to work somewhere and the financial incentives behind their choices.

Answer by the speaker:

This presentation is a study of the result of questionnaire surveys and its aim is to extract the characteristics of students' identities. So, I do not consider your point. However, in discussing your question, we need to verify Type 3 (Exclusive identity of 'Hungarian in Slovakia') and Type 5 (Composite identity of 'Citizen of the Slovak Republic +  $\alpha$ '). Especially, I suppose that further study of Type 5 perhaps would clarify the relationship between the place to work and financial incentives.

Comment from the audience: Nigel Swain, School of History, University of Liverpool, UK

According to your presentation, many students seem to be looking into the prospect of becoming bilingual teachers in their hometowns. This is an interesting fact, because from my research and personal experience, people or groups who are marginalized in their locality usually try to financially transcend the rules of the majority group or populace that surrounds them by becoming businessmen or venture startup entrepreneurs. In this respect, it seems strange to me that Hungarians in Slovakia do not go into, for instance, venture entrepreneurship, and choose the plain, quiet career path of school teacher.

Answer by the speaker:

Thank you for your fruitful question. This result was very interesting for me also. However, today my conclusion is based on the result of questionnaire surveys in 2011 and 2014. So, in order to draw a more objective conclusion, I need further future explanation through a close investigation based on longitudinal

research to be continued over the next few years.

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## Multi-ethnic Experiences Concerning Nationalism and the Cultural Right to Use the Minority Language: From Perspectives of the Hungarian Minority Elite in Southern Slovakia

Yuko KAMBARA

The Slovak Republic has experienced a historical ethnic conflict between the Hungarian minority and the Slovak majority, which, although not severe enough to lead to warfare, is nevertheless regarded as a serious problem by Hungarian minority elites and Slovak nationalists. The purpose of my presentation is to analyze multi-ethnic experiences ethnographically from the perspective of the Hungarian minority elites, in the context of problems relating to the cultural rights of the Hungarian minority.

In fact, the perception of ethnic problems was created by some instances of trouble and official arguments. The Slovak language law (1995) and its revision (2009) is the source of the most controversial arguments between politicians from the Hungarian minority and Slovak nationalists. In contrast to political antagonism, Slovak ethnographic studies have reported that ethnic conflict and hostility has been managed, in order to prevent it from spreading among people who live in multi-ethnic areas. Local inhabitants also regard their multi-ethnic communities as peaceful. They explain the “ethnic conflict” as a problem outside their community, or as a political issue that does not influence their everyday lives. Local Hungarian politicians claiming the protection of minority cultural rights also insist on the fact of peaceful ethnic symbiosis in everyday life and its importance. They tend to recognize that there is no contradiction between demands for cultural rights and ethnic coexistence, because maintaining one’s ethnic identity is an undoubted right as a Slovak citizen.

Komárno, one of my research fields in southwestern Slovakia, is a city on the border between Slovakia and Hungary. This city became a symbolic conflict zone, because Slovak and Hungarian nationalists travelled to the city and tried to incite nationalist agitation, although not all inhabitants were interested in taking part. Many informants criticized these movements that destroy peaceful ethnic symbiosis, yet they sometimes failed to distinguish nationalism from the

reasonable rights of the minority. On the other hand, it is a fact that a certain part of the Hungarian minority tends to declare themselves Slovaks, because they are used to living as Slovaks in Slovakia, and desire to avoid ethnic conflict; however, this creates a risk of assimilation for the minority. Maintaining and enlarging minority rights plays a role in maintaining the multiethnic character of the region, and may avoid assimilation and exclusion. The hope is that multiculturalism will cultivate democratic citizens who can protect minority rights and manage ethnic problems in the future, although the protection of minority rights may remain the cause of ethnic conflict. Ideal ethnic symbiosis cannot avoid facing the differences between ethnicities.

Comment by Prof. Hiroshi FUKUDA:

Slovakia is a relatively small country, however, regional differences are not so small among western, central, and eastern parts of the country. The Hungarian minority, mainly populating the southern parts of Slovakia, is no exception. Though your research chiefly focuses on the southwestern area, I'd like to ask whether there are any differences among the Hungarian minority in Slovakia?

Answer by the speaker:

My research has targeted the western part of Slovakia, where the Hungarian minority is a large proportion of the population. I hope I will be able to find answers during my next research project in eastern Slovakia. I agree with your comment, because the western and eastern parts of Slovakia have been different administrative districts since the period of the Kingdom of Hungary. I assume it was not until Hungarians became an ethnic minority that they discovered a sense of mutual solidarity. However, the western part of Slovakia is the best field for minority research, because it has the largest proportion of minorities in its population.

Comment by Prof. Tadaki IIO:

Church leaders in Hungary often gain public attention, especially when they voice support for minority rights of Hungarians living abroad. In Slovakia, has religion focused on minority politics? Have church leaders played a constructive role in co-existence, or rather have political and church elites tended to keep a distance from one another?

Answer by the speaker:

Unfortunately, I cannot give any answer about the role of the church, because I do not have enough research data on it. The cities that I researched have three denominations: Roman Catholic, the Lutheran Church, and the Reformed Christian Church. I can however point to an interesting case, where a sculpture expressing sadness about lost Hungarian territory is set up in the garden of the church of the Reformed Christian Church, because the members of the Reformed Christian Church are solely Hungarians in this area. The religious factor will be an interesting research issue for me in the future.

Questions from the audience:

Q1: What do the Hungarian minorities think about recent Hungarian nationalist attitudes, for example, the Orban government?

Q2: The identity of the Hungarian minority has been reconstructed under the historical political situation in Slovakia. Does not ethnic identity consist of a more complex structure?

Q3: What kind of role does the Hungarian minority play in the borderland regional cooperation between Slovakia and Hungary?

Q4: I am wondering whether they really can live peacefully in this area, because Hungarian nationalism is becoming stronger in Hungary.

Q5: The Hungarian government decided to revise the law concerning nationality, so Hungarians who live outside Hungarian territory can acquire Hungarian nationality. What was the impact of the law in this area?

Answer by the speaker for all:

Firstly, I would like to emphasize that my research is based on interviews with Hungarian minority elites who can speak Slovak. Almost all of the Hungarian minority speak Slovak fluently. However, if I talked with them in Hungarian they might complain about the Slovaks more frankly. At least, my informants do not regard Orban as a nationalist politician and the influence of his politics is limited. I also would like to note, in relation to the changes to the Hungarian nationality law that, after the revision of the law in Hungary, the Slovak government decided to revise their nationality law as a countermeasure. The Slovak law now bars Slovak citizens from applying to another country for citizenship (except in some exceptional cases). I do not have statistical data; however, many informants mentioned that only a few people have applied for Hungarian nation-

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ality.

(edit. Susumu NAGAYO)