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## THE APPEARANCE AND ROLE OF MICRO-REGIONAL CO-OPERATIONS IN THE HUNGARIAN SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT

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The study deals with smallest spatial developing unit, the so called micro-regional tier. This tier had developed during the transition process. Institutionalism and operation of the organizations of micro-regions can be linked to three periods during the transition decade. The 1990s was the *first period*, known as the “early days”. In this period there was a diffuse atomized local municipality system with micro-regional co-operations mainly in the rural areas, which supported the villages with the aim of enhancing their lobbying capacity. During the second period these organizations operated as a bottom-up model and gained different financial resources for the common infrastructure development and started a way of micro-regional thinking. The third period started after the appearance of the 1996/21 Act (on physical planning and spatial development). It was a significant milestone for micro-regional co-operation, because this act defined the micro-regional level and declared micro-regional co-operation in the Spatial Development Association of Municipalities. The micro-regional tier can be named the tier of bottom-up and local will. In the rural areas, it meant a social innovation process, which is the result of this tier and is strengthened by the modified spatial development act in 2004.

**Key words:** transition, spatial development, micro-regional tier, association of municipalities for spatial development, partnership at micro-regional level

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## BACKGROUND

The concept of “locality” came to the fore in regional policies in Europe in the 1970s, and especially the 1980s. Thus, while economic integration deepened and globalization gained increasing momentum, the role of local development grew in importance, with decentralization and subsidiarity as priorities (Westholm et al. 1999). Globalization and localization are two seemingly mutually exclusive processes. However, this is far from being the case. On the contrary, economic and, in particular, cultural globalization leads to homogenization. But they may also elicit a clear-cut definition of identity. Indeed, the very channels of globalization (e.g. the Internet and mobile telephones) are instrumental in strengthening locality (Inotai 2001). Efforts are being made to integrate social groups on the periphery of the globalized world into that same globalized world, with the role of small communities becoming increasingly accentuated and the protection of cultural heritage gaining prestige. In the process a humanistic model of development has been gaining ground (Fekete 2001). Such ambivalence in the 1990s drew attention to local development in the process of regional planning, culminating in according priority to the local level of area development and then in increased attention to clearly disadvantaged rural areas. As a result, integrated, community-based rural development was first raised as an issue, then integrated into development policies (Moseley 2003). In a smaller regional unit the adoption of a humanistic approach, allowing for the wishes of local participants, seeks to improve the quality of life of local residents, emphasize local values, while remaining capable of embracing globalization.

### THE RURAL COMPONENTS OF REGIONAL POLICY IN HUNGARY IN THE 1990s

The process of globalization and localization started to evolve simultaneously in Hungary in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Economic integration into the EU economy facilitated globalization, while the political change of the regime fostered localization by emphasizing and representing the interests of local communities.

The Act on Local Self-Governments came into effect in 1991, immediately after the regime change, abolishing the former system of local councils and urban environs<sup>1</sup>. A two-tier system of public administration was established, whereby the administration traditions were discontinued. Under the Act on Local Self-Governments, communities as the units of public administration took charge of responsibilities. Hence this Act can be considered as the model of a grass-roots hierarchy. The spirit of the Act on Local Self-Governments was at odds with attempts at administrative centralization in the era before the regime change. The Act accords priority to decentralization, hence to local-level decision-making. This is really why the first self-government elections came to symbolize regime change at the local level.

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<sup>1</sup> Urban environ (városkörnyék) was only a statistical tier without administrative authority between 1984-1990 after termination of district-council in 1984.

Between 1950 and 1990, under the system of local councils<sup>2</sup>, regional authorities were the local representatives of the government's powers; communities did not have the right to self-determination, with execution becoming the most important priority at the local level. In accordance with the National Settlement Development Concept and a government decree on regional development passed in 1971 as well as the subsequent Act on Local Councils, the allocation of resources favouring smaller communities decreased owing to a heavily centralized system of public administration. Of the communities placed in a hierarchical order, those with amalgamated-community status were granted practically no resources earmarked for development, which often led to their disappearance. In 1984, the system of districts was replaced by that of urban environs, which heralded the establishment of the two-tier system. However, the plight of the small communities was far from over, since available funds for development were still hard to come by. Only the local communities of the late 1980s undergoing transformation – while becoming increasingly resilient – were able to secure more central government funds for villages and communities. Such funds were often lobbied for by aldermen elected in amalgamated communities.

With the Act on Local Self-Governments entering into effect, residents in small communities rightly felt that, at long last, they were the true masters of their own communities. Under the Act, they had the right to set up independent decision-making bodies, and they were only too glad to fulfil their statutory obligations and attend to their chosen responsibilities. As a result, each community elected its own local body, which meant nearly 3,200 local self-government bodies taking over from 1,600 local councils. It was disintegration, pure and simple. This is why a village called Nemesmedves with a population of 17 was able to set up a local self-governing body of its own, to cite only one extreme example. It was during this period that a number of villages – in effect former amalgamations of several communities – also voiced their demand for administrative separation, thereby adding to the number of independent communities and municipalities.

The Act did not take into consideration the size of municipalities. What is more, the corridors of power helplessly stood by and watched the fragmentation of local power. Despite recommendations of Ministry of Home Affairs, the earlier fusion of local councils did not revive. Economizing on the possibilities that the law provided for them, even the communities that used to get along with each other strove for full independence, often going so far as to reject the reasonable system of district public notaries<sup>3</sup>. And even when some communities did set up a system of district public notaries, it was rarely at places that used to be council seats. It was often the case that district public notaries had their central offices in some of the former cooperating communities. But it was even more common that each settlement had its own public notary. “Under the local self-government system, the forming of partnerships is not a necessity, but a liberty.” (Kovács Pálné 1999, p. 158).

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<sup>2</sup> The local council (*községi tanács* in Hungarian) meant the administrative committee at settlement level.

<sup>3</sup> District public notary office is a saving expenses institution because of the district notary office supplies administrative tasks for municipalities.

Thus, a rather fragmented and expensive system of local self-governing bodies was established, but it was able to exercise a community's right to self-determination. Atomization, however, did not rule out co-operation: small regions, spurred on by grass-roots initiatives at the local-government level, started to form partnerships on a voluntary basis from the early 1990s. Thus the conflicting process of integration and disintegration took place simultaneously within the sphere of communal networks.

The Act on Local Self-Governments resulted in the disintegration of community groups, which used to be under the administrative control of joint councils. Dazzled with a sense of autonomy – which made up for resources slowing to a trickle, or often the lack of such resources – communities became isolated, striving to comply with statutory obligations and carry out chosen responsibilities on their own. Aware of the need for concerted infrastructural capital investment, the mayors of small communities soon identified the difficulties that their respective local self-governing bodies faced in terms of interest representation. Before long, the first signs of co-operation could be seen. Depending on the local decision-makers, the nature of the problems faced and community structure, the intensity of such signs varied from one region to the next (Kovács Pálné 1996).

#### THE CONCEPT AND ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS OF MICRO-REGIONS

In the early 1990s, micro-regional organizations, alliances, associations, partnerships, foundations or whatever they happened to be called proliferated, since the law did not provide for their forms of operation. Before the Act on Regional Development and Physical Planning<sup>4</sup> took effect, partnerships and alliances had been the most common forms. The results of a survey in 1999 revealed that 70 % of the small regions operated as partnerships. Even today 13 % operate either as associations or foundations<sup>5</sup>.

The concept of micro-regions differs from that of micro-regional organizations. While the former denotes limited physical space, the latter is a group of communities where local self-governing bodies operate – more often than not as associations – in co-operation with each other. As a rule, micro-regional organizations suggest good personal relationships between the aldermen and mayors of the various municipalities, indicating potential areas for co-operation. Local decisions and intentions were first reflected in the names that small regional associations had chosen for themselves: they were names of landscapes or areas (e.g. Fertő mente, Répcesík, Cserehát, Hegyhát, Ormánság and Szigetköz), which had all but sunk into oblivion in the communist era. Such names came to symbolize the identity of small regional associations.

Today, spatial development, regional studies and geography use the concept of “small regions” (micro-regions) as a spatial category. In this context, it de-

<sup>4</sup> The Act XXI of 1996 on Regional Development and Physical Planning was the first Act for regional development after the political change.

<sup>5</sup> A survey conducted by the Centre for Regional Research, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, in 1999.

notes a spatial unit of planning and development which forms the background of economic, market, commercial, infrastructural, supply and public administration-related issues for the majority of local residents as well as social relationships. "Its main tasks are to express shared intentions related to and inherent in the surroundings, locality and local self-governing bodies working in cooperation, get the necessary plans prepared and co-ordinated, obtain additional resources, implement developments, facilitate the burgeoning of the city-village relationship, enhance regional identity and aid rural development" (Csatári 1996, p. 6). This is the definition of micro-regions made up of cities and their catchment areas.

The designation of the boundaries of micro-regions is not an easy task, since administrative boundaries, natural geographical boundaries, or even those of catchment areas are unable to unequivocally define them. This is a complex spatial unit, used for studying the historical and cultural roots, social, natural and economic potential and ethnographic values as a whole of a group of communities. The contiguous areas where the homogeneity of these factors is the highest can be labelled as a micro-region (Kukorelli Szörényiné and Rechnitzer 1993).

Although the designation of the boundaries of small regions – based on the above considerations – has not taken place at a national level, empirical studies reveal that small regional organizations, which started to spring up in the early 1990s, were mostly based on a shared natural area and ethnography (Fekete and Bodolai 1995).

The concept of micro-regions also features in Act XXI of 1996 on Regional Development and Physical Planning, which provides the following definition of small regions as a basic concept: "a spatial unit that can be identified and whose boundaries can be designated on the basis of the aggregate functional relationships that exist between the individual communities". The smallest spatial unit under the National Regional Development Concept is the micro-region. Thus, both the law and the concept refer to small units as a spatial category. The question is what concept of micro-regions the law uses and how it designates their boundaries. The answer to that question is the concept of micro-regions designated by the Central Statistical Office (CSO).

As a rule, neither the boundaries of micro-regional organizations (which were voluntary associations of local self-governing bodies) nor the boundaries of small regions designated by the CSO coincided with the boundaries of small regions designated by the CSO in 1994 (modified in 1996). The CSO method was based on its former system of urban environs set up between 1984 and 1990. In its publications the CSO refers to these districts as small regions. There were 138 so-called statistical micro-regions with no organizational basis whatsoever, effectively created as units of data provision, without local residents consenting to or having a say in the creation of such units. It follows that the components of the CSO's system of spatial division as at January 1994 should simply be referred to as CSO districts. Between 1994 and 1996 12 communities were granted urban status, which redefined the terms of reference set out in the CSO's system of towns and their gravity zones, thereby re-drawing the boundaries of the latter. This was one of the reasons why the former system of districts

was reviewed in 1996, which in turn allowed the possibility of creating new districts. As a result of the revision, in 1996 the number of CSO districts rose to 150<sup>6</sup> (Fig 1). On 1st January 2004, 17 new CSO small regions were established as a result of a new revision. Thus, currently, there are 167 statistical micro-regions (Fig 2).

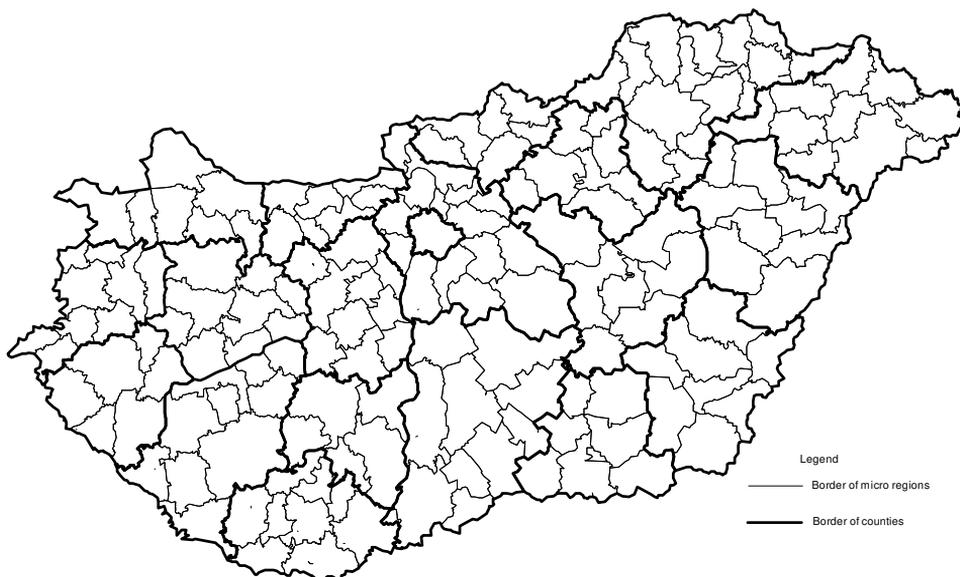


Fig. 1. Micro-regions designated by Central Statistical Office, 1996

Part 3 of Act XXI of 1996 on Regional Development and Physical Planning also includes association of municipalities for spatial development (ÖTT)<sup>7</sup> as one of the organizational forms of small regions in “regional authorities responsible for area development and spatial planning”. This amounted to granting legal status to a form of small regional partnership, the establishment of which had started earlier. The law sanctioned the foundation of such partnerships as a legally non-binding duty, allowing local self-governing bodies to set up association of municipalities for spatial development.

The foundation of small regional partnerships went through three distinctly separate stages in the 1990s. The first one spanned the period between 1990 and 1993, the second 1994 and 1996 and the third started when Act XXI came into force in 1996.

<sup>6</sup> The Act XXI of 1996 on Regional Development and Physical Planning uses this category as the level of intervention.

<sup>7</sup> ÖTT (Önkormányzati területfejlesztési társulás) means Association of Municipalities for Spatial Development.

### The “early days” (1989-1993)

While undergoing integration, micro-regional partnerships, set up in the first half of the 1990s, invariably strove to downgrade their earlier relationships, including the town-village relationship. They went to great lengths to exclude such relationships in order that they could do away with pre-1990 spatial relationships imposed upon them. It was at this time that “Zalakar” was established, refusing to include Zalaszentgrót, formerly the centre of its urban environs. An endless series of examples may be quoted, such as the Alliance of the Local Self-Governing Bodies of Szigetköz, which Mosonmagyaróvár joined after 1996, the Ethnic Regional Development Partnership of Muramente near Nagykanizsa, and the Regional Development Association of Rábatorok in the vicinity of Győr. The exclusion of cities from the partnerships set up during this period cannot be ascribed exclusively to the attitude of villages. Cities themselves were negative. In those years Székesfehérvár was a rare example of cities offering to resume relationships with either their catchment areas or adjoining communities. Generally, micro-regional partnerships chose the name of the geographical area that symbolized their regions as their name, which suggested strong ties with geographical identity and accentuated – through the exclusion of cities – their separation from the centre of their catchment areas (Fekete and Bodolai 1995). The reasons for founding micro-regional partnerships included joint interest representation and the pursuit of opportunities. These organizations were the first real examples of bottom-up initiatives.



sewerage, gas and telephone lines (Süli and Zakar 1997). However, as soon as tasks were accomplished, task-oriented small regional partnerships no longer had a shared purpose. Micro-regional partnerships set up for carrying out infra-structural development did not have too much in common with area development partnerships established later. Joining ranks was not based on grass-roots interest representation but, rather, on agreements to build public utilities with the most reasonable arrangement possible. Such task-oriented co-partnerships were common in areas where sewerage, gas and telephone lines were to be established. The task-oriented nature of such co-operation was clearly proven by the fact that various partnerships, set up to facilitate the construction of utilities, did not necessarily comprise the communities with a variety of public utilities. There were, however, examples of flourishing partnerships, set up originally to facilitate the construction of utilities, transforming themselves into area development ones undertaking the responsibility of implementing some comprehensive development.

Simultaneously with the foundation of partnerships to develop the local infrastructure, small regional organizations, setting area development as their goal, were also established and incorporated. The first such organizations were the Cserehát Communal Alliance and the Alliance of the Local Self-Governing Bodies in Vas County's Backward Regions set up in 1989 and 1991 respectively.

Representing and promoting or about to represent and promote interest, micro-regional partnerships soon realized that without an organizational and operational background goals were little more than pie in the sky. If they were to survive they had to raise funds, for the paltry membership fees that member local self-governing bodies paid, facing scarcity of capital themselves, could not cover their costs. Partnerships set up earlier also identified the funds they could raise by applying for grants. So did the local self-governing bodies that did not belong to any micro-regional partnerships. The possibility of raising funds by applying for grants gave birth to further micro-regional partnerships, offering existing ones a chance of survival. Hence integration continued or even accelerated at the micro-region level.

#### The period of "gathering momentum" (1994-1996)

The second wave of establishing small regional partnerships was triggered by the availability of PHARE<sup>8</sup> and OFA<sup>9</sup> funds, for which Hungary had become eligible. Of the two, PHARE Inter Communal Co-operation (ICC) preceded the OFA project by a couple of months.

Launched in early 1994, Inter Communal Co-operation was a component of the PHARE Regional Development Programme, launched in 1992 and spanning

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<sup>8</sup> PHARE Aid Programme: pursuant to the decision made by the Council of the European Union in December 1989.

<sup>9</sup> OFA *Országos Foglalkoztatási Közalapítvány* (National Employment Public Fund).

the period between 1993 and 1996. The main objectives of ICC were as follows:

- promoting and strengthening co-operation between local self-governing bodies in area development,
- supporting quality projects of co-operation, highlighting the advantages of co-operation between local self-governing bodies and proving the viability of cross-community economic development.

The system of application for funds stipulated two rounds, both consisting of two stages. Only the applications complying with the requirements to be met in the first stage and approved by a team qualified for entering the second stage. The two rounds started at different times, allowing for the possibility of applicants submitting their applications at different times or, if need be, extending the intervening period between the two stages. This system of application for funds, stipulating two rounds (both consisting of two stages), granted financial support to a total of 30 small regional alliances in the first stage of each round. During the first stage in early 1994, 56 organizations, either in place at the time or set up specifically to use the system of application for funds, submitted applications for funds to finance small regional alliances. Of them, 15 won (Andrasek 1995).

The fact that 94 organizations – twice the number participating in the first round – submitted their applications during the first stage of the second round proved the popularity of the programme, enhanced interest in it and the innovative capacity of rural areas.<sup>10</sup> There were 20 overlapping applicants, that is applicants who failed to win during the first stage in the first round, but who were allowed to re-submit their application in the second round. But then again, of the 94 applicants, only 15 were eligible for further support from PHARE aid funds during the second stage of the second round.

Judging from the above figures, and supposing that each had submitted an application, at least 130 small regional partnerships should have been in existence by the autumn of 1994, which means that the number of organisations doubled within a mere six months.

However, the effects of the programme should not be overestimated. Notwithstanding the funds granted, not all the winners succeeded in implementing their objectives. And those that were not among the 30 winners and failed to persist or raise funds or find a dedicated person to lead their cause did not even start operating and/or joined other partnerships years later.

The OFA project served as a bailout for unsuccessful applicants. Its objectives had much in common with those of PHARE ICC. OFA also targeted the level of small regions, called for inter-communal co-operation and provided financial support for working out comprehensive area developments projects for small regions. Thus the small regions that failed to obtain funds in the first stage of PHARE ICC, could still do so under OFA. Of the applications submitted, 32 were successful. OFA funds, amounting to HUF 35.2 million, enabled the small regional alliances of the time to get their development concept worked out.

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<sup>10</sup> KTM Area Development PHARE Office

OFA also launched a project – an organic continuation of the previous one – promoting the employment of small regional managers in three successive years, starting in 1995. Its objective was to financially support the small regional partnerships that had already had a finalised comprehensive regional development project but no funds to launch and implement it with the participation of regional managers. This OFA project launched a process leading to the institutionalisation of small regions.

Both PHARE and OFA played a pivotal role in launching the process of inter-communal co-operation through the establishment of small regional partnerships. Either intended to support small regional partnerships that fitted in with the EU rural development policy, that is those based on grassroots initiatives and partnerships, and able to make decisions locally and also rely on their own funds (Kukorelli Szörényiné 2001).

The period of “accomplishment” (after Act XXI came into effect)

The designation of the boundaries of micro-regions by the CSO did not have much impact on the establishment of small regional partnerships, but the law that used this designation did. With the Act on Regional Development and Physical Planning becoming law in 1996, micro-region organisations were either established or re-established in line with the spirit of the law, and the communities that had not previously belonged to any small regional partnership joined old or newly established ones.

Though the law does not stipulate the compulsory establishment of Association of Municipalities for Spatial Development (ÖTT), in order for communities to be able to have representatives on county development councils, membership or the foundation of a regional ÖTT was highly recommended. The reason for this was that, prior to the amendment of the Act on Regional Development and Physical Planning (1999), partnerships were allowed to have a representative each on the county development council in the relevant county in each CSO micro-region. This is why the passing of the Act on Regional Development can be regarded as a milestone in the history of micro-regional partnerships. The Act accelerated the process of communities joining spatial development partnerships. Where there had been no small regional partnerships, ÖTT formed after the Act on Area Development became law, often representing CSO small regions. It was often the case that former partnerships, when they operated in areas smaller than CSO small regions, founded umbrella organizations or another partnership in areas with boundaries designated by the CSO.

From 1996, micro-regional partnerships – formed in the first half of the 1990s in areas with boundaries not designated by the CSO – had a voice in spatial development issues. They were usually viable partnerships with development offices and a concept of development of their own. In accordance with the Act on Regional Development and Physical Planning, the partnerships formed earlier, if they wanted to have representatives on county spatial development councils, had the following options:

- transformation into ÖTT set out in Act XXI of 1996 on Regional Development and Physical Planning; inclusion of towns or other communities in the region intending to join them; if there were several viable partnerships in sta-

tistical catchment areas, they were represented in the spatial development councils in a pre-arranged manner, e.g. on a rota basis,

- communities in CSO districts formed ÖTT in accordance with the stipulations of the law; communities which had formed previous partnerships were allowed to become members, thereby having double membership. In that way, however, their representation was safe,
- forming ÖTT in districts with boundaries designated by the CSO, with former partnerships terminated simultaneously.

The merits of Act XXI were that it accelerated the process of the formation of micro-regional partnerships, encouraged bodies of municipalities to work in co-operation with each other and provided for the possibility of participation in decision-making by having representatives on the spatial development councils of counties. At the same time, however, it treated the concept of micro-regions separately from that of ÖTT, which prevented it from being able to provide a finalized and unambiguous spatial division (Pfeil 2001). What is enshrined in the law put an end to an earlier practice – that, in addition to municipalities, others could also be included in micro-regional partnerships – thereby violating the principle of a broad partnership. It also failed to resolve the problem of spatial coverage. In 1999, there were 74 such communities which had not joined any partnership, and many that were members in several simultaneously.

There are co-existing small regional partnerships which:

- were formed before the Act on Regional Development and Physical Planning was enacted, and have not changed their form of partnership,
- were transformed into local self-governing partnerships after the Act on Regional Development became law,
- formed new local self-governing partnerships after 1996.

As regards spatial coverage, in some counties small regions coincide with the geographical area of the county in question, while in others there are “holes”, as forming a partnership is not compulsory. There is also overlapping and multiple membership (Fig 3). Functional and statistical micro-regions exist side by side. They either coincide with or are separate from each other geographically. As a result, the organizational structure of small regions is still unclear. The 1999 amendment of the Act also failed to effectively clarify it.

Since the 1999 amendment of the Act on Regional Development and Physical Planning, the role of micro-regions has only changed slightly. The number of the members representing micro-regions in county and regional spatial development councils has dropped, which has resulted in their having fewer powers to decide on area development issues.

In 1999 new small regional partnerships emerged: the so-called SAPARD<sup>11</sup> small regions in the rural areas. Announcing a call for applications in late 1998, the Division of Rural Development Programmes at the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development encouraged small regional partnerships to prepare stra-

<sup>11</sup> SAPARD: pre-accession aid programme.

tegitic programmes for rural development. Under the stipulations of the call for applications, however, it was not ÖTT, but rather the municipalities that were allowed to submit applications. The municipalities had to declare that they worked in co-operation and were members of only one partnership, that is each community only belonged to one small SAPARD micro-region. The municipalities submitted their applications either as ÖTT that had already been set up (e.g. the Ethnic Area Development Association of Muramente) or as joint partnerships (e.g. Nyugati Kapu and SZÖSZ as a joint partnership). Sometimes communities set up a new self-governing conglomerate, e.g. two SAPARD regions were formed within Kistrába ÖTT (Local Self-governing Development Partnership). The only advantage of this system of call for applications was that it did away with overlapping.

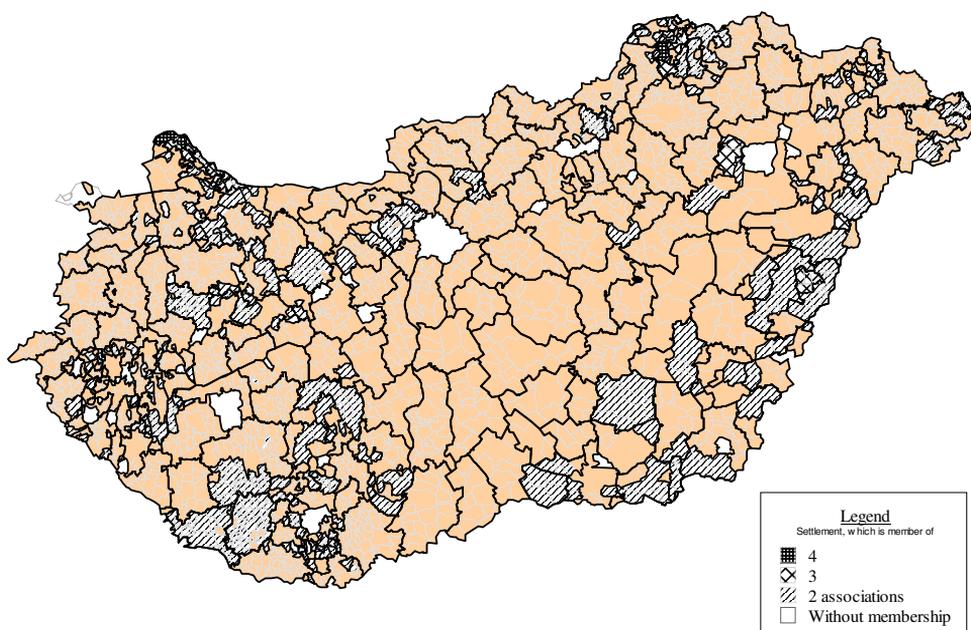


Fig. 3. Association of municipalities for spatial development (ÖTT), 2000

Thus, in the course of the preparation for pre-accession funds, further small regional partnerships sprang up (Fig. 4). However, now their spatial coverage was approximately 95 %, and no territorial overlapping was possible. Legally speaking, SAPARD small regions are non-existent entities: they were formed for a special purpose. Yet, with their respective strategic and operational rural development programmes having been prepared, there are further tasks awaiting them in the process of pre-accession.

Taking into consideration only small regional partnerships formed to facilitate regional and economic development, there are currently at least three different small regional partnerships in Hungary:

- CSO small regions, denoting statistical regions and supporting regions by spatial development,
- ÖTT – functional small regions,
- SAPARD small regions – also of the functional type, identified in the context of the preparation for rural development programmes.

Table 1 lists the total number of small regions included in these three types in a regional breakdown, showing the difference in their numbers.

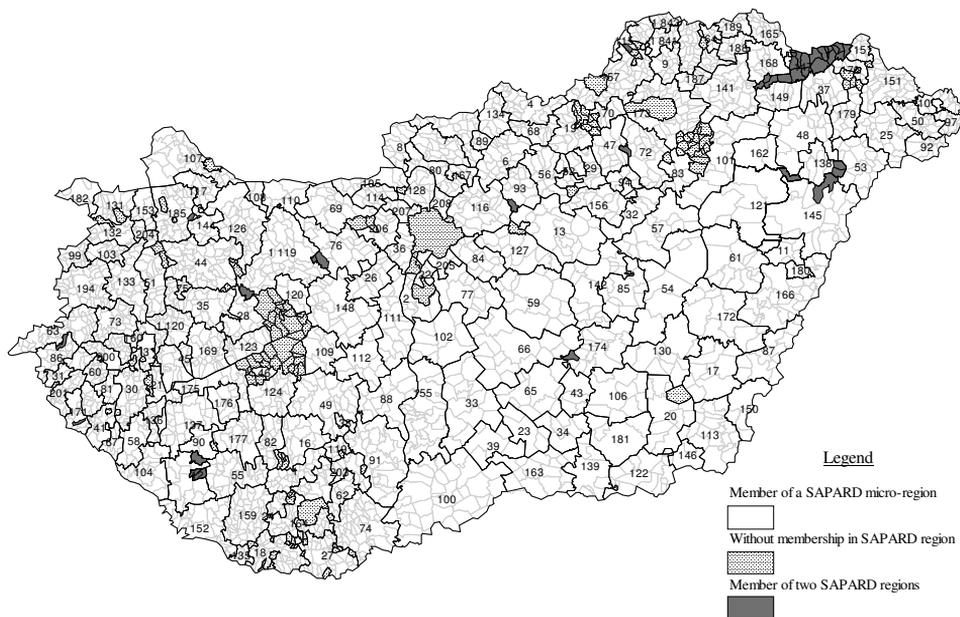


Fig. 4. SAPARD (rural development) micro-regions, 1999

Source: Database of Agricultural and Regional Development Ministry (2002)

### The future of different types of small regional partnerships

Debates on the role of small regional partnerships in spatial development started as early as the early 1990s. However, their perception is still conflicting and unclear. Research spanning a decade reveals that their role in regional development has been unequivocally important mainly in promoting and managing local development, and this trend is likely to continue.

As regards functional small regions where ÖTT operate, no central funds have been granted to them as yet, and the amount of membership fees paid by member councils is tiny, hardly covering the costs of their formal operation or the contribution to be paid out of their own budget upon submitting applications for projects (Kukorelli Szörényiné 2001).

When they were formed, there was no pattern to be followed or experience relied upon in Hungary. Scarcity of funds notwithstanding, they have survived.

The underlying reasons for this are the existence of grassroots initiatives and the will of local decision-makers. The partnerships, already in place in the first half the 1990s, have been able to complete various tasks in an increasingly professional manner, obtain additional funds by applying for grants as well as managing and implementing projects. This does not, however, hold true for every small region, rather for some partnerships whose enthusiasm and will have persisted, enabling them to succeed in obtaining funds by applying for grants.

**Tab. 1. Number of different micro-regions in a breakdown of regions (1999-2004)**

Regions	Number of CSO small regions	Number of CSO small regions*	Number of association of municipalities for spatial development (ÖTT)	Number of so-called SAPARD small regions formed to facilitate rural development
Western Transdanubia	21	22	43	37
Southern Transdanubia	22	24	30	32
Central Transdanubia	23	26	29	20
Northern Hungary	23	28	28	36
Central Hungary	15	15	15	16
Northern Great Plain	23	27	33	29
Southern Great Plain	23	25	32	24
Hungary	150	167	205	194

\* In accordance with the designation by CSO of the boundaries of small regions, effective from 1 January 2004

Source: West Hungarian Institute of Sciences, Centre for Regional Research, Győr, Hungarian Academy of Sciences

The question still to be answered is whether this tier of spatial development will be able to operate as such, and how, through the accumulation of what funds and in what form of institutionalization it will be able to fulfil the role awaiting it.

Empirical examples suggest that there is a direct relation between the efficiency and foundation of partnerships in the sense that the partnerships that have been successful were founded as early as the first half of the 1990s (Kukorelli Szörényiné 2002). It should be noted, however, that not all partnerships established at the time have been successful. Another factor contributing to efficiency is the existence of an institutional framework, which is synonymous with the setting-up of an office and employment of a micro-regional man-

ager. The association of municipalities for spatial development that can employ experts, paid out of their own budget or external funds, are able to diversify their activities, which in turn makes them more eligible for various funds. Unfortunately, their operation is still encumbered with a great deal of haphazardness, the underlying reasons for which are numerous. Area development policy-makers should decide what role they want to assign to them and which forms of partnerships they should prioritize.

Only ÖTT that can employ experts are able to obtain funds. For there is more to applications than monitoring, preparing or submitting them: objectives must be delivered if applications are successful. This, in turn, entails enormous work and is very time-consuming. Hence the employment of full-time staff is inevitable. It is a fact that micro-regional managers play a key role in small regions as they facilitate or, in some cases, even resuscitate their operation.

Efficiency also depends on whether existing associations of municipalities for spatial development (ÖTT) can work in co-operation with each other and add new activities to existing ones. These years did see some efforts made to keep small regions going. Unfortunately, it remains unclear to which forms of partnership spatial development policy-makers should accord priority.

Rural development policy-makers unambiguously regard "SAPARD small regions" as units of development and CSO small regions as those of planning and support. With the Prime Minister's Office having established a network of CSO small regions, public administration also seems to have taken the first steps towards the adoption of CSO small regions as units. A centrally supported process of institutionalization has commenced, as each CSO district has someone (commissioner) responsible for it. These commissioners, however, have no organizational background. Funded by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, SAPARD micro-regions each has a regional manager as well. However, if the membership of SAPARD small regions differs from that of ÖTT, then we cannot speak of the existence of any background organization. The operation of the form of partnership (ÖTT) recommended by the law is thus left unfinanced; in this case, unless they pay their regional managers out of their own budgets, which is limited very much. In consequence the implementation of their projects becomes uncertain. Or worse still: the preparation of projects itself becomes a mere illusion.

The decade under review has failed to sort out the issues for micro-regions. The role that the central government and its departments will assign to them still remains vague (Németh 2001). If they are to be a tier in spatial development (and have one of the above small-region types), the one to be reinforced and institutionalized should have been identified by now. If they are to be used as units of spatial development in the future, what is called a micro-region development body (council) should have been or should be established. Its powers are defined in accordance with the Act on Regional Development and Physical Planning so that the tasks accomplished so far can yield results, written proposals on micro-regional development can be turned into reality and organizations unable to manage their affairs can launch their own projects in a manner that allows for a realistic implementation plan. Unfortunately, rather than striving to deliver the objectives they identify in their programmes, partnerships may apply

for anything that can help them survive. As a result, their activities may well depart from what they set out in their original programmes. They should apply exclusively for funds enabling them to implement what is set out in their programmes, whether they are county, regional or national funds.

The micro-regional organizations that are no longer one-man shows and have been able to prove their viability through quality performance can now rise to the challenges of a more intricate system of grant applications, and fervently prepare for applying and winning EU grants as well. Such organizations can also serve as patterns for micro-regional development initiatives.

If, out of the different small region systems, SAPARD small regions are selected as instruments of rural policies, they will have to be shaped accordingly. The civil society as well as entrepreneurs will have to be included so that rural development small regions can acquire LEADER funds, be prepared to operate as LAGs (Local Action Groups) and able to implement EU projects and manage related financial issues. To this end, management organizations will have to be set up, since current one-man shows can hardly do the trick.

As regards small regions, the imminent amendment of the Act on Regional Development and Physical Planning is expected to bring about truly radical changes<sup>12</sup>. No matter how the law is re-framed or whatever the new regulations are, ten years' work clearly reflects local will, small regional efforts and results as well as the fruits that community integration has borne.

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<sup>12</sup> Amendment of the Act XXI was introduced in July 2004, but the paper was closed before.

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## **FORMA A ÚLOHA MIKROREGIONÁLNEJ SPOLUPRÁČE V PRIESTOROVOM ROZVOJI MAĎARSKA**

Táto štúdia analyzuje desaťročný proces spolupráce mikroregiónov a zhŕňa jeho výsledky a úlohy, ktoré táto spolupráca zohrala v priestorovom rozvoji. Reviduje maďarský termín pre mikrokregión. Podľa autorky je mikroregión zložitá regionálna jednotka s najvyššou homogenitou historických, kultúrnych, sociálnych, prírodných a hospodárskych charakteristík. Autorka na základe desaťročných skúseností rozlišuje tri druhy mikroregionálnej spolupráce.

Deväťdesiate roky minulého storočia boli prvým obdobím, keď rozptýlené a rozdrobené miestne samosprávy zakladali mikroregionálnu spoluprácu s cieľom zlepšiť svoju schopnosť lobovať – pri vylúčení veľkých centier. Týmto spôsobom chceli prelomiť bariéry, ktoré zdedili zo systému národných výborov. Významným symptómom bolo aj to, že založená spolupráca bola nazvaná podľa geografického názvu malej oblasti, čím sa zdôraznila identifikácia s krajinou.

V druhej fáze sa spolupráca posilnila možnosťou vypisovať súťaže a získanými finančnými zdrojmi. Phare, ICC a OFA priniesli tendre, ktoré vytvorili novú vlnu tvorby mikroregionálnej spolupráce. Tieto zdroje posilnili priestorové myslenie podporou prípravy rozvojových koncepcií pre oblasť mikroregionálnej spolupráce.

Tretie obdobie sa začalo po vydaní zákona o územnom plánovaní a priestorovom rozvoji z roku 1996. Zákon sa stal významným míľnikom vývoja mikroregionálnej spolupráce, pretože definoval mikroregionálnu úroveň a kodifikoval spoluprácu, ako napríklad Združenie miestnej samosprávy pre priestorový rozvoj. Nový zákon vyvolal

nevidané zakladanie zoskupení a združení obcí pre priestorový rozvoj (ÖTT), ktorých počet prekročil 200; nepokryl síce celý priestor, ale umožnil niekoľkonásobné členstvo, na druhej strane však nezabezpečil financie.

Mikroregionálna úroveň a jej inštitucionalizovaná forma Združenie obcí pre priestorový rozvoj (ÖTT) sa zachovala napriek chýbajúcim skúsenostiam, neexistujúcim vzorom v Maďarsku a chýbajúcim financiám. Jej existencia, fungovanie, výsledky a sila sa dajú vysvetliť budovaním zdola nahor a rozhodnutím miestnych rozhodujúcich činiteľov urobiť niečo pre obce. Na vidieku to bol inovačný proces po zmene socialistického režimu.

Zmeny zákona o priestorovom rozvoji v roku 2004 poskytli príležitosť na posilnenie mikroregionálnej úrovne tak funkčne, ako aj finančne a ich efekt sa bude dať zmerať v budúcnosti, čo predstavuje možnú tému pre ďalšiu štúdiu.

Preložila H. Contrerasová