

## NATURAL CONDITIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE POLISH-SLOVAK TRANSBOUNDARY TIES

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**Abstract:** This paper analyses natural conditions of the territory along the Polish-Slovak boundary from the point of view their influences to the development transboundary ties. The natural environment of this borderland is very differentiated and attractive. Lack of ties in this region is the result of action of many factors. At present the new conditions for the development of the transboundary ties are constituted. It seems that this will contribute to the dynamic development of the areas located close to the Polish-Slovak boundary.

**Key words:** transboundary ties, transboundary cooperation, transboundary region.

In the years 1989-1993, all the states bordering upon Poland changed. While the total length of land boundaries of Poland remained unchanged and is still equal 3054 km, the number of independent states with which Poland borders increased from three to seven. The change of the southern neighbour of Poland resulted from the gradual disintegration of Czechoslovakia, through first establishment of Czecho-Slovakia, and then separation of the two states: the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Thus, the present Polish-Slovak boundary has been in existence for a relatively short period of time - since January 1993 - and it accounts for 15% of length of all the boundaries of Poland, and 17,2% of the continental boundaries. The Slovak Republic, having gained independence, borders on the North with Poland, and this border constitutes 33% of the total length of its boundaries.

Polish-Slovak border goes along the Carpathians and divides the area, which is very attractive in terms of natural assets. The natural environment of this borderland is very differentiated and is considered to be one of the most interesting in Europe. The high nature-related attractiveness of this area is determined by several factors, among which the most important are:

- ♦ the young folded mountains of a differentiated geological structure (Tatry, Pieniny, and Beskid Mts.),
- ♦ the differentiated surface relief (high mountains of alpine character, middle mountains, low mountains and submontane areas),
- ♦ the distinctly shaped climatic and vegetation floors,
- ♦ the high share of forest areas (relatively little transformed by human activity),
- ♦ the exceptional mountain meadows in Eastern Beskids, called "poloniny",
- ♦ the river gorges,
- ♦ the clean waters,
- ♦ the rich plant and animal world, with endemic and relic species,
- ♦ the relatively limited transformation of natural environment, resulting from, in particular, difficult access to many areas due mainly to relief, secular proximity of the state boundary, which contributed to less intensive exploitation of the border areas, significant distance from large urban areas, industrial centres, etc., as well as the quite early undertaken efforts aiming at protection of natural environment, coupled with the possibility of protecting nature on both sides of the border.

Polish-Slovak borderland is an exceptional area. It is the only boundary, for both Polish and Slovak sides, which neighbours directly upon so many areas of protected nature. On the Polish side the boundary neighbours directly with: five national parks, four landscape parks, and ten nature reserves. On the Slovak side, there are three national parks, three landscape parks, and twelve nature reserves. Besides, no other state boundary in the world divides two international biosphere reserves (Tatra Mts. and Eastern Carpathians), and directly neighbours with yet another one (Babia Mt. reserve).

Likewise, this border has in its adjacent vicinity the longest stretch of protected areas. National and landscape parks neighbour with the boundary along the stretch of 410,7 km, which constitutes 79,29% of the total length of this boundary (if we account for the semi-protected surroundings of parks the length is 453.25 km, equivalent to 87,5% of total border's length). On the basis of the national ecological network, one can state that the Polish-Slovak border is the only one (except for the maritime boundary) which ought to be protected in its totality. As much as 90% of the border's length is constituted by the biocentres, nodal areas and ecological channels of international significance, 8% - by those of national significance, and only the remaining 2% are excluded from the network. This is the only boundary with such a high share of areas included in the ecological network.

The mountainous areas located close to the Polish-Slovak border are for more than a century an attraction for tourists. This is also the only boundary along which so many accommodation facilities are located. As many as 158 marked tourist routes reach the Polish-Slovak border, the only such case among the Polish borders. There are 75 such routes reaching from the Slovak side, and 83 from the Polish side of the border. This means that the marked tourist paths join the border every 3,3 kilometres on the average. Then, almost 300 kilometres of such paths go along the border itself. Floating on the rafts down the Dunajec river gorge - which constitutes a fragment of the Polish-Slovak

border - is possible for many decades already. No other border river has been so much used in watership tourism.

The political and economic changes, which took place in this part of Europe, contributed also to establishment of the transboundary collaboration ties between Poland and Slovakia, to strengthening of the transboundary connections, and also to emergence of transborder regions.

Initially, after the Slovak Republic was established, the cooperation processes developed very slowly. They were characterised by the lowest dynamics of development among all the cooperation processes with the neighbours of Poland. The legal bases for the transboundary cooperation between Poland and Slovakia are constituted by:

- ♦ the agreement between the government of the Republic of Poland and the government of the Slovak Republic of July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1994, approved by the decision of the (Polish) Council of Ministers no. 107/94 of December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1996 (the Polish-Slovak Intergovernmental Commission on Transboundary Cooperation was created on the basis of this agreement);
- ♦ the agreement between the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on legal relations and collaboration over the common state border of July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1995 (*Dz. U. [Journal of Laws]*, 1996, no.55, item 250);
- ♦ the agreement between the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on local cross-boundary movement, concluded in Zakopane on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1996 (*Dz. U. [Journal of Laws]*, 1997, no.127, item 827);
- ♦ numerous governmental, regional, and self-governmental agreements concerning cooperation in particular domains;
- ♦ the statutes of the Carpathian Euroregion and the Tatra Mts. Euroregion Association.

A reflection of the course of transboundary cooperation processes is provided by the transboundary ties. These ties should be understood as the regional or local binds, which function across the state borders. They include all types of contacts between authorities, institutions and people from two bordering countries, or the transboundary transport connections. Such ties define certain spatial reach, which determines the limits of the transborder region.

The transboundary ties may concern many aspects of life and human activity on both sides of the border. The most important types of ties are: political, economic, social and cultural. One can also distinguish other kinds of ties, related to: communication, science, religion, family, tourism, sports, or administration.

In terms of their spatial aspect the transboundary ties can be classified into point-wise, linear and surface. The linear ties can be divided into transversal (shaped across the borderline) and longitudinal (formed along the borderline). This aspect may also be used to account for the situations, in which the ties have not taken shape due to the excessively strong barriers.

### **Lack of ties**

Lack of ties is the result of action of many factors. The most important of them are the political, economic and ecological-natural barriers. The ecological barriers are related to the limitations entailed by international and domestic law in the domain of nature protection. These regulations forbid the development of some kinds of human activity within the protected areas. Natural barriers are also formed by the natural environment itself, either in direct or indirect manner. The Polish-Slovak barrier is on both sides the one that is the most difficult to cross among the boundaries of the two countries, mainly due to the deeply cut relief. Rivers (such as Poprad and Dunajec), and large forest surfaces constitute, as well, an essential difficulty in crossing the border and developing the transboundary ties. The strongest barriers in spatial terms are formed by Bieszczady Mts., Lower Beskid Mts., Tatra Mts., and Żywiec Beskid Mts. (see an adequate illustration with isochores, here - the lines of equal distance from railway lines).

### **Point-wise ties**

These are the binds between offices, institutions, and companies from the two countries. Their bases are formed by respective agreements and legal acts concerning the wish of undertaking cooperation in definite domains. The intergovernmental ties between Warsaw and Bratislava refer to the legal regulation, which forms the basis for the functioning of the regional and local transboundary cooperation (international legal acts, such as mutual recognition of neighbours, functioning of border infrastructure, bylaws and agreements related to the concluded international treaties). On the regional and local levels, ties are being developed by the representatives of local and regional authorities, companies and institutions functioning in the border zone. The influence of the environment on point-wise ties is merely of indirect character. It can namely uniquely stimulate and accelerate development of cooperation in these domains, which are related to natural environment, like, for instance, joint rational use of nature for tourist purposes, forest economy, or water economy.

### **Linear ties**

One should distinguish two types of these ties: the longitudinal and the transversal ones. The longitudinal linear ties are often being formed even without the necessity of crossing the state boundaries. They go along these boundaries. Tourist development contributes in a particular manner to formation of these ties. There are presently 291 km of tourist routes along the course of the boundary. Plans exist concerning approximately 20 km of the new tourist routes going along the border. The longest stretches of the border routes are located in Żywiec Beskid Mts. (92 km), Lower Beskid Mts. (67 km), Sądecki Beskid Mts. (42 km), and in Bieszczady Mts. (31 km). We do not find them in the areas of lower tourist attractiveness (like in the Orawa-Nowy Targ Low) nor there, where it is impossible to develop such routes for safety reasons (High Tatras). Border

rivers are the places of canoeing, floating and rafting events. The tourist rafting along the Dunajec river gorge started already in 1830's. A new expression of the tourist use of border rivers is a recent similar development on Poprad river.

The transversal linear ties cannot exist without border crossings. Since these ties are formed transversally with respect to the border, they require crossing the border. The most important transversal linear ties are railway and bus connections. At the turn of 1990's, the transboundary bus connections did not exist, while the only railway connections were between Warsaw and Bratislava. This situation changed gradually. Currently, railway connections exist, crossing the border at all the three railway border crossing points. Their number is steadily increasing.

Situation is similar with respect to bus connections. They are, however, much more numerous. In the western part of the borderland, the most important ones are the connections Cieszyn-Žilina-Banská Bystrica. In the middle part of the border, the essential ones are the bus connections using the border crossing of Łysa Polana - Javorina (the respective coach lines connect Zakopane and Nowy Targ with Poprad and Spišská Nová Ves). On the other hand, in the eastern part of the borderland bus lines use the border crossing on Dukla Pass (Barwinek - Vyšný Komárnik). The most important line here is the Krosno - Prešov - Košice connection.

### **Area (zonal) ties**

This type of ties refers to cooperation encompassing the areas located on both sides of the border. Cooperation concerns a definite area and (usually) concentrates on one domain of human activity. Expressions of the area or zonal ties are the protected areas. Suffice to look at Map 1 to note that the potential capacities in developing cooperation in the domain of nature protection on the Polish-Slovak are very large indeed. The area ties are being intensified by the Tatry and Pieniny Mts. national parks, and, in the eastern part of the borderland - by the national parks of Bieszczady Mts. and Poloniny, as well as by the system of the Carpathian landscape parks and the landscape park Východné Karpaty.

Other focuses of regional cooperation are, in particular, the Beskid Intercommunal Association or the Union of Resorts of Sudecki Beskid.

The zonal ties often precede formation of other types of ties, which, as a consequence, lead to development of the regional ties.

### **Regional ties**

This type of ties constitutes the highest stage of development of transboundary ties. They are expressed over a certain surface, on which both point-wise and linear ties also exist. Barriers are either liquidated altogether or are effectively weakened. There exist border crossings and transport connections, and transboundary cooperation in many

domains is well developed. An example for such type of ties is provided by the Euroregions.

Within the Polish-Slovak borderland, the national parks, located on both sides of the border, start to form the cores of cooperation. Within the confines of the protected areas there are numerous tourist routes (both going along the boundary and joining it), which, owing to establishment of new border crossings, start to be used by tourists from the two countries. Cooperation is also being enhanced by transport connections, which usually cross the border between the protected areas. The transboundary cooperation concerns an increasing number of domains of human activity. These domains include nature protection, tourism, transport, water economy, forest economy, trade, culture, and education.

In comparison with other frontiers of Poland, the Polish-Slovak border presents itself in a kind of a two-sided manner. On the one hand, it is a zone, which is very valuable from the point of view of nature. The longest belt of the protected areas stretches along this border. The whole territory in question constitutes a major tourist attraction and is best developed with respect to tourism. On the other hand, it is characterised by a low level of economic use. There are a small number of border crossings, small dynamics of increase of the number of the people crossing the border, and a poorly developed transport network. Thus, conclusion can be drawn therefore that the areas adjacent to the Polish-Slovak border have a great chance of preserving their natural value, which, also owing to the development of transport and other infrastructure, may serve a further expansion of tourism and activation of the whole region. While it is extremely difficult to repair the destroyed natural environment (like, in particular, in the so-called "black triangle", the area located in adjacent corners of Poland, Czech Republic and Germany), overcoming of delay in the development of infrastructure is possible. It seems that this will contribute to the dynamic development of the areas located close to the Polish-Slovak boundary. Hence, there is a perspective of development ahead of the territory considered.

## **Resume**

### **Prírodné podmienky ako báza rozvoja cezhraničných vzťahov medzi Poľskom a Slovenskom**

Prírodné prostredie pozdĺž poľsko-slovenskej hranice je veľmi diferencované, pričom patrí medzi najatraktívnejšie v rámci Európy. Vysoká atraktivita prírody je tu výsledkom viacerých faktorov, predovšetkým mladými pohoriami s rozdielnou geologickou stavbou a rozdielnymi tvarmi reliéfu, vysokým podielom zalesneného územia, originálnou sieťou riek s čistými vodami, bohatým rastlinným a živočíšnym svetom s množstvom endemitov a reliktov a relatívne obmedzenou transformáciou prírodného prostredia.

Existujúci nedostatok cezhraničných vzťahov medzi Poľskom a Slovenskom je dôsledok viacerých politických, ekonomických a ekologických bariér, ktoré pôsobili v minulosti. Dnes sú podmienky pre rozvoj cezhraničnej spolupráce podstatne lepšie.

Okrem iného bolo podpísaných rad dohôd o spolupráci v tomto priestore na úrovni vlád i miestnych inštitúcií, ktoré predstavujú legislatívny základ pre spoluprácu.

V súčasnosti sa ako najperspektívnejšie javia možnosti rozvoja dopravnej, technickej i sociálnej infraštruktúry v tejto oblasti, expanzia aktivít súvisiacich s turizmom a všeobecný regionálny rozvoj. Rozvoj cezhraničnej spolupráce medzi Poľskom a Slovenskom však musí rešpektovať ochranu prírodných hodnôt tohto priestoru. Všetky fakty, včítane postoja miestnych samospráv, naznačujú na dynamický rozvoj regiónov pozdĺž poľsko-slovenskej hranice v blízkej budúcnosti.