

THE CROATIAN-SLOVENIAN BORDER: DIVERSIFICATION OF FUNCTION

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Abstract: The border dividing the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Slovenia is one of the longest-enduring borders in Europe. Formed to a great extent by geographical features, the border today remains almost unchanged, as it closely follows the originally set boundary. Among the geographical features helping to create the boundary, rivers deserve particular attention. Two types of river valleys can be found in the region studied. This categorization is based on how the river valleys affect the layout of the cross-border transportation network.

As Europe is becoming more united, the Croatian-Slovenian border has grown in significance. The disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, as well as Slovenia's accession to the European Union, have resulted in changes to the border's function.

This article presents the functional diversification of the Croatian-Slovenian border, taking into account political and social changes taking place in the border regions.

Key words: Croatia, Slovenia, border, cooperation

1. THE FORMATION OF THE BORDER

The dynamic changes at the Croatian-Slovenian border, especially those that have been taking place over the last dozen years, have made the border an interesting subject of study. The aim of the studies is to find out how the function of the border has evolved and whether, in light of political changes taking place in this part of Europe at the turn of the 21st century, cross-border cooperation between Croatia and Slovenia is weakening or intensifying.

Boundaries dividing the Balkan countries have shifted numerous times over the centuries. The boundary between Croatia and Slovenia remains the most unchanged and is considered to be one of the oldest in Europe (Crkvenčić, I., 1998). With its major portion set down in the 12th century, with minor alterations, it remains otherwise unchanged till this day.

In 1918, after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kraljevina SHS) was formed. By 1945, Yugoslavia was a federation comprising six republics: Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro. Slovenia was the richest republic, accounting for 35% of the federation's industrial production, Croatia was second. The two republics' long tradition of maintaining ties with the West was facilitated by shared elements – the Catholic religion and the Latin alphabet. Slovenia and Croatia left the League of the Communists of Yugoslavia following referendums in 1990 and 1991, respectively (Tanty 2003).

Table 1 The length of Croatia's land border with Slovenia compared to that of Croatia's other borders

Neighboring country	Total in km	Percentage breakdown
	2,197	
Bosnia-Herzegovina	932	42 %
Montenegro	25	1 %
Serbia	241	11 %
Slovenia	670	31 %
Hungary	329	15 %

Source: The World Factbook, 2005, Washington, DC

Table 2 The length of Slovenia's land border with Croatia, compared to that of Slovenia's other borders (in km)

Neighboring country	Total	Land	River	Sea ¹⁾
	1.37	920	402	48
Austria ¹⁾	318	250	68	–
Croatia ²⁾³⁾	670	380	290	46.6
Italy ¹⁾	280	201	31	48
Hungary ¹⁾	102	89	13	–

¹⁾ The length of the state border according to the data of the International Commission for Borders

²⁾ The border is not yet marked out on the territory. The length of the border is computed from the digital data on borders of cadastral communities.

³⁾ The length of the border on the sea has not been defined yet.

Source: The Ministry of the Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy – Surveying and Mapping Authority of the Republic of Slovenia, Statistični Urad Republike Slovenije, <http://www.stat.si>

Currently, the Republic of Croatia shares its northern border with the Republic of Slovenia. The combined length of Croatia's borders is 2,197 km, of which 31% is shared with Slovenia. The combined length of Slovenia's land borders amounts to 1,370 km, of which 49% is shared with Croatia.

2. FOLLOWING THE BORDER LINE

Starting out at the Adriatic shore, the border stretches out the valley of the river Dragonja. Next, the border cuts through the Čičarija mountain range, and then turns

north, where the land rises even more, culminating with the massif Veliki Snežnik at 1,796 meters above sea level. This is the most elevated section of the border, running through the most densely forested and sparsely populated region on either one of its sides (Figure 1).

The following segment of the border follow rivers Kopa, Kupa and Drava. The final section of the border is formed by the river Mura.

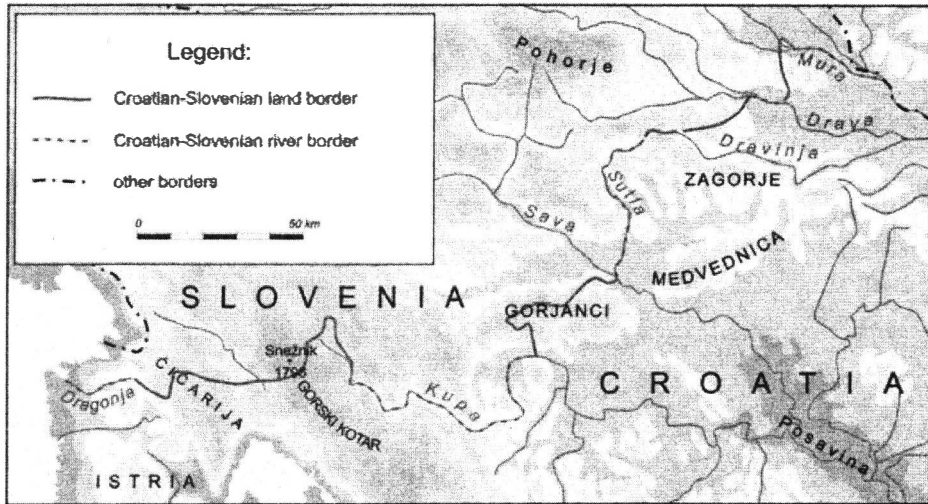


Figure 1 The Croatian-Slovenian border line. Own rendition based on the Copernicus Road Map of Croatia, scale 1:300,000

It is possible to divide the border into two long segments. The eastern segment is mainly defined by the flow of rivers. The western segment is orographic in character and to a large degree follows the Čičarija and Gorjanci mountain ranges which reach in excess of 1,000 meters above sea level.

The river valleys of the region studied have been classified into two types, depending on the way in which they influence the layout of the cross-border transportation network. The first category includes those river valleys that act as an element that divides the region up, along which the state border has been marked out. They are the valleys of the Dragonja, Kolpa, Kupa, Sutla and the Mura. Their presence has made the construction of bridges necessary.

The other river valley type is unifying in character and includes the valleys of successive rivers. The type is represented by the river valley of the Sava, and partly also of the Drava.

3. DIVERSIFICATION OF THE CROATIAN-SLOVENIAN BORDER'S FUNCTION

Up until the time when the Republics of Slovenia and Croatia declared independence, their border was an internal border of the Socialist Federal Republic of

Yugoslavia, and since they were both part of the same socio-political system, they were integrated to a large degree. Following the secession of these two states, many of the elements linking them together were weakened and currently efforts for bringing about cooperation are underway.

After the breakup of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, this internal border became an international border. The line it follows is tied to the land's history and geography. In areas where agricultural land dominates, it has become crucial to determine the ownership of land parcels bisected by the border. To facilitate movement across the border, a bilateral agreement was signed on April 1, 2003, pursuant to which residents of the border regions are able to cross the border upon presenting authorization. This agreement is still in effect following Slovenia's accession to the European Union.

Slovenia, which for centuries has gravitated towards the West, being at the same time the richest of all the republics, began membership negotiations with the EU in 2000 and joined the union on May 1, 2004. This resulted in the international border between Slovenia and Croatia becoming the external border of the EU. As the result of political transformations, the increased role of the border as a dividing element was hardly of little consequence for relations between the two states, and to this subject we devote the rest of the article.

4. THE LOCATION AND TYPOLOGICAL DIVERSIFICATION OF BORDER CROSSINGS

The asymmetry that can be observed in the layout of the border crossings can be explained by features of the environment. The highest number of border crossings is located along the eastern segment of the border (Figure 2). This area is well-developed, land surface being favorable. In the border regions of Croatia, population density figures correspond to variations in the terrain. Within administrative units located along the western part of the border, population density is less than 75 inhabitants/1 km² (with the exception of the Rijeka region), while in the eastern part it is over 100 inhabitants/1 km². Likewise, in Slovenia, more people reside in the eastern lowlands than in the forested, southern highlands of the country. As the result, while the western section of the border, running from the Adriatic shore to the town of Metlika, has 20 border crossings, along the eastern section there are 37.

Border crossings on the Croatian-Slovenian border have been divided into four types (Republic of Slovenia, Customs Administration – Carinska Uprava Republike Slovenije). Following Slovenia's accession to the European Union, four Border Inspection Posts (BIPs) have been created. In addition to serving as border and customs control sites, they also function as epidemiological/sanitation, veterinary, and phytosanitation control points for products being brought in. Products imported in large volumes also enter through these inspection posts. The BIPs are located along main international routes: BIP Gruškovje on the Zagreb-Maribor motor route, BIP Dobova – a major border crossing for rail and motor vehicle traffic – in the Sava valley, BIP Obrežje on the Zagreb-Ljubljana expressway, and BIP Jelšane on the Rijeka-Ljubljana motor route. The existence of so few of these inspection posts may stem from the fact that the costs associated with employing specialized personnel and operating the equipment are high.

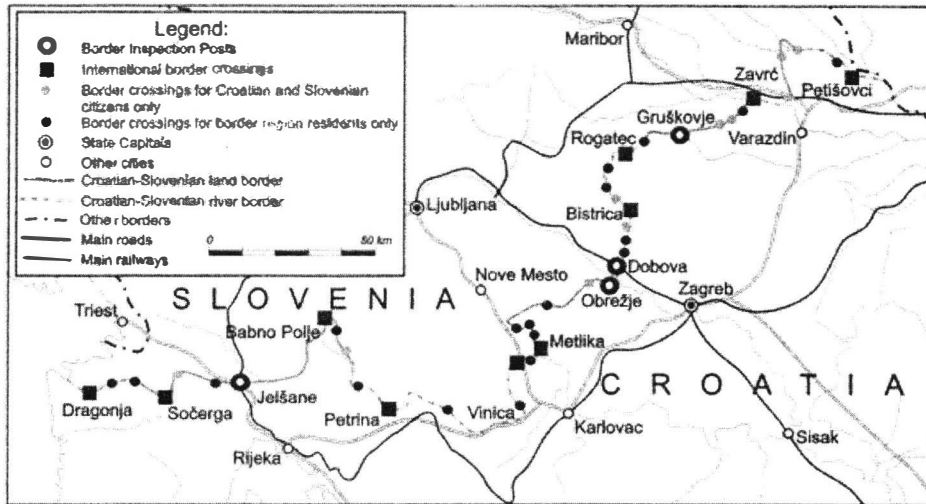


Figure 2 The type and layout of the border crossings. Own rendition based on a map by the Republic of Slovenia, Customs Administration

International border crossings also exist. Border crossings of the third type are those intended exclusively for citizens of Slovenia and Croatia; of the fourth type are those intended exclusively for residents of border regions and requiring the presentation of appropriate documentation.

5. SEPARATING FUNCTIONS

5.1. The Croatian-Slovenian Border as a Spatial Barrier

The border constitutes a barrier to the movement of people. The low percentage of ethnic minorities within the population of both countries testifies to this fact. According to the 2002 census, Slovenia's residents are 93.06 % Slovene, 1.98 % Serbian, 1.81 % Croat, 1.1 % Bosnian, 0.32 % Hungarian and 1.73 % other.

According to the census conducted in 2001, only 0.3 % of Croatia's residents are Slovene (Statističke Informacije, 2004), even though both countries are Roman Catholic and the residents of northern Croatia speak Kajkavian, a dialect of Croatian similar to Slovenian – two conditions conducive to ethnic mixing.

5.2. The Croatian-Slovenian Border as a Legal Barrier

Up until the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Croatia and Slovenia were functioning as part of the same state, and the transport of people and goods between the republics proceeded efficiently (Respond, 1935). Following the creation of the independent states, border patrol checkpoints appeared, serving as passport and customs clearance facilities.

New regulations came into effect on the day Slovenia entered the European Union, what has resulted in longer clearance wait times at the border.

5.3. The Croatian-Slovenian Border as a Natural Barrier

The path followed by the Croatian-Slovenian border line is a reflection of the geography of river valleys and mountain ranges that have visibly influenced settlement patterns and road network density, and, in effect, the layout of border crossings. As was observed by Janiszewski (1959) "The natural environment of a country either facilitates contact between settlement communities, (...) creating a network of land regions that gravitate towards each other or it impedes the formation of ties between communities and land regions."

Mountain ranges are seen as barriers to transportation and communication. The longest segment between two border crossings, Jelšane to the west, and Babno Polje to the east, is located in a mountainous region, at altitudes decidedly above 1,200 meters above sea level. A decided majority of border crossings are located at altitudes of 50 – 500 meters above sea level.

Hydrographic barriers play a slightly lesser role in the area studied. Although rivers constitute over 40 % of the border's length, they do not appear to be a factor which could in any significant way hamper the development of cross-border ties. A particular kind of situation can be seen in the valley of the successive river Sava, where there's also an expressway and a rail line.

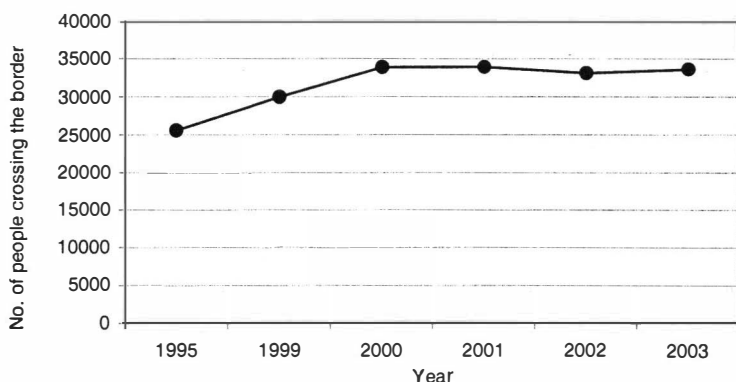
6. UNIFYING FUNCTIONS

6.1. Cooperation in the Sphere Of Transportation

As part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Croatia and Slovenia were connected by means of various motor and rail transportation routes. Owing to this fact, now there are no problems caused by so-called "dead-end rail lines" (when, upon reaching the border, the rail line ends at the terminal station). The most densely-knit network of roads, and in effect, the most densely positioned border crossings, are to be found along the eastern segment of the border. In 2003, there were six railroad lines crossing the Croatian-Slovenian border.

Development of cross-border cooperation with regard to transportation is ongoing. Especially, the wide river valley of the Sava has enormous significance here, as has been the case for centuries. An expressway and a rail line, linking Zagreb and Ljubljana, pass through the valley, with numerous bus connections and trains running between the two capitals daily. The significance of the Sava/Danube waterway dates back centuries, due to the fact that this was the route linking the countries of Southwestern and Southeastern Europe (Milojević, 1958).

The number of people passing through the border crossings increases year by year (Graph 1). According to the data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, this number grew by 31 % from 1995 to 2003 (Statistični Urad Republike Slovenije).



Graph 1 The number of people passing through the Croatian-Slovenian border at road border crossings, 1995 – 2003

The number of people crossing the Croatian-Slovenian border is variable depending on the time and also varies from one border crossing to another (Table 3). In 2003, the highest number of people crossing the border was recorded at the Obrežje road border crossing – an 82 % increase from 1995. Obrežje is a major road crossing located in the valley of the Sava and for years has played a tremendously vital role in international transport, because the road passing through it is a highly important transportation artery connecting the countries of Southwestern Europe to the countries on the Balkan Peninsula.

Table 3 The number of people going through the Croatian-Slovenian border at major road border crossings

Border crossing	Year					
	1995	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Sečovlje	3.13	3.09	3.34	3.44	3.19	3.17
Dragonja	2.02	3.41	3.62	3.62	3.54	3.53
Gruškovje	2.48	3.47	3.85	3.96	3.99	4.16
Obrežje	2.69	3.48	4.81	4.34	4.53	4.91
Jelšane	2.23	2.14	2.38	2.62	2.43	2.40
Others	13.04	14.38	15.84	15.91	15.41	15.46

Source: Statistični Urad Republike Slovenije, <http://www.stat.si>

An increase in cross-border traffic is also clearly visible at the Dragonja border crossing, where the figure grew by 75 % over nine years. The Adriatic Coast Highway (Jadranska Magistrala) runs through Dragonja and the border crossing plays an especially significant role during the summer season, due to the increased number of tourists passing through the western sector of the border.

At the Gruškovje border crossing, traffic had grown by an impressive 67 %. The crossing is located on a major road which runs from eastern Slovenia, through north-western Croatia and on to Hungary, and also plays a large role in international transport.

Keeping in mind the spatial aspect of cooperation, in accordance with Więckowski's (2004) classification of cross-border associations, the associations most commonly found in the border region of Croatia and Slovenia were assigned to the transverse linear

bilateral category. This is clearly manifested by the existence of numerous rail and bus connections between cities located in Slovenia and Croatia, as well as by the high number of road border crossings.

6.2. Cooperation in the Legal and Organizational Spheres

Cross-border cooperation manifests itself by the institution of numerous international agreements, among other factors. The most significant bilateral agreements existing between the Republic of Slovenia and the Republic of Croatia are: The Agreement on Cross-Border Traffic and Cooperation and The Agreement on Cooperation in the Area of Defense. The Free Market Agreement, which ceased to be effective the day Slovenia entered the EU, was replaced by the Free Trade Agreement. Other agreements signed pertain to mutual defense, cooperation in the area of tourism, and the preservation of military and civilian wartime cemeteries.

Joint construction projects, involving the development of industrialized zones, roads and a pipeline, are underway in Rijeka, Croatia and Koper, Slovenia – two ports in the north of the Adriatic.

Following Slovenia's entrance into the EU, Croatian and Slovenian citizens enjoy various benefits, including the reduction of formalities required for crossing the border. Furthermore, residents of the 10 km-wide border zone may cross the border at checkpoints intended exclusively for them, upon the presentation of an appropriate document.

6.3. Cooperation in the Sphere of Environmental Protection

Cooperation in the sphere of environmental protection is currently just beginning. Slovenia has one national park, 40 nature parks, two regional parks, and 26 NATURA 2000 network sites. In Croatia there are seven national parks and 10 regional parks. Although the protected areas are located near the border, no cross-border national parks or nature reserves exist.

In accordance with the signed agreement, any activities undertaken in the border zone, within 10 km of the border, need to be approved by both sides. Important issues being discussed include: a cross-border water supply system, road construction and improvement, and also flood and contamination control. Development in the valley of the Drava – a NATURA 2000 site and an ecological corridor – is another project requiring cooperation.

6.4. Economic Cooperation

Economic cooperation between Croatia and Slovenia manifests itself in trade. Croatia is the third biggest importer of Slovenian goods and the fourth biggest exporter to Slovenia. According to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, in 2003 trading amounted to 1.56 billion USD – a 24 % increase from 2002. Visitors from Slovenia are also the third largest group of tourists and hotel patrons in the Republic of Croatia (Statistični Urad Republike Slovenije).

It is widely believed that Croatia's accession to the European Union would greatly help in the development of further ties between the two countries. It would also allow Croatia to receive funds from the PHARE program.

6.5. Cooperation in the Sphere of Cross-Border Tourism

Many opportunities for cross-border tourism in Croatia and Slovenia still remain unexploited. Near the border, in the area surrounding the Croatian city of Karlovac, one can find numerous mansions, castles, monasteries, sacred sites, walking and biking trails, caves and thermal spas, making this one of the most interesting regions of Croatia. Trails, spas, museums and castles exist on the Slovenian side as well. At the border, rivers provide the perfect venue for rafting, while forested mountain ranges are an attraction for hiking enthusiasts. The uniform natural environment lends itself to development by joint efforts. Both sides could perhaps also benefit from a joint tourism marketing campaign.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Borders between countries on the Balkan Peninsula were formed and repeatedly altered throughout history. The Croatian-Slovenian boundary had been the longest-enduring of all the internal borders within former Yugoslavia.

In the wake of political transformations – the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the early to mid-1990s, and the accession of Slovenia to the European Union on May 1, 2004 – it has become more difficult for people to move and transport goods across the border. In the process of European unification, Slovenia's accession has caused the border between the two former republics of Yugoslavia to become an even greater barrier in the spatial, legal, and organizational sense. Securing the external EU border additionally necessitated the construction of new border crossing facilities (Border Inspection Posts or BIPs).

The asymmetry that is clearly visible in the layout of the border crossings is linked to land development, which in turn is affected by the shape of the terrain, land forestation and the flow of rivers. The greatest number of border crossings (37), can be found along the eastern segment of the border, while only 20 are located in the west. Between 1995 and 2003, traffic across the Croatian-Slovenian border had increased by 31 %. It is the greatest at border crossings situated on major thoroughfares – the international transit and tourist routes.

Cooperation between the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Slovenia is seen as strong and multi-faceted. Cross-border relations are visible at various levels and are manifested by the development of international and interregional agreements and interpersonal connections.

For Croatia, favorable cross-border relations with Slovenia – its link to Central and Western Europe – are of paramount importance. It is speculated that in the upcoming years, cross-border cooperation will be developing most intensely in the areas of environmental protection and tourism.

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Granica chorwacko-słoweńska: zróżnicowanie funkcji

Resume

Granice między krajami płw. Bałkańskiego kształtowały się na przestrzeni wieków, wielokrotnie zmieniając swój przebieg. Najbardziej trwałą spośród granic wewnętrznychb. Jugostawii jest granica chorwacko-słoweńska.

Chorwacja i Słowenia, dawne republiki nieistniejącej już Socjalistycznej Federacyjnej Republiki Jugostawii, po ogłoszeniu niepodległości, stały się niezależnymi państwami. W wyniku przemian politycznych, takich jak rozpad Jugostawii w pierwszej połowie. 90-tych XX w. i wstąpienie Słowenii do Unii Europejskiej 01.05.2004 r., powstały utrudnienia w ruchu transgranicznym. Akcesja Słowenii sprawiła, że w procesie jednoczenia się Europy granica między dawnymi republikami Jugostawii wzmocniła swa rolę jako bariery przestrzennej, prawnej i organizacyjnej. Uszczelnienie zewnętrznej granicy unijnej dodatkowo pociągnęło za sobą budowę przejść granicznych nowego typu (BIP). Na badanej granicy utworzono 4 przejścia tego typu.

Rozmieszczenie przejść granicznych wykazuje asymetrię, nawiązując do rzeźby terenu, lesistości i przebiegu dolin rzecznych. Na wschodnim odcinku granicy znajduje się 37 przejść granicznych, zaś na zachodnim zlokalizowanych jest 20. Liczba przekroczeń granicy chorwacko-słoweńskiej w roku 2003 wzrosła o 31 % w porównaniu z rokiem 1995. Największy ruch obserwowany jest obecnie w: Obrežje, Gruškovje, Dragonja oraz Sečovlje tj. na przejściach granicznych leżących na szlakach komunikacyjnych odgrywających ważną rolę w tranzycie międzynarodowym oraz w ruchu turystycznym.

Współpraca między Republiką Chorwacji i Republiką Słowenii jest intensywnai wielostronna. Powiązania transgraniczne odbywają się na kilku poziomach; przejawiają się m.in. w nawiązywaniu umów międzypaństwowych, regionalnych oraz występowaniu więzi interpersonalnych.

Dobre kontakty we współpracy transgranicznej są dla Chorwacji bardzo ważne, gdyż poprzez terytorium Słowenii jest powiązana z Europą Środkową i Zachodnią. Przewiduje się, że w najbliższych latach najintensywniej może rozwijać się współpraca transgranicznaw zakresie ochrony środowiska i rozwoju turystyki.