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MARGINAL REGIONS AND THE STATE BORDER

Introduction

This contribution summarises opinions of the inhabitants of the region of Horní Podyjí (the former court districts of Vranov n.D. and Jemnice — now parts of the Districts of Znojmo, Třebíč and Jindřichův Hradec) and the region of Bojkovice and Valašské Klobouky called, for the purposes of this work, White Carpathians (now, this region is part of the Districts of Uherské Hradiště, Vsetín and Zlín) on the state border. These opinions have been gathered during an inquiry carried out among the population of both of the above-mentioned regions. Carrying out this inquiry investigation, we made use of the possibility to cooperate with schools of all types found in the areas involved. We gathered 710 inquiry forms in the region of Horní Podyjí, while in the region of *White Carpathians* we gathered 2150 inquiry forms filled in by the pupils' parents. In addition to the parents, also 340 grandparents in the region of Horní Podyjí and 1298 grandparents in the region of *White Carpathians* took part in these investigations.

The inquiry forms prepared for the inhabitants of these regions contained 52 questions for parents and another 13 questions for grandparents in the case that they also lived in the regions under examination. In this contribution, only questions concerning the opinions on life in borderland areas, and problems connected with the state border are discussed.

Similarities and Differences Found in Both Regions

Marginality is among those features that are common to both areas under examination. Both of these areas have less favourable conditions for farming, and no settlements with a stronger concentration of population can be found in them. The whole area of Horní Podyjí and also part of the model area *White Carpathians* are situated aside of traffic corridors of a greater significance.

The marginality of the region of *White Carpathians* was originally conditional upon the natural configuration, which was not favourable for the development of farming and did not create favourable transport conditions. After 1993, the marginality of this

region intensified as a result of the new state border that had been established between the Czech and Slovak Republics. The new border has become a barrier affecting not only transport but also economy, and has contributed to the marginality of the region becoming substantially bigger.

Bordering Austria, a section of the region of Horní Podyjí was, for almost 50 years, part of the borderland area "protected" by the Iron Curtain. Despite the fact that the border with Austria has opened, no significant improvement in the economic situation has occurred so far. Here, further developments are impeded, in particular, by the remoteness of this region, which is intensified by a substandard transport service and an insufficient infrastructure. In terms of the border-crossing cooperation, the agricultural character of Lower Austria, an area adjacent to the region of Horní Podyjí, also hampers its development. After Austria had joined the European Union, stronger controls carried out on the Czech-Austrian border became another factor limiting the development of this region.

In terms of demographic stability, both regions are very different. While the population has exchanged in a number of settlements in the region of Horní Podyjí in the last 60 years — in some of them even several times (Czech population's fleeing to the inland after the area concerned had been annexed by the Grossdeutsches Reich in 1938, the compulsory transfer of German population in 1945 and, in the first years after World War II, frequent in-migration of the population coming here from the inland) — the population of the Region of White Carpathians is relatively stable. Also the special folklore of this region has been preserved. The inquiry investigation showed that families representing more than half of the inquired (57 per cent — included grandparents) in the region of Horní Podyjí moved to it after 1950, while the same is true of only 13.2 per cent of respondents in the region of White Carpathians. As far as the pupils' parents alone are concerned, the replies are more comparable. In the Vranov region, 78.6 per cent of the inquired stated that at least one of the parents had been living in this region since his/her birth, while in the region of White Carpathians this reply was given by 94.1 per cent of respondents. It may be judged from this that the population is gradually stabilising in the region of Horní Podyjí, too.

Results of the Inquiry Investigation

Respondents

The age structure of respondents corresponds with the method chosen to carry out the inquiry investigation. Young people aged up to 30 made up 5.0 per cent of all respondents in the region of Horní Podyjí, and 7.3 per cent in the region of White Carpathians. Persons aged between 30 and 39 made up 49.5 per cent of all respondents in the region of Horní Podyjí and 54.3 per cent in the region of White Carpathians. Persons aged between 40 and 49 made up 40.0 per cent in the region of Horní Podyjí and 32.7 per cent in the region of White Carpathians. Persons aged 50 and over made

up 5.1 per cent of all respondents in the region of Horní Podyjí and 5.5 per cent in the region of White Carpathians. However, these higher-age categories prevailed in that part of the inquiry form intended for grandparents.



Village of Hnanice near frontier of Austria. On the background slopes of the Bohemian Massif are covered by large woods (photo K. Kirchner).

Opinions on the Opening (establishing) of the Border

Cadastrs of 9 settlements reach as far as the state border in the model area of the region of Horní Podyjí. As the state border is an above-standard border representing, among other things, the border with the countries of the European Union, it is allowed to be crossed only at border-crossing points, in this case in Vratěnin and Čížov.

In the region of White Carpathians, cadastrs of 15 settlements reach as far as the newly established border. The border with the Slovak Republic is not a standard border yet. It means that in addition to official border-crossing points (4 road and 2 railway border-crossing points in this case), citizens of both countries are allowed to cross the state border on foot at any place. However, motor vehicles are allowed to cross the state border only at border-crossing points.

In both regions, the opinions on the state border sharply differ. It is completely understandable. While the strict border-crossing regime has released in the region of Horní Podyjí making a free movement of citizens possible, the newly established border in the region of White Carpathians has, on the contrary, become a barrier.

Evaluating the opinions on the state border in both model regions, we had to address two different issues. While in the region of Horní Podyjí we were interested in the inhabitants' opinions on the opening of the state border, in the region of White Carpathians the question raised was how people feel about the split of Czechoslovakia. In consideration of the fact that it is just the area of White Carpathians that was plagued by a long-dragging conflict about the line of the state border in which both countries were involved (the hamlets Sidonie and u Sabotů), this fact was reflected in the population's opinions on the split of Czechoslovakia.

Opinions on the Opening of the State Border in the Region of Horní Podyjí (in per cent):

• Definitely positive	28.9
• Rather positive	48.0
• Rather negative	19.6
• Definitely negative	3.5

The above-mentioned table shows that three quarters of respondents expressed their positive opinion on the opening of the state border in the region of Horní Podyjí, while almost one fifth of all respondents perceive this opening as "rather negative" and 3.5 per cent of respondents have a definitely negative opinion on it. The reasons for these attitudes toward the state border will be analysed later.

In the region of White Carpathians, 57.4 per cent of respondents hold a negative opinion on the division of the Czechoslovak Republic. Roughly 12 per cent of inhabitants consider it definitely positive. As we have stated before this opinion is partially influenced by the conflict concerning the running of the state border, partially by the political situation in Slovakia. The attitudes of respondents are not nationalistic on any account.

Opinions of Respondents Residing in the Region of White Carpathians on the Division of Czechoslovakia (in per cent):

• Definitely positive	11.8
• Rather negative	30.8
• Rather positive	36.8
• Definitely negative	20.6

The question about the division of the Czechoslovak Republic was connected with the question what opinion the respondents have about the current relations between Czechs and Slovaks. The respondents' replies show that the prevailing opinion is that these relations have remained unchanged but not a negligible portion of respondents has the impression that the relations between both nations have become

worse. What made the greatest contribution to this opinion was most likely the long-lasting tension accompanying the drawing of the border, the introduction of the border-crossing regime, the reduction in the volume of commuting to work in the Váh River region and the current political situation in Slovakia, too.

Respondents' Opinions on the Current Relations between Czechs and Slovaks after the Division of Czechoslovakia (in per cent):

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------|
| • They have improved | 0.9 |
| • They have remained unchanged | 58.2 |
| • They have become worse | 40.9 |

In the region of Horní Podyjí, the focus of our inquiry was on if and how (positively and negatively) the opening of the state border influenced family life. Although the majority of the population are convinced that the opening of the state border has positive impacts in general, two thirds of the respondents do not see any positive effect on their own life or that of their families respectively. Solely 9 per cent of respondents hold the opinion that the improvement of the economic situation has concrete effects on their life. The others see a concrete improvement at the general cultural and recreational level.

Positive Effects of the Opening of the Border on Family Life in the Region of Horní Podyjí (in per cent)

- | | |
|---|------|
| • Possibility of finding a job in Austria | 2.1 |
| • Benefit from money spent by Austrian visitors in the CR | 2.7 |
| • Reasonable purchases in Austria | 4.3 |
| • Travelling to Austria to see new places and to relax | 18.9 |
| • Other positive effects | 1.3 |
| • No positive effects have occurred | 70.6 |

Half of the respondents negatively answered also the question about the concrete negative effects caused by the opening of the border. The biggest problem (as stated in one third of replies) is the rise in prices of products and services offered in borderland areas as a result of the higher purchasing power of Austrian visitors. Thus, local people often go farther into the inland, particularly to do shopping (Jemnice, Moravské Budějovice etc.). Approximately 9 per cent of respondents state that they find the influx of foreign visitors disagreeable. This opinion is likely to result from the fact that the prevailing majority of local people do not understand German and that, in most cases, Austrian citizens regularly visit Czech Republic to do shopping. A number of respondents may also have a wrong feeling that Austrian visitors are high-handed in their manners.

In the region of White Carpathians, also a question was asked about the kind of negative impacts that the opening of the border had on the life of resident families. Also here, more than 10 per cent of the inquired have the opinion that prices are higher in their area as compared to those in the inland as a result of the establishment of the border and, on the contrary, more than 60 per cent of respondents have the feeling that no impacts have occurred. In comparison with the region of Horní Podyjí, there was a higher number of replies containing statements about conflicts with foreigners or about conflicts caused by them. These statements reflect the problem caused by organised groups of people who illegally smuggle refugees from the Balkan, the Near East and the states of the former Soviet Union across the border. The inhabitants consider the increased movement of foreigners disagreeable which confirms the above-mentioned statements.

How has the Establishment of the New Border Effected the Life of Resident Families (in per cent):

	Horní Podyjí	White Carpathians
• Higher prices of products and services as compared to the inland	35.0	11.6
• Increased movement of foreigners is perceived to be disagreeable	9.4	16.4
• Conflicts with foreigners or those caused by them	0.3	4.8
• Other effects	0.6	5.8
• No effects have occurred	54.7	61.4

Journeys of Respondents to Austria and Slovakia

This question has not been received by the respondents with much understanding. Therefore, we got only a small number of relevant replies. In the region of Horní Podyjí, almost 40 per cent of the inquired have not answered it at all while in the region of White Carpathians this figure was 17 per cent.

The development of the travelling to Austria and Slovakia has many common features. During the first years after the opening of the border, a number of inhabitants of the region of Horní Podyjí visited Austria (as did the inhabitants of other parts of the former Czechoslovakia). Gradually, the number of visitors to Austria began to decrease until it stabilised at a certain level. In the White Carpathians, the number of journeys to Slovakia has been gradually decreasing since 1993 as a result of the customs and passport regime having been introduced at the frontier and the currencies of both countries having been separated.

It follows from the relevant answers given by the respondents in the region of Horní Podyjí that the average number of their visits made to Austria in 1996 is two, with 115 respondents making one visit to Austria (26.9 per cent), 62 respondents making two visits (14.5 per cent) and 32 respondents making three visits (7.5 per cent). 21 persons (4.9 per cent) made more than 10 visits to Austria. It is obvious that the hunger for visiting our southern neighbours that had very strongly manifested itself in the early 1990s dropped. Another of the potential barriers limiting the number of visits made to Austria may include the insufficient knowledge of German.

A similar situation exists in the second model area, too. Here, more than 40 per cent of the inquired stated that they had not visited Slovakia last year, roughly one fifth state one visit and more than 10 visits were recorded only in 5 per cent of all replies.

Number of Visits Made to Austria/Slovakia in 1996 (per cent of replies):

	Horní Podyjí	White Carpathians
• No visit	29.6	42.8
• One visit	26.9	20.9
• 2 to 5 visits	32.3	25.1
• 6 to 10 visits	6.3	6.1
• 11 to 20 visits	1.9	2.8
• More than 20 visits	3.0	2.3

83.7 per cent of those inquired in the region of Horní Podyjí say that they do not shop regularly in Austria on their visits, while for the White Carpathians this figure is slightly higher (89.6 per cent). Before the division of the Czechoslovak Republic, shopping in Slovakia was one of the most significant reasons for travelling to Slovakia in the region of White Carpathians. Czech citizens purchase industrial goods in Austria rather than foodstuffs, with the contrary being true of those shopping in Slovakia. 64 inquired persons stated that they go to Slovakia to buy petrol there. Unlike the inhabitants of the region of Horní Podyjí, the inhabitants of the region of White Carpathians state that visiting their relatives is a much more frequented purpose for their going to Slovakia.

Knowledge of Languages

This question is very significant in the region of Horní Podyjí. As travelling to Austria was virtually impossible for more than 40 years, local people had no motivation to study German (as had not the majority of the inhabitants of the former Czechoslovakia). Despite the fact that the knowledge of German appears to be necessary at the present time, more than 55 per cent of respondents state that they have no knowledge of German.

Respondents' Knowledge of German in the Region of Horní Podyjí (in per cent):

• Level of knowledge	Per cent
• Good	2.0
• Can make themselves understood in everyday situations	24.2
• Reading knowledge	17.0
• No knowledge	56.8

Watching Austrian/Slovakian Mass Media of Communication

It may be presumed that the knowledge of the particular language is closely connected with

watching TV, listening to the radio and reading the press of the neighbouring country. However, the inquiry investigation suggested that this thesis does not correspond with the reality.

6.2 per cent of those inquired in the region of Horní Podyjí regularly watch Austrian television, while Slovakian television is regularly watched by 7.2 per cent of respondents although there is no language barrier.

Regular Watching of the Austrian/Slovakian Television (in per cent):

	Horní Podyjí	White Carpathians
• Yes	6.2	7.2
• No	93.8	92.8

9.5 per cent of the inquired residing in the region of White Carpathians regularly listen to the Slovakian radio while only 1.4 per cent of those inquired in the region of Horní Podyjí regularly listen to the Austrian radio. This difference in the rate of listening to the radio of the neighbouring country may be explained by the language barrier. Listening to the radio requires relatively good knowledge of the particular language. Unlike television, the listener cannot rely on being helped to understand through seeing accompanying pictures.

Regular Listening to Austrian/Slovakian Radio (in per cent):

	Horní Podyjí	White Carpathians
• Yes	1.4	9.5
• No	98.6	90.5

In terms of the press printed in the neighbouring country, the situation is similar. In the region of Horní Podyjí, Austrian press is read by less than 1.0 per cent of the

persons inquired, in the region of White Carpathians, this figure for those reading Slovakian press is almost twice as high.

Reading Austrian/Slovakian Press (in per cent):

	Horní Podyjí	White Carpathians
• Yes	0.8	1.3
• No.	99.2	98.7

Friends Across the Border

The question of whether the respondents have friends on the other side of the border, that is in Austria or Slovakia respectively, has also been asked. Replies to this question clearly show the different developments on both sides of the border. Since the Austrian border was virtually hermetically sealed and the existing friendly or family relations were suppressed violently, most of the respondents began to make new friends only after the year 1989. In the Moravian-Slovakian borderland, friendly and also family relations started to gradually form after the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic (1918). The result is that more than half of the respondents in the region of White Carpathians stated that they had friends (or relatives) on the other side of the border, while in the other model area bordering Austria only less than one fifth of the respondents stated to have friends or relatives on the other side of the border.

Friends on the Other Side of the Border (in per cent):

	Horní Podyjí	White Carpathians
• Yes	19.3	51.4
• No	80.7	48.6

Another question was asked in connection with the above-mentioned one, namely whether they would like to have an Austrian or a Slovak respectively, among their relatives. In both regions, the prevailing answer to this question was "I do not care". In the region of Horní Podyjí, this reply was given by two thirds of the inquired, while in the region of White Carpathians this answer was given by more than three quarters of the inquired.

	Horní Podyjí (%)	White Carpathians (%)
• Would be glad	11.5	6.6
• I do not care	66.5	73.2
• I do not want to have such relatives	62.0	24.7

What Is Your Experience with Austrians/Slovaks?

Two questions related to this issue have been asked. The first one was about the experience Czechs have made with Austrians/Slovaks visiting Czech Republic; the other was about the experience Czechs have made with Austrians and Slovaks on their visits to Austria and Slovakia.

Answers given to this question also reflect more than 70 years of the co-existence of Czechs and Slovaks in a single country. More than one half of respondents residing in the region of White Carpathians have a good experience with visitors from Slovakia, 42 per cent of them consider them neutral and only less than 3 per cent of respondents have the impression that their experience with these nationals is bad. In the region of Horní Podyjí, roughly one fourth of the inquired state good experience with visitors from Austria, more than half of respondents consider them neutral and the remaining roughly 14 per cent have bad experience with visitors from Austria. Also this evaluation is most likely connected with the higher purchasing power of Austrians in the Czech Republic.

Experience of Respondents with Visitors from Austria/Slovakia (in per cent):

Experience	Horní Podyjí	White Carpathians
• Very good	6.3	19.1
• Rather good	21.3	35.4
• Neutral	58.3	42.5
• Rather bad	11.8	2.5
• Very bad	2.3	0.4

Similarly to this, the respondents evaluated their experience with people in Austria, or Slovakia respectively. In the region of White Carpathians, more than 60 per cent of respondents stated good experience with Slovak nationals in Slovakia, more than one third find them neutral and only 3.1 per cent of respondents have bad experience with them. In the region of Horní Podyjí, almost one third of respondents have good experience with people in Austria, 60.1 per cent of respondents state neutral experience with Austrian nationals in Austria and 3.8 per cent of respondents state bad experience.

Experience with People in Austria/Slovakia (in per cent):

Experience	Horní Podyjí	White Carpathians
• Very good	8.5	24.9
• Rather good	23.8	36.1
• Neutral	60.1	35.9
• Rather bad	2.5	2.8
• Very bad	1.3	0.3

Opinions on Barriers Impeding the Development of Relationships with Austria/Slovakia

All these questions reflect the current political and economic situation in the neighbouring countries and the anticipated political developments. This opinion of ours is testified to by answers given to the question: "What are the main barriers (according to respondents) to a more intensive development of relationships with Austria, or Slovakia respectively?" Most respondents consider the different level of economic development, the purchasing power (favouring Austrians) and the knowledge of German to be the main barriers impeding the development of relationships with Austria, while other problems are considered less important:

The Main Barriers to the Development of Relationships with Austria (in per cent of answers):

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|--|------|
| • The different level of economic development and purchasing power | 48.1 |
| • Language barrier | 30.6 |
| • Lack of information on both sides | 9.4 |
| • Historical loads (compulsory transfer of Germans, fascism, war) | 5.5 |
| • Marginality of the area on both sides of the border | 3.1 |
| • Bad transport infrastructure connecting both countries | 1.6 |
| • Other barriers | 0.2 |

As shown in the inquiry investigation, approximately three quarters of respondents do not fear that there might be tendencies in Austria toward claiming property damages as a compensation for the compulsory transfer of German speaking population after World War Two. However, this question is of common concern in some communities in the region of Horní Podyjí since — as mentioned at the beginning of this contribution — 57 per cent of inhabitants came to this area after 1950. It means that a number of our respondents, or their parents respectively, bought — from the state — real estate originally owned by Austrian Germans who had been transferred compulsorily after World War Two. Thus, these people might feel that they are threatened by requirements to compensate this property.

In the region of White Carpathians, the "property question" is not of common concern because, on the one hand, it is a region with a stable population, and, on the other hand, because both nations had a long period of co-existence in a single state, with their economic conditions being the same throughout this period. In spite of this, neither in this case the respondents see the future relationships between the newly established Czech and Slovak Republics as idyllic. In the region of White Carpathians, more than 40 per cent of respondents think that, on the part of Slovakia, there are tendencies to worsen mutual relations as a result of nationalism, the remaining 60 per cent have the impression that these tendencies are not imminent.

Also in this case, the different economic development in both countries, the lack

of mutual information, the existence of bureaucratic barriers and the worsening transport service across the border are seen by the respondents to be the main barriers to the current and future development of relationships between these two countries.

Barriers to the Development of Relationships with Slovakia (in per cent of answers):

• Different economic development	23.9
• Lack of mutual information	23.1
• Bureaucratic barriers	18.7
• Nationalistic load	16.4
• Bad transport service across the border	9.3
• Marginality of the area on both sides of the border	6.4
• Other barriers	2.2

Conclusion

The results brought by this inquiry investigation illustrate how local people perceive the state border in two peripheral borderland areas of the Czech Republic. We would like to point out that they are opinions of respondents and, therefore, they may be different from those officially proclaimed by the governments and other public administration bodies.

It might be interesting to repeat this investigation a few years later since the dynamics of politics and economy in the Czech Republic are still considerable, and the individual changes may considerably effect not only the real state of things but also the opinions on them.

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