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**SOCIAL REINTEGRATION STUDY OF  
BORDERLINE SETTLEMENTS IPOLYHÍDVÉG  
AND DRÉGELYPALÁNK**

Theses of the doctoral (PhD) dissertation

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## **1. Description of the topic, research objectives and methods**

After 1920, borders within the Carpathian Basin not only demarcated territories but also severed vital historical and cultural connections. These newly drawn boundaries disrupted traditional ethnic groups and integration processes, slicing through both geographical and mental spaces. In some instances, different cultural and ethnic groups found themselves forcibly merged within the administrative maps of new states. Alongside the establishment of these new state borders, ethnic-based internal mental borders emerged, influencing society's spatial usage and its administrative structure. This phenomenon complicated people's lives as their ethnic affiliations placed them under different administrative jurisdictions, subjecting them to diverse legal, political, and social influences

This thesis focuses on analyzing the reintegration processes between Drégelypalánk (Hungary) and Ipolyhídvég (Slovakia), two settlements located along the Ipoly River. The analysis involves a comparative examination of the social structures, population dynamics, and demographic and economic patterns of the two settlements, including the districts they influence. Additionally, it encompasses an analysis of questionnaire responses provided by the residents.

The study examines the effects experienced by these borderland communities in recent years. It investigates how the population structure and economy have evolved and the consequent impacts on

the reintegration processes of the communities on both sides of the border.

The analysis of the questionnaire results is pivotal in understanding how local residents perceive their situation and their needs and ideas regarding reintegration processes.

For examining reintegration in the aforementioned border region, a combined research approach was employed. This study utilized an array of qualitative and quantitative methods to achieve a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the reintegration processes. On the qualitative side, semi-structured interviews were conducted, providing insights into the effects and experiences of reintegration from the local residents' perspective. In the quantitative realm, questionnaires were administered and statistical data concerning the area's demographic and economic characteristics were collected. This multifaceted approach allowed for an objective and thorough insight into the quantitative dimensions of the reintegration processes. Additionally, factor analysis was applied in data analysis to elucidate the relationships and interconnections among various variables.

Data derived from the questionnaires were processed using IBM SPSS 26 software. Regarding statistical data collection, the thesis primarily relies on resources such as the Slovak Statistical Office (Slovenský Štatistický Úrad SR), Eurostat, official statistical data from the municipalities, regional archival sources, district office data, information from Municipal Economic and Social Development

Plans, as well as the Hungarian Central Statistical Office and its TEIR database.

The thesis, grounded in its historical context, covers the period starting from 1920. Through semi-structured interviews, it reaches back to the 1930s and 40s, drawing particularly on the narratives of the older generations. However, when it comes to statistical or quantitative data and questionnaires, the focus is primarily on the period from the early 2000s to the present. This focus is due to the fact that the processes of reintegration in the studied border region began in earnest during this time. Additionally, reliable, comparable, and publicly accessible statistical data for measuring and tracking these processes have been available since the early 2000s.

In this thesis, it was deemed essential to explore the possibility of re-establishing the underlying unified space from a cultural anthropological and sociological perspective in everyday life. Among the central research questions, there is a significant emphasis on investigating and understanding how, in the Carpathian Basin – particularly in the Hungarian-Slovak border region – the border zones established a century ago have evolved and continue to evolve concerning imagined or actual, and possibly even non-existent, integration processes. The research focuses on these pivotal questions, aiming to comprehend the lives of communities affected by these borders.

Based on these primary research questions, the study set forth the following objective:

- Exploration of Integration Processes: How have individuals, communities, and institutions attempted to unite or adapt to the challenges posed by border zones over the years?
- Changes in the Social Structure and Economy of Border Zones: What impacts have border zones had on demographic and economic trends within the population, and what changes have occurred over time?
- Imagined and Real Border Communities: How do perceptions and identities along the border influence social cohesion and cooperation among the people?
- The Role of Borders in Community Life: In what ways have borders affected the everyday lives of individuals?
- Building on these questions, the research endeavors to delve deeply into the history and current state of border zones. It aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by people and communities living in these areas, particularly in the context of reintegration processes.

**Table 1: Sub-questions of the dissertation**

<p><b>Q1:</b> Does the Martinez border type (border regions of equal rank) of the region under investigation have an effect on the unification processes?</p>	
<p><b>Q2:</b> What kind of social, economic, cultural and historical factors help the development of integrated spatial units along the border narrowed down to the examined area, Ipolyhídvég and Drégelypalánk?</p>	
<p>Based on the main questions, I am looking for answers to the following unification dimensions in the form of sub-questions:</p>	
<p>• <b>the '<i>structural</i>' dimension of unification</b></p>	<p>– Q2/1: What kind of social structure characterizes and helps the reintegration processes in my area divided by the border?</p>
<p>• <b>the '<i>functional</i>' dimension of unification</b></p>	<p>– Q2/2: What is the cross-border transport accessibility between the two studied settlements?</p>
<p><b>the '<i>institutional</i>' dimension of unification</b></p>	<p>– Q2/3: What are the cross-border institutional relations?                      – Q2/4: What is the networking of the border characters of the examined subregion?</p>
<p>• <b>the '<i>human</i>' dimension of unification</b></p>	<p>– Q2/5: What is the linguistic communication and identity of the people living in the border area of Ipoly?                      – Q2/6: What population dynamic trends, demographic and economic patterns, and what social-personal relationships characterise the two settlements divided by the border, as well as the two districts affected by the border?</p>

Source: Based on Uszkai (2018, p. 15) with additions edited for my own research 2020

## 2. Hypotheses

At the onset of the research, the following hypotheses were formulated for the dissertation:

- H1: In the examined region, the new political (state) borders established a century ago, categorized as "forced border types" according to Haggett, did not act as a separating factor in local social relationships within the neighboring border areas.
- H2: The transformation of the region's Martinez-type borders (based on interactions among residents in the border area) from a "collaborative border area" (between 1990 and 2004) to an "equal border area" after 2004 has positively reinforced the existing reintegration processes.
- H3: Owing to a shared cultural and historical heritage, familial and kinship ties, and mutual trust, friendly, economic, and institutional collaborations continue to thrive even in the presence of century-old borders.
- H4: The state border established a century ago between Ipolyhídvég and Drégelypalánk in the Ipoly Valley became solely a political border zone and did not transform into a "mental border" that could hinder integration processes between the two settlements.
- H5: Differences in the societies of the two villages, such as place of residence, age, and educational background, demonstrate distinctions in the motivation for integration processes.



- H6: Residents of the two villages exhibit differing attitudes toward the possibilities of human-to-human contact.
- H7: Different personal relationships among the residents of the two villages do not weaken the reintegration processes.
- H8: The reintegration processes of Ipolyhídvég and Drégelypalánk are strengthened by unified motifs, considering their centuries-old shared historical, cultural, and economic past.

### **3. A dissertation content and rationale**

One of the central concepts in this dissertation is reintegration, a term employed by various scientific disciplines, each with distinct approaches. Generally, reintegration is understood as the process of (re)approaching, (re)interconnecting, (re)merging, (re)uniting, and creating a new, qualitatively superior, and more efficient unity (Varsádi, 1987; Juhász, 1989; Kulcsár–Rostás, 1989; Kovács, 2001; Kiss, 2005; Losonc, 2005). This research delves into the concept of reintegration within the specific context of the Ipoly Valley, particularly focusing on Ipolyhídvég and Drégelypalánk. The dissertation endeavors to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the reintegration processes in these two neighboring villages, overcoming the historical border that separated them a century ago.

Various aspects, including demographic trends, economic patterns, and the perceptions and experiences of the local population, will be examined through surveys and interviews. The objective is to

understand the influence of the century-old state border on the lives of these communities, examining whether it has acted as a mental barrier or facilitated integration. Furthermore, the research will investigate the role of shared cultural and historical heritage, familial ties, and personal relationships in either aiding or impeding the reintegration processes.

Employing a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, the dissertation aims to offer an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the reintegration processes in the Ipoly Valley region. It will shed light on the experiences and challenges faced by the local communities. The study will incorporate historical data and statistical sources to provide a historical backdrop for the analysis, covering the period from the border's establishment in the early 20th century to the present day.

The research is underpinned by several hypotheses, addressing issues related to the impact of the border, changes in demographic and economic structures, the role of mental boundaries, and the motivations and attitudes of Ipolyhídvég and Drégelypalánk residents towards reintegration. The study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of reintegration processes in border regions and their implications for local communities.

The concept of integration, within the context of regional or territorial integration, encompasses various approaches. Generally, this concept pertains to the possibilities and intensity of interactions (cultural, economic, personal relationships, etc.) between

neighboring regions, including the exploration of cooperative opportunities. These interactions manifest across various territorial, social, communal, and economic levels.

In this dissertation, the concepts of integration and reintegration are not distinctly separated. This is because, within the context of the examined border region's unification processes, reintegration differs from integration mainly in that the regional unification in the studied area represents a (repeated) process.

This approach recognizes that the processes of integration and reintegration can be interconnected. The dissertation aims to understand how these processes unfold specifically in the Ipoly Valley region, particularly with respect to Ipolyhídvég and Drégelypalánk. The research endeavors to explore the interactions and potential for cooperation between these neighboring regions, considering various aspects such as cultural, economic, and personal relationships at different community levels.

By avoiding a rigid separation of the concepts of integration and reintegration, the dissertation facilitates a more comprehensive examination of the evolving relationships and interactions between these two neighboring communities over time. This approach seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play in the border region, illuminating the complexities of regional and community interactions and cooperation.

Within the context of the Ipoly Valley region, metrics for measuring regional integration across borders may encompass the

presence of social, institutional, and human relationships, shared cultural events, collaborative local economic strategies (where applicable), cooperation among local municipal authorities, and joint tourism initiatives.

In summary, definitions employed in border studies commonly articulate cross-border regional integration as a concept to be examined alongside national borders. This encompasses phenomena related to interactions among various actors across these national boundaries (Sohn, 2014). This perspective is particularly relevant for national borders that have materialized within the last century, often without historical precedents.

Such an approach underscores the significance of analyzing how communities and entities interact and cooperate across these newly established national borders. It emphasizes the necessity to comprehend the dynamics of these interactions in regions where historical boundaries have been redefined. The research in the Ipoly Valley, focusing on Ipolyhídvég and Drégelypalánk, aims to explore and analyze the multifaceted nature of these interactions and their influence on regional integration.

The concepts of "border" and "border region" are pivotal in the context of this dissertation. After 1920, the studied region and, more broadly, border areas were long considered border zones without any preceding historical or developmental background. Understanding and investigating this phenomenon is paramount for this research.

In defining „border“ and "border region“, it is crucial to consider the multifarious meanings behind these terms and to examine how the border region evolved in the studied area, even in the absence of clear geographical, historical, or cultural delineations between the borders. This approach allows us not only to strictly consider geographical borders but also to take into account invisible or subjective factors that can influence the development of the area and the relationships among its inhabitants. Borders are not only physical barriers; they can also be psychological, social, and economic boundaries. The dissertation should delve into the study of these various aspects.

#### **4. Summary of results and presentation of theses**

The research delved into demographic and economic patterns within the Carpathian Basin, with a specific focus on the Hungarian-Slovak border region. This analysis was based on three primary indicators: the aging index, dependency ratio, and educational attainment levels. A comparative study revealed that the Balassagyarmat district exhibited a more pronounced aging trend compared to the Nagykürtös district. The dependency ratio also indicated an increase in both districts, notably within Ipolyhídvég and Nagykürtös. Furthermore, changes in the structure of educational attainment were observed, with a rising proportion of individuals holding secondary and higher education degrees, especially in the Nagykürtös district. Unemployment and

emigration also emerged as influential factors in shaping the social structure.

The findings suggest that, following the regime change, the northern part of the Ipoly region is economically and demographically more disadvantaged. Notable differences between Ipolyhídvég and Drégelypalánk were also identified, particularly in terms of educational attainment and labor market conditions. The disparities between urban and rural areas may have contributed to these differences.

The analysis was anchored in empirical data with a focus on reintegration and integration processes. Guided by our research questions, we scrutinized reintegration, highlighting that the motives for interaction between the two villages can be diverse, and in some social strata, personal interactions may be entirely absent. The findings suggest that reintegration processes are indeed tangible between the two villages, particularly in the human dimension. Various indicators, such as work relationships, familial and friendly ties, motivations for visits, as well as challenges and benefits, play pivotal roles in the reintegration process. These indicators can be classified into three categories, and the analysis revealed a correlation between these indicators and the hard variables. The study found that the reintegration processes are most profoundly understood through the human dimension, as the local populace directly influences these processes.

The thesis organizes the results into thematic areas. The first theme involved an analysis of changes in relationships, encompassing familial and friendly ties, as well as shifts in social connections and spatial usage. The subsequent theme focused on examining the advantages and disadvantages of the two villages, delving into the diverse thought patterns among the locals. Drawing on empirical data, we contrasted the views of the local residents regarding the pros and cons of the villages.

In summarizing the analysis, we highlighted that discernible differences exist between the two villages, especially in relation to the hard variables. However, the analysis also revealed that reintegration can be viewed as an opportunity for positive change by the residents. There is a strong belief among the locals in the economic revitalization potential of reintegration. Drawing on their past experiences, they envisage future development through cooperation between the two villages. The division created by state borders has not extinguished the concept of economic unity from the community's collective consciousness. The locals deem the rekindling of their erstwhile connections significant, while acknowledging the shifts in societal and economic landscapes.

### *Further findings from the research*

- The construction of a bridge spanning the Ipoly River is of paramount significance to local residents, chiefly in terms of bolstering interpersonal connections.
- For the denizens of Ipolyhídvég, the bridge is not only economically significant but also bears existential importance.
- The enduring perception of the southern side as a land of existential opportunities, as viewed from the northern side, continues to be a dominant trend.
- The analysis meticulously documents the persisting economic disparities between the two sides of the river.
- Inhabitants of Ipolyhídvég underscore the potential and significance of fortifying human connections, a potential ushered in by the construction of the bridge.

### *Evaluation of hypotheses*

- H1: The findings suggest that in areas bisected by the Ipoly River, the political boundary does not obstruct the fortification of human relationships and the reinforcement of social connections.
- H2: Transforming Martinez's border types into the "equal border region" typology positively influences reintegrative processes, enhancing institutional cooperation and professional relationships.



- H3: Despite a century-old border and the preservation of familial and kinship ties grounded in history and mutual trust, there's no hindrance to the strengthening of human relationships, which continue to flourish in friendly, economic, and institutional collaborations.
- H4: The national border has not transformed into a psychological barrier; it does not impede integration, evidenced by the maintenance of robust connections on both sides.
- H5: Social disparities influence motivations for integration, with variations in living standards and educational levels highlighting differences in reintegrative efforts between the two communities.
- H6: Perceptions of human interaction possibilities between the two settlements vary among individuals, leading to diverse motivations and approaches.
- H7: The diversity of human relationships does not diminish but rather bolsters integration processes in both communities, as varied connections enhance interconnectedness.
- H8: Despite Ipolyhídvég and Drégelypalánk's historical unity, divergent motivations and intentions regarding reintegrative processes have emerged between the two communities, driven by changes in social structures over time, fostering varied motivations.

### *Novel scientific findings*

- The novel findings of this research underscore the significant role of human relationships in the reunification processes within the region, a facet previously underexplored.
- Investigations have revealed the unceasing existence of human relationships, persisting even through years of political dictatorship. This highlights the enduring nature of historical human bonds.
- Data analysis indicates that the dissolution of borders, leading to the formation of cooperative border regions, positively impacts reintegrative processes, thereby accelerating unification.
- The transformation in border type is intricately linked to the local population's interactions, going beyond mere physical border elimination. This finding emphasizes the critical role of human factors.
- The results demonstrate that, despite sharing cultural and historical heritage, integration processes can be driven by varying motivations across different communities, yet this diversity does not impede the process of integration.
- A significant novelty among the findings is the dual role of the border region bridge, serving not only functional purposes but also playing a vital part in the human aspects of reunification processes.

- The research highlights that institutional dimensions alone are insufficient for effective integration. Support for the human-social dimensions is imperative, as reintegration of border regions is unattainable without nurturing human relationships.
- Economic and political shifts do not necessarily hinder reintegration. However, profound social changes, such as migration, can significantly influence the dynamics of unification.

## **5. Conclusions**

- In the Ipoly mente border region, human relationships are found to play a more pivotal role in the processes of reunification than institutional relationships.
- The enduring influence of a shared historical and cultural heritage is evident in the region, particularly manifested through interpersonal interactions and common thought processes.
- The establishment of state borders did not result in a mental separation; instead, the region continues to witness the emergence of new connections, professional relationships, and friendships.
- Adopting a unified regional perspective offers distinct advantages, superseding the conventional frameworks of political or state institutions.

- Although the processes of reunification exhibit variations between the two municipalities, they collectively contribute to the overarching goal of reintegration.

## **6. Recommendations**

- Comprehensive research should be expanded to encompass the entire Hungarian-Slovak border region, and potentially the Carpathian Basin, to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of post-World War I artificially created borders and the dynamics of reunification processes.
- It is recommended to conduct human-societal studies across multiple border regions, including Hungarian-Romanian, Hungarian-Serbian, Hungarian-Croatian, Ukrainian-Hungarian-Slovak, and Hungarian-Austrian bordering municipalities, to gather diverse perspectives.
- An in-depth examination of human factors is essential, particularly exploring the consequences and impacts of intermarriages between residents of bordering municipalities on the reunification processes.

## List of own publications related to the topic of the thesis

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3. Samu, I. és Kulcsár, L. (2020). A véget nem érő történet – A társadalmi és gazdasági kapcsolatok rekonstrukciója két Ipoly menti faluban a folyó szemközti oldalán. In: Péti, M., Schwarcz, G. és Ress, B. (szerk.): Multidiszciplináris tanulmánykötet a Kárpát-medence és magyarságának egyes társadalmi, gazdasági, környezeti jelenségeiről és kihívásairól. Budapest, Magyarország: Nemzetstratégiai Kutatóintézet, pp. 165-172.
4. Samu, I. és Kulcsár, L. (2019). The Process of Re-joining: Reconstruction of Social and Economic Relations between Two Hungarian Villages on Both Sides of the Ipoly River. *GAZDASÁG ÉS TÁRSADALOM*, 12(4), pp. 114-125.

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7. Samu, I. (2018). Csallóközi kistérségek regionális egyenlőtlenségei. In: Resperger, R. (szerk.): DEMOGRÁFIAI VÁLTOZÁSOK, VÁLTOZÓ GAZDASÁGI KIHÍVÁSOK Nemzetközi Tudományos Konferencia. Sopron, Magyarország: Soproni Egyetem Kiadó, pp. 52-66.
8. Samu, I. (2017): Kulcsár László: A vidékfejlesztés elméleti megközelítése: regionális és kulturális összefüggések. *FÓRUM TÁRSADALOMTUDOMÁNYI SZEMLE: A SZLOVÁKIAI MAGYAR TUDOMÁNYOS MŰHELYEK FOLYÓIRATA*, 21(3), pp. 175-176.
9. Samu, I. (2017). Ipolyhídvég - Drégelypalánk, mint a kettészabdalt Ipoly mente típusú két szomszédos településének területi töke kutatása és összehasonlítása 1920 előtt és közvetlen utána. In:

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