

Various mental images about the geographical extension of Central, Southeast and Eastern Europe

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Abstract. Central Europe, Eastern Europe, the Balkans and Southeast Europe as macro-region space concepts are not regions designable by physical geography; the geographical content of these concepts is drawn and re-drawn by historical, cultural and geopolitical processes. Debates on the extension and content of the macro-regions featured intensify every now and then, especially in crisis periods – it is enough to think of the years before, during and after the world wars, the regime change, and these days. Our paper, with the brief summary of the preliminaries, highlights, from the perspective of our age, the geopolitically determined transformation and demonstrates the findings of our empirical research. During our research we made a questionnaire survey in which we recorded mental maps of the university students of Hungary and its seven neighbour countries, looking at where the respondents put their own countries and what image of the respective macro-regions lived in their minds. Our findings may be subject to debates but clearly show the convergent or divergent directions of the respective countries, at least as regards the judgement by the youth.

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1. Introduction

Geographical macro-spaces are space concepts that are often used in everyday context as well. We often specify something as Central European, Balkanic, Eastern European, etc., but if we want to specify the exact designation of these concepts, we may face problems. Regional geography creates its own concepts about the geographical content of the respective areas, but even these designations are often different from each other. Also, these concepts are used, in addition to geographers, by historians, politologists and geo-politicians as well and they often mean different regions under the specifications of the respective macro-spaces; what is more, in the course of time these judgements are also transformed, extended, transferred or they cease to exist. These spatial concepts are flexible in our opinion; they leave space for debates and cannot be treated as exact geographical concepts as e.g. the extension of a water catchment area. Evidently, there have been attempts at this in geography, but the goal of this paper is to demonstrate how differently these concepts are seen by university students living in different countries. We asked university students in Hungary and the seven neighbour countries about their opinion on the macro-regional position of their own countries and their neighbours. The results that we received only partially reflect the concepts taught in the geography lessons of the respective countries; the students often classify the respective groups to one category or another on the basis of their own opinions, prejudices, and the information gained from the media and other sources. Accordingly, the goal of our paper is not the designation of the macro-regions; it is the introduction to the opinions geographical, historical and politological literature has presented on the extension of Central Europe, Eastern Europe, etc., and how these concepts are reflected in the mental maps of the students in our survey. We can clearly state in advance that our paper is not on exact geographical units but on areas that originated in the community consciousness on a historical, political and cultural basis, and as such may change, and seem different from alternative viewpoints. In the first part of our paper we analyse the concept of macro-regions, in the second part we look at literature, to select from among the variations of the concepts of Central Eu-

rope, Eastern Europe, Southeast Europe and the Balkans region and to summarise the directions of approaches, while in the third chapter the opinions of the students about the extension of the respective macro-spaces, surveyed just recently, are introduced.

2. Geographical macro-regions

The basic problem for the survey of the concept of regions is the vast number of definitions. Different (partial) disciplines and also the non-academic common talk use the notion of region for spatial units that can be defined alternatively.

The concepts of region used in international relations are surveyed by Volgy et al. (2012), who divide them into five groups. According to this, several definitions consider regions as very large geographical clusterings, like e.g. Asia, Europe [in fact, Eurasia combined], Latin America. These can be seen as “meta-regions”, considering the fact that they involve several regions (Putnam, 1967; Lagos 2003; Karawan, 2005). In others’ view, regions are institutionalised cooperations among geographically linked states, or geographically linked security communities (Buzan-Waeaver, 2003), or geopolitical areas controlled by a regional or global power (Lemke 2002), or geopolitical space integrated by common identity, culture and history (Katzenstein, 2005). These categories can be seen as the foundation of the existence of large international regions, the ‘raison d’être’ of their existence.

The above-listed five categories include regions with functional approach and ones that can be characterised by structural features. As a matter of fact, the classification of respective states can change, i.e. the territory of a certain region can expand or shrink, even new regions can appear or formerly existing regions can be lost in the system. If we want to match the spaces in our examination to these categories, we can see that occasionally the same geographical unit can be described by the characteristics of more than one category, and the main characteristics can change in history.

Our own approach to this issue can be stated as follows: there are geographical macro-regions within which international relations are more intensive. They have some characteristics which are shared by all ter-

territories belonging there and which distinguish them from other macro-regions, and so these spaces can be treated as units in geopolitics as well. These complexly integrated regions exist in historical scale, and one or several of the five ‘raison d’être’-s listed by Volgy et al. (2012) is/are valid for them, the regions serve as the geographical frameworks of these ‘raison d’être’-s.

Thus, the concept of geographical macro-regions in our paper is used for regions that cover the territories of more than one state totally or partially and meet the criteria listed above. In literature these are often called sub-continental regions (Dingsdale, 1999), as due to their size they involve a significant proportion of their continents, and their name often refers to their position within the continent (points of the compass, central or middle-, far, etc.) but can also imply some physical geographical phenomena, peninsulas, mountains, mountain ranges or seas.

The birth of macro-regions is not automatic, of course. Despite the fact that the American continent has an eastern part, there is no region called East America (Lendvai, 1997); geography only provides (may provide) the natural foundations for the designation of the macro-regions, but the content is always a social formation that coincides with the spatial division of physical geography in only a few cases, rather as an exception than as a rule.

These macro-regions are civilisation, cultural, geopolitical and mental formations which therefore do not follow the physical geographical regions, and their relation to the political borders is not clear-cut either. If we look at such macro-regions within Europe like Western, Southern, Northern, Central, Eastern, Southeast Europe or Iberian, the Balkans, Scandinavian, Alpine, Carpathian, Danube, Rhine, etc. region, we inevitably have states in our minds and think that they can automatically be put into these categories. If we look at different sources (e.g. geography school books, academic dissertations, websites categorising countries, maps, etc.), it becomes clear that the designation of these regions is far from consistent, there are no universally applicable rules; there are some countries whose participation in a region is not doubted, while others, such as Central European countries and the Balkans, are considered by some sources only.

The reasons for this uncertainty are manifold:

- Behind the cultural characteristics of macro-regions we find long-existing political-geographical

historical formations (territories of empires, religious or ethnic groups) which have disappeared by now, their borders can no longer be seen in political maps but they had a long-term civilisation impact on their own territories, still visible in socio-economic features, identity, value systems, etc. Modern borders do not coincide with these “crypto-borders”, and so we can see many countries whose certain parts now belong to different macro-regions, or even the state as a whole can be classified into several regions. A good example of the former case is Romania, where Transylvania is undoubtedly part of Central Europe (Săgeată 2006; Miklósné Zakar 2009), whereas Moldova belongs to Eastern Europe or Southeast Europe and Wallachia to Southeast Europe. An example of the second case can be Croatia, which, as a former member republic of Yugoslavia and because of its southern-Slav ethnic majority is categorised as part of Southeast Europe, but its Catholic religion, its historical relation to Hungary and more recently its membership in the European Union make it more of a Central European country. The uncertainties of the designation of Eastern, Central and Southeast Europe can primarily be seen as the “survival” of the historical borders of Poland, which although as hidden structural borders within the territories of the present states, like e.g. the historical borders of Poland that run within the present state territory and which can still be traced in e.g. the behaviour of the political electors (Surazska, 1995).

- As we could see by the example of Croatia, the judgement of where a country or a region belongs can change in time. Of course, this is less valid for certain spatial concepts, if made impossible by e.g. physical geographical foundations (like in the case of the Balkans), while others are definitely “mobile”, and in fact, can disappear from the map temporarily or permanently. Eastern Europe is such a “volatile” spatial category; ones that temporarily get lost are Central Europe or the Baltic Region. This statement is especially true for those spatial categories in whose formation geopolitics and history played an important role, and thus the change in the geopolitical circumstances results in the fact that in different historical periods different groups of states or territories are covered by the given concept.

In the designation of the macro-regions the mental element is dominant. Our view of space is influenced by our geographical location; for example, the categorisation by the points of the compass can reflect this phenomenon. In Germany or Austria, for example, the concept of 'Southeast Europe' often involves Hungary; as a matter of fact, Hungary does lie in this direction from these countries and Southeast Europe is accessible for them via Hungary. Our mental maps are also influenced by the values and identification force the macro-regions as social formations carry. This means that belonging to a macro-region can carry positive or negative judgements, and identification with or rejection of the respective macro-region. The concept of Central Europe, for example, often bears positive values. It is an interesting phenomenon that the "middle" of Europe can be found in several countries, memorial places of touristic significance have been erected to designate this in Ukraine, Romania, Slovakia and Hungary, but the concept also appears in the marketing materials of the Italian city, Milano. Evidently, 'middle' also means, among other things, the meeting point, the junction of roads, and as such has a positive connotation in itself. This is complemented by the fact that, especially in poorer countries, the concept of Central Europe is closely related to the image of the Danubian Hapsburg Empire, to Austria, which is attractive due to the economic development level of this country today.

The role of identification is thus strong. Where the population of a state or territory feel they belong to and where they are seen by others, by their neighbours, can determine the place of a region. It is interesting that in common talk, political speeches and in the school books in Romania the country is more and more often referred to as a country of Central Europe, though they declared themselves as part of Southeast Europe formerly. This evidently impacts the development of the relationship system of the country but also some internal issues, such as the priorities of urban development that more closely tie Romanian society to the values of Central Europe.

This proves that the major part of the macro-regions in our examination is characterised by non clear-cut but visible borders, and these borders are

shaped by 'common talk' and 'public opinion' rather than by some codified order.

3. Some comments on the mental map method

The method has been taken over and used by several disciplines including geography, sociology and cultural anthropology (Garda, 2009); in fact, it can even be applied in the field of urban development and planning (Fenster, 2009) and in decision-making on foreign politics issues (Da Vinha, 2011).

Cognitive maps are the subjective space of the individual (Kuipers, 1978). Such maps are made by the selection of spatial elements that are shaped by the emotions, judgements and other personal traits of the individuals. The result is actually the re-interpretation of space (Didelon et al. 2011). Mental maps, as regards their form of appearance, can be draft maps as well. Such maps are typically made for questionnaire surveys in which respondents are asked to draw a specific map on a blank paper. The main goal in this case is to find out how respondents position themselves in space. Classic mental mapping is based on questionnaires that assess the knowledge or ask about the opinion of the individual about space (Didelon et al. 2011).

The level of knowledge about space may be related to the scale of the examination. Parallel to the increase of the area represented, there is growth in the significance of secondary information and indirect learning. There is a limited chance to obtain personal information on, for example, cognitive world maps that are basically built on cartographic information (Csépe et al. 2011; Uszkai, 2015).

4. Concepts of Central Europe, Eastern Europe, Southeast Europe and the Balkans

In this research we carried out by a questionnaire survey the conceptual examination of four macro-regions that overlap each other and may even be alternatives for one another in different historical times, but there are overlaps among all of these concepts.

It seems to be a commonplace that these spatial concepts are hard to grasp, they can be interpreted for spaces of different sizes and their areas of relevance also change with time. This evidently leads to the common feature that these concepts specify an in-between space, a wide stripe of European territory that is situated at the encounter zone of the influence of great powers and large centres of civilisation, from the Baltic region right to Greece. Accordingly, this zone is not a homogeneous space; what is common in these four spatial concepts is the phenomenon of ‘between-ness’, to which the creators of the different spatial concepts tried to find answers. The French-Romanian authors, V. Rey and O. Groza, defined the political geographical reasons and consequences of geographical between-ness when defining the Balkans (but also applicable for the whole area in our survey) as follows: “A space where developments are governed by processes of outside interference and influence that are stronger than inside forces. Its history is composed of recurrent adver-

sity, while lack of durability prevents accumulation and causes return to previous states, contributing to a cyclic, discontinuous experience of time that does not favour integration of what has been previously acquired” (Rey, Groza, 2009: 265; Rogatka, Ramos Ribeiro, 2015).

All four spatial concepts are relatively young in historical approach, as their appearance coincided and their concept became widely used with the weakening and disintegration of the large empires covering their territories. Actually, it is only since the second half of the 19th century that they have existed.

As regards the spatial concepts examined, it may be Central Europe that has raised the strongest professional interest and provoked most discussions, and is still the most broadly discussed concept.

The concept of Central Europe raises exciting issues – and not only these days. In 1954, a German geographer, Karl A. Sinnhuber, summarised the concepts that had been constructed so far and demonstrated them in a map (Fig. 1).

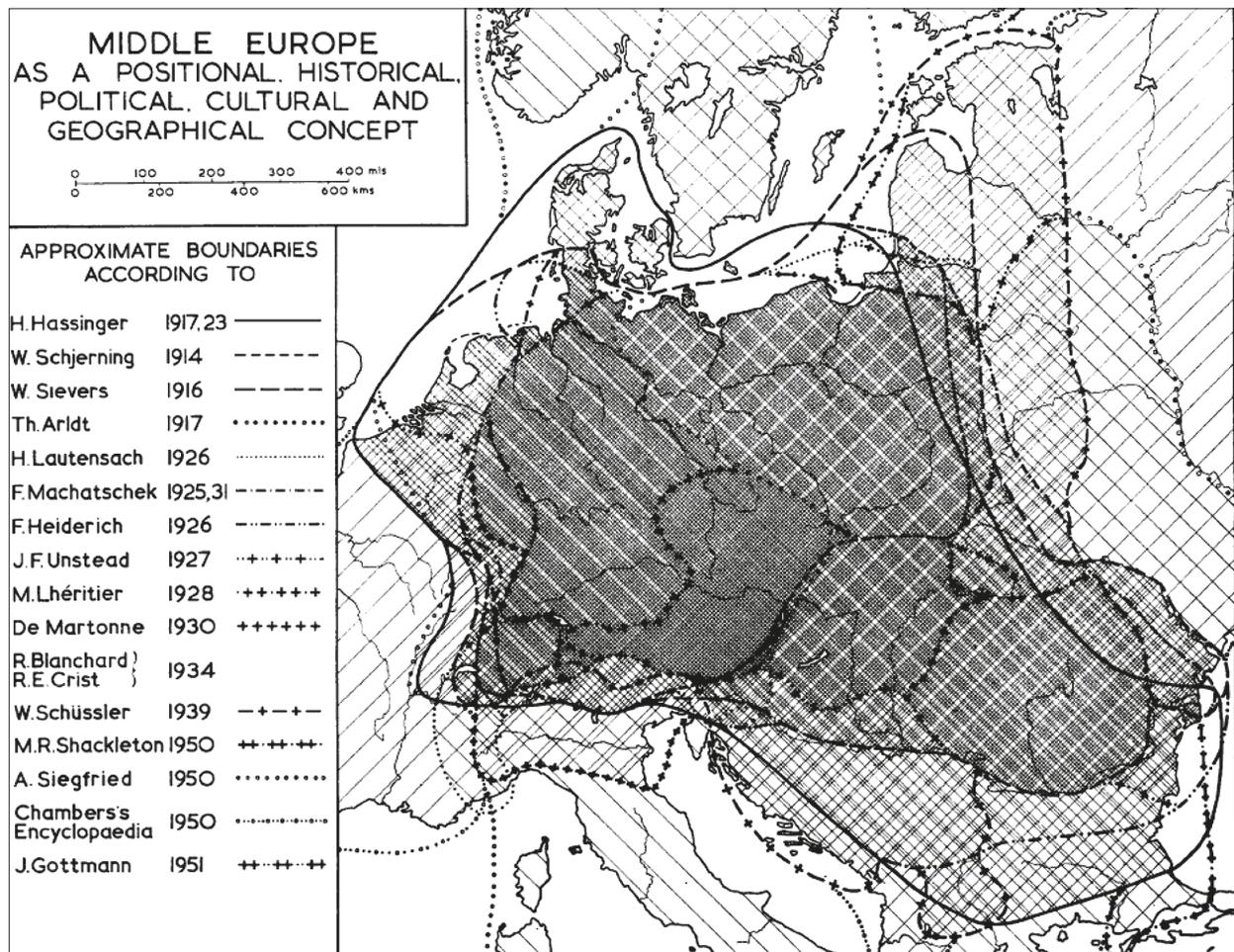


Fig. 1. Middle Europe as a positional, historical, political, cultural and geographical concept: a graded assessment of the degree of coincidence existing between sixteen definitions of Middle Europe

Source: Sinnhuber 1954, p. 19

He stated that the versions of Central Europe raised since the early 19th century cover the major part of the core area of the continent, practically only the Iberian Peninsula is missing from that – Spain and Portugal have never been considered as part of the region in question by anyone. His figure shows interesting similarities to the figure concluded from the findings of our research (see the part of Figure 3 relevant for Central Europe), i.e. the Central Europe image after the regime change did not change much compared to the classic concepts; on the other hand, our findings also reveal that the integration of the Union and the current geopolitical crises have shed light on the issue of the definition of Central Europe again, and they may even change this concept.

Lendvai L., Ferenc (1997) in his thorough summary introduced the effort of German geographers to demonstrate Central Europe as an exact scientific phenomenon. In the 19th century, Karl Ritter saw the essential feature of this region in its distance from the seas, and identified Central Europe with the German-Sarmatian-Russian plain land between the Rhine and the Volga rivers. He was followed by Albrecht Penck, Alfred Hettner and von Seydlitz in whose view Central Europe was already defined as a territory under basic German influence. This approach was taken over by French geographers as well.

The French historian Lhéritier gives another answer to this issue in his book called 'Région historiques' (1928). In his opinion there was no Central Europe in the Middle Ages. This region actually was the eastern frontier of the continent that is expressed by the name Austria-Österreich. This expression appeared in history after the 16th century, as a result of the strengthening of Austria and the penetration of German civilisation. The political concept of Central Europe actually appeared when the opposition of Austria and Prussia weakened the Hapsburg power and it was a question whether the heterogeneous Austrian empire would be able to survive at all. The collapse of the empire following World War I resulted in new spatial concepts. In 1928 Lhéritier said about the zone consisting of many new small states: 'Le Mitteleuropa est mort, mais l'Europe centrale n'en existe pas moins ...' (1928, 47). Lhéritier's 'l'Europe Centrale' region basically consist of the successor states of Austria-Hungary: Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Although his concept was a political one, it also had a clear-cut geographi-

cal character. In his opinion, l'Europe Centrale was part of a continental (landlocked) zone that reached from the North Cape to Cyrenaica and Egypt and was extremely heterogeneous with regard to the ethnic, language and religious aspects. Within this zone, the 'raison d'être' of l'Europe Central is the role of a turntable, a junction. Europe Centrale can also be interpreted as the synthesis of Europe, and each state there is the synthesis of the synthesis. Actually, the whole of Europe can be found here in a miniaturised version. He thought that this region was small but gradually expanding and penetrated into the larger surrounding units as well. This broader zone was called Central Europe (l'Europe Central) by Jacques Ancel (1930), and also by Emmanuel de Martonne (1931), complemented in his opinions by Germany and Switzerland.

All in all, the concept that drew the in-between zone (in German language: *Zwischeneuropa*) onto the map of Europe was born in the years between the two world wars, to replace the old imperial structures, but also mixed with them. In the middle of the 19th century the political and cultural definition of Central Europe was made as well. In order to secure the economic hinterland of Germany, the concept of *Mitteleuropa* was defined already in the 1830s in the works of politicians and philosophers (e.g. Friedrich List) (Lendvai, 1997; Krejci, 2005), but in the years before and during the First World War significant works were done on this issue, as well. The book of Friedrich Naumann with the same title was clearly opposed by the Hungarian public (Lengyel, 1916). The concept *Mitteleuropa* relates to a Germany-centred economic macro-space reaching out to the southeast, crossing the boundaries of the spacedesigned by the pan-German movement.

The political significance of the region grew after World War I, as the revolutionary transformation of Russia deprived the French of the eastern ally that could make a strategic partner against Germany on its east side (Ormos, 2007).

In Europe divided in the cold war period the concept of Central Europe was meaningless, as the Iron Curtain was actually drawn in the middle of this macro-region, and the territories in the focus of our paper were seen as parts of Eastern Europe. It was the eighties when public discourse started to use this spatial concept again, especially as a result of receding from the East cognitively. Being Cen-

tral European, accepting a hardly definable, intellectual and cultural community reinforced the sense of historical belonging to Western Europe, emphasising at the same time the regional characteristics of Central Europe. The repeated appearance of this spatial concept was used by the peoples of the region as a tool to “relocate” themselves from Eastern to Western Europe in the cognitive sense, emphasising their ties to Western culture (Hagen 2003). Of course, this search of identity may seem less pathetic from other viewpoints. It is interesting to read R. Wagner’s article with a rather strong sense of superiority but correct view of the situation in the newspaper called *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, under the title ‘Der Traum der Ränder. Mitteleuropa – eine Vision erfüllt sich und lebt als Utopie weiter’ (i.e. The dream of the edges – a vision is fulfilled and lives on as a utopia) on the revival of the Central European identity, whose main goal is to emphasise the ties to the West. He sees the contradiction between the emphasis of the macro-regional identity, the respective countries and nations turn to each other with strengthening nationalism, and the smaller-scale regional identities and chauvinisms which endanger the balance of the macro-region (Wagner, 2003). After the regime changes this could be seen in the political cooperations of the community as well, demonstrated by the Central Europe Initiative (CEI), the free trade association (CEFTA) and the foundation of the Visegrád Group. These days this community seems to disintegrate, and a narrower (but definitely Central European) cooperation seems to be born (Slavkov Agreement) as a closer cooperation of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Austria, while Poland wishes to make a more integrated geopolitical unit with Germany and France in the first place. These processes indicate a new, internal transformation of this macro-region.

The concept of Eastern Europe raises even more issues than the previous spatial concept. Very different groups of countries can be the content of this spatial concept, depending on the historical period in question or the context. In the cold war period the concept of Eastern Europe involved the post-socialist countries without the Soviet Union, while the most widespread meaning of this concept today is the circle of the former Soviet republics without Russia. An important aspect of Eastern

Europe is whether we include Russia in the region or exclude Russia from Europe in general. This does not mean an anti-Russian attitude, as this view is also shared by some of the Russian philosophers. The reason for this is the fact that the development of Russia does not follow the European patterns but a mix of European and Asian ones, due to the impact of the long Mongol rule and the Byzantine traditions. Just for this reason, the Polish historian Oscar Halecki (1980) in his theory developed between the two wars defined Eastern Europe as the territory inhabited by the Slavic peoples other than the Russians, and named this region as the “borderlands of western civilization” even in the title of his book. One of Halecki’s contemporary researcher, the Czech Bidlo, draws the border at the interface of the zones of influence of the two large Christian religions, defining the Orthodox states as Eastern Europe (Romsics, 2005). The content of the Eastern Europe concept has changed considerably after the regime changes. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union the former member republics were defined by this attribute, with the exception of the Baltic region that identified itself more with Central Europe and Northern Europe, thereby expressing also their difference from the Russian Slavic world. In Dingsdale’s view (1999), after the cold war Eastern Europe can be divided into four large regions: Central Europe, Baltic Europe, South-East/Balkan Europe and the Eastern Borderlands. All this shows that the most “volatile” spatial concept is that of Eastern Europe.

The specification “Balkans” seems to be more of a physical geographical expression, as this basically covers the Balkan Peninsula (Kobolka and Pap, 2011). The name of the peninsula comes from a German geographer, Zeune in 1808 (Hajdú, 2010), and the area is bordered in the physical geographical sense by seas from three sides and by the Danube and Sava Rivers from the north. The boundaries are less clear-cut in the socio-political sense. In the 19th century the specification was more and more widely used in Western geographical literature in connection with crossing the Balkan Mountains, but then the region was referred to as “European Turkey” as the whole territory was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, and actually the geographical specification ‘Balkans’ became widely used for this region after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, in the cri-

sis of the ‘East issue’ (Mazower, 2004). The specification was thus connected to a region that was extremely mixed ethnically, and was also the arena of the competition of super powers. Thus it was also the potential source of conflicts for super powers, while from time to time a power vacuum also emerged during which conflicts broke out among the inner ethnic groups of the region. For all these reasons, today the words ‘Balkans’ or ‘Balkanic’ are attributes used for other regions with similar endowments in the world (Brzezinski, 1999).

The expression Southeast Europe can also be found in the maps from the early 19th century, but it was only filled with content in the 20th century. It is more neutral politically and concerning its value than the expression Balkans; also, it covers an area bigger than that. In the first half of the 20th century it was mainly used for the definition of the German geopolitical efforts in the broader sense, while its significance today is that it contains, in addition to the Balkans states in the narrower sense, those countries that are culturally integrated, but do not fit into the concept of the Balkans. Such a country is Romania that is related to the Balkans countries by its religion, or Slovenia and Croatia that have ethnic, linguistic and historical connections to the states of the Balkans, but they have at least as strong relations to Central Europe as well.

It is clear thus that the way of thinking of our age is influenced by macro-regional perceptions of different origins:

- Definitions of regional geography and physical geography, in which we find the German concept that sees the “middle” areas of Europe, far from the seas, as Central Europe. Another physical geographical approach is to take the geometrical centre of the continent, but in this case the question emerges how we define the eastern boundary of the continent? The Balkans as a peninsula can be designated, although its northern border can be debated from a physical geographical perspective.
- German and Austrian imperial spaces of the 19th century, supplemented with their economic and cultural background, are reflected in the concept Mitteleuropa and similar perceptions that still exist.
- After World War I the geopolitical importance of the region (the separation of the East and the

West, between-ness) is underlined by the opinions of French origin, and also by the German concept *Zwischeneuropa* that designates a broad zone.

- During the cold war period the eastern half of the separated continent, the stripe between the Iron Curtain and the Soviet borders, was articulated as a single region.
- Finally, after the regime change and the enlargement of the European Union the concept of Eastern Europe was pushed eastwards to designate the post-Soviet member republics either with or without Russia.

In today’s thinking all these impacts are mixed and influence our perceptions about the macro-regions.

5. Methodology and judgement of the spatial concepts today – in the light of a survey

The previous chapters have shown that the spatial concepts demonstrated are social creations, in whose evolution history and culture play a significant role, as do mental maps coming from the geographical position and knowledge.

We conducted a questionnaire survey in 2013–2014 to examine the spatial concepts typical today. The focus was on the analysis of the perception of space. We asked a total of 1,294 higher education students in eight countries about which of the four large political and geographical concepts of space they thought their country, and also their neighbours and the neighbour of these, belonged to. They were allowed to order several macro-regions to one respective state, remembering that these spatial concepts have overlaps and their borders can in no way be defined along the borders of the states. Figure 2 shows the countries and locations of the questionings, and the countries that our questions were related to. In addition to the position of the respective states within the macro-regions we also looked at relationships among the countries, and the inner spatial division of the respective states as well, but the scope of this paper only allows the discussion of the above-mentioned issue.

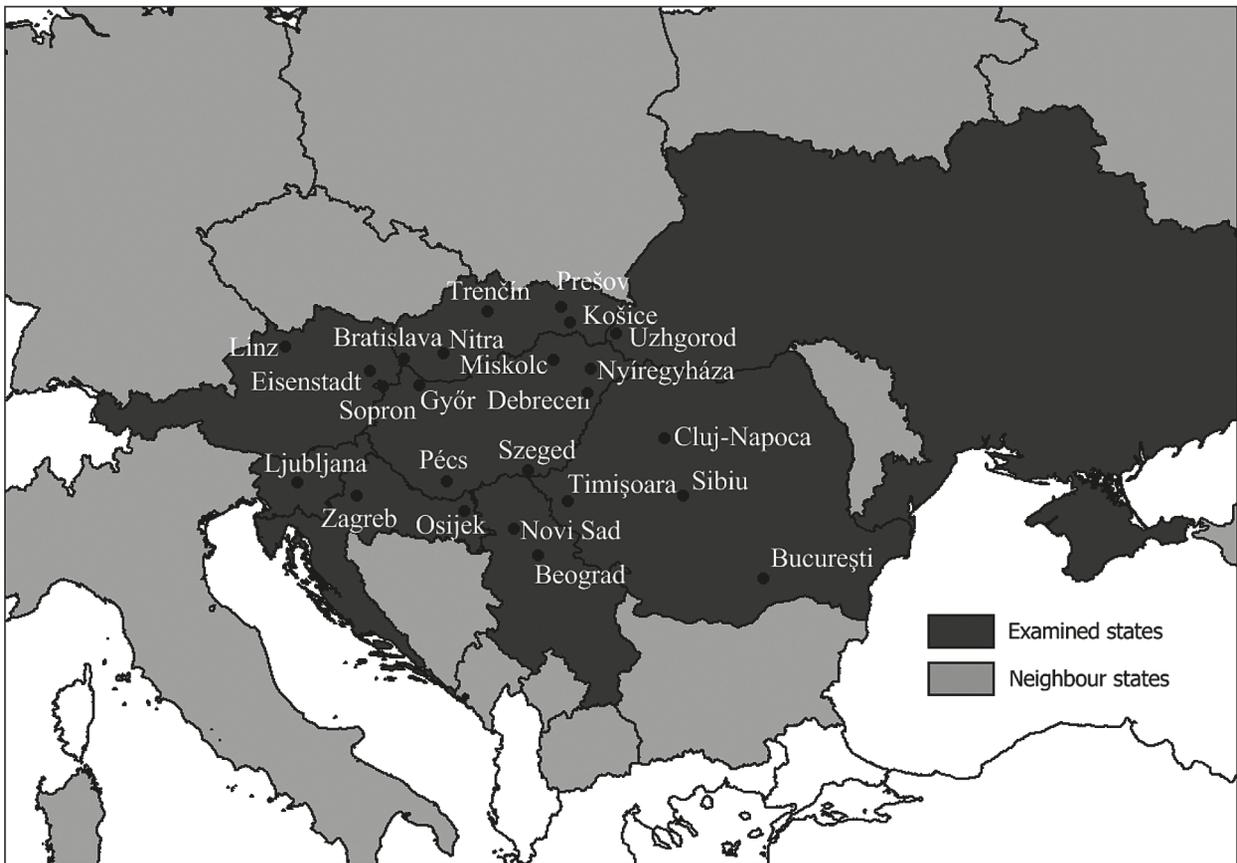


Fig. 2. The region of the examination

Source: By the author

6. Research findings

The answers of the respondents clearly mark the respective macro-regions. Figure 3 is a summary of the findings that can be concluded from the answers. The figure demonstrates the proportion of “votes” placing the respective countries within one spatial category or another. We treated separately the opinions of the respondents about their own countries and the other countries. Thus, we can speak separately about a) international judgement (i.e. where the respondents categorise the other countries) and b) the identification of the macro-region by the respondents. These two research directions together form those mental macro-regions the model of which is created at the end of the analysis, and with the help of which we can see the changes that can be concluded from the responses. In the analysis of the international judgement we only took those

countries into consideration and categorised them to any spatial category that were selected by at least ten per cent of the respondents.

In the mental map of our respondents the four spatial concepts partly overlap. The eastern, formerly state socialist countries of Central Europe (from Poland to Bulgaria) are also parts, though not unequivocally, of the concept of Eastern Europe as well. At the same time, the concepts of Southeast Europe and the Balkans mark the same geographical space, with the exception of one single country (Italy), only the emphases are different.

There are few countries that are only categorised as parts of one single spatial concept or maybe two. The position of Austria and Germany is clear; they are only positioned in Central Europe. The core area of Eastern Europe in the opinions of the respondents includes Russia, Ukraine and Belarus; these countries were mentioned only in this spatial category. In the Southeast Europe/Balkans mac-

ro-region the following states are mentioned only here and not in any other spatial concepts: Macedonia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina can unequivocally be called Southeast European/Bal-

kans countries; although they are mentioned in two spatial categories, these, as we have already mentioned, relate to the same area in the geographical sense.

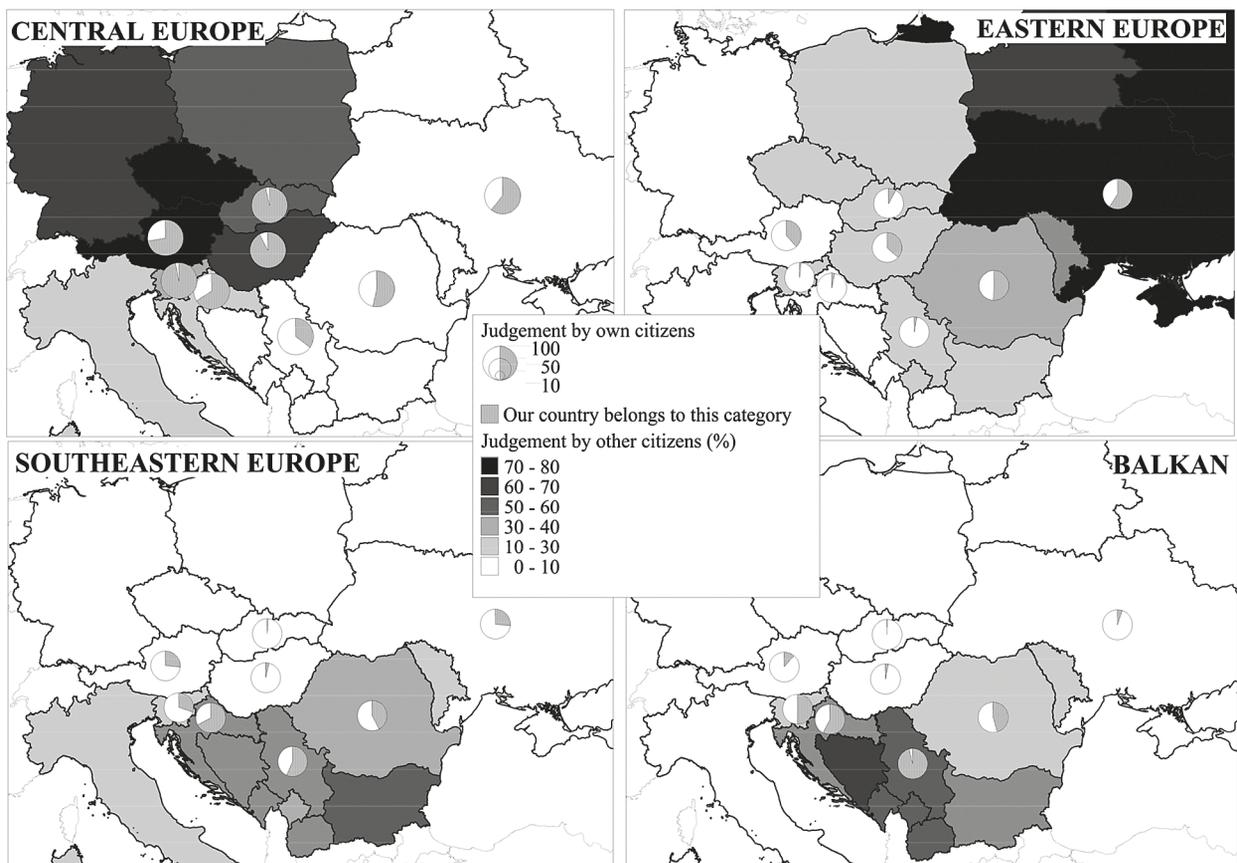


Fig. 3. Judgement of the extension of the four macro-regions

Source: By the author, using the questionnaires of 2014

Slovenia, on the other hand, is part of all four categories; although a relatively high proportion of respondents consider this country as part of Central Europe, the shares of the mentions in the other three categories are quite high, too.

As the survey was done in eight countries, we can talk about a macro-regional identification. The respondents categorised their own countries too. We asked the respondents to mark which macro-region or macro-regions their own states belonged to, i.e. they could place their countries within more than one category. In Figure 3 pie charts show the proportion of respondents placing their own countries within the respective spatial concept.

Two types of discrepancy can be examined here: when a country is less typically considered by the

international public to be part of a region while it is placed there by its own inhabitants; and the opposite case, when a country is part of a spatial concept but the citizens do not feel that it belongs there.

The first case is most typical for the concept of Central Europe. We made the survey in three of the countries of the core area (Austria, Slovakia and Hungary), and all three of them were definitely categorised as Central European by the international judgement, also a high proportion of their own population believe that they are parts of this macro-region. On the other hand, there are several states which are not considered or considered only by a small part of the international public to be parts of Central Europe, but their own population has a strong Central European identity. Our map re-

veals that in the case of Ukraine and Romania, less than 10% of respondents from other countries considered these countries as Central European ones, while 61% of the Ukrainian (we have to emphasise that the events taking place in Ukraine in the spring of 2014 left our questionnaire survey incomplete, we only conducted the questionnaire session in Uzhgorod, in the Zakarpatska region. This fact must be taken into consideration when interpreting the answers) and 53% of the Romanian respondents categorised their countries here. (The questionnaire survey took place in Ukraine in the spring of 2014, the conflict that broke out at that time significantly contributed to the rejection of the Russian orientation. The situation is similar in Croatia and Serbia, where more than two-thirds and one-third of the respondents, respectively, marked Central Europe as their own regions, while they were given only 16% and 9%, respectively, by the respondents of the other countries. The place of Slovenia in Central Europe cannot be questioned: although only some 40% of international respondents placed Slovenia into this region, the same figure by their own population was 97%, which was the highest proportion in the survey. We can say then that the Central European identity of the inhabitants of this area is strong. The Central Europe image made by the neighbourhood is also definite and clear-cut. At the same time, we may accept the opinions of several authors who state that the Central Europe consciousness sleeping at the time of the cold war revived in the 1980s, especially by circles of the opposition. The reappearance of this spatial concept was used as a tool to help the peoples of the macro-region 'relocate' themselves from Eastern Europe to Western Europe in a cognitive sense, emphasising their ties to the Western culture (Hagen 2003; Wagner 2003). In other words, the strong sense of identity often means the rejection of Eastern Europe, while in the case of Slovenia the lessening of the significance of the ties to the Balkans.

The other case is when the public opinion considers a country as part of a respective macro-region, while this view is less widely accepted by its own inhabitants. A typical example of this is the Eastern Europe concept. Several states of Central and Southeast Europe were also listed in the Eastern Europe specifications: Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Serbia, Kosovo, Bulgar-

ia and Romania are all parts of the Eastern Europe concept made by the respondents. Of these, Slovakia, Slovenia, Serbia and Ukraine were categorised into this spatial concept by the public opinion, while the inhabitants of the respective countries were less convinced, with the exception of Ukraine in a very small per cent, that they belonged to the East.

In Central Europe there is one country whose inhabitants saw themselves less Central European than the others did, and this is Austria, one of the central, most typical states of this macro-region. Of Austrian respondents, 72.3% selected Central Europe, as opposed to 78.2% of others. Both are high proportions, making the belonging of Austria evident, but compared to the Central Europe identification of the other countries the tendency is different in this case. In the opinion of Paul Luif (2012), Austria is no longer the evident part of Central Europe, especially as regards the assessment of its own inhabitants. The division in the cold war period, parallel to the seemingly lost Central European identity, automatically made Austria part of Western Europe, and then the accession to the European Union and the economic differences separated it from its previous hinterlands. The opinions of our Austrian respondents outline an image of a Central Europe that consists of Germany and Austria, anyway. Their image of their neighbours is more 'Eastern European'. The belonging of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary to the concept of Eastern Europe is mostly due to the opinions of the Austrian respondents. The Czech Republic was considered as part of Eastern Europe by 11.4% of the respondents, on the average, while this proportion in the circle of the Austrians was 51%. The same figures for Slovakia are 14.8 and 54.5%, respectively; for Hungary, 11.5 and 51.8%. This proves that the cold war, 'Ostblock' image lives on in our respondents.

Romania and the opinions of the Romanians are not less interesting, either. While in the other respondents' view this country belongs to both Eastern Europe (35%) and Southeast Europe (36.8%), in a smaller proportion of the answers to the Balkans (18.6%) and rarely to Central Europe (7.5%), there are only small differences in the judgement of these four spatial categories by the Romanians; no particular direction was outlined by the answers. In the highest proportion Central Europe was mentioned (53.3%), but the other three categories did not lag

much behind this figure, either (Eastern Europe: 50.4; Southeast Europe: 42.3; Balkans: 45.5). Actually, Romania is situated on the border of the three macro-regions, and some of its territories show similarities to the latter.

As we have already mentioned, the concepts of Southeast Europe and the Balkans overlap in space. In the general usage of the word, Southeast Europe is a concept covering a somewhat broader area than the Balkans, but the latter has more emotional, value content. These are reflected by the opinions. Our respondents were more uncertain in making opinions in this case than in the case of Central and Eastern Europe. In the opinions we cannot see values as high as in the case of the previous two regions. The diverse content of the two concepts in the case of the countries belonging here are demonstrated mostly by the differences in the internal proportions. The judgement of Southeast Europe is more balanced, that of the Balkans more concentrated. In the former case it is only Bulgaria that stands out to some extent (50.6%), while all other countries are in the 39–50% range. This matches the political and cultural content of the concept, which is more neutral than the concept of the Balkans. The Balkans is a concept that is more clear-cut and concentrated: its central element is Bosnia and Herzegovina, belonging to this macro-region in the opinion of 63.4% of persons questioned, together

with Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Kosovo. We can see that the “Balkans character” is identified with this core area and we can also see that these are the countries that have not joined the European Union yet. Bulgaria, a member of the Union, is considered by our respondents as less a Balkans country than as Southeast European and the situation is similar in the case of Romania. In Romania, this is justified by geographical facts as well, as the geographical boundary of the Balkans is the Danube River, i.e. Romania is not part of the Balkans.

We usually feel the attribute ‘Balkanic’ as pejorative, but this does not seem to be justified by the findings of the identifications. In Serbia, 96.3% of the domestic citizens felt that they were a Balkans country, as opposed to only 56.5% who said it was a Southeast European one. Besides the Central Europeanness expressed by the Slovenes, this was the highest proportion of identification in the survey.

On the basis of the research findings, we use the following model to summarise the macro-regional patterns designated in the mental maps of our respondents (Fig. 4).

In our figure, we summarise, on the basis of the replies, which states were categorised into the respective macro-region concepts and the common sections of their sets, while the arrows indicate the processes in which direction these judgements seem to change.

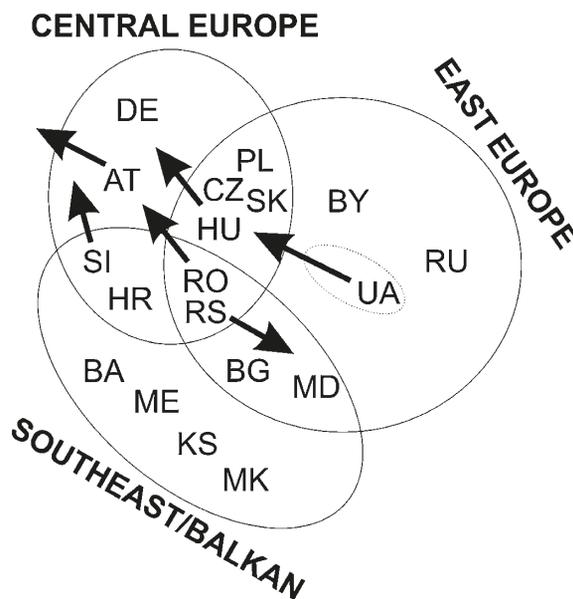


Fig. 4. The structural model of the examined macro-regions and the processes of macro-regional shifts

Source: By the author, using the findings of the questionnaire survey

The figure shows that the region is in motion. The countries changing the region are striving for the West, and so Central Europe, and together with it also Eastern Europe, is pushed eastwards. The overlapping parts of the macro-regions have made a 'Middle Europe' that can also be specified with the German expression 'Zwischeneuropa'. As all spatial concepts change, this concept also cannot be used in the early 20th century sense; it is to be meant to include those countries whose categorisation is changing, especially between the eastern and the western orientation. This in-between, transitory situation characterises Romania and Serbia to the largest extent; in the case of Serbia a shift of macro-region is expected, putting the country in the section of east and southeast that was occupied – and is still occupied, although involuntarily – by Bulgaria for decades. The Evidence for this is found elsewhere in our questionnaire, but this was not discussed in this paper. In the analysis of relationship systems and preferences, the Serb (and also the Slovak) respondents stood out with their strong sympathy for Russia.

7. Conclusions

The four macro-regions of our survey still live intensively in our thinking. As regards the Eastern Europe concepts, none of them is fully valid any longer; now this specification denotes a new, Russia-centred post-soviet space in the first place, and this attribute is also used for the specification of the ex-socialist countries, especially as a tool of separating them from the former members of the European Union.

The Central Europe specifications well reflect the historical space of the concept: the Germany and Austria led cultural and geopolitical space. Typically, the closer a state to the developed centre of the region, the narrower they interpret the region, whereas the respondents of Croatia, Serbia and Romania think of a bigger and broader Central Europe. This means that Central Europeanness is also a value and can mean some form of identification.

The concept of the Balkan is concentrated to an area that is smaller than the actual geographical range of the peninsula. The reason for that may be

the fact that the Balkans and the Balkanic character are attributes that do not have a positive connotation, as we have shown earlier; they are identified with the geopolitical crisis region. For this reason the Balkan specification is now concentrated in a narrower sense on the West Balkans, while the concept of Southeast Europe has become a neutral expression and lost its significance in the German geopolitics.

As we can see, our spatial concepts are still in transition. The significance of how we use the concepts is usually strengthened in crisis situations. The transition at the time of the regime changes is now overwritten or reinforced by the events taking place in Central, Southeast and Eastern Europe.

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