Ethnicity, Labour and Mobility in the Contemporary Borderland. A Case Study of a Transcarpathian Township

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The article explores the connections between social, political, economic and ethnic processes in the Ukrainian-Romanian borderland. The aim is to describe how borderlanders work out strategies to overcome the contradictions inherent in the state border. The study is based on ethnographical field-work (participant and non-participant observation) conducted in a small town, a former mining centre, in the region of Transcarpathia in Western Ukraine. I point to the political changes in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (the collapse of the Soviet bloc and Ukraine neighbours' integration in the European Union) and their impact on local social life. The crucial aspect, linked to the town's geographical setting, is the role of the state border, which changes in accordance with the political changes in the region and in Europe. First, the collapse of the communist dictatorships in Ukraine and Romania resulted in the opening of the border and an increase in cross-border contacts. However, in the first decade of the 21st century, Romania tightened its passport and visa regulations for Ukrainian citizens. Another factor is the complete disintegration of the mining industry and local labour market, resulting in significant changes in occupational patterns and a greater role of the border in respect of labour migration and shuttle trade. I also acknowledge local ethnic composition and argue that the use of ethno-national symbolism, languages, relations between ethnic minorities and their 'external homelands' constitute an inherent element of the strategies to overcome the lack of regular employment and poverty.

Keywords: borderland, mobility, Transcarpathia, ethnic minorities, strategically situated ethnography

This article explores the correlations between social, political, economic and ethnic processes in the Ukrainian-Romanian borderland in the context of the European Union (EU) proximity and regional historical legacies. Some of these phenomena – border infrastructure (and its imprint in the local landscape), visa policies, local cross-border links and cooperation – can be seen as part of the wider processes associated with the eastern frontiers of the European Union in general. Others are consequences of the catastrophic economic situation in Ukraine – unemployment, low wages, labour migration. Finally, aspects of ethnic composition and language usage are primarily embedded in the regional and local context.

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The study is based on ethnographical fieldwork conducted in a small town (or to be precise, an urban-type settlement) in the region of Transcarpathia in Western Ukraine. In this article I focus on how the locally encountered daily life practices are shaped by the above-mentioned processes and contexts. I pay particular attention to changes of and at the state borders, as well as the consequences of economic and political developments in the region. Thus, I present local specificity as set in history and in political processes related to the European integration (EU expansion), cross-border neighbourliness as well as border and visa policies. I then argue that observed local strategies to overcome the lack of regular employment and poverty, including migration and shuttle trade, should be understood as a manifestation of individual and group agency under the conditions of an uncertain political and economic situation. Moreover, I claim that the use of the ethno-national symbolism, languages, relations between ethnic minorities and their 'external homelands' including the possible acquisition of Romanian and Hungarian citizenships constitute an inherent element of those strategies.

Writing about Transcarpathia, Judith Batt states that: *No one writing about Transcarpathia can resist retelling the region's favourite anecdote. A visitor, encountering one of the oldest local inhabitants, asks about his life. The reply: 'I was born in Austria-Hungary, I went to school in Czechoslovakia, I did my army service in Horthy's Hungary, followed by a spell in prison in the USSR. Now I'm ending my days in independent Ukraine'. The visitor expresses surprise and how much of the world the old man has seen. 'But no!' He responds, 'I have never left this village'* (Batt 2002: 155). In my study, I acknowledge not only the changing borders and citizenships in the course of the 20th century, but also the fact of living by the state border: it's impact on daily life practices as well as its changing role over time. I also point to the phenomena of not only, to rephrase the anecdote quoted by Batt, 'leaving one's own village', but also of doing so on a regular basis.

A town at the changing border...

Transcarpathia (or Transcarpathian District; Ukr. *Zakarpats'ka Oblast'*) is an administrative unit in Western Ukraine with its centre in Uzhgorod. The region borders on Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania, as well as the Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk Districts (*Lvivs'ka Oblast'*, *Ivano-Frankivs'ka Oblast'*) of Ukraine. Unlike the two latter (which in the course of history were a part of Red Ruthenia, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Habsburg Galicia and Poland), the territories comprising Transcarpathia belonged to Hungary, Austria and the Hungarian part of Austro-Hungary from the Middle Ages until the First World War (WWI). After WWI they were ceded to Czechoslovakia, and in 1938 were annexed by Hungary, and in 1944 by the Soviet Union. The region is characterised by a mixed ethnic composition: apart from Ukrainians (and a difficult to estimate number of people referred to as Rusyns or Ruthenians), Transcarpathia is inhabited by Hungarians, Romanians, Roma, Slovaks, Germans, Russians and other nations of the former USSR.

Solotvyno (Rom. *Slatina*, Hung. *Aknaszlatina*) is a town (an 'urban-type settlement' – Ukr. *selyshche mis'koho typu*) of 10 000 inhabitants, situated in Tyachiv *raion* (a smaller administrative unit within *oblast*) by the river Tisa, which separates it from the town of Sighetu Marmaţiei (Sighet) in Romania.[1] In terms of ethnicity, the official sources state that 60 per cent are Romanians, 30 per cent are Hungarians, and 10 per cent are classified as 'Others' – mostly Ukrainians (Molnár, Molnár 2005: 84). However, I believe that the statistics should be seen merely as a rough indication, as there are a significant number of ethnically mixed families, unmeasured in terms of population statistics, whose ethnic identity is either unclear or different from the one declared in the census. There have also been recent social and demographic processes influencing the ethnic composition and social stratification like emigration or the settling of ethnic Romanians from the neighbouring, wealthier villages of Nyzhna Apsha (Dibrova) and Bila Tserkva.

The built-up area of Solotvyno ends only tens of metres from the river, which forms the state border. Until the 1990s, the access line was demarcated by the posts and the no longer existing (dismantled) fence, while the border ran along the middle of the river, as it still does now. Nowadays, some of the blue-yellow concrete border posts stand just a few metres from the inhabited buildings, but they no longer delimit the accessible space as the river bank is easily approachable. The border on Tisa not only separates the two towns and countries: it also forms the outer limit of the European Union and will delimit the future Schengen Zone, while in the past it was an internal border, though by no means less protected, within the 'Eastern Bloc' (the Comecon, Warsaw Pact). It was only in independent Ukraine that crossing this border became possible, first by train from the nearby village of Teresva and only since 2007 (that is, already after Romania introduced visa requirements for Ukrainian citizens) across the Solotvyno-Sighet bridge. The river can also be regarded as a boundary, separating territories of common history and similar ethnic and linguistic composition. Crossing the bridge to Sighet, Solotvynians are required to apply for visas that are issued by the Romanian Consulate in the city of Chernivtsy, at a distance of 250 kilometres. Obtaining a visa requires two visits, and the visa cost is 50 euros. Carrying it does not guarantee permission to cross the border. That is one of the reasons why some people go 'to Romania' every day (mostly to the market in Sighet), while others have not been 'there' for over a decade, if ever. The frequency of visits is weakly associated with ethnicity – some Solotvynian Romanians know Sighet only from radio, television and others' stories, while among those who go there a few times a week are both local Ukrainians and Hungarians.

From the beginning of its existence – and the oldest mentions can be found in 14th century chronicles (Makara 1982; Maryna 2001)[2] – until the first decade of the 21st century, Solotvyno was a salt-mining centre (extraction stopped in 2010). Mines served as a main employer for the town and neighbouring villages. Nowadays they not only do not operate but are either collapsed or dismantled. The local landscape, which used to be of an industrial character with facilities and means of transport operating twenty-four hours a day, has turned into apocalyptic-like scenery of deserted ruins, the remains of the industrial 'radiant past' (Burawoy, Lukacs 1992). Apartment blocks (built by the Soviets) lack central heating, and roads and pavements have not been repaired or renewed for years. Some 'Soviet' buildings are deserted, some of the 'new' ones remained unfinished.

Facing a lack of regular employment, Solotvynians search for work abroad (mostly in the Czech Republic, Russia and Hungary) or in Ukraine's big cities (Kyiv, Donetsk, Mariupol). This kind of mobility can be described as circular (see: Triandafyllidou 2010; Vertovec 2007; Wallace 2002). In this case, it means that migrant workers spend a certain amount of time in the place of destination without giving up their residence in Solotvyno. The proportion of time spent 'here' relative to the time spent 'there' varies. 'There' has no constant character; depending on the circumstances, the same people travel to different places that offer employment. Others focus on small-scale shuttle trade (see: Wallace 2002: 613), household farming or do small, seasonal work (renovations, chopping wood, harvesting, farming), fixing cars and household equipment for their comparatively wealthier friends and neighbours. This type of small work is unregistered and untaxed, and can often be described as mutual help rather than employment (see: Williams 2007). Nonetheless, it plays a significant role in sustaining many households and their budgets.

... and its ethnography

The ethnography of the narrowly defined site can contribute to the study of broadly defined issues. In the manner of the extended case method (Burawoy 2009)[3] and strategically situated ethnography (Marcus 1995), I link the locally observed processes with wider phenomena of international political and economic issues and the way they impact 'the local'. As Ido Tavory and Stefan Timmermans put it, *ECM ties the ethnograph-*

ic observations to outside forces (Tavory, Timmermans 2009: 254). In the case under study, these 'outside forces' may refer to the following: political changes in the post-communist countries (or the changes and breakthrough moments in Central Europe dating back to 19th century); the progressive European integration (the expansion of the EU), the economic situation and labour market in Ukraine, and the destination countries of emigration. Here, I refer to Stephen Castels' attempt to link migration and mobility with social transformations (Castels 2010). Although my study is geographically bound to one particular site, it still carries some characteristics of multi-location as, to quote Candea: *In the spirit of multi-sited ethnography, I followed people, stories, metaphors and debates through multiple spaces both within the village and without, with a constant attention to the way such spaces were constituted* (Candea 2007: 173).

The visible collapse of the local mining industry and infrastructure which dominates the local landscape turns our attention to the context of political and economic changes and the decline of industry and public investments in the post-communist countries. The other outcome of those changes can be observed in the accessibility and porosity of the Ukrainian-Romanian border, which is also set in the wider issue of political changes in Europe, such as: the opening of the borders after the collapse of the 'Soviet Bloc' and the development of neighbourly relations between the new countries on the one hand, and imposing more restrictions on cross-border mobility in the course of some of these countries' integration with the EU, on the other. The processes of securitisation and tightening the surveillance at its external borders, as well as labour migration and cross-border mobility provide the context of the outside, international and global conditionings of that particular site and its links to other places (such as destinations of mobility, the European capital cities and decision centres). State borders and international politics as well as the changes faced by industry and the patterns of employment observed in Solotvyno appear as implicated in *what goes on in another related locale, or other locales, even though the other locales may not be within the frame of the research design or resulting ethnography* (Marcus 1995: 110). The history of the region, with its political and territorial shifts, furthermore helps to embed the case study in macro-structures and to relate the site to the world as a whole, and to *make historical connections between places, which in turn help us to advance in both our understanding of particular people and the refinement of theory* (Lapenga 2009: 12).

The fieldwork, which the following article is based on, was divided into two main visits (although both were interrupted), the first from November 2009 till February 2010 and the second between November 2010 and May 2011. 'Hanging out' with the people I chanced to meet offered the opportunity of following Solotvynians in their daily life activities. During that time I accompanied the employees of one of the communal institutions in their daily duties (which left them plenty of time to share with me and to respond to my questions), car mechanics in their workshop, traders at the local market, and shuttle-traders in their cross-border visits. I was a guest during festivals, and 'intruder' during daily chores in the households. I walked, cycled, travelled by cars and a horse-cart. I spent hundreds of hours talking, listening and observing, and additional hours taking notes. My goal was to study 'others in their space and time' (Burawoy 2009: 75),[4] to acknowledge and understand local inhabitants' everyday practices, and to contextualise them within wider macro-structures. As Karolina S. Follies puts it after Carol Greenhouse, ethnographic fieldwork is *a relational practice linking knowledge production to the historical and local specificity of experience* (Greenhouse 2006: 187, cited from: Follis 2012: 214).

Ethnic minorities and the state (part 1): symbolism, languages, and inter-ethnic relations

Ukrainian symbolism, such as flags, emblems and maps placed on the facilities as well as the uniforms and insignias, is visible mostly at the border checkpoint. Ukrainian flags also fly at the two of the mine towers and, next to Romanian and Hungarian ones, on the local municipality building and the schools. Some street

names, including those given in the Soviet period (Bohdan Khmelnitsky, Ivan Franko, Taras Shevchenko, Kyiv), refer to Ukrainian traditions. So does the monument to Bohdan Khmelnitsky – which stands in front of the Romanian school, facing Romania. Ukrainian script is seen mostly on the street signs and official information boards. It is comprehensible to the inhabitants but not many are fluent in it. In daily life it gives way to Russian, which serves as the local *lingua franca*.[5] This is the case even for the youngest generation, born and brought up in independent Ukraine (including students and graduates of Ukrainian classes).[6] It can also be seen as a legacy of the mining industry and Soviet ethnic and linguistic policy. Most people I had a chance to interact with were sceptical of or reluctant towards the state language. A common justification was the lack of contact and impossibility of learning it at a proficient level. Sometimes reluctance towards the language was accompanied by scepticism about the Ukrainian state as such. It is worth mentioning that the people declaring Russian ethnicity or mother tongue form a barely significant number of inhabitants. What is more, the place is hundreds of kilometres away from the Ukrainian (or Moldovan) territories densely populated by Russian speakers. It also makes the language neutral, neither favouring nor discriminating local ethnic groups.

Unlike some Transcarpathian towns and villages inhabited by Hungarians, in Solotvyno there are no monuments or memorial boards referring to the Hungarian tradition or bilingual street names. Admittedly though, street name signs in any language are quite rare. Hungarian language is visible on the posters of the Hungarian Cultural Federation in Transcarpathia (Kárpátaljai Magyar Kulturális Szövetség – KMKSZ), and it can also be heard on the streets. References to Hungarian history and culture are made mostly in direct oral statements, as individuals and entire families cultivate the memory of Hungarian past of the place and willingly talk about it.

With regard to Romanian symbolism, a statue of the Moldovan prince Stephen the Great and Holy (whose ancestors are believed to originate from northern Maramuresh) was erected in the centre of Solotvyno in 2012 after almost three years of preparations. The Romanian writer Mihai Eminescu, after a similar period of time, has only been honoured with an empty pedestal in front of the Romanian school. However, Eminescu has been honoured with a street name, and so has George Coşbuc. Romanian tradition is also cultivated through cultural events on the Great Union Day (commemorating the Union of Romania with Transylvania) and the Unification Day (the unification of Moldavia and Valahia into the Kingdom of Romania). None of these commemorated historical events concerned Solotvyno in terms of its geographical location. Participation in these celebrations is not 'mass', most of my interlocutors could not explain the meaning of these festivals and the statements regarding the 'unity' and 'Romanianess' of the territories on both sides of the Tisa were sporadic. Still, Romanian TV (especially music and entertainment channels) as well as radio and music (commonly played on mobile phones and passed around through Bluetooth) are highly popular.

Local inter-ethnic relations can be traced in the numerous mixed families as well as everyday interactions in the workplaces or public spaces such as streets, market and shops. In such a diverse environment, the number of ethnically mixed marriages is difficult to assess (but is unquestionably high), as is the category of ethnic belonging. This makes the ethnic boundaries blurred and the ethno-national categories arbitrary. Even those who declare a particular ethnicity have people of other ethnicities (kinsmen and relatives) in their families. Ethnic affiliation appears to be strictly declarative, and the category of mother tongue does not always apply. Notwithstanding family ties, friendships and neighbourly relations cross the 'ethnic boundaries', however, this does not mean that ethnicity goes unnoticed or does not play any role in local daily interactions. References can occur in conversations in the form of occasional jokes (sometimes accompanied by vicious remarks) or mentions of the history and (multi)national legacies of the town and the regions of Transcarpathia and historical Maramuresh. This is accompanied by a widespread knowledge and frequent use of the different languages. Despite Russian being a common language of communication, most people

speak or at least understand other 'local languages', with some switching fluently between Romanian, Hungarian, Russian and Ukrainian (with some being fluent in Russian, Hungarian and Romanian but not speaking good Ukrainian). Sustaining a conversation in the language it was started is common practice.

In the past, having the same job played an important role in sustaining inter-ethnic relations. According to my interlocutors, when the mining industry still functioned[7] the shifts were ethnically mixed and the workers (not only miners) would pick up their colleagues' languages by listening and asking about the meaning of certain words and expressions. Another aspect of coexistence was swopping the shifts so that the co-workers of different confessional affiliation (followed by the ethnic one) could take part in their religious holidays. As I was told by one of my informants, *Nationality [Rus.* natsyonalnost] *did not matter – we were all just workers.* What emerged from my fieldwork is that even under the conditions of less regular, less stable employment and less organised labour (no longer playing the same role in Solotvynians' life as it used to), people speaking different mother tongues and declaring different ethnic affiliations still work together, providing an opportunity to learn languages and maintain relations, regardless of ethnicity. This attitude could also be observed in leisure time (hanging out together, switching between languages) or occasional conversations in public places.

Following Fredrik Barth's (1969) classic study of ethnicity as a form of social organisation and the related question posed by Katherine Verdery (1994) about the significance of certain types of differences (i.e. related to ethnicity, class, gender) and the boundaries that constitute the groups, in my study I suggest that neither languages nor ethnic self-identification play a central role. Various stereotypes are applied much more frequently to the ethnically Romanian villagers from neighbouring Dibrova and, to the lesser extent, Bila Tserkva. However, even if they are sometimes referred to as 'those Romanians' or 'Romanians from Dibrova', the most common form is just 'Dibrovans' or 'those Dibrovans'. These stereotypes, which are commonly shared by Solotvnians of different ethnic identification and are not necessarily negative, are associated with their wealth and other local specificities, like strong family networks and a strong attachment to the land and to their villages of origin. What I describe in this sub-section contributes to the processes of ethnic differentiation as observed in the borderlands, where both state and ethnic boundaries are subverted and negotiated (Donnan, Wilson 1999). The attitudes towards Romania and Hungary with their inhabitants as well as Ukraine and Ukrainian citizenship, which also contribute to local ethnicity and differentiation, are elaborated in the next sub-section of the article.

Ethnic minorities and the state (part 2): other states, other citizenships

The difficult economic situation has fuelled criticism of the Ukrainian state and its political elites. However, Romania and Hungary are not necessarily seen as an alternative. The distance and scepticism towards Ukraine as a state are not accompanied by positive sentiments towards Solotvynian Romanians' and Hungarians' 'external national homelands' (Brubaker 1996). The EU's 'new iron curtain' can take a form not only in tough border-visa regulations but also in the attitude of Romanian border guards and customs officers towards Ukrainian citizens (regardless of their ethnicity and fluency in Romanian). That makes 'local Romanians' averse to their 'external homeland' and its inhabitants.[8] People travelling to Hungary have a much longer way to go, as the nearest border crossing to Hungary is 100 kilometres distant from Solotvyno (and the visas are issued in the towns of Uzhgorod – 160 km, and Beregovo – 115 km), and the destinations are mostly Nyíregyháza, Debrecen and Budapest, not the border cities. However, we can speak of the similar exclusion with the ethno-national factor being even more visible, as almost all people travelling to Hungary identify themselves as Hungarians. According to Solotvynians, though speaking the same language, having the same names and similar surnames,[9] 'Ukrainians' are often treated by their uniformed co-ethnics from the

external homeland with an aloofness that sometimes turns into superiority and contempt (whereas the civilians' attitude is much more diverse).[10] These kinds of attitudes do not stop some of the Solotvynians – those who not only can afford passports and visas but also have a reason for such visits – from travelling to their 'external national homelands' to work, shuttle trade or visit relatives.

Another notable issue concerns citizenship. Although it is forbidden to possess dual or multiple citizenship in Ukraine, the state lacks the means to control and prevent the process of obtaining foreign passports by its citizens, who are obligated by law to give up Ukrainian citizenship when granted another (Shevel 2010). This makes it difficult to estimate the number of Ukrainians who do possess other passports (Shevel 2010: 16-17; Popescu 2008: 433). The citizenship policies of neighbouring countries and their impact on Ukraine and its inhabitants are also remarkable. The Hungarian law on citizenship, in effect from January 2011 (Act XLIV 2010), entitles the inhabitants of the historical Hungarian territories, regardless of their ethnicity,[11] to apply for citizenship of Hungary (Toth 2010; Kovacs, Toth 2013). At the time of my fieldwork, it was too early to estimate the scale of this phenomenon in Solotvyno (I talked to four people who were planning to apply and one who was still unsure). According to the Romanian law, those who have relatives in Romania and the former citizens of the Kingdom of Romania as well as their families can apply for a passport (Iordachi 2013). (I met two people who had acquired Romanian citizenship and one family of five who were interested in it, but they assured me that the phenomenon is much more widespread). Importantly, the perspective of obtaining Hungarian or Romanian passports, which not only makes it easier to cross the bridge to Sighet or visit Nyiregyhaza but also enables people to travel to and work in most of the EU countries, was not always accompanied by any plan to work or settle in the respective countries. The efforts to obtain Romanian and Hungarian passports should be seen as part of a strategy for migration and to escape from poverty, rather than ethno-national ideology or the outburst of nationalism.

Borders and mobility in uncertain times

The collapse of communism in the USSR and its satellite countries signified a transformation of the national economies from state-planned into free market economies. Various scholars point to the free market economy and its associated belief in entrepreneurship, competition and private property as well as in freedom and democracy, as forming the new ideology in the new countries' politics and shaping the new patterns of everyday practices (see for example: Burawoy, Verdery 1999). Transformation in Central-Eastern Europe was not a unified process, as the communist systems were not either. In the context of economic changes in Ukraine and their impact on Solotvyno, we should note the withdrawal of the state from its active role in the economy and the lack of public investments. This has resulted in the closing and collapse of the mining industry and other workplaces. For the residents, this has meant a lack of employment and regular income. The condition of the local economy also has an impact on the social mood and adds to the easily observed indifference, sometimes turning into reluctance towards the Ukrainian state. According to the commonly shared view, the entire industry and all the public institutions were developed during Austro-Hungarian, Czechoslovak, Hungarian and Soviet times. Czechoslovakia built water supply facilities and apartment buildings. The Soviets developed the industry, erected concrete blocks of flats with running water and central heating. But in independent Ukraine the workplaces were closed and the infrastructure devastated.

As a starting point for the analysis of the diverse nature of state borders and their impact on groups and individuals, I refer to the studies by Hastings Donnan and Thomas Wilson who treat borders as *signs of the sovereignty and domain of the state and markers of the (…) relations between a state and its neighbors (…) [they are] records of a state's relations with other states and with its own people* (Donnan, Wilson 1999: 15) and point to various behaviours and meanings negotiated in the frontiers. State borders can also be linked to

global inequalities preserved under the conditions of 'free' and 'democratic' societies (Balibar 2004), serving as selective gates (which according to each particular situation can be either open or closed) and barriers for information, commodities, capital and people. With their selectivity, borders seem more open for capital and commodities than for people, who are treated unequally on the basis of their citizenship and wealth (Donnan, Wilson 2010; Smart, Smart 2008).

I understand borderland as *a region and a set of practices defined and determined by the border* (Alvares 1995: 448), where the state is subjected to subversion (Donnan, Wilson 1999: 4). According to Donnan and Wilson, borders can also serve as an indicator (a 'litmus test') of the processes applicable to the entire country as well as its international relations (Donnan, Wilson 2010: 3). *[B]orderlands (...) have shown themselves to be zones of a remarkably wide variety of legal and illegal transborder economy and society. Whether it is in the form of such things as agricultural production and cooperation, labour migration, marriage, smuggling or just pure friendship, borders are punctured in myriad ways which often subvert the state's international relations, the state's own design for its borders* (Donnan, Wilson 2010: 6-7). What is more, the studies of state borders, borderlands and mobility challenge the notion of separated cultures (Alvares 1995).

The mutual influence of the values, ideas, customs and shared economic relations of the borderlanders on both sides of the state border can also be associated with transnationalism (Donnan, Wilson 1999: 5), a process linked to circular mobility (Triandafyllidou 2010: 12) in which *migrants operate in social fields that transgress geographic, political, and cultural borders* (Brettel 2007: 120). In the process of transnational migration they maintain social relations in both, sending and receiving, countries (Schiller, Barsch, Blanc 1995). Stephen Vertovec highlights the importance of cross-border networks and the possession of dual citizenship as assets that increase one's chances to circulate (Vertovec 2007). Applied to the studied case, these concepts link local cross-border mobility with labour migration to further destinations. They served as a barrier in the Soviet period and as a 'selective gate' after the collapse of the dictatorial systems on both sides. This political collapse triggered further processes which have led to the increased role of borders and the regulations of international mobility. The selective gate between Ukraine and Romania and the phenomena observed around the Solotvyno-Sighet border can serve as an example of something that is likely to take place on a wider scale. Local cross-border mobility provides us with the context of the mobility of Ukrainian citizens and the selectivity performed at its neighbours' checkpoints. Queues of Solotvynians at the Solotvyno-Sighet bridge, waiting to visit their relatives on the other river bank or carrying goods to Sighet's market, and groups of circular migrants travelling on mini-buses or private cars to Prague or Moscow appear to be two sides of the same coin.

The street market in Sighet is always full of traders, both from Solotvyno and Sighet, selling Ukrainian products: sweets, sunflower seeds, sunflower oil, sugar, flour, spices, toilet paper and cigarettes. People from both sides of the border cooperate in this buying-selling and in storing the products unsold or to-be-sold. Some goods, like fruits, vegetables and meat, are cheaper in Romania and they are also carried across the border in the other direction but more for domestic use than for trading. The shops in the centre of Solotvyno and just by the border (some of them open till late or round the clock) are always full of customers from Romania, coming by cars and loading their trunks full. The border crossing, the market in Sighet as well as the shops in Solotvyno appear as spaces of social and cultural interaction where law and order are renegotiated, commodities exchanged and the languages (Romanian, Hungarian, Ukrainian and Russian) mixed.

Travelling further than just across the bridge, i.e. working in Russia and the Czech Republic (the most common destinations[12]), and the accompanying practices are also set in local specificities. Ethnicity, even if arbitrary, is helpful in obtaining Romanian and Hungarian citizenships (granted, let us remember, on historical backgrounds) which entitle one to work in most of the EU countries (including the Czech Republic). The majority of male Solotvynians (women also migrate but on a smaller scale) have experience working in the

Czech Republic. It is also popular to bring in cars from the Czech Republic and to drive them without exchanging the number plates for Ukrainian plates, as this enables the owner to bypass a special tax for registering a foreign car in Ukraine. The visa free regime between Russia and Ukraine and common fluency in Russian works in favour of migration in the opposite direction, and for many Solotvynians it is easier to travel to faraway Moscow than to nearby Sighet. With its dynamic labour market, relatively high salaries, Moscow was often mentioned in conversations, also by those who had never been there. Popularity of Russian music, TV and movies made Russia even more present in daily life.

In their ethnographic research on Transcarpathia and the border crossings with Slovakia, Hungary and Romania, Andre Simonyi and Jessica Pisano point to the role that the proximity of the state border plays in the daily life of the borderlanders. By describing different patterns of dealing with the frontier and making use of it (in the form of shuttle trade and cross-border shopping and entertainment), and the ethnic and linguistic factors for cross-border dynamics, they point to both inclusive and exclusive aspects of the state borders and the way they create 'zones of engagement', as *the apparatus of state security itself contributes to the formation of local and transnational networks* (Simonyi, Pisano 2011: 223-224). Additionally, in her study of Szelmenc (a predominantly ethnic Hungarian village divided by the Ukrainian-Slovakian border), Jessica Pisano elaborates on the social and linguistic changes faced by the small community after opening the border crossing in the village (particularly the increased use of Ukrainian and Slovak languages and the change in the structure of local properties due to development of trade) (Pisano 2009). Both studies acknowledge that living close to the checkpoint does not contribute to equal chances to cross it (Pisano 2009; Simonyi, Pisano 2011). Particularly striking in this respect is how historical legacy and ethnic (minority) issues appear as intertwined with current international policies and legal regulations in the field of cross-border mobility and the circulations of goods and capital. These studies convincingly portray the (Hungarian) national culture, consumer (commercial) culture, leisure and small economic activity in its specific borderland and peripheral shape. Although the role of trade in Solotvyno is not as significant as in Szelmenc, and the Hungarian ethnic component not as central as in their studies, Simonyi and Pisano's evidence of inclusive and exclusive aspects of the state border nevertheless contributes to the findings of my study.

Concluding remarks

I have described how the local and the international ('global') phenomena shape the practices of the studied group. I see these phenomena as linked to the economic situation and state politics which shape the daily life of the borderlanders. In Transcarpathia, this background has been changing for the last century along with changing state jurisdictions. Borders and borderlands, no matter how 'old' or 'new', are not only the spaces where the relations and mutual connections between people, state(s) and capital are easily observed – they are also sites where territories, historical legacies, economies, identities and citizenships are negotiated. The state border's impact on the life of the borderlanders changes with the economic situation in the countries on its both sides (labour market, supply and demand for certain goods or services that could be cheaper or easier to obtain in the neighbouring country) as well as bilateral and international regulations (visa regime, customs law or the limits of goods to be carried across the border). The latter also influences the level of cross-border contacts, family life and friendships for the inhabitants of both sides of the border, regardless of their ethnicity.

Complementing David Harvey's concept of time-space compression, Alan Smart and Josephine Smart propose the idea of time-space punctuation which structures the world with borders acting as *periods, full stops denying legal entry (...) semi-colons, requiring visas and work permits* (…) *comas slightly slowing movement at various checkpoints* (Smart, Smart 2008:175). Surveillance applied at the checkpoints and the

passport system as such can be regarded as part of an ongoing process of control performed by the state and capital over the workers and the poor (the 'dangerous classes') against their self-determination (Balibar 2004: 113). Applying the metaphor to the bridge linking Solotvyno and Sighet would mean that it serves either as a 'full stop' or a 'semi-colon', and as a means of exercising control over the third country nationals (needed but also 'dangerous') in Romania and entire European Union. Regardless of their porosity, the ambivalent nature of the state borders – these *absolutely nondemocratic, or 'discretionary' condition(s) of democratic institutions* (Balibar 2004: 109) – can work in favour of different kinds of contact, inclusion and exclusion (Simonyi, Pisano 2011). Even if we assume that the state borders preserve and sustain international inequalities, groups and individuals work out different strategies to overcome these conditions and contradictions as well as to dealing with implied historical and ideological burdens.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] Almost all towns and villages in the neighbourhood have their twin-settlements on the other side of the border river; as is the case with for example Tyachiv (UA) – Teceu Mic (RO), Velikyi Bychkiv (UA) – Bocicoiu Mare (RO), Lug (UA) – Lunca la Tisa (RO). However, the Solotvyno-Sighet case is different as, unlike in the previous examples, the towns have never formed one settlement. What accounts for ethnic composition, with 79.7 per cent of Romanians, 15.8 per cent (according to the 2002 census available on the website of the Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center: http://www.edrc.ro/recensamant.jsp?regiune_id=2140&judet_id=2376&localitate_id=2378, accessed: 30 June 2014). With Hungarian, Romanian and Ukrainian villages around, we can speak of some similarity (excluding the size and regional economic and administrative significance) between the towns.

[2] According to the available sources, surface mining in Solotvyno dates back to the ancient period and the underground mining to the Middle Ages, while the industrial methods started in 1778 (Dyakiv 2012: 69; Privalov, Panova 2008: 155).

[3] According to Michael Burawoy, the extended case method consists of the four extensions: *the extension of the observer into the lives of participants under study, the extension of observations over time and space; the extension from microprocesses to macroforces; the extension of theory* (Burawoy 2009: xv and further). My application of the first three steps in the field is explained in the further paragraphs. The last point helped me challenge the notion of bounded ethnic (national) groups as they figure in the existing statistics and some of the literature about Transcarpathia and ethnic minorities in Ukraine. However, the most challenging was the application of concepts related to transformation and the imposition of neoliberal solutions on Central and Eastern Europe, which made me give up the use of the concept of neoliberalism in reference to Solotvyno.

[4] However, I did not aspire to become a part of the studied group and to hide my 'real' goals in Solotvyno, which in case of an educated foreigner and a vegetarian (among the meat enthusiasts), not doing 'real work', asking strange questions, would have been quite impossible. What is more, not always was my observation fully participant; according to the particular situation it could be either participant or non-participant, but there was always a constant *interaction between ethnographer and participant* (Burawoy 2009: 124).

[5] In the Soviet period it was Russian, not Ukrainian, that was taught as the state language in schools for national minorities. It was also the language of industry. The study on the role of Russian language in Solotvyno can be found in the work of Angela Palagyi (2011).

[6] There are three schools in Solotvyno (not counting the music school and the 'special' school for the disabled): Ukrainian (commonly referred to as 'Russian') with separate Russian classes, Romanian and Hungarian.

[7] Mines used to give employment not only to men, as women also worked there: in the offices, canteens and as cleaning personnel or lift operators.

[8] I heard complaints about and insults aimed at Romanian officers from Solotvynians crossing the border regardless of ethnicity. However, the division between (Ukrainian) 'us' and (Romanian) 'them' seems most relevant when expressed by the people of Romanian ethnicity.

[9] Both Hungarian and Romanian names have often been 'translated' into their Russian or Ukrainian equivalents, for example: 'Istvan – Stepan', 'Sandor – Aleksandr', 'Ion – Ivan'. Surnames are distorted due to Cyrillic transliteration which is re-transliterated into Latin alphabet in Ukrainian passports with the use of the official Latin Transliteration based on English spelling (which, for example, turns the surname Nagy into Nod).

[10] This can be illustrated by a conversation I had with two young men (25-30 years old), a Romanian and a Hungarian. Both were educated in schools in Hungary and Romania, respectively, and both were convincing me, referring to each other's experiences (*tell him*, *he also had the same problem*) that Romanians and Hungarians from Ukraine are not always welcome in 'their' countries.

[11] In case of Solotvyno these are either declared Hungarians or people from mixed families.

[12] Migration to Russia is a common phenomenon in Transcarpathia and the entire Ukraine. In the Czech Republic, Ukrainians form a significant number of immigrants, the majority of whom come from Transcarpathia. According to Zdenek Uherek, the popularity of the Czech Republic among Transcarpathian job-seekers can be explained through the historical legacy: the Czechoslovakian past and the memories of opportunities offered by Bohemia passed down through generations (Uherek 2009). Nowadays, there is even a regular bus connection between Rakhiv and Prague *via* Solotvyno.

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