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STUDIES

Border region – peripheral center, cross-border region – common space of development.

Case study: Romanian-Hungarian border region and foreign direct investment

SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

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Keywords: border, border region, cross-border region, foreign direct investment, common development space, Romanian-Hungarian border region, foreign companies, automotive industry

The study of borders deserves a place within regional studies, with a series of research showing that borders are not just simple delimitation tools or administrative barriers between regions.

The end of the Cold War, globalization, the accelerated European integration process, and the ongoing restructuring of the European continent have led border regions to be the focus of intense multidisciplinary research.¹

The proposed approach started from the idea of analyzing the particularities of the Romanian-Hungarian border region, extending the analysis to the cross-border space. The approached perspective is that of foreign direct investments engaged in this area, having as a leitmotif the concept of border, around which the ideas from the entire research were gathered, closely following the transformations that may take place at the border and border region level. After Romania's accession to the EU, the counties near the western border of Romania had an advantage in attracting foreign investors for various reasons, such as: proximity to western markets, easy access to the road and railway infrastructure of western states, qualified and unqualified workforce with lower wages, access to cross-border European funds, etc. The topic of foreign investments at the border aroused interest for several reasons, detailed in the main paper.

The paper aims to support studies that see the border as an opportunity and resource, and the border region as an area of contact and having growth potential, bringing an additional argument through a new component - that of foreign direct investment.

Hypotheses

Christophe Sohn stated that the idea of separation that the border induces generates interactions, and the idea of obstacle makes it exploitable as a resource.² Addressing the topic of cross-border cooperation, Klára Czimre stated that activities and processes in border areas always have a cross-border relevance and effect.³ And Ioan Horga, discussing the role of

¹ Jan Wielgohs, Arnaud Lechevalier, „Introduction”, în *Borders and Border Regions in Europe. Changes, Challenges and Chances*, edit. Arnaud Lechevalier, Jan Wielgohs (Transcript, 2013), pp. 9-18 (pp. 9-10).

² Christophe Sohn, „Borders as resources: towards a centring of the concept”, în *A Research Agenda for Border Studies*, edit. James W. Scott (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020), p. 76.

³ Klára Czimre, „Shifting Focuses in European CBC Modelling: Theories Influenced by Space and Time”, *Eurolimes*, 27-28 (2019), pp. 49-64 (p. 57).

universities in the border area, considered that their presence produces an innovative effect with implications in all spheres of cross-border cooperation.⁴ In certain specific circumstances, peripheral location can create opportunities – attracting investors based on this location, developing economies of scale and limiting transaction costs.⁵

Starting from these ideas, we considered issuing hypotheses intended to guide the research.

The theoretical hypothesis refers to the connections between phenomena and has been defined as a story that explains actions, events, structures, and ideas.⁶

The hypothesis underlying the formulation of the research purpose refers to the fact that the border is not only a clear line of demarcation, but can be an incentive for the development of the border region, contrary to the first impression of the creator of a peripheral area. Despite its compelling aspects that cannot be contested, the border is more than that. The border not only separates, but also connects, having a dual role. The border region can overcome the status of a peripheral area through foreign direct investment, and development can be reflected in the entire cross-border space.

The first main hypothesis is that the border region within the EU cannot (can no longer) be considered a peripheral area, having strategic and economic potential and possessing the advantage of cross-border space. Starting from this hypothesis, the first main objective of the paper was defined.

The second main hypothesis is that foreign direct investment can trigger the creation of a dynamic development hub in the common cross-border space, with the border losing its importance, even becoming a facilitator of development. Starting from this hypothesis, the second main objective of the paper was defined.

Research purpose, objectives and questions

The question posed by Hardi and Uszkai deserves important attention: where can the limit of the area be drawn where proximity to the border has a greater impact than distance from the center on socio-economic processes.⁷ Starting from this question, the research aims to obtain another perspective on the border area and directly targets the research purpose. The research

⁴ Ioan Horga, „The Contribution of the Universities in Building Innovative Cross-Border Communities at Eastern EU Borders”, *Eurotimes*, 29 (2020), pp. 147-167.

⁵ Ewelina Szczech-Pietkiewicz, Honorata Nyga-Łukaszewska, „Transforming Borders into Opportunity for Development”, *Curs în cadrul Proiectului Enacted co-Finanțat de Programul Erasmus+ al Uniunii Europene* (februarie 2021), p. 5.

⁶ Robert I. Sutton, Barry M. Staw, „What theory is not”, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40.3 (1995), pp. 371-384 (p. 378).

⁷ Tamás Hardi, Andrea Uszkai, „Theoretical models of cross-border integration”, *Social studies*, 14.1 (2017), pp. 9-30 (p. 11), doi:10.5817/SOC2017-1-9.

purpose is to capture the way in which foreign direct investment act in the border and cross-border region and the specificity of this region in terms of them, having as its leitmotif the concept of border, around which the ideas of the entire research come together. In other words, at the center of the research is the issue of the border in relation to foreign direct investment. A series of objectives and questions derive from this purpose.

Research design focuses on the questions "why" and "how", leading the researcher to clearly establish what he or she wants to discover and what is the best method for doing so.⁸ Further, from the purpose stated above, two main objectives and several secondary objectives emerge. A series of supporting objectives are also outlined.

The first main objective is represented by analyzing the dynamics and peculiarities of foreign direct investments in the border region. The research question from which the objective derives is: What are the dynamics of foreign direct investment in the border region and how do they distinguish themselves? The main objective is supported by several secondary objectives, accompanied by the research questions from which they derive:

- a. Analyzing the dynamics of foreign direct investment in the border region depending on the type of EU border - external and internal; Are there changes in the dynamics of foreign direct investment in the border region depending on the type of EU border - external and internal?
- b. Comparative analysis of foreign direct investment in the border region and in the rest of the regions; What is the ratio between foreign direct investment in the border region and in the rest of the country's regions? What is the position of foreign direct investment in the border regions compared to other regions?
- c. Description of the evolution and current situation of foreign direct investment in the border region;
- d. Exploring the characteristics of foreign direct investment in the border region;
- e. Identifying trends and main directions of foreign investment in the border region;
- f. Investigating the rationale for the investment decision in the border region and determining the possible motivations of foreign investors; What are the reasons underlying the investment decision in the border region??
- g. Examining the role of the border and the influence of the geographical positioning at the border in attracting foreign direct investment in the studied region; What is the role of the border in attracting foreign direct investment? Is the border a

⁸ Earl Babbie, *Practica cercetării sociologice*, trad. Sergiu Gherghina, George Jiglău, Monica Andriescu (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2010), p. 136.

stimulating factor for foreign direct investment? Is the border an advantage for investors?

- h. Examining how the border and border region are perceived in relation to foreign investment (this is also a supporting objective); How do foreign direct investment relate to the border region? Are border regions attractive or less attractive for foreign direct investment?

The second main objective is represented by the analysis of the relationship between foreign direct investment and the cross-border space, aiming to identify the role of foreign companies in the Romanian-Hungarian cross-border space. The research question from which the objective derives is: What is and what does the relationship between foreign direct investment and the cross-border space imply? The main objective is supported by several secondary objectives, accompanied by the research questions from which they derive:

- a. Identifying the contribution of Romanian-Hungarian cross-border cooperation programs in the development of the Romanian-Hungarian border region, as a foundation for facilitating further, deeper development through foreign direct investment;
- b. General synthetic description of the foreign direct investment situation in Hungary, with a focus on the counties near the border with Romania;
- c. Exploring the effects of foreign direct investment, delimited by a border, on the cross-border area in its proximity and on the border itself; What are the effects of foreign direct investment on the cross-border region and on the border itself? Does the border have the capacity to transform under certain conditions?
- d. Identifying the area of influence of foreign direct investment in the border region and analyzing the impact on the development of the cross-border region; What is the area of influence of foreign direct investment implemented in the border region? Is there a transcendence of the border? Is there any impact of foreign direct investment on the cross-border space? How is the border region evolving?

Also, in addition to the objectives stated above, a series of supporting objectives have been outlined, detailed in the main paper.

Main assertions and structure of the thesis

The present thesis, intuitively, begins with an introduction and ends with a conclusions section, these parts of the work not being considered as chapters. The paper comprises five chapters which in turn contain several subchapters. The end of the thesis also includes the bibliography and the research appendices.

In the section dedicated to the Introduction, the choice of the research topic was argued, along with the relevance and originality of the thesis, and the study of the border and the border region was placed in the context of scientific research. At the same time, this section includes the hypotheses and objectives of the research, as well as the research questions. The research methodology is also part of this section. The Introduction concludes with a discussion of the limits of the research.

The first chapter is dedicated to the literature review, addressing the general characteristics of the border, border regions, foreign direct investment and their particularities, capturing the vision of several authors and institutions and targeting the studies undertaken in the field. The chapter deals, on the one hand, with the meanings of the border and the different nuances attributed to the border and cross-border region, and, on the other hand, with the particularities of foreign direct investment (their role, functions and incentives). The chapter also addresses the theoretical relationship between the border and the border region and foreign investment.

The second chapter dedicated to the conceptual framework aims to define and explain the main concepts around which the entire work revolves: border, border region, cross-border region and foreign direct investment. The chapter presents the types of borders, as well as their perception in economic studies and European integration, the meanings attributed to the border region and the definitions of foreign direct investment. The border subject to analysis is represented by the western border of Romania, an internal border of the EU and the Schengen area, territorial, open, soft and permeable, having the meaning of the limit of the state system, but also the meaning of the space located in the proximity of the border. The border region is represented by the western border region of Romania and the eastern border region of Hungary (i.e. two border regions), formed by eight administrative-territorial units at NUTS III level. FDI can be of several types, the most relevant being greenfield, mergers and acquisitions, extension of capital and financial restructuring.

The third chapter provides a synthetic description of the socio-economic environment and the issues of foreign direct investment both in Romania and in the Romanian-Hungarian border region formed by the counties of Satu Mare, Bihor, Arad and Timiș. Topics such as the evolution of the socio-economic framework and FDI at the national level, the current FDI situation in Romania, with an emphasis on those in the automotive sector, the facilities offered to foreign investment at the national level are integrated. At the same time, the counties subject to analysis are described through the lens of certain indicators, in order to outline an image of the socio-economic climate within them.

The fourth chapter analyzes the dynamics and particularities of foreign direct investment in the border region, as its title suggests, offering a new perspective on the border. The analysis follows four main directions, each corresponding to a subchapter of the paper.

The first subchapter is dedicated to examining the evolution of foreign direct investment in the border region, comparing the Romania's pre-accession and post-accession to the EU periods, with the aim of identifying changes or particularities determined by the status of the border (external, then internal to the EU). The sources used are mainly National Trade Register Office (NTOR) reports issued between December 2003 and October 2024. This approach began with the analysis of FDI (more specifically, the subscribed share capital and the number of newly registered companies) at the national level and, then, at the border region level, in order to cross a framework from general to particular, but also to have indicators to which to report the results of the border region. The results indicated that the process of Romania's accession to the EU and, implicitly, the transformation of the external border into an internal border attracted a strong increase in foreign capital within the border region.

The second subchapter aims the comparative analysis of foreign direct investment in the border region and those in the rest of the regions, providing an image of the perception of the border and the border region in relation to foreign direct investment and in relation to other regions in the country. The main sources used are represented by the annual reports of the National Bank of Romania (NBR) on foreign direct investment in Romania in the period 2003-2023, being analyzed data on the territorial distribution of FDI by development regions and counties. At the same time, another important source is represented by the Ministry of Finance for identifying the largest companies with foreign participation in the share capital in each county.

The results show the favorable position of the counties on the Romanian-Hungarian border compared to the counties near other Romanian borders and other counties of Romania (with a tradition in attracting foreign direct investment and flourishing economic development, through their central position or reputation as large industrial centers), both in terms of the FDI growth rate and in terms of the FDI balance at the end of 2023 and over the period 2013-2023. In light of these results, it can be stated that the Romanian-Hungarian border region represents an incentive for foreign direct investment, holding a privileged place in the ranking regarding attracting foreign direct investment.

The trend in recent years in this region is positive, of growth, and the region has a higher level of attractiveness compared to other border areas in the country. The attractiveness

of this area is continuously increasing, consolidating its position in the top regions attracting foreign investment.

The third subchapter, with a more precise character, focuses on the evolution and current situation of foreign direct investment in the four counties in the border region, identifying, at the same time, their characteristics and main directions. The source used is represented by the own database (Appendix 3) comprising companies with foreign participation in the share capital in the counties of Satu Mare, Bihor, Arad and Timiș, with a turnover of at least 500 thousand euros in at least one year of the last ten years with available data, i.e. the period 2014-2023. The built database contains information gathered from several sources.

The results indicate a sustained increase in the turnover of foreign companies in the counties of Satu Mare, Bihor, Arad and Timiș over the last ten years. In 2020, a decrease compared to the previous year is observed, most likely caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in Romania, with the exception of the values in Bihor county. However, the turnover values in 2023 far exceed those in the years before the pandemic. Also, the distribution of turnover over the years reveals a constant in the hierarchy of counties, with Timiș ranking first, with values significantly higher than the other three counties, which follow it in written order: Arad, Bihor and Satu Mare. At the same time, a trend of increasing discrepancy between Timiș and the other counties is observed, as well as a convergence of the values recorded by Arad and Bihor.

The number of employees of foreign companies registers low fluctuations, with some increases in the first years and a slight decrease trend in recent years. The upward evolution of turnover values is not directly proportional to the number of employees; however, in the case of Timiș county, a certain proportionality can be identified, in terms of the fact that the number of employees increases significantly over the period 2014-2023. This situation may indicate, on the one hand, the change in the fields of activity of companies, the development of activities with higher added value and the technologization and automation of production processes, and, on the other hand, the decrease in the civilian employed population, generated, in part, by the decrease in the resident population. The distribution of the number of employees between counties reveals a similarity with the distribution of turnover.

The distribution of economic activities within foreign companies in the border region reveals the following aspects: all economic activities in Romania are covered in the region, except for sections O (public administration and defence; compulsory social security) and U (activities of extraterritorial organisations and bodies); manufacturing (C) dominates with a percentage of 31%, followed by trade and repair of motor vehicles (G), with a percentage of 24%, and agriculture, forestry and fishing (A), with a percentage of 8.5%. The structure of

active companies in each of the four counties analyzed is similar, with a concentration in manufacturing, followed by trade and repair of motor vehicles.

Another important part of this section was the presentation of the largest companies in each county, more specifically the top twenty companies in each year from 2014 to 2023. The analysis of these companies revealed the formation of agglomeration effects in certain industries, such as the automotive industry, with most of these companies operating in large cities and their metropolitan and peri-urban areas.

The fourth subchapter deals with the arguments that can determine the substantiation of the investment decision in the border region. Indicators such as labour force, road connectivity, business infrastructure and support services, and others were used.

The fifth chapter deals with the relationship between foreign direct investment and the cross-border space, with a focus on clarifying the role of foreign companies in the Romanian-Hungarian cross-border space and gaining a perspective on the development of the border and cross-border region. It is divided into five subchapters.

The first subchapter is dedicated to cross-border cooperation between Romania and Hungary, with the objective of establishing the contribution of cross-border cooperation projects and program priorities between the two countries to the development of the Romanian-Hungarian border region, as a basis for facilitating further, more in-depth development through foreign direct investment.

The second subchapter presents an overview of foreign investment in Hungary, with a focus on the counties on the eastern border with Romania, in order to establish the framework for the following subchapters. The net FDI flows in Hungary over the period 1995-2023 and the FDI flows by economic activity over the last ten years, i.e. 2014-2023, were addressed. The structure of economic activities reveals a similarity between Hungary and Romania. The territorial distribution of enterprises with foreign participation in the share capital and the territorial distribution of the FDI balance were also presented, both at the end of 2023. At the same time, the importance of the automotive industry in Hungary was argued. The sources used are, among others, the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, the National Bank of Hungary and articles from specialized journals.

The following sections explored the subunits of analysis (embedded units of analysis) represented by the BMW company in Debrecen and the group of companies in the automotive sector and other related sectors.

The third subchapter is dedicated to presenting the BMW investment in Debrecen – the characteristics of the BMW group, the decision-making framework on which the choice of

a new location is based, the history of the factory preparation and construction process, the main reasons for choosing the city of Debrecen, the directions and characteristics of the new iFactory, the importance of the human component.

The fourth subchapter explores the effects of foreign direct investment, delimited by a border, on the cross-border area in its proximity and on the border itself. Using own database, the dynamics of foreign companies in the western border region of Romania in the period preceding the BMW investment in Debrecen is analyzed, showing to what extent automotive companies in this region can contribute to an investment in the immediate vicinity, across the border.

The network of automotive companies operating across the border in Romania, near Debrecen, can be considered a significant advantage for the future BMW plant. These companies could become suppliers of components and services, which would lead to cost efficiency and a significant reduction in delivery times. The newly created jobs would not be limited to those within the plant, but would be extended to the nearby geographical area, contributing to the economic development of the region.

All companies in the automotive and related fields were identified and carefully selected to reflect reality as accurately as possible. The results indicate that the automotive industry is highly developed in the Romanian-Hungarian border region due to, on the one hand, companies in the segment of products, components and services for the automotive industry, and, on the other hand, companies operating in other divisions of the manufacturing industry serving the automotive industry (such as rubber and plastic products manufacturing, metallurgy, metal construction industry and others). The Romanian-Hungarian border region, located in the vicinity of the city of Debrecen in Hungary, is distinguished by a significant concentration of foreign companies operating in and for the automotive industry, prior to the announcement of the BMW investment.

The results suggest that, in the process of selecting the location for the new factory, BMW took into account, in addition to other criteria and defining factors related to the group's global network and the environment in Hungary, the network of suppliers and potential suppliers in the border region of Romania. Proximity to a convergent business infrastructure (market, certain suppliers) and the opportunity to attract employees from the cross-border area may be defining for the choice of a location for a new investment.

The fifth subchapter deals with the area of influence of foreign direct investment in the border region and analyses the impact on the development of the cross-border region. This subchapter in turn comprises several subchapters. After an introduction to the issue of

geographical proximity in the automotive industry, in order to illustrate the spillover effect produced by the BMW investment, the foreign direct investment announced or implemented in both the eastern border region of Hungary and the western border region of Romania were analysed, especially after BMW's announcement of the opening of a new factory.

For the Hungarian side, data from the Hungarian Investment Promotion Agency from the period January 2014-November 2024 and from company websites and press articles were used. A selection of major investments implemented or announced in the counties of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Hajdú-Bihar, Békés and Csongrád-Csanád was made to determine the dynamics of FDI in the eastern border region of Hungary. Over half of the total investments went to the manufacturing industry, reflecting the importance of this sector.

The electric vehicle industry in Hungary, and especially in the eastern border region, has seen significant development following BMW's announcement in 2018 to build an electric car factory in Debrecen. A number of companies have announced investments in the border region, focusing on the production of components and products for the automotive industry. More importantly, investments in battery and battery component factories for electric vehicles are the highest, with most of them currently under preparation and construction. Following the announcement of BYD's second electric car factory in the border region, in Szeged, investments are expected to increase further and the electric vehicle industry to reach an unprecedented level of development.

Similarly, on the Romanian side, a selection of major investments implemented or announced in Satu Mare, Bihor, Arad and Timiș counties was carried out to determine the FDI dynamics in the western border region of Romania after the BMW announcement. One hundred newsletters from the time period August 2016-November 2024, made available by the Romanian Agency for Investment and Foreign Trade, were used. After a careful selection, the websites of the companies and various press publications were used.

While the Hungarian-Romanian border region has attracted significant investments in the production of electric car batteries and automotive components, concentrated near the BMW factory, the Romanian-Hungarian border region stands out for its orientation towards innovation and high-tech. Investments in this area are focused on high-value-added activities. The automotive industry is the main beneficiary of research and software development activities. At the same time, there is a considerable volume of investment in automotive component production facilities, given that the manufacturing industry absorbed approximately half of the total investment. The information and communications sector has also attracted a significant volume of investment. Construction, closely followed by real estate transactions,

and professional, scientific and technical activities also stood out, although they have a lower share.

Most of the investments in the manufacturing sector were destined for the automotive industry, being concentrated in three main directions: the manufacture of electrical and electronic equipment, the manufacture of tires and the manufacture of certain parts and accessories. A clear orientation towards research and development, engineering, the implementation of innovative production systems and processes, the integration of modern technologies and the provision of state-of-the-art equipment is noticeable.

In the case of investments in the field of information and communications, the research and development of software solutions for the automotive industry stands out.

Another important area of investment is real estate development and transactions. In this context, a number of companies have invested heavily in the development of industrial parks, logistics parks and retail parks, considered strategic for economic growth.

The conclusions section of the paper includes both the most important conclusions and discussions of the thesis, as well as personal contributions, the applicability of the results, and further research opportunities.

Research methodology

Etymologically, methodology refers to the science of methods,⁹ the science of conducting research and represents "a general discipline in which the ways of achieving scientific knowledge are developed and concerns all the elements that intervene in the research of social life".¹⁰ Literally, methodology means "the integrated science of methods".¹¹

If we were to refer to the three directions that sociological research can follow, defined by Miller and Salkind, we argue that the present research would be a combination of fundamental and evaluative research, with an emphasis on evaluative research. Fundamental research aims to obtain new knowledge and develop theory, applied research analyzes social problems and identifies solutions, while evaluative research analyzes the effects of certain actions taken in society.¹² At the same time, the research attempts to cover the three purposes of social science research – exploration, description and explanation – given that achieving a single purpose would have generated incomplete research on the chosen topic.

⁹ Septimiu Chelcea, Ioan Mărginean, Ion Cauc, *Cercetarea sociologică. Metode și tehnici* (Deva: Destin, 1998), p. 34; Septimiu Chelcea, *Metodologia cercetării sociologice. Metode cantitative și calitative* (București: Editura Economică, 2001), p. 50.

¹⁰ Ioan Mărginean, *Proiectarea cercetării sociologice* (Polirom, 2000), p. 53.

¹¹ Roland Caude, *Méthodologie vers une science de l'action* (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1964), p. 4.

¹² Delbert C. Miller, Neil J. Salkind, *Handbook of Research Design and Social Measurement*, ediția a 6-a (Sage Publications, 2002).

The combination of methods, techniques, procedures and tools leads to the shaping of research strategies.¹³ The research strategy of this thesis is based on combining quantitative and qualitative research, depending on the objectives and sections of the paper.

Despite the debate among researchers regarding the issue of quantitative precision versus descriptive richness, these two approaches are not mutually exclusive, but are different elements of a unique and unitary process.¹⁴ The two approaches, quantitative and qualitative, can be integrated within the same study, coexisting or even overlapping.¹⁵ The combination of the two strategies responds to the need for adequate knowledge of social reality, their interdependence is more than obvious, it being expected that some research will be more pronouncedly quantitative and others will be more pronouncedly qualitative,¹⁶ as is the present research.

To reiterate, the present study combines qualitative and quantitative research. This approach results from the conditioning brought by the specificity of the topic and objectives, the existence of information sources and the availability of data.

The research strategy is based on the case study, which is considered a non-experimental, multi-method, longitudinal and, last but not least, qualitative strategy¹⁷ – generalizations are made through abstraction, without following the spread of a phenomenon, aiming to elucidate the context.¹⁸ We note that the case study is the main method and is considered, rather, a research strategy that integrates other methods.

The qualitative methodology encompasses qualitative data collection methods, on the one hand, and qualitative data analysis methods, on the other. The qualitative data collection methods used are document analysis, secondary research, and case study.

Quantitative methodology encompasses quantitative data collection methods, on the one hand, and quantitative data analysis methods, on the other. Quantitative data collection methods are represented by document analysis and secondary research.

1. Case study

¹³ I. Mărginean, *op. cit.*, p. 59; Patrick Dunleavy, *Authoring a PhD. How to plan, draft, write and finish a doctoral thesis or dissertation* (Londra: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 69-70.

¹⁴ Ronald A. McQueen, Christina Knussen, *Metode de cercetare în științele sociale*, trad. Mihai Avădanei (Iași: Institutul European, 2006), p. 46.

¹⁵ R. A. McQueen, C. Knussen, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

¹⁶ I. Mărginean, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

¹⁷ I. Mărginean, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

¹⁸ Julia Brannen, „Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches: an overview”, în *Mixing Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Research*, edit. Julia Brannen (Routledge, 1992), pp. 3-37, *apud* I. Mărginean, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

In this paper, the case study is a longitudinal method, observational method, and casuistic method. The case study is not a research method in itself, but rather an approach to social research that includes a series of methods.¹⁹ Yin also considered the case study as a research strategy.²⁰ In 1975, Donald T. Campbell said of the case study that it was a small step towards a grand theory.

Case study investigation draws on multiple sources of evidence and, in order to guide data collection and analysis, relies on previously developed theoretical hypotheses.²¹ The case study can use a series of both qualitative and quantitative methods,²² as is the case in this research.

I chose the Romanian-Hungarian border region as a case study for several reasons. One of the main reasons is that it is an internal EU border for both Hungary and Romania. The two states also have a relatively similar history in terms of EU accession, having been accepted into the EU bloc in close proximity (Hungary in 2004 and Romania in 2007) and both belong to Central and Eastern Europe.

2. Document analysis

Social document analysis is a non-reactive research method through which the researcher studies social phenomena after they have occurred, thus ensuring the objectivity of the study, as the phenomena are not influenced by the presence or intervention of the analyst.²³

In this paper, the document analysis method was applied to a multitude of documents. After identifying, evaluating, selecting and verifying relevant documents, the information was processed (analyzed).

Thus, the data extracted from the documents used in this paper were obtained by carefully reading the documents and extracting the essential ideas, a study of the documents being carried out. These methods are supported by Chelcea, when it is not necessary or the research problem does not require the application of the content analysis technique.²⁴

3. Secondary research

¹⁹ R. A. McQueen, C. Knussen, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

²⁰ Robert K. Yin, *Studiul de caz: designul, analiza și colectarea datelor*, trad. Valentin Alupoaie (Iași: Polirom, 2005).

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

²² R. A. McQueen, C. Knussen, *op. cit.*, pp. 27, 40.

²³ S. Chelcea, *op. cit.*, p. 467.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 517, 530.

Secondary data is data collected and organized by other researchers, but which forms the basis of new or current research,²⁵ offering the possibility of performing analytical procedures on a larger amount of information.²⁶

In this paper, secondary research was applied, among others, to articles in specialized journals, books, course materials, reports, strategic planning documents, and others.

The paper includes both theoretical research and case study. The key activities carried out followed the logic of the paper's objectives. We list the main activities: reviewing the literature, collecting and processing data from statistical documents, analyzing documents (press articles, the legislative framework, sections on official websites, reports, etc.), building the database, interpreting the collected and processed data, formulating conclusions. During the research, we tried to permanently update the data on foreign direct investment.

Regarding the case study design, this is a design for an individual case, holistic (studying a unit of analysis represented by the Romanian-Hungarian border region) and embedded (encompassing multiple units of analysis represented by the BMW investment in Debrecen, the group of companies with foreign capital, the group of companies in the automotive industry).

The research used both primary and secondary sources.

Regarding primary bibliographic sources, we mention the following categories of sources used in this research:

- EU and Romanian legal norms;
- Reports and statistics:
 - NBR reports on FDI in Romania
 - Reports of the National Bank of Hungary on FDI in Hungary
 - Reports of the National Trade Register Office of Romania
 - Report by CBRE Romania on industrial spaces, by IBC Focus on the construction market, by EuroMoney Romania on the attractiveness survey of Romania, by fDi Intelligence on the ranking of European cities including several aspects of their attractiveness for FDI, by PriceWaterhouse Coopers on the survey conducted among suppliers in the automotive industry, by the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration on the situation of industrial parks, report on real estate trends, UNCTAD report

²⁵ R. A. McQueen, C. Knussen, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 114.

- Annual reports of certain companies
- Eurostat statistics
- Statistics of the National Institute of Statistics
- Statistics of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office
- Manualul OCDE privind definiția de referință OCDE a investițiilor străine directe
- OECD Benchmark Definition of Foreign Direct Investment
- Official company web pages (press releases, news sections, sections with various information);
- Own database (built from several sources, such as the Ministry of Finance, commercial providers of company data and Order no. 337/2007 on updating the Classification of Activities of the National Economy – NACE);
- Official web pages of business infrastructures (industrial parks, innovation centers, business incubators), of various government structures (Border Police);

Regarding secondary bibliographic sources, we mention the following categories of sources used in this research:

- Books;
- Specialized articles;
- Media and institutional sources (press articles, official press releases, official news);
- Official websites (of the European Commission, of various universities, of various regional/local structures – INNO ADR Nord-Vest, ADR Vest, ADLO –, of the Romanian Agency for Investment and Foreign Trade and Invest Romania, of the Hungarian Foreign Investment Promotion Agency, of the Ministry of Finance, of the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure and others);
- Reports and statistics (various situations regarding tax regimes, reports);
- Strategic planning documents (county development strategies, infrastructure-related documents – General Transport Master Plan, National Spatial Planning Plan –, polycentric development – Territorial Development Strategy of Romania –, development strategies of the West and North-West regions);
- Other sources (data from commercial company data providers, EU-funded courses, ARICE guide);

Some sources used contextually within the present research were not mentioned.

Main conclusions

Starting from the stated hypotheses, the results indicate that they are valid, being supported by several evidences and arguments.

The border is not just a clear line of demarcation, but can be an incentive for the development of the border region, contrary to the first impression of a creator of a peripheral area. The research captures the transformation of the border region, from a peripheral area into an area with high development potential through foreign direct investment, which have an impact on the entire cross-border area.

The results obtained in the fourth chapter suggest that the border region within the EU cannot and can no longer be perceived as a marginal area in relation to the other national regions, but a development pole with strategic and economic potential, through the fruition of the geographical position and the cross-border potential. The border acts as a catalyst for foreign investment, the role of the border region within the EU being redefined. At the same time, the transition of the Romanian-Hungarian border from the status of an external border to that of an internal border of the EU has significantly stimulated the attraction of foreign capital to the region. Companies with foreign participation in the share capital benefit from advantages such as developed infrastructure (transport, business), proximity to several markets, especially to Western European states, qualified workforce and opportunities offered by the cross-border space.

The fifth chapter offers a new perspective on the development of a border and cross-border region and on the role of the border. The results obtained in this chapter indicate that foreign direct investment can engage the creation of a dynamic development hub in the common cross-border space, with a process of blurring the border and highlighting its role in facilitating development, under the network of suppliers and customers, respectively employees and employers, collaborative partnerships and integrated infrastructure. The results of the present research facilitate the provision of answers related to the issue of the relationship between the border and cross-border region and foreign direct investment. The effects of foreign investment extend to the cross-border region. The common development space can be created by attracting FDI.

The Romanian-Hungarian cross-border region is an emblematic case of the transformation of two distinct national areas, positioned on the edge of the countries, into a dynamic development hub.

At the same time, it can be stated that there is a complex relationship, characterized by a so-called interdependence; interdependence suggests that the border region and foreign direct

investment influence each other. The border region creates favorable conditions for investment (geographical position, infrastructure, access to markets, labour force, proximity to certain suppliers), and investments, in turn, transform the border region and the cross-border space, creating new opportunities.

The border and cross-border region has several channels through which it can develop. FDI represents a source of growth for the border region. The border can no longer be seen as an impediment to the development of a local or regional economy. The border is a hybrid instrument, simultaneously holding the functions of delimiting and crossing economic spaces. The border not only separates, but also connects, having a dual role.

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