

**THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ENVIRONMENTAL  
CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE ROMANIAN-HUNGARIAN  
CROSSBORDER REGION ALONG THE RIVERS KÖRÖS**

**CARACTERISTICILE MEDIULUI ÎNCONJURĂTOR ÎN  
REGIUNEA GRANIȚEI ROMÂNNO-UNGARE ÎMPREUNĂ CU  
RÂUL KÖRÖS**

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*The environment-conscious activities may fulfil an outstanding role in solving – and in line with this, in creating and maintaining favourable future living conditions – most environmental problems in the cross-border regions also. Therefore our main starting point is the following: - the environment-centred thinking and responsible acts may contribute to the renewal in the Romanian-Hungarian crossborder regions. Related to this, gaining knowledge on environmental conflicts experienced within settlements in the crossborder region was found really timely. The exploration of certain cultural-mental factors – the environmental consciousness of the inhabitants and the attitudes was found essential.*

**Keywords:** *environmental consciousness, Romanian-Hungarian crossborder region, civil society, environmental partnership*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Nowadays, the Romanian-Hungarian cross-border region can be described with complex and serious settlement-environmental problems. The negative processes accelerated in the last decade causing many environmental conflicts. After all, we think that this cross-border region will have a better future in the twenty-first century. Under the aegis of the CRISKÖR CBC project, (“CrisKör Environmental cadastre and ecological action plan of the Rivers Fehér-, Fekete- and Kettős-Körös”) we carried out a survey in this region covering 30 settlements and tried to discover the environmental attitudes of local societies. In this study we try to summarise the main characteristics of environmental consciousness in the Romanian-Hungarian crossborder area along the Rivers Körös.

The familiarity of environmental consciousness between selected communities could be advantageous for several reasons. Firstly, the environmental problems related to these settlements become cognisable and penetrable with the help of summarizing opinions of inhabitants and professionals, and thus certain environmental-social-economic issues could become interpretable. Secondly, expectations, worries as well as local ideas and needs in connection with environment could become outlined, what contribute to the development of more valid and region-specific local environmental policies. Besides, mapping environmental consciousness may also give a helping hand in the preparation of educational and training schemes by which local communities can be encouraged to live a more environment-conscious lifestyle.

## **2. DEFINITION OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS**

More and more authors (scientists, politicians and leading intellectual circles) called attention to the importance and burning urgency of environment-conscious social activities – in connection with the global population, ecological and urban environmental problems of the twentieth century and the related worries and fears (including CARSON R. 1962; DONELLA H. MEADOWS ET. AL 1972; 2005; HUBER, J. 1989; BROWN L. R. 1981; DALY, H. E. 2001).

The environmental conscious is the environmental scale of values of the individuals and the society which are formed by the knowledge about the environment, and the aesthetic and moral principles determined by the certain cultures. On the one hand, the environmental conscious helps to understand the development of environmental damages; and on the other hand, it may make people notice the importance of fighting the dangers, and relying on the scientific attainments it may become a significant social organising and problem-solving factor. That is, the knowledge of the society about the environment and its appropriate way of thinking – in theory – form the basis of the activity system destined to protect the environment.

The environmental consciousness includes ideologies ensuring long-term sustainability, men and social communities as well as behaviour types and all concrete activities based on them. The aim of environment-conscious activities is creating and maintaining dynamical balance between environmental subsystems. In modern societies – so as in Romania and Hungary – it is probable only in that case, if the protection of environment

is in harmony with technical, scientific knowledges and principles, with economic and political policies, as well as with civil activities of society and implemented thorough considering all these phenomena.

### **3. THE EXAMINATION AND SOME SPECIALITY OF ENVIRONMENT-CONSCIOUSNESS IN ROMANIA AND HUNGARY**

The environmental consciousness examinations have become actual due to the expansion of social background of activities related to environment protection. Examining personal and communal responsibility, people's opinion connected to environment and attitude mainly includes the exploration of researches that have spreaded in these countries. Its main cause is that environmental consciousness has been raised as special question in the urbanized areas of developed regions over the classical problems (waste management, air and noise pollution, energy management, biodiversity, water management). Creating environmental image has been shown up as a new target including settlement construction that considers environmental issues environmental collaborations, partner relations between settlements and regions, developing communication as well as new (holistic) environmental teaching and education.

The aim of the researches were providing insight for EU Member States environmental policy decision-makers into the inhabitants' common environmental knowledge, anxieties and role-taking capability. These examinations focused on the following questions: What kind of global, regional and local environmental problems are known by the inhabitants? Which are the most important environmental anxieties? What are the main environmental needs of the people and what are their future conceptions? Wherein would persons participate to protect the state of the environment?

The main lesson learned from this research pointed out that majority of the population thinks that environmental problems are very pressing, but does not feel responsible for their solution. The ecological sensibility, the anxieties towards environmental safety increased, and citizens wanted to play roles in environmental questions much more in Romania and Hungary. Society realized in the decade following regime change that beside the centrally developed environmental policies and expert decisions, the civil population's opinion is also authoritative in environmental questions. Inhabitants could even have veto in some cases.

Unfortunately, recent international surveys (Eurobarometer, 2007) primarily pointed out that the general population of these countries are not enough environment-conscious in terms of daily lifestyle. Most people worry about the state of the national environment but only a few of them are willing to make real changes. According to the majority, environment protection is not the persons', but the state's task. From this it can be seen that higher taxes should be put on activities more harmful for the environment, what would contribute to decrease people's tax and affix burdens. In addition, the state should take stricter action against the polluters who do not pay for the damage that they caused. Some parts of the society are still showing total disinterest towards environmental cases. Even those who have sufficient knowledge can only be motivated to carry out activities that do not need financial contribution and do not take long time.

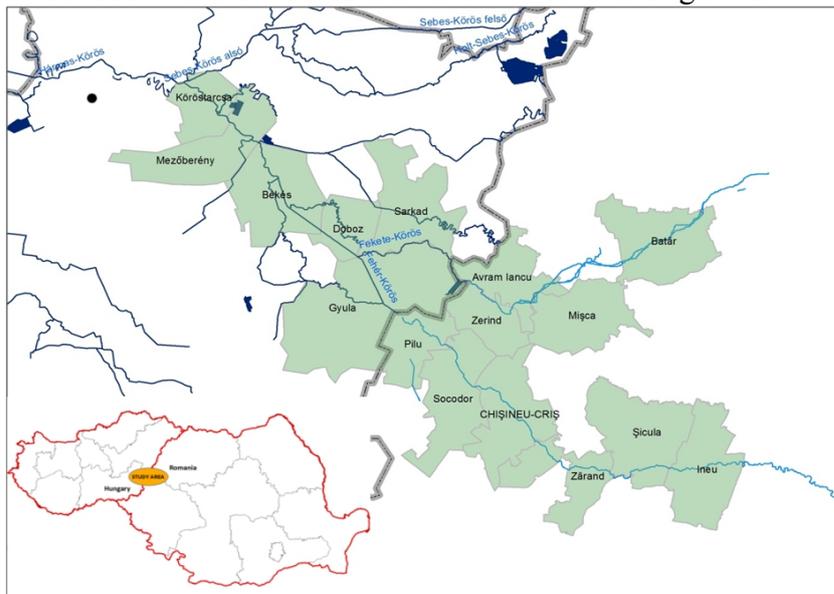


FIGURE 1: THE STUDY AREA

#### 4. THE METHODOLOGY OF THE SURVEY IN THE CROSSBORDER REGION

Applying the international methods of environmental consciousness examinations, we made surveys in the settlements of CRISKÖR project among inhabitants in winter 2011.

The main aims of the survey were to get acquainted with the opinion of the residents in the following topics: what people think about environment protection in general, and as a social activity system, and what environmental issues are perceived by local communities. The questions of the survey involved global and local problems too.

The survey was carried out with random sampling procedure. 302 Romanian and 107 Hungarian respondents were searched up to get an accurate picture of the views of the population

The survey took place in 30 villages and cities, using interviewers who were "random walk" on the streets of the settlements. The applied sample's statistical margin of error is within normal ranges (approx. +/- 5%). Therefore in our results can be only a slight deviation from that event, if we would have asked all the older citizen in the study area.

## **5. THE MAIN RESULTS OF THE SURVEY**

### **5.1 BASE DATA**

The youngest respondents of our survey were in the 18-20 years old age group, and the oldest were above 70 years. The age groups and their rate in the sample were the following: below 25 years 15 %, between 25-40 years 35 %, the middle aged generations (between 40-70 years) 45 %, and finally above 70 years only 5 %. 48 % of the people in the sample have secondary school or high school, and only 17 % have higher degree level. 51 % of the respondents were female, and 49 % were male. Two-thirds of the sample haven't got children, 50 % of the families with children only have one child. The status of respondents is very mixed, approximately represents the social structure of the study area's population. On the Hungarian side there were more students, retired, maternity leave and individual entrepreneur in the sample, while on the Romanian side the rate of employees was higher.

### **5.2 THE ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVE - CONCERNS, IDEAS**

The respondent's interest in environmental issues considered relatively vibrant. There was almost no respondent who have been left cold by environmental issues. Only 15 % of the participants said that he or she only just sometimes and in certain cases interested in the protection of the environment. So the majority is fundamentally interested in the environment, and by our results there is only a narrow difference in the

answers by nationality. The Hungarians show more interest, but with a very slight margin.

The response of the population to the questions referring to the overall assessment of environmental problems was detailed, but shows only those factors (global climate change, chemicals etc.) which are known by the wider circles of the society. From the results we can say that the public is informed, and has an accurate knowledge about these processes, and they feel responsible for these problems. The answers were independent from the respondent's age and gender, only those who have higher education show higher level of environmental consciousness (both in the cognitive and in affective components).

The respondent's view of the general environmental issues is very similar to the European standards. 80 % of the respondents agree that everybody has responsibility in these questions, and need to do more for the solution. Most people feel that the environment protection is very important, but basically depends on the financial resources. The environmental health is considered important to the respondents, they see their own environment relatively healthy. In the perception of this question there is a visible difference between the two sides of the border. The Romanians say the environmental health conditions are good, but the majority of the Hungarians only say it's average.

There is a difference in the most common problems too. The Hungarians mostly mentioned that the settlements are neglected, the street's view is unsettled, and the public places are rubbish. On the other hand at the Romanian side people have problems with the dust and noise. They are worried about the illegal garbage landfills, and about the missing environmental programs too.

The assessment of drinking water quality was mixed, unfortunately, many of the respondents (approx. 30 %) said that it's only average or bad. Definitely food for thought that only 31 % of the respondents believe that he or she consumes high quality drinking water.

The majority of the respondents in both sides think that the waste disposal is solved, but the selective collection option is not used by the population. In general, the Romanian respondents showed more willingness to do selective collection than the Hungarian counterparts.

By our results only a very small portion of the population involved in the activity of environmental groups or associations. 35 % of the

Hungarian respondents have sympathy to this type of organizations, but only 1-2 % member in a similar group. The Romanian respondents don't have sympathy to green organizations, 90 % said no to this question.

## **6. SUMMARY**

From the answers of the citizens of the Romanian-Hungarian border region many important lessons can be drawn.

- The majority of the residents like to live in the region and in their villages, and they don't want to move elsewhere. This is definitely a good base to the local development activities, which can be firmly established on environmental consciousness. In other words, "local patriotism of the local communities can be switched to environmentally friendly lifestyle and farming!"
- The population of the settlements perceived the local environmental problems as important factors in living conditions, and these must be solved in the future.
- The majority of respondents say that environmental responsibility is everybody's, and they consider that is very important issue, and everybody need to protect the environment.
- The opinion of the respondents is very different about their settlements. They put the environmental consciousness of the settlements between average and good during the scaling.
- The population waits for outside help to solve the environmental problems, and the activity of the civil society is not sufficient yet. So in the region there is a need to revitalize the public life of civil and environmental activity.
- In the future, the increase in environmental consciousness can be a good starting point for improving the living quality and the local community development programs, which helps the municipalities and the region's further development.

Unfortunately in despite of the positive factors and encouraging phenomena, – the widening of the environment-consciousness – that explored during the researches, the environment protection activities are still can't unfolding sufficiently in the examined regions. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, those supporting systems, governmental and autonomic funds, that could allow coordinated cross border settlement environment programs, are missing. There are no such organizations that would undertake the

particular environmental management of the region. Secondly, the appropriate partnership wasn't formed between the institutes and civil societies interested in the environment protection and developing.

Summing it up, it may be established that the environment-consciousness of the studied social communities is evolving but it cannot be reinforced properly due to various reasons. For having the impacts of the environment-consciousness and the cultural-mental factor really felt on the studied settlements, the knowledge of the people needs to be extended and their attitudes must be changed. Besides, the practical implementation of certain special scopes of duties be realised only if the local communities try to realise long-term environmental objectives in co-operation with the local governments, institutions and the civil sphere.

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