

THE AUSTRIAN-HUNGARIAN BORDER REGION

The Austrian-Hungarian border region is playing a bridging role between Western and Eastern areas of Europe and is also located along the connection route between the Baltic and the Adriatic space. The border region is at the cross-road between these two corridors: the traditional West-East Trans-European route and the reviving historic “North-South Amber” route. This excellent geographic position has resulted in a faster economic growth of this region than the European average over the last 10 years.

Eligible area and regional structure

The Austrian-Hungarian border region covers the Austrian Länder of Burgenland and Wien and the NUTS III region Wiener Umland-Südteil as well as the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron, Vas and Zala from the Hungarian side. The adjoining NUTS III-regions Niederösterreich-Süd and Oststeiermark fall under the 20% clause in the sense of Article 21 of the ERDF Regulation (Map 1: Regional Structure, eligible areas) due to their geographic proximity to the border and their strong relations with the bilateral border region.

Referring to Article 21 of the ERDF Regulation *“at project level, expenditure incurred by partners located outside the programme area may be eligible, if the project could hardly achieve its objectives without that partner’s participation”* this possibility may be used from partners e.g. from CENTROPE¹(-area) or from Graz/Graz-Umgebung.

The past experience has shown that multilateral projects are of rising importance for regional development and territorial cohesion in the multi-programme area comprising Austrian, Czech, Slovakian and Hungarian border regions. Therefore the Austrian-Hungarian programme partners consider it as important for the programme design and implementation to widen the scope of the cross border programmes and to take care of the needs and opportunities of multilateral projects.

The Austrian-Hungarian border region covers 13,5% of the total area and 20,4% of total population of the two countries. On the Austrian side 33% of the countries total population is living. Regarding the Hungarian side the share is 10%. Approximately 3,7 million people lived in this region in 2005.

¹ CENTROPE contains the following regions: Wien, Niederösterreich, Burgenland, Győr-Moson-Sopron, Vas, South Moravia, Bratislava and Trnava.

Map 1: Regional Structure, eligible areas

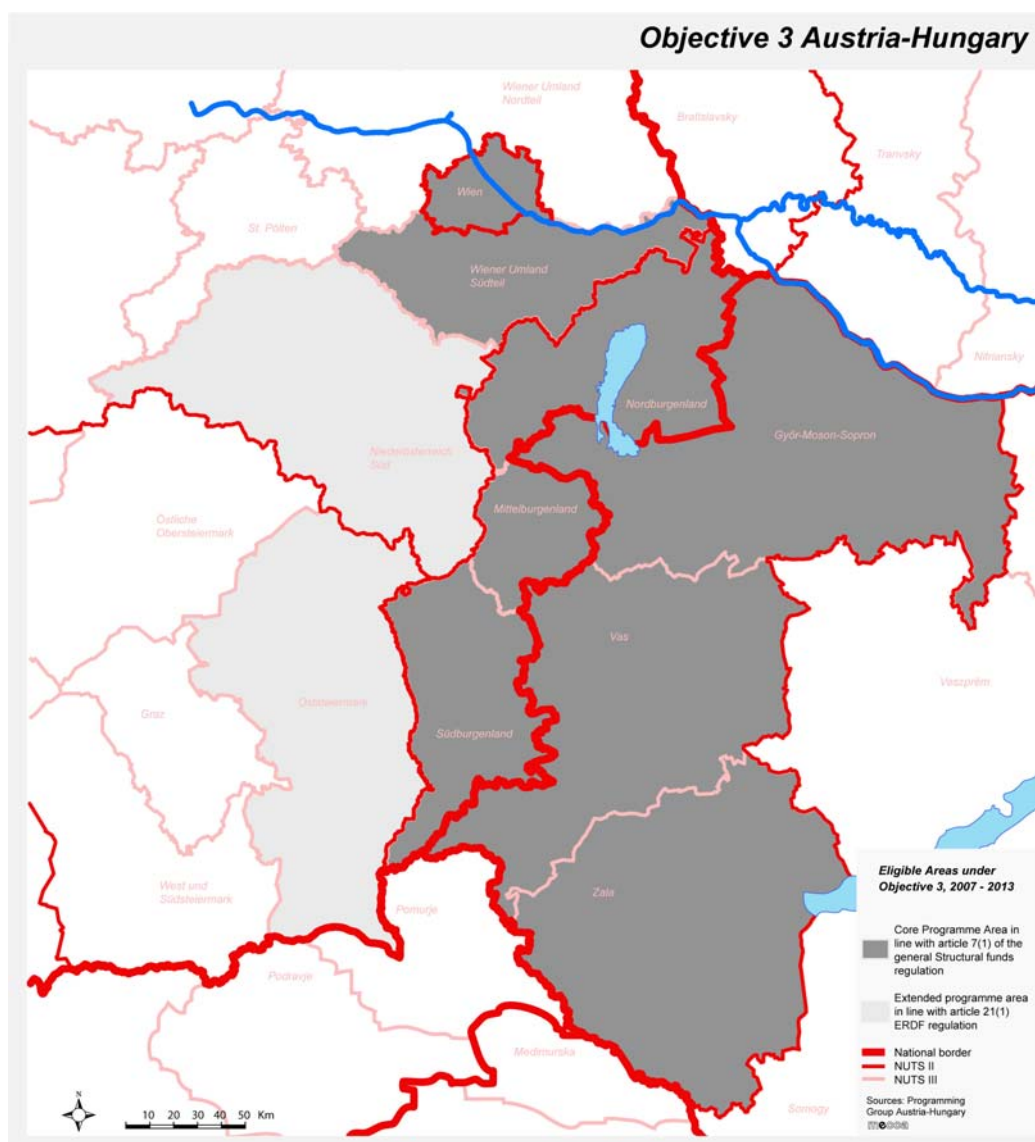


Table 1: Area and Population of the Austrian-Hungarian Border Region

NUTS III region	Area (km ²)	Population 2005	Density (inh/km ²)
Wien	415	1.626.440	3.919,1
Wiener Umland Südteil	1.475	303.046	205,5
Niederösterreich-Süd	3.366	249.900	74,2
Nordburgenland	1.793	143.196	79,9
Mittelburgenland	702	37.505	53,4
Südburgenland	1.472	97.514	66,3
Oststeiermark	3.369	268.627	79,7
Total Austrian Border Region	12.592	2.726.228	216,5
Győr-Moson-Sopron	4.208	439.922	104,5
Vas	3.337	265.229	79,5
Zala	3.784	295.197	78,0
Total Hungarian Border Region	11.329	1.000.348	88,3
Total At-HU Border Region	23.921	3.726.576	155,8

Source: Statistics Austria (2005), KSH (2005)

The region is characterized by a mix of ethnic groups on both sides of the border, differences can be observed only in terms of proportions of the given nationalities. Communication and travelling lines follow geographic and morphological facilities in the southern parts of the region again: they usually follow river valleys (Rába/Raab). Compared to the West-East direction, North-South directions were less important during periods of history and this is the case even nowadays – causing problems in strengthening regional economic cohesion.

The economic core of the area is Wien, the only Metropolitan European Growth Area (MEGA) in the programming area of the total 75 MEGAs in Europe². Győr is defined as transnational/national Functional Urban Area (FUA), and the rest of centres over 50.000 inhabitants are regional/local FUA's.

The joint programme region has a dual character regarding the urban network. The north part of the region is an industrial growth pole of central Europe while the southern part of the region is rather the periphery of this growth region with medium sized centres in the Hungarian and small centres in the Austrian side, having more rural characteristics. The level of urbanisation is decreasing from north to south, the average size and economic capacity of towns and villages becomes smaller along the same pattern.

² Nordregio, et. al.: ESPON 1.1.1 - Potentials for polycentric development in Europe. ESPON Monitoring Committee (Hrsg.). Final report. August 2004.