

Paradiplomacy in Hungary: a New Research Topic?

— by Balázs Brucker & Zsuzsanna Zsibók —

Abstract

Paradiplomacy has a well-established and extensive body of international scholarly literature. However, it is worth examining to what extent research and academic discourse on paradiplomatic issues have been present in Hungary, a country that, under the communist regime prior to 1990, operated within a system that imposed significant limitations on international—and, by extension, sister city—relations. The objective of the present study is to provide an overview of the Hungarian literature on paradiplomacy, as well as the research being conducted in this field within Hungary. In doing so, the study addresses both bilateral and multilateral dimensions of municipal diplomacy.

Keywords: Hungary; subnational diplomacy; city diplomacy; paradiplomacy; twinning; European Union, cross-border cooperation; European networks

| INTRODUCTION

The significance of city diplomacy started to increase after the end of World War II, and the main features of city cooperation also constantly changed throughout the post-war decades. Despite its growing importance, sub-national diplomacy has attracted less attention from the social sciences (political science, regional studies, international studies, social geography), and the subject has managed to preserve its position, however peripheral, within the framework of research and theories relevant for the analysis of international relations. Studies on sub-national diplomacy emerged in the Anglo-Saxon literature as early as the 1970s and 1980s, and from the mid-1980s, the focus has shifted to the investigation of the international weight and relations of Western European regions. The study of Duchacek (1984) represents one of the first comprehensive works on the diplomatic activity of sub-national actors. The ini-

tial focus of the analyses of the regions' diplomatic activities was limited to federalism, later extended to the autonomy struggles and international activities of regions (Aldecoa & Keating, 2003). Studies focusing on the European Union investigated European-level interregional relations (Tatham, 2015), as well as the role of sub-national actors in multilevel governance regimes (Keating, 2014; Pasquier, 2002; Rodriguez-Pose & Courty, 2018; Trobbiani, 2016). The findings of the research reviewed above seek to highlight the role of the international relations of local and regional governments in shaping international relations and integrations, and to identify the distinctive features of sub-national diplomacy compared to inter-governmental diplomatic relations.

Research on paradiplomacy is supported by an extensive body of international literature. However, the question arises: what contributions have Hungarian scholars made regarding the international activities of Hungarian subnational actors and what literature

is available on subnational diplomacy in Hungarian language? The aim of the study is to present the current state of Hungarian research efforts related to subnational diplomacy and the Hungarian-language literature on this topic. The literature analysis concerns both bilateral (twinning, cross-border cooperations) and multilateral relations of local and regional governments (participation in international networks; advocacy in international/EU institutions). Research activities conducted so far on Hungarian subnational diplomacy will also be presented. Within the framework of the study, the first, and to date, only comprehensive – 4-year – research in Hungary related to paradiplomacy will also be presented (title: Sub-national diplomacy in the international arena), which will be carried out by the Institute for Regional Studies of the HUN-REN Centre for Economic and Regional Studies. Our article introduces the objectives of the research, the research questions and hypotheses, and the quantitative and qualitative methodology used in the research.

Since the scientific activity related to the international relations of subnational actors is closely linked to the evolution of international activities of Hungarian local and regional governments, the paradiplomacy activity of Hungarian subnational actors will be presented in the first part of our study. The second part of the study explores the articles of Hungarian scholars, both in Hungarian and in English, related to the international activity of subnational actors, while the third part will present the Hungarian research works in paradiplomacy.



SUBNATIONAL DIPLOMACY ACTIVITIES IN HUNGARY SINCE 1945

The Fundamental Law of Hungary stipulates that the territory of Hungary consists of the capital, counties, towns and villages. Municipal districts can be formed in the capital city and in other towns (Hajdú et al., 2024). Budapest, the capital of Hungary has 23 capital districts which are local administrative units with their own municipal councils, mayors, and administrative functions. In a peculiar dual self-government system, Budapest has also a local government, the Budapest Municipality. Local government tasks are generally implemented by the capital district governments while tasks stemming from its nationwide scope and related to multiple districts or the city as a whole are undertaken by the Budapest Municipality. There are 25 cities with county rights in Hungary, 18 of which are county seats (the seat of Pest county is Budapest). The status ‘town with county rights’ is a special kind of settlement (municipal) government. On the one hand, it performs the tasks of a settlement government, while on the other it has to exercise county competences in its territory (Tábit, 2012). In addition, there are 322 municipalities with town status locating a diverse number of inhabitants (between 1 thousand to 43 thousand). Altogether, Hungary has 3155 municipalities, all of which have their own elected mayors and local councils. Although they have power to make decisions on local matters, their political autonomy is constrained by the overarching authority of the central government. At the meso level, the tasks of the county governments are limited to regional development and spatial planning, rural development, and unspecified coordination functions. From the perspective of both the local governments and the county governments, the policy trend after 2010 led to a strengthening of the state organizational system, accompanied by a weakening of self-governance both at local and county levels (Hajdú et al., 2024).

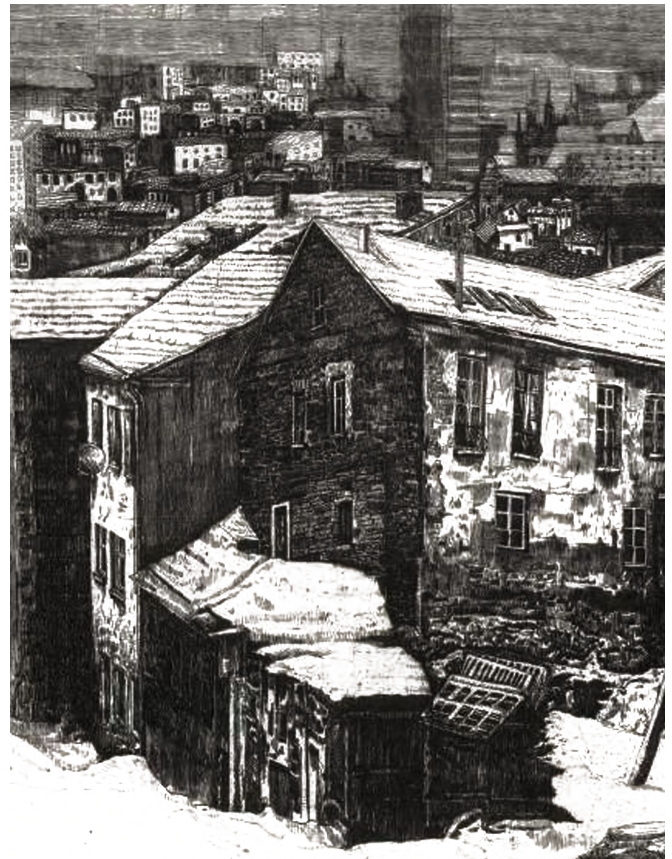
The significance of city diplomacy started to increase after the end of World War II, and the main features of city cooperation also constantly changed throughout the post-war decades. While sister city agreements became widespread in Western Europe during the 1970s and 1980s, in East-Central Europe, including Hungary, such initiatives were heavily restricted from the 1950s onwards. The communist regimes in these countries limited all forms of contact with foreign nations, particularly with Western European settlements, due to ideological considerations (Kézai & Páthy, 2023). This restriction also partially affected paradiplomatic relations. Even though sister city partnerships were also possible during the socialist period, the frequency of contacts was limited. In addition to geographical proximity, as expected, co-operation was usually organised around some kind of historical linkages (Pete, 2017). During the socialist period, however, twinning was largely formal, rarely going beyond the bounds of protocol and culture. Moreover, the approval of the sister city agreements has always depended fundamentally on the relationship between the two states (Rechnitzer, 1999), and sister city cooperation has often been “banned” or discontinued (Süli-Zakar & Czimre, 2007).



In Hungary, the international activity for local and regional governments became of paramount importance only after the fall of the Iron Curtain (1989–1990) and its subsequent access to the European Union. Subnational diplomatic relations were initially limited to bilateral (twinning) relations, but as Hungary's accession to the EU approached, multilateral relations, namely the participation of Hungarian subnational actors in international networks, and then, after EU accession, the interaction between Hungarian municipalities and EU institutions came to the fore.

In Hungary, subnational actors have historically been limited in their international engagement due to Hungary's centralized approach to foreign policy. Mérey (2011) introduces that during the socialist era, connections between capital cities gained prominence, and they were established with central permission and support. These manifested first in council leaders' visits for cultural events and, later, extended towards gastronomic initiatives and cultural festivals. At that time, there were no international city organizations in the Eastern European countries due to the centralizing approach. In the 1980s, the opening towards the West was signalled by city diplomatic initiatives, particularly between Budapest and Vienna, Tel-Aviv and Frankfurt am Main. After the regime change in 1989–90, actors at the sub-national levels took increasing role in the international connections of the Eastern European countries (Mérey, 2011).

Regarding the geopolitical orientation of the sister city relationships, westward orientation (mainly Germany, Austria) was typical of the 1990s, but Hungarian-Hungarian (Transylvania, Upper Hungary, Vojvodina, Carpathian Ruthenia, etc.) relations became also stronger. The importance of Hungarian settlements' relationship with other ethnic Hungarian communities of



the neighbouring countries is the result of the Treaty of Trianon (1920). The victorious forces redrew the borders of Hungary so that it runs through Hungarian-majority areas. As a consequence, lost over two-thirds of its land to Austria, Czechoslovakia, Italy, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Poland and Romania, and 3.3 million Hungarians found themselves outside the new borders. In the context of the Hungarian-Hungarian city diplomacy relationship, in addition to transferring professional experience, it is particularly important to help and support the cities of Hungarians across the border in various forms. In 1989, after the fall of the Romanian communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu regime, the main motivation for establishing contact with Hungarian communities in Romania, who lived at a much lower standard of living than in Hungary, was to express solidarity with Hungarian communities across the border.¹

¹ Online interview with Katalin Sabján, Secretary of Foreign Affairs/ Hungarian National Association of Local Authorities (17.02.2025).

The Fundamental Law of Hungary allows local governments to cooperate with local governments of other countries within their functions and powers and become members of international organisations of local governments. In November 1990, Hungary was admitted to the Council of Europe, and through its Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the local governments integrated into the regional subnational diplomatic activities. The process of EU integration provided incentives for local governments to cooperate at the regional level through the general vision of the EU on the role of the regions, as well as the supports and programmes for interregional cooperation. In this vein, several Euroregions were created with Hungarian participation, Hardi (2007) listed 15 covering almost all directions along the border of the country. Euroregions promote connections and communication between local governments, local SMEs and local economic organizations. According to Hardi (2007), most of the Euroregions were launched after the Madrid Convention in 1997 (European Outline Convention on Trans-frontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities or Authorities). Another incentive for launching joint initiatives was the emergence of programmes specially developed to improve the collaboration between the borderland regions. The Phare Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) programme has been functioning on the Austrian-Hungarian border since 1995, a programme which, first limited to this specific border, was subsequently extended to every other border of Hungary. A good example within this programme was mentioned by Mérey (2011) which was the cooperation of Western Transdanubian counties with areas in Burgenland, Vienna, Slovakia and Slovenia in the field of road construction, establishing industrial parks and modernising public administration. A precedent of the Euroregions is the Alps-Adriatic Working Group which was established in 1978 and promotes co-operation between the states of the Eastern Alps and the Northern Adriatic region in the field of tourism, environmental protection, culture, science, politics, economy and European integration (Mérey, 2011).

Pámer et al. (2024) show that the first innovation of European cohesion policy with a focus on border regions was the INTERREG Community Initiative introduced in 1989. In the 2000-2006 programming period, the new member states, accessing in 2004, were also able to participate with limited timeframe and funding. In the 2007-2013 period “European Territorial Cooperation” (ETC) was declared as ‘Objective 3’ of Cohesion Policy, meaning cross-border cooperation – replacing the Community Initiative – became a part of mainstream EU structural policy.



One of the most prominent frameworks facilitating cross-border subnational interactions is the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), which provides a legal structure for partnerships across national borders from 2006. The Ister-Granum EGTC, for example, unites Hungarian and Slovak municipalities along the Danube River to promote economic development, local agriproduct promotion, tourism, and infrastructure projects since 2008.

The Hungary-Croatia IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) Cross-border Co-operation Programme 2007-2013 was a notable achievement which was approved by the European Commission in 2008 (Rácz, 2016). Among the beneficiaries there are local governments, associations, civil society organisations, as well as educational institutions. Considering the territorial deviation, smaller municipalities close to the border were characterized by civil society activity, while – moving away from the border – the dominance of larger organizations and institutions can be detected.

In order to benefit from European integration, local authorities have established links with the EU institutions, in particular the European Parliament and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR). Representatives of selected local and regional authorities are also directly involved in the work of the Committee of the Regions. To obtain information from the EU, the Hungarian regions and the capital city have opened representative offices in Brussels. The Hungarian regional representative offices were closed in the early 2010s for financial reasons, but the Budapest Representative Office continues to represent the interest of the capital city (Józsa, 2016). Hungary has 12 full members and 12 alternate members in the Committee of the Regions (CoR), in accordance with CoR rules and the Lisbon Treaty. Six of these members represent county governments, while the other six represent municipalities or districts of Budapest. Among them, nine belong



to the ruling parties (Fidesz and KDNP), and three are from opposition parties. The ruling party members sit in the moderately Eurosceptic, conservative European Conservatives and Reformists group, while two opposition members are part of the Party of European Socialists group, and one is independent.

HUNGARIAN LITERATURE ON PARADIPLOMACY

The increasing diplomatic activity of local and regional governments in Hungary after the fall of the Iron Curtain and its subsequent access to the European Union did not attract the attention of Hungarian researchers, or only to a limited extent. On the one hand, research on local and regional governments in Hungary focused primarily on the legal frameworks for the operation of domestic local and regional governments, the issues of centralisation and decentralisation, the legal and financial autonomy of local governments, and –

especially after 2010 – the relationship between local governments and central government (Bencsik, 2017; Pálné, 2021). Research on international studies, on the other hand, has mainly focused on the state as the main actor of international relations (Gazdag, 1997; Nuber, 2021) and ignored the issue of the international activity of local and regional governments. After World War II, only one scientific work, a book was written on city diplomacy, which touched upon the international relations of the Hungarian capital city, Budapest (Németh, 1947), and then the issue was forgotten for a long time. The issue of paradiplomacy came to the attention of researchers after the fall of the Iron Curtain (1989–1990). The first and so far the only comprehensive study covering all areas of the Hungarian subnational diplomacy, and therefore the relationship of the Hungarian subnational actors with the EU, was the article of Zolt Mérey, published in 2011 (Mérey, 2011). The study focused mainly, but not exclusively on the international activity of Budapest.

At the same time, several articles had been dedicated to different aspects of the international relations of subnational actors. The first articles in Hungary related to subnational diplomacy – for obvious reasons – focused on twinning relations. Studies dealing with town twinning mostly review the development of twinning relationships of a specific settlement (Bali & Kurilla, 2011; Biskup & Szűts, 2023; Gergő, 1999; Giczi & Sik, 2003, 2004; Kráncz, 2010; Nagy, 2011; Nagy & Nagy, 2013; Süli-Zakár, 2009, 2014; Tózs, 2021) or twinning between cities/towns in Hungary and another (European) country (Hajdú, 2012; Kurilla & Pap, 2009; Kurilla, 2010, 2011). It is interesting to note that in almost all of these publications a recurring theme is the trauma of the territories lost due to the Treaty of Trianon (Trianon trauma) and the question of twinning relations with settlements that once belonged to Hungary (historical Hungary, great Hungary). The so-called Hungarian-Hungarian re-



lations became important immediately after the fall of communism, since during the four decades of communist rule Trianon became a national taboo. Later, during Viktor Orbán's second term as prime minister, the question became a priority topic again. The studies emphasize the discrimination often suffered by Hungarians who have become minorities in neighbouring states, but at the same time they highlight that, in addition to the fact that twinning enables support for Hungarian communities in neighbouring countries it also creates an opportunity for the exchange of experiences in connection with EU accession. These studies mentioning the Trianon trauma and the Hungarian-Hungarian twinning focus solely on the domestic situation and are not connected to the broad international literature on identity paradiplomacy or perhaps protodiplomacy (e.g., Paquin, 2004; 2007; 2023). Among the articles, Zoltán Hajdú's study (2012) deserves special mention, which, in addition to city-level twinning relations, pays special attention to county-level relations in relation to Hungary and Switzerland.

Hungarian researchers placed particular emphasis also on the study of Central and Eastern European twinning cooperations, which are decisive for Hungary due to its geographical location (Hilbert, 2017; Kézai, 2022; Kézai & Párthy, 2023). In his study, Hilbert (2017) concluded that the number of twinning rela-



tionships between Visegrad Cooperation countries is negligible. The special feature of the study is that it is the first in the Hungarian literature to analyse the capital's twin district relationships. The study also highlighted that Central and Eastern European capitals, ignoring the international priorities of the state level, simply pursue their own priorities or try to open up to cities in other regions as a complement to state diplomacy. The same is confirmed by Petra Kézai's individual (2022) and later in her joint empirical research with Ádám Páthy (Kézai & Páthy, 2023), pointing out that there are no clearly defined Central and Eastern European priorities or systematically planned cooperation initiatives for twinning partnerships.

With the growth of Chinese influence in Europe, an article was also written about the impact of Chinese city diplomacy in Hungary. The study points out that cities are the main focus areas of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In line with Chinese foreign policy, Chinese city diplomacy helps achieve geopolitical and geostrategic goals. Budapest plays an important role in the success of BRI, as in addition to infrastructure investments, it promotes the local economic and social embedding of the project (Kiss & Porhaya, 2022).

The issue of cross-border cooperation has also appeared in Hungarian literature. The articles published on this topic primarily examine the cross-border relations

of counties and cities along the Hungarian border (Bali, 2012a, 2012b; Baranyai, 2007, 2009, 2010; Fejes, 2010; Fekete, 2020; Hakszer, 2017; Hardi, 2010; Páthy-Edelényi, 2005; Rechnitzer, 1999, 2005). The specificity of Béla Baranyai's work lies in the fact that in his study, he analyses the impact of the change brought about by the completion of the Schengen process on cross-border relations. The new dimensions of the border relations mean the growing importance of smaller scale, bi- and trilateral institutionalised interregional cooperations, primarily along the internal Schengen borders. In the case of Hungary and the neighbours on the other side of the internal Schengen borders, the border regions and the cross-border cooperation may promote the strengthening of the connecting (bridging) role, the reorganisation of the past integrations, the "reunification" of the spatial units torn apart by the Treaty of Trianon — in the optimal case the birth of a new transnational macro-regional economic space in the Carpathian Basin (Baranyai, 2009, 2010).

Despite the fact that there is a wide international literature on the issue of the EU and local and regional authorities (Keating, 2014; Pasquier, 2002; Rodriguez-Pose & Courty, 2018; Trobbiani, 2016), Hungary's accession to the European Union has not been followed by academic works analysing the special relationship between subnational actors and the European Union. This may be because researchers dealing with European integration focused primarily on the legal and political conditions of Hungary's accession, the functioning of integration institutions – especially the Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament – the EU decision-making process, community policies and EU advocacy. In contrast, research dealing with local governments focused on the cohesion policy (Fargó, 2016) and eventually on the operation of the Committee of the Regions (Agg, 2011). At the same time, it can be stated that, so far, no studies have analyzed other relevant issues related to the Committee of the

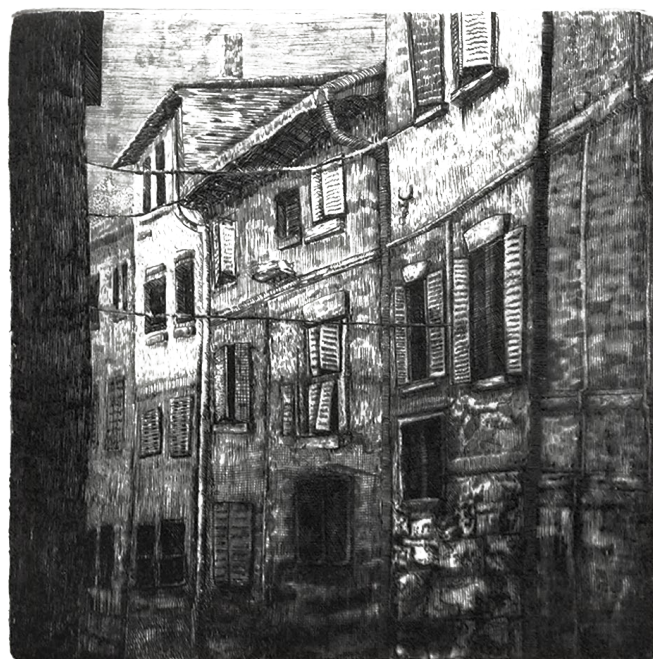
Regions beyond the level of university textbooks. These issues include its parliamentarisation process, its capacity to assert local and regional interests (especially considering the limited representativeness of this EU body), and the role of interregional groups, semi-formal bodies within the Committee.

The first analyses on this topic were published by Péter Szegvári (2002) and then by Zoltán Simon (2007) and present the possibility of local and regional authorities advocating for the EU. Although Szegvári's paper was considered a real novelty in Hungarian paradiplomatic literature at the time of its publication in 2002, due to EU enlargement and subsequent institutional reforms, it can no longer be considered an up-to-date article. Simon examines the theoretical framework of the possibilities of subnational actors to assert their interests in the EU. The study is based on an article published in 1996 by Hooghe and Marks (Hooghe & Marks, 1996) which describes the EU advocacy channels of local authorities. These might include the national pathway, i.e. advocacy through the Council of the EU, the European Council and the Permanent Representations of the Member States; the so-called Brussels based advocacy, i.e. advocacy in the European Commission and the European Parliament; the Committee of the Regions as a specific EU body of representatives of European regions; EU interest representation networks, subnational representative offices in Brussels. After that, for a decade and a half, no study had been published on the relationship between Hungarian subnational actors and the EU institutions.

Balázs Brucker started to deal with this topic once again after joining the HUN-REN CERS Institute for Regional Studies, after defending his doctoral dissertation on the advocacy of national and ethnic minorities in the European Parliament. A study examines the advocacy of subnational governments in the EU (Brucker & Finta, 2023), with a particular focus on the relationship be-

tween the European Parliament and local and regional authorities. The study intends to analyse whether the European Parliament can represent sub-national interests in the EU decision making process (Brucker, 2022a). It is particularly interesting that Brucker was the first in Hungary to deal extensively with the issue of intergroups in the European Parliament. In one of his studies, he analyses the role of the European Parliament's intergroups in territorial advocacy. The aim of that paper is to discuss whether semi-official groups of MEPs are able to channel territory-focused interests into EP decision-making. According to Brucker's hypothesis, these semi-formal forums of the European Parliament can properly exploit the capabilities inherent in semi-formal operations and therefore effectively participate in the representation of territorial interests (Brucker, 2022b).

The issue of European networks of municipalities is also closely linked to the problem of European integration and subnational actors. Only two articles have been published on this issue, both of which are studies by Laura Kovács (Kovács, 2010, 2016). The first article outlines the specific relations between local authorities and the Council of Europe and between local authorities and the EU and then presents the European networks involving local authori-



ties (UCLG, ULA, CLRAE, CEMR, etc.). The main finding of the study is that the position of local governments within the EU institutional system is still weak, but it is getting stronger from time to time (Kovács, 2010, p. 115). The second study by Laura Kovács analyses the experiences of Hungarian municipalities in the field of municipal networking. The study highlights the advantages of municipal networking and rightly points out the need to employ at least one staff member in Hungarian municipal offices who deals with international tenders of municipalities and the mapping of municipal networks (Kovács, 2016, p. 10).

PARADIPLOMACY RELATED RESEARCH IN HUNGARY

The publications mentioned above were not the outcome of collaborative research projects but rather the result of independent individual research efforts.

The only research in Hungary that (partially) concerned the international activity of local governments was carried out in the early 2000s. The research analyses the operation of local governments from different perspectives. Among others, it concerns the assessment and expectations of local government leaders, the IT equipment of local governments, the situation of minority self-governments, the Roma population of Hungarian settlements and the issue of twin cities. The analysis dealing with twinning towns touches on the factors behind the establishment of twinning relationships before and after the regime change, the geographical direction of twinning relations, and deals with the twinning of Dunaújváros, a medium-sized city in Hungary, as a case study. At the same time, the research is limited to bilateral relations and does not affect the multilateral cooperations of Hungarian local governments preparing the EU accession. After this research project, no comprehensive research on subnational diplomacy was conducted in Hungary for nearly twenty years.

Based on the previous publications and personal research experience of the Institute (especially publications of Petra Kézai and Zoltán Hajdú concerning twinning relations, Zoltán Pámer's publications on CBC, Balázs Brucker's publications on the enforcement of local governments' interests in the EU), HUN-RENCERS Institute for Regional Studies launched its comprehensive research project on the topic of subnational diplomacy, which, for the first time in Hungary, touches both on the bilateral and multilateral relations of local and regional governments.

The Institute for Regional Studies is a leader among national think tanks in regional science, not only because of its size, but also its presence in different regions of the country through its four scientific departments, providing valuable local knowledge and embeddedness. The knowledge of the spatial patterns of natural, social and economic resources and the reduction of spatial disparities, which requires a complex social science approach, are key to the country's competitiveness and balanced development. Only the Institute for Regional Studies of the CERS, the base institute of Hungarian regional science, can provide this in Hungary, which has the critical mass for interdisciplinary research in cooperation with representatives of economics, geography, sociology, political science, law and history.

A four-year research program (from 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2027) was launched at the Institute for Regional Studies of the Centre for Economic and Regional Studies under the leadership of academician Ilona Pálné Kovács with the aim of exploring the international relations of local and regional governments. The program is supported by the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund of the Hungarian Ministry of Culture and Innovation. The 12-member interdisciplinary research group explores the connections affecting the international re-

lations of local and regional governments primarily using the methods of political science, social geography, regional science, economics, law and history.

According to our assumption, Hungarian municipalities are only able to take advantage of the opportunities arising from sub-national diplomacy to a limited extent. The centralized governance system provides limited room for manoeuvre, but the missing motivations, capacities, and culture of cooperation presumably serve also as an explanation for this. Our research can prove that well-managed sub-national diplomacy is an additional resource, the use of which can improve local living conditions. Furthermore, cooperation between the central government and local actors in nurturing international relations can improve the chances of both the central government and sub-national governments in asserting their interests more effectively.

To carry out the research project, the approach is based on a bilateral and multilateral classification of local governments' diplomatic activities, following the traditional categorisation of diplomatic theory describing inter-state relations.

The analysis of bilateral, twinning and project-based, periodic relations of local governments will follow several approaches: geography of relations, definition of the role of linguistic and cultural heritage, exploration of patterns; analysis of the specifics of bilateral international relations. The other main direction of classical diplomacy, multilateral self-government diplomacy, will also be examined, including the role of international organizations, especially the European Union. The aim of the analyses is to show to what extent Hungarian municipalities are embedded, how they behave in the international space, for what and how they use their international relations systems.

Empirical research on local government paradiplomacy might combine qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative methods are exploited to provide an international overview and to assess the state of play in Hungary. In the field of local government's international relations, these tools are mainly used in the case of metropolises or global cities, therefore their adaptation to smaller settlements may be a methodological novelty. The quantitative research of urban networks also touches on the fields of economic geography and political economy and can be a good complement to the more common, qualitative research.

Case studies are an integral part of HUN-RENCERS's research project, which cover the evolution of international relations, the context of local actors and decisions, their content, local impact, what actors and institutions participate in shaping international relations, what knowledge and administrative capacity are needed, how much awareness is characteristic of the development of relations, whether personalities, personal relationships, traditions, and the ethnic composition of local society play a role. Last, but not least, analyses among national associations of local governments will reveal the role they play in the international relations of member municipalities and the country.

CONCLUSION

Our study pointed out that the vast majority of studies related to the international activities of domestic subnational actors deal only with bilateral twinning relations, with a special, recurring topic, the Trianon trauma in case of the twinning with neighbouring countries, while the issue of the relationship of local and regional governments with international (especially EU) institutions and their participation in international/European self-government's networks did not attract the attention of Hungarian

researchers. The main reason of this shortage is that research on local and regional governments in Hungary focused primarily on the legal frameworks for the operation of domestic local and regional governments, the issues of centralisation and decentralisation, the legal and financial autonomy of local governments, and the relationship between local governments and central government, while research on international studies, has mainly focused on the state as the main actor of international relations, and ignored the issue of the international activity of local and regional governments.

A four-year research project launched in January 2024 at the HUN-REN CERS Institute for Regional Studies, the first comprehensive research in Hungary on subnational diplomacy, aims to fill this gap. In the year since the launch of the project, based on the results of our empirical research (questionnaires, interviews), several manuscripts in Hungarian and English have been elaborated on the mapping of Hungarian twinnings, on the geopolitical aspects of sister city relations, on CBC, on the special relationship between the European Union and subnational actors, as well as on international networks of local and regional governments. These articles, after publication, will contribute to the expansion of the Hungarian literature on paradiplomacy and the English-language writings will also enable foreign researchers to get acquainted with the results of paradiplomatic research in Hungary.

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