

# PhD Dissertation Theses

## **Situational boundary formation practices in the everyday lives of the people living in Beregdéda, Transcarpathia**

Julianna Kohut-Ferki

Supervisor: Dr. Veronika Lajos

Associate Professor



UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN

Doctoral School of History and Ethnography

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## I. Objective of the dissertation, identification of the topic

Macro-social events always influence the perspective of interpreting the socio-cultural lifeworld locally. One element of the macro-level interpretive field is that the local lifeworld of Beregdéda is part of a young nation-state, Ukraine, created in 1991, which was at war with Russia also at the time of the empirical fieldwork of this dissertation, in 2015-2016.

The topic of this dissertation is one of the central issues of ethnicity studies, the examination of situational re-interpretation strategies of different identities in a rapidly changing socio-cultural society. In the case of the present work, the interpretation of the complex socio-cultural environment of Beregdéda, characterised by Hungarian-Ukrainian-Gypsy inter-ethnic relations (social practices and discourses), and the examination of the processes of situational boundary formation of the inhabitants of the local society. The objective of the research is to investigate when and on what occasions the separation from other ethnicities or the identification with the own ethnicity is significant for the Hungarian, Gypsy and Slavic population living together in Beregdéda.

In my current work, I am looking for answers to the following research questions. I want to find out:

- I. What ethnic strategies do Hungarians, Ukrainians and Gypsies develop in different life situations when living together? In multi-ethnic living situations, when and how does ethnicity become significant or, on the contrary, when does it lose its significance symbolically or at the level of social practices?
- II. What are the issues and topics that create symbolic boundaries in the everyday life of a mixed-ethnic community, also observable in social practice?
  - 2.1. What rules and values shape the relationship between groups of different religions and cultures?
  - 2.2. How does religious practice and religious identity function as boundaries, how does it connect and separate the members of a multi-ethnic local society in Transcarpathia, located 5 km from Beregszász (Berehove), close to the Hungarian-Ukrainian border? What similarities and differences can be found in coexistence situations in the field of religious practice?
  - 2.3. What are the social processes in which ethnic consciousness is dominant and in which actions take on an ethnicised character?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Fenton 1999: 25. Feischmidt 2010: 10.

- III. Distinctions based on ethnicity often take on significance in the worlds of religion, language, neighborhood and work. It takes shape in the relationship system of the other and in the institution of mixed marriage. But the content of this can vary.
- 3.1. How does the role and importance of language manifest itself?
  - 3.2. How does the institution of neighborhood affect ethnicity, the relationship between the Hungarian, Ukrainian and Gypsy ethnic groups living in Beregdéda?
  - 3.3. Are ethnic boundaries demarcating the work of ethnic groups? Is there cooperation and joint working between ethnic groups? How is this cooperation organised?
- IV. How is the experience of the other in a multi-ethnic community? When does the other, who is different than your own emerge, at what occasions?
- 4.1. Why is it necessary to articulate otherness, and how does the emergence of the new other modify, erase, rebuild or create symbolic boundaries between the ethnicities living together?
  - 4.2. Who are the participants in mixed marriages and how is ethnic differentiation organized in their case? Do mixed ethnic and religious marriages play a role in challenging stereotypes about ethnicity?

The first chapter of the thesis is the introduction, in the subsections of which I present the subject and purpose of the research, the research questions, the ethnographic fieldwork location. I then describe the research methods, the factors influencing data collection and the background to the research. The introductory chapter of the thesis also includes the theoretical framework of the research, where I introduce the schools of ethnicity research, and then I write about ethnicity research in Transcarpathia and the concepts used. In order to better understand the ethnic relations in the local society, in the next section of the dissertation I will present the historical processes, on the one hand, the circumstances of the resettlement based on archival research and interviews, and on the other hand, the social factors influencing the coexistence at the time of the field research. A further chapter of the dissertation focuses on the themes of coexistence that have a group-forming quality for the community. One such typical practice is religious and linguistic segregation. In the next section of the thesis, the themes that seem to emerge most from the field experiences and are relevant for boundary formation, such as neighbourhood, work, relations with the other and mixed marriage, are discussed.

## II. Outline of the methods used

The research required for writing the doctoral dissertation involves, on the one hand, diachronic research using the method of historical anthropology, and, on the other hand, synchronous research, ethnographic fieldwork, which forms the basis of the manuscript. My research, using the method of historical anthropology, examined the circumstances and socio-cultural significance of the Bereg-area resettlement in Beregdéda that took place in 1945-47. The research on the resettlement began in the Beregszász (Berehove) department of the Transcarpathian County State Archives (hereinafter referred to as KMÁLB). Here I examined Déda's collective farm materials, and then I studied the documents of the Déda material between 1945 and 1950 in the Transcarpathian County State Archives in Ungvár (Uzhhorod). Focusing primarily on Beregdéda from the resettlement to the Beregszász district, I was able to find some relevant sources for my topic from the 4062 pages of material reviewed in four different fonds (78, 64, 1349, 1156). A micro-level examination of the historical background of the resettlement to Beregdéda gives an idea of the everyday life of the local people.

The ethnographic fieldwork on which my dissertation is based was carried out from 2015 to 2016, spending one week in the field every two months on average.

The sampling of the population of the settlement was random and not representative, but it was important to keep in mind that no ethnic or religious community should be under- or over-represented in proportion to its size, or even completely excluded from the interviews. During the present research, I conducted informal interviews with people from different social strata of the village, of mixed religious and ethnic backgrounds and of different age groups, and conducted a total of 57 semi-structured interviews. Ethnographic fieldwork goes beyond data collection using the interview method. In empirical research, the researcher participates in the life of the local community, recording and interpreting his/her observations, what the people in the field allow us to see of themselves.<sup>2</sup> I recorded my unstructured conversations with people in the local community, as well as my experiences and impressions in the field, in a field diary. During the fieldwork, I also participated in various secular and ecclesiastical events organised in the locality.

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<sup>2</sup> Feischmidt, <http://mmi.elte.hu/szabadbolcseszlet/mmi.elte.hu/szabadbolcseszlet/indexa3ef> (Date of download: 15.11.2024.)

### III. Location of the research

The site of the empirical ethnographic research is Beregdéda, which is located in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine, in the Beregszász (Berehove) district, next to the Hungarian-Ukrainian state border.

Beregdéda was founded in 1967, by the merger of Déda<sup>3</sup> and Mezőhomok<sup>4</sup>. Elek Fényes (1851) mentions Déda as a Hungarian village with a Reformed mother church (600 Reformed, 168 Greek Catholic, 23 Roman Catholic) and Homok as a Russian village (4 Roman Catholic, 8 Reformed, 176 Greek Catholic, 6 Jewish)<sup>5</sup>.

The local life world, the socio-cultural characteristics of the settlement, its ethnic composition and proportion are equally decisive in the interpretation of coexistence. According to the latest 2001 census data, Beregdéda is a settlement of 2013 inhabitants, 79.8% Hungarian, 15% Ukrainian and 5% Gypsy. Beregdéda is predominantly Greek Catholic, with Reformed, Orthodox and Roman Catholic inhabitants. According to the statistical data received from the village administration, the population of the settlement covers 100% of the four denominations mentioned above (Greek Catholic, Reformed, Orthodox, Roman Catholic), but my field experience and the opinion of religious leaders shows a much more nuanced picture. The three ethnic groups living in the settlement (Hungarian, Ukrainian, Gypsy) have a total of nine churches or small churches to choose from locally.

Beregdéda is a target of Ukrainian-Hungarian national policy and tourism, which also affects Transcarpathia, and as part of Ukraine it is multi-ethnic, a local imprint of global changes. It offers a great opportunity to explore different aspects of ethnicity (cultural, linguistic, religious).

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<sup>3</sup> Lehoczky mentions it in 1881 as a "nice Hungarian" village with 134 houses, called Déda. Lehoczky 1881: 220.

<sup>4</sup> In the 14th century Lehoczky records it as the estate of the Homoki family with 51 houses as a "magyar-tót" village. Lehoczky 1881: 295.

<sup>5</sup> Fényes 1851: 115. (Volume II.) Homok; 1851: 248. (Volume I.) Déda

#### IV. List of the results in thesis form

In local society, ethnic coexistence and ethnic boundary formation become situationally important with different emphases and themes. Macro-social events such as the resettlement in the past, the war conflict and its circumstances have had an impact on Hungarian-Ukrainian-Gypsy ethnic relations in the period under study in several ways. I summarize my findings in the following thesis points:

1. The migration of Slavic ethnic settler families to Beregdéda – which changed the ethnic proportions – is a decisive macro-social event in the Ukrainian-Hungarian-Gypsy coexistence in the local life. According to archival sources, the families arriving in the settlement from Verhovina, as highlighted by the narratives of the people concerned (both movers and receivers), moved to the villages of the Beregszász district between 1945 and 1947. In the case of Beregdéda, archival sources testify to the arrival of twenty families. The resettlement was planned and conscious on the part of the authorities, but it was not seen as a forced step for the people who moved in. The authorities provided the settlers with favorable conditions for resettlement. Various correspondence and records testify to the settlers and Beregdéda inhabitants living in the same house. A 1947 letter of complaint from the leaders of the settlers' housing authorities shows that the settlement of the resettlers in the houses of the Déda families did not go smoothly. The only thing that mattered in the process of moving in was where there was a vacancy, and the people of Déda were not asked about moving into a house. This forced living in the same house, despite the difficult circumstances, is evidenced of a humane attitude, where the settler who came to know by the host family was seen more positively than all the other Slavic families who came to the village. The settler family, which had become acquainted with the settler family in a close relationship, later became a positive counterexample to the generally negative views that discriminated against settlers. The event of settlement in the past is a local memory, a knowledge with potential practical functions that can be used in the present to deal with the encounter with the other.

2. Religion is a determining factor in the coexistence of the local society of Beregdéda, which becomes a factor in shaping ethnic identity situationally. At the micro level, boundaries can be crossed in everyday life, with members of different denominations attending each other's liturgies at times of common prayer or when religious festivals do not coincide. Denominational boundaries are more rigid at the level of church leaders but are not impassable. The absence of jointly organized (ecumenical) occasions of the different churches is overridden by the attachment of church leaders to localism. The choice of religion follows the patterns of local

society on the one hand, and on the other hand it reacts to macro-social processes (e.g. church schism, emergence of small churches) along the lines of different social and economic interests and in decision-making situations. For the individual, religious conversion can mean a break with tradition, but it can also mean a need for socio-cultural appreciation and the possibility of a new beginning. For ethnicised believers, conversion is an opportunity to show themselves, to be seen in different roles and functions.

3. The deepening of inter-ethnic relations, the nuancing of stereotypes and the positive empirical experience of living together were facilitated by a series of everyday encounters in neighborhood. The results of my research show that being neighbors does not exclude the possibility of ethnically, religiously and culturally mixed good-neighborly relations between Hungarians, Ukrainians and Gypsies in Beregdéda. A deepened relationship in the neighborhood helps to get to know each other better, to put any religious and ethnic differences to one side and thus to bring general human traits to the fore. A culturally mixed neighborhood is also fostered by the community's axiomatic view that it is not appropriate to be angry with one's neighbor, and that maintaining good neighborly relations is a credit to one's own merits. Good neighborliness among people in the local community can be seen as a virtue and an important social recognition. However, the knowledge gained through personal experience is an exception to the commonly held stereotypes and is not sufficient to overturn them. The 'generalized' negative stereotypical image and the experiences and perceptions that differ from it are present in the everyday life of the ethnic groups living together, as parallel, complementary perceptions.

4. In social relations, the neighborhood is a key element, a bond that creates a sense of belonging in the settlement. Local identity is an important element of Beregdéda's identity, and within the village it is primarily the street where the residence is located. My field experience shows that the social and neighborhood relations of the locals influence their territorial attachment. It can be observed that the neighborhood relationship has both physical and symbolic boundaries. In my thesis, I have shown that in the local society of Beregdéda, physical boundaries (such as a road junction or the last house in a street) are more conducive to drawing the boundaries of an extended neighborhood relationship for groups living on the margins of society. Among the more 'affluent' and financially stable, the neighborhood relationship is more 'constricted' and closed, so that it is mostly closed at the immediate neighborhood, or may be drawn along the same lines of interest, ignoring physical boundaries and leaving out some houses.

5. The results of my research show that in the local society the meaning of work, the possibilities and occasions of Hungarian-Ukrainian-Gypsy work are formulated within socio-

cultural frameworks. The interpretation of the neighborhood relationship is closely related to the institution of "exchange work". The organisation of seasonal work is based on neighborhood relations, but religious affiliation does not become a condition for this. In the case of temporary work, ethnicity, as well as religion, can be an exclusion criterion for the organization of work in the case of Gypsies only. In the locals' understanding, joint work with Gypsies can be interpreted as a subordinate relationship of patron-client. Those Gypsies who choose opportunities and livelihoods other than the subordinate client position in the asymmetrical patron-client relationship become "shirkers" in the eyes of the majority society. In my thesis, however, I have pointed out that the accusation of "work avoidance" of Gypsies is also due to their different understanding of work. The local embeddedness of notions of work and non-work in the case of Gypsies is ethnicizing and can be explained by changes in social order, and also results from social difference.

6. Foreign employment has deep roots in Transcarpathia, which may be motivated not only by money-making, but also by the desire for adventure, the desire to experience positive narratives of those returning home or working abroad, and the desire to verify the reality of these narratives. At the same time, the perception of the "invisible" activities that were traditionally performed by women at home and around the house, and which were previously considered low-prestige "non-work, has also changed. One reason for this is that welcoming tourists to Beregdéda has become a money-earning, highly valued job that constitutes a significant part of the family's financial income. In fact, the accommodation and catering of tourists is a money-making activity resulting from the necessity to "not work", which demonstrates the ability to adapt quickly, especially for women. The importance of this income is shown by the change in the use of space during the beach season and the fact that the family also accommodates tourists in their own living spaces in order to maximize income.

7. The presence of the others in Beregdéda creates new situations and challenges for the locality due to the mass arrival of tourists. The appearance of the other in the local society has given rise to the possibility of reconciling different cultural and economic interests, the possibility of mutual curiosity, the possibility of nuancing and overturning stereotypes, and the creation of new stereotypes when encountering difficulties in interpretation. In my opinion, the difference in values is ethnicised in the local society, where the Ukrainian appears in the narratives as a traveler seeking experience and preferring excursions, while the Hungarian is an owner who spends his life beautifying his house and does not want to leave his home for excursions. This can be seen as a clash of values that are "fixed", oriented towards staying in place and those that are different, oriented towards mobility.

8. At the time of the fieldwork, in the spring of 2015, the Russian-Ukrainian war conflicts increased the chances of different ethnicising, stereotypical interpretations. At the same time, the arrival of stranger vacationers in Beregdéda led to a strengthening of relations between Ukrainians, Hungarians and Gypsies in the local society, and to a unification of them. The formulation and interpretation of otherness did not begin with the 2014 Russian-Ukrainian war and its local effects. Locals have their own strategies and practices to cope with the emerging others. This has its origins in past resettlement and the memory of living in the same house with Slavic families arriving in the settlement.

9. In the midst of a war that deepens the unstable economic situation in Ukraine, the appearance and return of the other is interpreted as a "threat". But the Ukrainian tourist arriving in the local society was a source of livelihood and financial income for the locals, so individual interests overrode various macro narratives and fear of the other. It can be seen, therefore, that the interpretation of the other is constantly changing in line with various regional and global cultural and economic processes, and is formulated with individual interests in mind.

10. Mixed marriages between Roma and other ethnic groups are not common in Beregdéda. Decision-making strategies in Ukrainian-Hungarian mixed marriages are organized according to situational strategies of practices based on language, denominational and everyday customs, adapting to the macro-social context and taking into account the complexity of the family. In contrast, external interpretations of mixed marriages often focus on issues of ethnic and denominational assimilation and survival. It can be concluded that the rise of Ukrainian-Hungarian mixed marriages has made people living in the local society interested in to treat with reservations the attempts to interpret social conflicts in an ethnicizing way, which is typical of the macro-society.

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[http://mek.oszk.hu/19200/19269/pdf/19269\\_3.pdf](http://mek.oszk.hu/19200/19269/pdf/19269_3.pdf) (2022. 10. 11.)

## VI. Publications related to the topic of the dissertation



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MTMT ID: 10084299

### List of publications related to the dissertation

#### Hungarian book chapters (2)

1. **Kohut-Ferki, J.**: Az etnikai együttélés jellemzői Beregdédán.  
In: Kölcsönös átszövődések : A Balassi Intézet Márton Áron Szakkollégiuma 2016. évi PhD-konferenciájának tanulmányaiból. Szerk.: Novák Anikó, Külgazdasági és Külügyminisztérium, Budapest, 199-211, 2017. ISBN: 9786155389627
2. **Kohut-Ferki, J.**: Vallás és etnicitás összefüggései a kárpátaljai Beregdédán a 21. század elején.  
In: Terek, intézmények, átmenetek. Szerk.: Fedinec Csilla, Balassi Intézet Márton Áron Szakkollégium, Budapest, 234-248, 2015, (Határhelyzetek, ISSN 2064-3918 ; 8.) ISBN: 9786155389559

#### Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (3)

3. **Kohut-Ferki, J.**: A felekezeti és etnikai vegyes házasság elterjedése és társadalmi értelmezése Beregdédán.  
*Kult. Köz.* 13 (4), 39-48, 2022. ISSN: 0133-2597.  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.35402/kek.2022.4.6>
4. **Kohut-Ferki, J.**: A 20. század közepi beregdédai betelepítés mikrotörténeti vizsgálata.  
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5. **Kohut-Ferki, J.**: Beregdédai magyarok és a faluba költözött telepések együttélése az 1940-es évek második felében.  
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Foreign language scientific articles in Hungarian journals (1)

7. **Kohut-Ferki, J.:** The Interpretation of Strangeness and its Impact on the Local Society in Beregdéda, Transcarpathia.  
*Ethnogr. folklor. Carpathica.* 25, 87-106, 2023. ISSN: 0139-0600.  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.47516/ethnographica/25/2023/12498>

**List of other publications**

Hungarian book chapters (1)

8. **Kohut-Ferki, J.:** A beregszászi cigány nemzetiségű magyar anyanyelvű gyerekek iskolázottsági helyzete.  
In: Határhelyzetek IV. : Hagomány és jövőkép. Anyanyelv(ek), oktatáspolitikai stratégiák, karrierkövetés. Szerk.: Kötél Emőke, Szoták Szilvia, Balassi Intézet Márton Áron Szakkollégium, Budapest, 121-143, 2013. ISBN: 9789638742377

The Candidate's publication data submitted to the Tudóstér have been validated by DEENK on the basis of the Journal Citation Report (Impact Factor) database.

24 March, 2025



9. In press:

Erőss Ágnes – **Kohut-Ferki Julianna** – Kovály Katalin – Tátrai Patrik

Az időskorúak migrációja, mint transznacionális családi stratégia: kárpátaljai áttelepülők Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg megyében. Publication venue: *Socio.hu. Társadalomtudományi Szemle. A jóléti migráció folyamatai a magyarországi vidéki térségekben. Thematic issue.* Expected publication of the study: Issue 2/2025.

10. In press:

Tátrai Patrik – Ferenc Viktória – **Kohut-Ferki Julianna** – Kovály Katalin – Molnár József

Maneuvering between nationalizing policies: ethnically marked choices in the Ukrainian-Hungarian intermarriages in Transcarpathia, Ukraine. Title of the volume: *Minorities, Identity and Intermarriage: European Perspective.*

Editors: Lendák-Kabók Karolina – Martin Klatt.

Publication venue: *Routledge Advances in Minority Studies*. Series editors: Stavroula Pipyrou and Kyriaki Topidi. Publication date: 2025