

## *Life in the Village Cut in Two*

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to examine the particular case of Nagyszelmenc and Kisszelmenc, the twin cities that were separated due to the changes of history in the 20th century. The main aim is to present the social and economic consequences of the arbitrary border pulling that made these two cities the part of Slovakia and Ukraine. The problem is analysed in the frames of cross border relations which uses multiple perspectives and interdisciplinary indicators. The conclusion of the study indicates that the border pulling caused huge damages both economically and politically and had consequences on the twin cities' social relations as well because of the separated families. The paper also raises the question of the current visa problem that means an obstacle for effective relations and draws the attention to further economic problems.

**Keywords:** border pulling, twin villages, separated families, shopping tourism, visa

### Introduction

For the topic of this paper I have selected my village called Nagyszelmenc (*Velké Slemence*), a small but nowadays well-known settlement in Eastern Slovakia. The Slovak Nagyszelmenc is the twin village of Kisszelmenc (*Mali Selmenci*), which is currently located in Subcarpathia, in Western Ukraine. Both villages were part of the Hungarian Kingdom in Ung County until the end of the World War I, which also led to the conclusion of the Treaty of Paris in 1920. After the peace talks near Paris in 1920, Ung County together with the detached North Eastern counties was attached to Czechoslovakia, which was created at the end of the World War I and unravelled on 1 January, 1993. The twin villages returned back to Hungary after the First Vienna Award of 2 November, 1938, hereupon, they have belonged again to the motherland for 6 years until the end of 1944. Towards the end of the World War II the

Czechoslovak authorities returned back to this area, but they were driven away by the Soviet Union, who was pushing its borders to the West, thus it annexed the Eastern Kisszelmenc, the smaller part of the twin villages. The Soviet Union drew a new border between the houses in the village. This border was shifted back and forth within the village for a short time, and it remained there where it still stands nowadays. Soon, an Iron Curtain was built inside Szelmenc, which in fact hermetically blocked the Soviet Union from the other countries. After the new regime, the Czechoslovak-Soviet border became a Slovak-Ukraine border, and later it stood for the Eastern border of the European Union. Currently, a Schengen border lies in the place of Stalin's Iron Curtain. Due to the long struggles, on 23 December, 2005 an international pedestrian-cyclist border was opened between the twin villages – open from 8 am to 8 pm – , which resulted in the fall of Europe's last Iron Curtain.

Although, it is relevant to mention that the two villages have never entirely been one administrative unit, thus both villages had their own separate self-governments. The incorrect denomination that the twin villages were one village in the past comes from the fact that the inhabitants of Nagyszelmenc and Kisszelmenc used the community institutions jointly; over time, the houses coalesced, too, and the two villages gradually merged together. Nevertheless, the villages have never become united legally. Apart from this, I think that it is completely understandable that the inhabitants of the twin villages treat the half cut village as one settlement, and despite their separate municipalities they lived the joys and sorrows of everyday life together as one community, one village.

In this paper I attempt to discover in what extent did the Soviet-Czechoslovak border, arbitrarily drawn in 1944, influence the life of the twin villagers – Nagyszelmenc and Kisszelmenc –, how did they face the difficulties of life forced upon them by the central power; moreover, I try to find out whether it was worth opening the border between the two settlements.

## Methodology

The relations formed in border zones or border regions are called cross border relations by the social and cultural studies. The professionals are examining settlements or communities, which are located near borders, or the inhabitants' lifestyle which changed greatly or completely due to the border lines drawn over their heads. The examination is always

complex, thus the experts try to investigate the problem from multiple perspectives. In order to understand the nature of cross border relations, firstly, the notion of border has to be understood: “The state border is an imaginary line that separates the area of states and the non-sovereign states from each other”- (Rechnitzer). Throughout the history, these borders many times and continually alter as a result of great power interests. However, besides the artificial boundaries natural boundaries can be formed, too, which are usually created next to some kind of natural phenomenon. Over the years, the majority of border sections have become permanent, and thus cross border relations have been established between the neighbouring countries and the people who live there. These relations were primarily economic in nature, and were especially influenced by the political situation of the neighbouring country. An appropriate example can be the influence of Capitalism on the border regions after the World War II; thus with the help of the free market the border regions developed rapidly, while any development can be detected in the countries of the Soviet Union. The closed nature of the Soviet Union, its inward politics manifested mostly in the strengthening of borders and the neglect of border regions, which in many cases resulted in their conscious deconstruction. The best example can be the Western border of the Soviet Union, where the Soviet soldiers often used grenades and electrical signalling system in order to hermetically block East and West from each other. “Only the villagers and the people with permission could enter the wide border zone (...) Until the mid-sixties both personal and official relationships were neglected, the mined border really divided two worlds”- (Hardi). A change was brought by the new regime. By the disintegration of the Soviet Union its external borders also flew down. In the once underdeveloped Western Hungarian border regions a recovery began. Due to Austria’s EU membership, these regions could also join the INTERREG development programs, which contributed to their current status as the most developed regions in Hungary. However, the improvement of economic relations led to better personal relationships, too. It was found during research, that the people of different ages in the border regions experienced the closed nature of the border differently. The survey reveals that those people who are now older than 60 mostly felt a sense of confinement. On the other hand, the younger generation responded to the border with humour, and this feeling began to be gradually replaced by familiarity- (Hardi). This is understandable, as the years passed the border restrictions were also in decline. Along the border and the people living in border regions evolved a sort of notion regarding the other side of the border. This is natural, since in the almost hermetically blocked border lines people did not know anything about the people

on the other side. So certain stereotypes begun to emerge in the people. “The stereotypes are generally valid, based on exaggeration, and are the result of the specific cognitive ability which leads to simplified images. The basis of their foundation can be an unrealistic information heard from other people when far-reaching conclusions are drawn from isolated cases, but it may occur that existing, small differences are exaggerated- (Bindorffer)”. These stereotypes are largely connected with the Mental Map evolved in humans, which is one of the ways of the study of cross border relations. The essence of it is that the people know mostly the environment, the place where they live. Getting away from their living space, they are less capable of creating a realistic picture of their environment. “Thus we feel a settlement which is beyond a border, river or mountain more distant than the one that is in the same distance, but on our side. This mental distance changes when the border becomes permeable, thus a bridge is built on the river” (Hardi). This is mostly true when a certain border section, where the individual lives, is completely closed, so its crossing is prevented both in time and space. People living in a well-protected and strict border region know very little about the people living on the other side of their settlements. “The closed nature of the border prevented, made almost impossible the contact, cooperation, the cultivation of personal relationships and the creation of new ones with the outside territories”- (Nárai). At the end of her study Márta Nárai concludes that because of this the inhabitants know very little about the settlements on the other side of the border, which leads to the creation of certain stereotypes and associations.

To summarise the cross border relations, it can be examined from multiple perspectives, such as the intensity of economic relations, or the intensity of social relations in the cross border regions. These relations – mostly the social relationships – are highly dependent on the closed nature of the border. A strong border can have an impact on the micro world of the cross border community, and even negatively influence their life. In contrast, a relatively freely permeable border can positively affect the people’s living space, as the new social and economic relations can improve the quality of people’s life living there, and thereby develop the region.

### **Nagyszelmenc, the Half Cut Village**

Nagyszelmenc had a troubled fate in the entire 20th century. It resembles a bit to a stepchild who was not wished by anyone. The twin village, which has its first written record from 1332,

belonged to Hungary till the conclusion of the Treaty of Paris in 1920. However, in 1920 it was attached to Czechoslovakia as a result of the highland's annexation from the motherland. After 18 years, when the village began to resign with its fate, the First Vienna Award of 1938 re-annexed the tiny village to Hungary. Nevertheless, this only lasted for 7 years due to the village's annexation to Czechoslovakia in 1945. After the World War II the Soviet Union drew the new border in the middle of the twin village. The major part of the twin villages remained on the Slovak side with its school, nursery, cemetery, Greek Catholic and Protestant Churches, while the smaller part was left on the Ukrainian side with the Roman Catholic Church. The cemetery's division was also among the plans, but eventually the final border line left the cemetery untouched. The village which remained on the Slovak side was still called Nagyszelmenc, while the Ukrainian part of the village got a name, Kisszelmenc. At first, people probably did not understand what happened, they only perceived that in a short period of time Soviet and Czechoslovak soldiers were pulling a barbed wire in the village. Soon a watchtower with the 342 milestone was laid down in the middle of the twin villages, too. According to the older people, it happened that somebody normally went to work in the fields – which were in the Slovak side – in the morning, but he was not allowed to return home in the evening because that part of the village was already part of another country. The new border line has separated many families forever; siblings, parents, children, grandparents, relatives could not see each other ever again. My grandfather's three siblings and many relatives have remained on the Ukrainian side of the village. He has never seen them, he did not even know whether they live or die. When I asked him, how many relatives I have on the Ukrainian side, he talked about the long lost loved ones for hours.

However, the border line meant not just the separation of families; it also implied continuous military presence. Shortly after the pulling of the wire fence both in Nagyszelmenc and Kisszelmenc, barracks were built for the soldiers who had to stay there and patrol along the border night and day. Such austerity had to be maintained that the inhabitants of the two villages were not allowed to see each other, and if they managed to shout something to the other side they were punished by one week labour service on the Ukrainian side. They also took care of that no one would try to pass to the other side. "Long ago, the wire fence went in two lines. The view from Nagyszelmenc: the barrier at the end of the Czech street, the Czech column, the unplanned column, the Soviet column and ploughing; this is what the soldiers watch every day in case any trace. There is a way near the ploughing where the soldiers or tractors used to go. Then the fences, every three metres a column with a wire across them,

inside barbed wire, outside plain wire, if somebody touches it, the instrument rings immediately. The apparatuses were hidden, and the grass was always collected around it... Later, three wire fences, then four. Rocket trap. At the end of the street unplanned columns had to be put down in many rows that the border would not be approached. We had to make paling, not to see the other side”- (Zelei). This quotation reveals that how strict was the separation of the two villages. In Kisszelmenc the worst situation experienced those who lived next to the border, as they had everyday visitors who wanted to shout to the other side of the border in order to get some information about their loved ones. But the inhabitants were often afraid of this step, because the soldiers constantly threatened them by retaliation. For this reason, a number of people were taken to Siberia for two or three weeks. Although, the soldiers were also keen to visit these houses. Thus for the inhabitants it was almost natural that they had to cook for at least two more people, as the soldiers liked to visit them during lunch or dinner. The villagers were afraid to disagree with them, but they also knew that it was better to be in good relationship with the soldiers - (Zelei). The inhabitants soon learned how to win the soldiers for themselves; the people realised that if they gave the soldiers a cigarette or maybe half a litre of *pálinka* they could easily agree on things. However, many people did not shrink even from the thought of escape. Those who have succeeded were generally gone to Western Europe, but who got captured were deported or shut down for several weeks. The situation was not better in Nagyszelmenc, as the soldiers were constantly patrolling there, too. Evidently, the people next to the border lived in the worst conditions. Moreover, next to the border was not even allowed to build. Initially, the people were allowed to go to Kisszelmenc, but only in a limited number. If somebody had passed the border instead of someone who was really allowed to pass it, the person who actually ought to come back was never allowed to return home. After the crossing of the border was totally eliminated, the villagers had to apply new tactics in order to see and talk to their loved ones. Hundreds of people went to the border every Sunday to shout to their beloved ones. “At least one hundred and fifty-two hundred people stood there on Sundays. The relatives from the both sides wanted to know what happens on the other side. The separation of families was still fresh. So they built the hedge so we were unable to look through that. It was made from braided branches, they cut off the top of it nicely, and it could be about two metres high. It was not enough. Our people took the ladders, climbed up onto the roof, and shouted over. For this, they built a rod fence on the border, which was at least five metres tall. From that time, they began to discipline on the Czechoslovak side, too, if people came to the border to talk

with their relatives on the other side”- (Zelei). Disorderly conducts such this were later punished by retaliation. Many people received financial penalties or even spent a week or two in a detention house, because they shouted to the other side. But people were still able to deceive the border wardens. Many people say that the human ingenuity knows no bounds; this also manifested here. At first, many sent messages to their relatives to Kisszelmenc via Péter Lizák who lived next to the border. Péter Lizák took advantage of his Hungarian mother tongue and the position of his house, which was located only a few metres from the front door of the first house on the Ukrainian side. Péter and his wife simply went to work in the garden and he started to talk to her in Hungarian. If they wanted their conversation to be heard on the Ukrainian side, they just began to talk a little louder. Since they spoke in Hungarian, both the Ukrainian and Czechoslovak border wardens thought that they were only talking to each other. Later, people drilled holes in the potatoes and stuffed their little notes to them, which were simply threw to the other side of the border. These notes did not provide sufficient place for longer messages, only for a couple of words or possibly a sentence, but they were enough to inform the relatives on the other side about deaths, marriages or births. According to the villagers, a girl remained at her grandmother on the Czechoslovak side during the drawing of the border, and she was never allowed to go home. When she got married, she went to the border wearing her white wedding dress to let her parents know about her marriage. Those who managed to cross the border were hidden by the villagers of Nagyszelmenc for several days, while they were asking for their relatives. It seems that the people mostly helped each other, and tried to deceive the established regime somehow. Surely, there were people on the both sides who officiously tried to win the Soviet or Czechoslovak police and soldiers for themselves, thus they were even capable of reporting everyone who went close to the border. Of course, these people were known by the villagers, and everybody tried to do his/her what-abouts in a way that neither the soldiers nor the informers would surmise anything.

Besides the strong austerity the people had to cope with a new problem and even a bigger austerity soon. The Sovietisation brought with itself more soldiers and a greater level of control, especially in Kisszelmenc. The border wardens stood at each end of the village, this meant that those who came from Ungvár (*Uzhhorod*) may enter the village if their passport or official documents testified the village’s name as their birthplace. People could go to work in the cross border fields with special permission. If someone’s relative had slipped through the border, that person was harassed for several months. The families were visited on a daily basis by the border wardens to ask for the wanted person. Pigeons were observed with



particular caution because the villagers were able to send messages with them across the border. Furthermore, it was also important to speak Russian. Who did not speak Russian and was not a party member or at least a Komsomol member the soldiers controlled better, and they were given less work to do or not at all- (Zelei). The Hungarian language began to be forbidden in the two villages, and the colonization of Czechoslovak and Russian families also started. The Hungarian primary school in Nagyszelmenc was transformed into a Slovak school in a few years. After the collectivisation took the remaining wealth of the people, the villagers began to gradually accept the new conditions. They started to come to terms with the soldiers, thus the Soviet Union's assimilation policy came into effect. The older people died slowly over the years and the former strong family ties loosened. Of course, the villagers still stayed in touch with the people on the other side by using various tricks. Although, the Soviet Union's policy – Khrushchev and later Gorbachev – affected this village as well. Over time, fewer soldiers were patrolling, and the border crossing was also allowed near Szobránc (*Sobrance*), 60 kilometres away. However, the Iron Curtain remained untouched in Nagyszelmenc, and still operated efficiently. The Iron Curtain was small, but strong.- (Zelei)

After the new regime in 1989, the inhabitants of Nagyszelmenc and Kisszelmenc were hoping for a change. However, the only change was that the inhabitants of the two villages were allowed to communicate with each other through the barbed wire if the patrolling soldiers were indulgent (Radical Puzzle). Since the early 1900s more and more people began to talk about the opening of the border. The first signs were felt between 1995 and 1997, when the border gate in the neighbouring village of Dobóruszka (*Ruská*) was opened for one day in the occasion of a religious feast, however, this was abolished in a short time. The first major breakthrough in this case happened in 2000, when Miklós Zelei's *A kettézárt falu* was published. Thereafter, newspaper articles appeared about the village. The news about the last Iron Curtain of Europe spread all over Europe. The villagers were slowly getting used to the journalists and TV reporters. As that time my mother was the president of the Hungarian youth organisation in Nagyszelmenc, many journalists visited our home, too. I remember that we accommodated reporters and journalists from Hungary, and also people who worked in the Hungarian Consulate in Slovakia many times. Thus the events accelerated after 2000.

The next big event in the life of the villagers happened in 18 October, 2003 with the inauguration of the half cut Székely gate along the border, that were named The Gates of Hope (Nagyszelmenc.sk). One half of the gate was placed along the border of Nagyszelmenc,



the other part in Kisszelmenc. This half cut Székely gate represented the half cut village. There was even a poem engraved into the Slovakian Székely gate written by Julianna Tóth, an inhabitant of Nagyszelmenc:

“From one Szelmenc was two created, be united by the Creator.  
God bless you with quietude, and hold together with hope.  
Our hope is never ending, what is torn apart will be welded.  
The two Szelmences’ gate wings join our villages.”

The inauguration of the Székely gate was also a protest against the unfair decision made after the World War II. The event was attended by several public figures, such as József Komlóssy, the Counsellor of the Hungarian parliamentary delegation of the European Council, Igor Pritula, the Slovak Consul of Ukraine, Miklós Duray, the Vice President of the Party of the Hungarian Coalition, and several members of the Parliament. The most touching moment of the ceremony was when one of the inhabitants of Kisszelmenc threw a wreath over the wire fence and asked his relatives to put it on his father’s grave. At the end of the protest the participants sang the Hungarian Anthem together, and then the inhabitants of Kisszelmenc threw a piece of the barbed wire across the border with a request that József Komlóssy had to pass it to the politicians of the European Council - (Nagyszelmenc.sk).

After the inauguration of the Székely gate the journalists were still everyday occurrence, and the villagers possibly became bored with them. In 2004, the news about the two villages spread overseas as well. Lajos Tóth, the Mayor of the village could tell the sad story of his village in the Centre for American Hungarian Congressional Relations, in Washington. In March 2005, Pál Csáky, the Slovak Deputy Prime Minister visited Nagyszelmenc. During his visit he said that the Ukrainian party is prone to negotiate on the opening of the border. Lajos Tóth conveyed the request of the inhabitants, thus they wanted to gain a border crossing without a visa. Pál Csáky assured the inhabitants of doing everything in their case (Nagyszelmenc.sk). After his promise the villagers felt hope that after 60 years they would visit their almost forgotten relatives.

In August 2005, the Ukrainian border wardens finally started to remove the barbed wire between the two villages. This act was watched tearfully by the people from both sides of the border. By the removal of the barbed fence the official construction of the border crossing point started between the two villages. The constructions were completed on both sides till 18 October, 2005.

On 13 December, 2005 the day which were expected by everyone arrived. After 60 years the passage between Nagyszelmenc and Kisszelmenc was free again (Nagyszelmenc.sk). This also meant that Europe's last Iron Curtain finally felt down. The opening of the border took place in the midst of a huge ceremony, which was participated by a number of leading politicians, journalists, and almost all the villagers. However, the long-awaited joy mingled with a little wormwood, too, because after the politicians left the Ukrainian authorities allowed the crossing of the border only those people from Kisszelmenc who had a valid visa. It was a shocking experience as the old women and men were weeping and waving behind the rows of uniformed people, because they neither could visit the graves of their relatives, nor greet their long lost beloved ones. The people from Kisszelmenc were promised that their problem would be solved soon, but their situation has not changed.- (Nagyszelmenc.sk) One and a half months later, Lajos Tóth, the Mayor of Nagyszelmenc welcomed the opening of the border in an interview. According to him, his village eventually reached what they wanted the most in the last 60 years, only the visa requirement of Kisszelmenc's inhabitants remained the dark side of the story. However, the Mayor told that the village still had a lot of work to do: "We have to build a bigger car park in the village. (...) We managed to asphalt most of the side roads. The village hall is also modernised. The construction of the drinking water pipeline network has started in the village, which has to be completed this year. We want to build an outdoor stage, and so on" (Nagyszelmenc.sk). Since then, the mentioned transformations have all been built in the village. In the car park, which is next to the cemetery parking area, almost 200-300 cars turn around on a daily basis. The parking costs 1 euro for a day, which brings a nice sum of money for the village's municipality. Most of the villagers still visit their relatives, but the major part of the border traffic is consisted of people from Western Slovakia, who have to travel several hours until the Slovak-Ukraine border; as in Ukraine the consumers can buy many products cheaper than in Slovakia. For this reason, long queues are formed along the border every day. People are willing to stand 3-4 hours in a swelter in summer just to buy what they need cheaper on the other side of the border.

According to a newspaper article released three years after the opening of the border, the frontier traffic became unidirectional between the two villages. The visitors who travel from Ungvár to Kisszelmenc are surprised that Slovakia begins before Kisszelmenc, not after it; this is suggested by the Slovak labels on the shops in Kisszelmenc. Moreover, it can be seen that in the mornings and early afternoons queues are standing on the Slovak side, on the other hand in the late afternoons and evenings the Ukrainian side is more populous. Based on

statistical data, more than 377,000 people crossed the border between the two villages in 2008, but only 1-2 percent of them were Ukrainian citizens. Lajos Tóth said to the journalists that due to the border opening the elderly people can easier visit their relatives, but he also admitted that the border traffic became commercialised because many Slovak citizens go to Ukraine just to buy everyday goods cheaper. The article mentions that the inhabitants of Kisszelmenc do not complain at all because since the opening of the border they opened approximately 30 shops in their village, and this number is constantly growing.- (Felvidek.ma) I think that the border opening brought an entirely new lifestyle into the village. Before its opening hardly occurred any car in the village, but as I mentioned above now the situation is totally different; almost 200-300 cars occur in Nagyszelmenc every day. Due to the barracks built in the village the police also have multiplied their people, and they are constantly examining the cars heading outward the village in case any cigarette smuggling. The life on the Ukrainian side has also changed a lot; before the opening of the border Kisszelmenc was full of ravaged buildings and potholed roads, and nowadays the part of the village that is close to the border resembles to a small fair. It is common that people live in 1-2 rooms and the rest of the house was converted into a shop. Currently, the inhabitants of the two Szelmences can see each other easier, but the long queues on the both sides of the border, the shops in Kisszelmenc and the visa requirement of Kisszelmenc's citizens present the negative side of the border opening. Besides, the older villagers in Nagyszelmenc see the border opening as a joyful moment in their lives as they know they can freely pass the border whenever they want to.

The fate of the twin villages is unknown yet; of course, modernisations on both sides of the border are on schedule. I have learned in the course of my conversation with József Illár, the Mayor of Kisszelmenc that he is working on the opening of a new border crossing between the neighbouring villages of Palágykomoróc (*Palagy Komarivci*) and Dobóruszka (*Ruská*). He is planning to build a border for automobiles and trucks in contrast to the pedestrian border crossing between the twin villages. But to eliminate the traffic in Dobóruszka, the Mayor of Kisszelmenc suggests the building of a service road. According to him, this can be appropriate for the villages as it is 700 metres far from the Slovak-Ukraine border. As Illár states: "Well, the first steps have been made, and I hope that this process will not need 8-10 years. But I would say that 2-3 years will be enough (...) If they discover that this is beneficial for both Slovakia and Ukraine, then the progression will be started (...) The market is Russia and Ukraine".- (Illár) It is unknown what will be eventually achieved from these plans. In my

opinion, Kisszelmenc is like a little brother of Nagyszelmenc who always wants to break out from the shadows of his big brother, Nagyszelmenc, but Kisszelmenc always needs the help of his smarter and bigger sibling. One thing is certain, that the border opening brought a new way of living among the villagers. The history will tell us that this border opening will have a positive or negative impact on the fate of the two villages.

## Conclusions

In my opinion, it is totally obvious that the arbitrary border pulling completely changed the life of the twin villages both economically and socially. The border separated families and relatives from each other; as a result many of the villagers could not see their beloved ones, and also the farmers who transported their goods into the centre, Ungvár lost a great part of their economic relations. Though, this border cutting was not unique in the Soviet Union and Europe, what makes the Nagyszelmenc-Kisszelmenc case special is that after the regime change most of the border crossings were opened, only the Nagyszelmenc-Kisszelmenc border was closed until 23 December, 2005. A supporting example is the research of Tamás Hardi and Márta Nárai who write about the Hungarian-Austrian border line this way: “However, during the period of Socialism this border line became an obstacle separating two great world regimes, and the strictly guarded border areas were left out from important development programs, and the earlier traditionally developed areas were in a peripheral position. After the 1989–1990 regime change, the situation in the area was revaluated again, and a significant part of the Austrian-Hungarian border has become the leading region of the country’s economic development”.- (Hardi and Nárai) It is clear that the peripheral region became one of the most developed regions of Hungary after the regime change. In contrast, neither the regime change nor the independence of Ukraine and Slovakia brought the awaited border opening. Partly owing to this, the two settlements are treated as a dead end by both of the countries as both villages are situated in the most underdeveloped regions of their country; unfortunately, this fact have not changed since the border opening. Though, the first years brought some economic recovery in both villages, it has vanished for today. Thus, it can be concluded from the area of economic relations that the border pulling caused irretrievable damages in the life of the villages’ inhabitants.

As I mentioned, the Soviet-Czechoslovak and later the Ukraine-Slovak border brought enormous changes in the field of social relations, too. The almost hermetic closure of people,

the curfews, and the constant presence of soldiers in the village was a lifetime psychic experience for the villagers. The separation unfavourably affected mainly the citizens of Kisszelmenc, as they were under the Soviet rule; this meant that they were obliged to become Soviets. Györgyi Bindorffer analyses the phenomenon of dual identity in relation to the Swabian-Hungarian interethnic relations this way: “Because of the language and cultural abandonment, and the outrage from the German national development, and thus to complement the resulting loss the Swabian peasants had no choice in a new homeland but to use the nascent institutions and symbol system of the Hungarian statehood”.- (Bindorffer) After the annexation to the Soviet area, the inhabitants of Kisszelmenc had no choice like the Swabians. The previous Hungarian speaking village was soon forced to adapt to the Soviet regime, its everyday world, and of course, to learn the Russian language.

To conclude, the separation of the twin villages negatively affected the economic, personal and social relations. The former friends became strangers to one another, and many of the relatives have never seen their loved ones. Due to the division, the next generations were socialised in a totally different culture, thus the relations between the two villages gradually weakened; the voluntary population exchange in Kisszelmenc after the border opening completely decided the fate of the two villages. In my opinion, the former goal of the border opening, thus to visit the relatives has fully vanished; of course, the visa laws played a major role in this process. There is a strong but decadent shopping tourism in a long term between Nagyszelmenc and Kisszelmenc. For a long time neither party wanted to admit it but over time everybody realised that the primary purpose of the border opening has not been achieved. Consequently, the construction of the border crossings was unnecessary from a social perspective, as it does not serve the original goal for which people have fought for so many years. The youth, who were separated by the arbitrarily drawn Soviet-Czechoslovak border, were slowly growing old or many of them are already dead. Thus, such a noble aim as was the visiting of the relatives became slowly but surely forgotten. As it was mentioned, the visa issue has not been solved, and the elderly population of Kisszelmenc cannot visit Nagyszelmenc’s cemetery even now. The depopulation of the villages is in progress. The unemployment and hopelessness are instinctively driving away the youth of the twin villages. The multitude of empty houses shows that Nagyszelmenc and Kisszelmenc lies at the end of the world, just like 70 years ago. It is sad that apart from a few longing old eyes only the cars’ honking and the iron stalls’ glimmers are left in Nagyszelmenc. The Iron Curtain has

disappeared, but “Now, the border of East and West lies between Szelmenc”.- (Hosszú Utazás)

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