

THE BORDER THAT UNITES US: THE INTERREG VI-A IPA NOBORDER PROJECT OF THE ISTVÁN TÜRR MUSEUM IN BAJA

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The function of national borders is not only to separate but also to connect. Although state borders appear to divide, they also serve as connections through cultural, economic, ethnic, and religious ties. Numerous studies demonstrate that individuals and local residents do not solely experience borders as restrictions but also as opportunities. Thinking beyond state borders is a long-standing human behaviour that has shaped identities, including the European and Bácska identities.

The overall goal of the noborder project is to strengthen the European identity of the inhabitants of the trans-border region of Bácska (and partly Banat) through extensive cooperation between cultural and educational institutions. In addition to emphasizing a shared European identity, the project aims to preserve the common cultural heritage of Bácska and foster a sense of pride among its inhabitants. The partners promote these shared values through rich scientific, cultural, educational, and tourism programmes, setting a positive example for others.

The research realised within the project investigates the unifying effect of borders and seeks to establish symbolic connections across national boundaries and historical eras, linking people who live in the same region but in different countries.

Unique prehistoric archaeological finds uncovered by teams of the Türr István Museum in recent years indicate that this region was an integral part of a Bronze Age community known as the Tumulus culture, which spanned a significant portion of Europe, including today's Southern Germany, Southern Poland, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and the entire Carpathian Basin. The Tumulus culture covered a vast area and merged various earlier social groups, becoming one of the first cultural communities in central Europe to play a significant economic and social role in early continental history. These processes were foundational in the development of European identity.

Despite numerous ethnic differences in the region, not only the landscape, economic conditions, and historical events but also interethnic influences have shaped the culture and lifestyle of its people. This centuries-old coexistence has resulted in a rich and diverse ethnic heritage, but, in many cases, also a unified cultural heritage. Thanks to multilingualism, multiculturalism, and a tradition of ethnic and religious tolerance developed over centuries, European values are well-represented in the region.

The project's activities and programmes were designed to emphasize connection, aiming to highlight the links between space and identity through historical and contemporary examples, to popularize these ideas, integrate them into education, and demonstrate problem-solving strategies that have been used for centuries.

The ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity of the Bácska region is particularly unique. It is a microcosm within Europe. This fascinating coexistence is showcased through a range of joint cultural and scientific programmes, from thematic children's activities to knowledge-sharing conferences for researchers. Since the future is particularly important, the project also supports teachers who train future generations to foster a more inclusive and socially cohesive Bácska and Europe. As a result, the project integrates its findings into informal museum education and the teacher training curriculum.

The Interreg VI-A IPA Hungary-Serbia Programme HUSRB/23R/22/018 NOBORDER project, entitled *Border that unites us*, was designed and established along these lines, and received a substantial support of € 269,712.8.

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Fig. 1. Logo of the project

The lead partner for the project is the Türr István Museum and Cultural Center of Bácska in Baja, who received a funding of € 142,712.48. Other partners include the University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Hungarian Language Teacher Training in Subotica (€ 77,134.44), and the Vojvodina Hungarian Cultural Institute in Zenta (€ 49,621.89).

The two-year project, which encompasses significant archaeological and ethnographic research, knowledge sharing, and rich socialization activities, began on 1 April 2024 and will end on 30 March 2026.

ACTIVITIES

The planned activities have been grouped into three thematic areas: Past, Present, and Future.

The *Past* group focuses on archaeology and historical roots. It includes the archaeological and ethnographic exhibition “*Does Clothing Make a Woman? Bronze Age Fashion Trend or Cultural Identity?*” based on research on the Sükösd–Árpás-dűlő Bronze Age cemetery, the traveling exhibition “*Good Examples — Bácska people in Europe, Europeans in Bácska,*” the *MOMOSZ XIII* archaeological conference on pre-historic research, and the ethnographic conference “*National Coexistence and Ethnic Identity in Bácska.*”

The *Present* group focuses on research conducted within the project and the dissemination of its findings through conferences, workshops, thematic lecture series, book launches, and exhibitions. It also introduces new programmes related to national and town events that hold tourist interest.

The *Future* group is dedicated to education and shaping the future. It includes the writing and publication of nine research and educational works, the creation of an open-access online database on Vojvodina’s historic rural houses of ethnographic significance, fourteen research and seven thematic media workshops for university students, a six-part podcast series, and two educational videos detailing the project’s research and findings. The group also organises a 24-part thematic museum workshop for primary school children and a thematic summer museum camp for cumulatively disadvantaged students.

The majority of the Türr István Museum’s sub-projects focus on archaeology. This includes organising the *MOMOSZ XIII* conference for prehistorians, publishing selected conference contributions, and presenting research findings from the Bronze Age cemetery at Sükösd–Árpás-dűlő in an exhibition and in professional and educational publications. A significant number of museum education events related to these topics will also be organised.

MOMOSZ XIII Conference: Mobility and Borders in Prehistoric Times

As part of the project, we took upon us organising the *MOMOSZ XIII* conference for prehistorians in 2024. This academic initiative, which began in Hajdú-Bihar County in 1997, has grown into a prestigious event attracting nearly a hundred Hungarian researchers and university students at each gathering. The conference invigorates scientific exchange by addressing topics that align with the latest international research trends.

The theme of the 2024 conference was ‘*Mobility and Borderline – Movement, Travel, Border, Gateway, Gate – Separation and Cooperation in Prehistoric Times.*’

The conference concept was developed by the scientific organising committee, comprising Alexandra Anders, Gábor Kalla, Viktória Kiss, Gabriella Kulcsár, and Emília Pásztor. According to their concept:

”The permanence of a human group’s identity is secured by attachment to geographical areas marked by borders, by territoriality. Crossing borders may result in hostility, but it can also bring great cultural enrich-

ment. Movement across distant areas—in smaller or larger groups—means crossing not only geographical but also cultural and symbolic borders, leading to interaction between human communities. Raw materials, objects, and ideas can move, and migration can trigger substantial cultural transformation. Natural borders can function as metaphors for social, cultural, or psychological boundaries, whether in space or time. Human societies also have temporal cultural boundaries, and changes in material and intellectual culture indicate the crossing of these dividing lines. The reasons for such changes can be environmental, social, or ideological. Researching these processes can help us better understand how communities function.

Boundaries exist in science as well. Collaboration between disciplines is increasingly important for archaeology, and crossing disciplinary boundaries enables methodological progress.

While mobility has been widely researched in archaeology, boundary situations have received less attention. The goal of the *ΜΟΜΟΣ XIII* conference in Baja is to place both mobility and boundary studies at the centre of prehistoric research, as the two subjects can only be fully understood when examined together. We invited presentations that explored the dynamics of movement, passage, interactions, and change through case studies or broader analyses, rather than presenting static images.”

The conference, featuring 44 presentations and nine poster sessions, took place in 26–28 June 2024. The plenary sessions were opened by Judit Raffai, leader of the Serbian project partner and Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Hungarian Language Teacher Training at the University of Novi Sad. She summarized the historical and ethnographic background of the project’s theoretical foundation, illustrating it with concrete examples. Her presentation provided context for the archaeological discussions that followed.

Emília Pásztor presented results of research on the Bronze Age cemetery at Sükösd–Árpás-dűlő, supported by the Hungarian Genius Programme. These findings indicate that the cemetery was used during a transitional phase between the Middle and Late Bronze Ages. Looking further back in time, Judit P. Barna and Gábor Kalla examined the role of gateways, gates, and their symbolic meanings, focusing on the state of liminality in Late Neolithic circular ditches.

The 44 presentations were divided into eight thematic sections. The ‘*Borders, Roads, Crossings, Meeting Points*’ section included four presentations examining possible prehistoric roads and river crossings. The ‘*Mobility and Migration*’ session featured six presentations exploring different periods, the theory and practice of stable isotope-geochemical research on mobility, the dynamics of early farming communities,



Fig. 2. Participants of the *ΜΟΜΟΣ XIII* conference in Baja (photo by the author)

the steppe-originated Yamnaya culture in the Great Plain, and Bronze Age mobility and settlement structure changes.

The ‘*Distance Connection Systems*’ session comprised seven presentations on the movement of raw materials and objects, tracing broad cultural connections from the Palaeolithic to the Early Iron Age. The ‘*Cultural and Social Boundaries*’ session, with five presentations, analysed through case studies how individual archaeological cultures have been classified in different periods. Traditionally, archaeological culture boundaries have been drawn based on material culture, but contradictions between theory and practice have led to the development of new classification methods, which were presented.

A dedicated session titled *On the Border of the Middle and Late Bronze Age: Tumulus Culture* revolved around grave goods from Sükösd, with four contributions presenting new finds, petrographic studies, chronological research, and settlement network analyses. The ‘*Demarcated Spaces, Crossing Boundaries*’ section included nine presentations exploring the best examples of symbolic and physical boundaries, such as Late Neolithic circular ditches. While Middle Bronze Age and Late Iron Age fortified settlements represented physical boundaries, Late Bronze Age ditches in the Great Plain were interpreted as liminal and ritual spaces. Hungarian examples of Early Iron Age sieges and campaigns illustrated the violent crossing of borders.

The ‘*Changes in Technology and Subsistence*’ session featured five presentations examining movement, mobility, and technological changes in Palaeolithic and Mesolithic hunter-gatherer communities, the Bronze Age and the Middle Iron Age. The ‘*Frontiers of Science*’ session discussed the limitations of computational descriptions of archaeological phenomena, research on the lifestyles of Neolithic civil communities, and broader discussions on transitions and boundaries.

Selected presentations from the conference will be published in the Baja Publication Series of the Türr István Museum and as Volume IV of *Prehistoric Studies* in 2025.



Fig. 3. Judit Raffai speaks at the MŰMOΣ XIII conference (photo by Anna Éber)