

2 The Carpathian region in the European space

The Carpathian Mountains are the Eastern wing of the Great Central Mountain System of Europe, curving on the territory of eight Central and Eastern European countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Ukraine, Romania and Serbia). The Carpathians begin on the Danube near Bratislava. They surround Transcarpathia and Transylvania in a large semicircle, sweeping towards the south-west, and end on the southern bank of the Danube near the Iron Gate, in Serbia. The total length of the Carpathians is over 1500 km, and the width of the mountain chain varies between 12 km and 500 km. The greatest width of the Carpathians corresponds with their highest altitudes. The system attains its greatest breadth in the Transylvanian plateau and in the meridian of the Tatra group (the highest range with Gerlachovský štít, at 2655 m in Slovak territory near the Polish border). It covers an area of 190,000 km², and, after the Alps, it is the most extensive mountain system in Europe.

Although commonly referred to as a mountain range, the Carpathians do not actually form an uninterrupted chain of mountains. Rather, they consist of several orographically and geologically distinctive groups, presenting as great a structural variety as the Alps. The Carpathians, which only at a few places attain an altitude of over 2500 m, mostly lack bold peaks, extensive snow-fields, large glaciers, high waterfalls, and numerous large lakes that are common in the Alps. No area of the Carpathian range is covered with snow year-round, and there are no glaciers. The Carpathian at their highest altitude are only as high as the Middle Region of the Alps, with which they share a common appearance, climate and flora

The Alps and Carpathians share many – mostly economically disadvantageous geographic and natural features:

- Both spaces as mountainous areas are less favoured for agricultural production
- Both are geologically younger mountain ranges and therefore poorer in mineral wealth (in this respect, the endowment of the Carpathians is even somewhat better)
- Both are difficult to cross and hard to access.
- Both were peripheral areas in their respective countries, large sections of the mountain ranges constituted borders between countries and were far from the large urban centres.

Consequently, they shared – at least until the middle of the 19th century – the phenomena of poverty, agricultural overpopulation and large-scale emigration, characterising all mountainous areas of Europe at that time.

After the middle of the 19th century, however, development trends bifurcated radically:

- The *Alpine space* could live up with its few advantages: central situation in Europe, beautiful scenery, healthy conditions, tourism and winter sport opportunities and highly skilled craftsmanship.
- Most of the *Carpathian regions* could not live up with these opportunities or could not exploit them fully. Even the better endowment with mineral wealth became today a disadvantage in some areas, through the emergence of industrial crisis areas and brown-field problems.
- Today the Alpine regions are the most advanced and richest regions within rich countries (with a few exceptions).
- Today the Carpathian regions are mostly the poorest regions within poor countries (with some exceptions)
- Obviously, diverging development trends are characteristic for the whole area of Western and Eastern Europe, but in respect to the Alps and the Carpathians this divergence is even more stressed than elsewhere.
- Now, the main objective in the Carpathian area is to reverse this diverging trend and to diminish the development gap between the two mountainous regions in the middle of Europe.

2.1 The delineated “Carpathian Region”

For the purposes of the analysis and strategy building in the Carpathian Region, a wider area has been delineated, as Carpathian programme area (*Figure 1*). This delineated area comprises much larger area (470 thousand km²) than the area of the Carpathian Mountains (190 thousand km²). It covers also the fore-lands of the mountain chain. Furthermore, it is delineated according to the administrative regions of the Carpathian area (NUTS2 regions in Austria, Poland and Ukraine, NUTS3 regions in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Serbia) in order to have a larger data base for analysis and to enable the participation of regional governments with their whole administrative area in the project. According to this delineation, the whole territory of Slovakia is regarded as part of the Carpathian region (*Table 1*).

This larger area has a population of nearly 53 million, which is comparable to the population size of Britain, France and Italy in Europe. It is about 7,6% of the European population, and somewhat less than 5% of the European territory.

The breakdown of the Carpathian Region according to countries is the following.

Table 1

Main indicators of the Carpathian area (2004)

Country	Carpathian area km ²	Carpathian population thousands	As a percentage of the		As a percentage of the	
			country's area	country's population	Carpathian area	Carpathian population
Austria	23,558	3,373	28.1	41.6	5.3	6.3
Czech Republic	21,723	3,632	27.5	35.6	4.9	6.8
Hungary	54,322	7,286	58.3	72.9	12.2	13.6
Poland	45,514	10,138	14.6	26.3	10.2	18.9
Romania	165,013	13,920	69.5	62.1	36.9	26.0
Serbia	31,567	3,568	35.7	35.2	7.1	6.7
Slovakia	49,034	5,379	100.0	100.0	11.0	10.1
Ukraine	55,895	6,217	9.3	12.8	12.5	11.6
Total	446,626	53,513	28.4	34.9	100.0	100.0

Source: National statistical yearbooks.

Figure 1

Map of the Carpathian Development Region



Source: Author's construction.