

## **Cross-border cooperation in theory and practice the case of Czech - German borderland**

JONATHAN GRIX, VÁCLAV HOUŽVIČKA\*

Institute for German Studies, University of Birmingham

\*Department of Czech Borderland, Institute of Sociology,  
Czech Academy of Sciences, Ústí nad Labem, Czech Republik

### **Abstract:**

Contemporary literature on subject of borders and cross-border cooperation (CBC) as factor of continuing European integration offers only limited coherent theoretical approach that can explain rather than describe the complexities of transboundary networking of social and economic systems of neighbouring states. Most of existing research is aimed on description of CBC instruments giving up explanation of social processes initiated by geographical proximity with continually creating cross-border community. Euroregions on border of Poland, Czech Republic and Germany were chosen as the units of analysis where specific activities (formal and informal) help generate a "social capital" (among others trust) creating *conditio sinne qua non* dynamic development of local communities as direct consequence of European integration on both local and regional levels. Dynamism of cross-border linking is apparently limited by the three factors: *language, mentalities and economic disparity/asymmetry*. The case study is dealing with specific situation within the euroregion Krušné hory/Erzgebirge.

**Key words:** cross-border cooperation, Euroregion, Krušné hory/Erzgebirge

### **From diversity to complexity**

The existing literature on borders and cross-border cooperation (CBC) and the role it plays in European integration offers little in the way of a coherent theoretical approach that can *explain* rather than *describe* the complexities of transboundary exchange. There are many reasons for this lacuna in the scholarly literature. First, the disciplines involved in the study of borders and CBC are many and very diverse, ranging from political geography to international relations and economics. Second, borders and CBC are themselves so diverse and unique that some scholars believe that it is impossible to construct an approach that would be applicable across more than one particular area or region (see 'Transfrontier Co-operation – History and Theory' by Anderson for a discussion of CBC and theory in: Brunn and Schnitt-Egner (eds.) 1998).

Existing research offers little insight into the complex 'puzzle' of how formal and informal integration interact, their effect on and significance for wider EU expansion. This paper proposes an approach with which to analyse the neglected informal aspect of this dynamic by operationalising a theoretical framework which focuses on 'bottom-

up', micro-level 'transactions' to play alongside the much more fully researched formal aspects of integration. Drawing selectively on three small, unpublished empirical studies in the German-Polish and German-Czech border regions, we will attempt – by adopting a much refined definition of 'social capital' (for a full definition and exposition of the use of this term in the Social Sciences see Grix 2001) – to show how CBC is capable of generating mutual trust and cooperation between certain sub-groups of neighbouring populations. A concept with normative content, such as 'trust', requires an interpretivist approach to capture and uncover it. Quantitative data recording the increase or decrease of transborder flows is very useful, but can take us only so far in understanding the impact of cross-border interaction on attitudes of neighbouring populations. What this article does not do, however, is discuss in detail the many various *types* of CBC. It is quite clear that cultural trans-border exchange may have a different impact on mutual understanding of border populations than, say, some forms of economic exchange. CBC ought to be, however, by definition, taken as something aimed at, and motivated by, mutual beneficial action.<sup>1</sup>

Before introducing the social capital approach, we need to ask ourselves why should we study CBC in the first place? Cross-border cooperation in its many forms can be considered as important and relevant to European integration. The act of effectively 'knitting' together historically antagonistic neighbouring states at national, sub-national and local levels has been particularly successful in western Europe, where a myriad of Euroregions function as channels for, and facilitators of, formal and informal inter-state cooperation and exchange. CBC has been a key factor in this process and therefore could be seen as a model for many East Central European post-communist countries keen to accede to the European Union.

Bi-lateral relationships are likely to be crucial to the successful expansion of the EU and CBC could become the means of building trust between bordering countries, as it meshes the formal (EU-led initiatives) with the multiplication of informal, socio-economic and cultural interaction. The need for building trust between neighbours is essential, both between countries which share a border with the frontiers of the EU and, perhaps more importantly, between former Soviet satellite states in Eastern Central Europe.

#### **Cross-border cooperation and European integration**

On the macro-level much work has focused on formal structures of the European integration process.<sup>2</sup> Proponents of the key approaches, neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism, which represent both sides of the 'theoretical divide in EC studies' (Stone Sweet and Sandholtz 1997), have failed to agree on the relationship

<sup>1</sup> There may be some forms of CBC that are more beneficial to bringing bordering populations closer together than others. The point in this article is not to weigh up the impact of a joint sewage works project versus a choir made up of people from both sides of the border. My intention is to make some progress towards a broad approach to studying CBC, something clearly lacking in the descriptive literature around this concept.

<sup>2</sup> For an authoritative study of approaches to European integration, see B. Rosamund. (2000). For an interesting discussion on approaches to CBC see 'The "Network-Concept". A Theoretical Approach and Analytical Instrument for Research on Transnational Regionalism', in: Brunn and Schmitt, op. cit. pp. 98–107.

between formal integration, in the form of institution-building, EU rule structures and EU membership, and informal integration, in the form of social interaction and exchange (Woolcock. 1998). They tend to lend more weight in their analyses to elite level decision makers, rules, regulations and high-level inter-state actions taken by governments; society's aggregated articulation of interests via 'civil society' and interest groups is not central to their studies. In addition, traditional research has focused on the integration of existing EU member states and not on the process of incorporation of 'outsider' states especially those across former Cold War borders.

The analysis of multi-level governance (see, for example, the work of Marks in: Jeffery (ed.) 1997) seems a fruitful approach to the formal levels of European integration, one which perhaps come closer to some aspects of CBC by shedding considerable light on the role of subnational actors and regional elites in the process of inter-state bargaining. Actors involved in CBC and its implementation, for example, range from the European Commission right down to local civic elites. The increasing importance of CBC has in turn led to increasing autonomy for regional and local governments, who co-operate in subnational, transboundary projects, effectively managing parts of foreign policy at the local level (Scholte 1993).

The European Commission recognises that promotion of the formerly neglected frontier regions of the EU could actually facilitate and speed up European integration (Kessler 1999). The EU's eastern frontier, bordering the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, is considered particularly important given their historic sensitivity as the former demarcation between East and West. Large EU-funded programmes, such as PHARE and INTERREG, have provided the financial basis of CBC and a much needed injection of resources to kick-start cooperation between states.

The many different forms of cross-border co-operation, cutting across the economic, cultural and social spheres of life, which have increased greatly since the collapse of communist rule and the opening of the borders to Central European states, contribute immensely to accelerating these state's 'pre-integration' into the wider supranational framework of the EU. Flows of people (travel), communications, commerce (trade), culture and ideas across-borders have proliferated in recent years (Scholte 1993, p. 47).

The complexity of CBC flows is also to be found in the relationship between the factors making up the wider formal and informal integration processes of the EU of which CBC is part. A useful distinction between formal and informal integration can be found in Wallace (our emphasis):

Formal integration consists of deliberate actions by authoritative policy-makers to create and adjust rules, to establish common institutions and to work with and through those institutions; to regulate, channel, redirect, encourage or inhibit social and economic flows, as well as to pursue common policies. Informal integration consists of those intense patterns of interactions which develop without the intervention of deliberate governmental decisions, following the dynamics of market, technology, communications networks and social exchange, or the influence of religious, social or political movements. Informal integration is thus *a matter of flows and exchanges, of*

*the gradual growth of networks of interaction.* By definition it is a continuous process in which sharp discontinuities are rare. Formal integration is by definition a discontinuous process, proceeding treaty by treaty, regulation by regulation, decision by decision (Wallace 1990, 1992).

We propose that CBC, as manifested in joint, cross-border policy programmes of local/regional authorities and, especially, in intensifying informal social, cultural and economic cross-border transactions, helps generate a 'social capital' capable of underpinning formal EU, national, regional and local elite-level integration initiatives on-the-ground.

#### **Social interaction**

Some empirical evidence supports the contention that social interaction is the essential ingredient in developing social capital.<sup>3</sup> In a series of interviews with members of the *Pro Europa Viadrina Euroregion* on both sides of the German-Polish border, relations *between* members on the German side were found to be either non-existent or very exclusive.<sup>4</sup> Most members had little or no contact with one another and the idea of sharing good practice and collaboration on obtaining EU funding was alien to them. For social capital to be mobilised, one needs clear flows of information and frequent interaction. By isolating themselves from one another, members of the *Verein Mittlere Oder e.V.* are in fact *reducing* their chances of success or their levels of influence on specific matters. It is clear that the Euroregion would benefit greatly from more interaction between its members and a reinforcement of a common purpose. Thus one of the biggest hindrances to the development of 'between group' social capital – that is actually across the border – was in fact the lack of 'within group' social capital (i.e. interaction among group members, which would lead to trust relations and access to information) among actors keen to promote cross-border cooperation on the respective sides of the border. The type of interpretivist research strategy advocated in this article was able to unravel the lack of opportunity structures through which information could be shared and personal, face-to-face interaction could take place. In this way we were able to gain an overview of the structures that existed to promote or hinder cooperation and understand the actors' perception of these structures, including their assessment of their access to specific information channels.<sup>5</sup>

If interaction is the first stage in the process of mobilising social capital, then language, central to all communication and social interaction, is of great importance

<sup>3</sup> The select results presented below are drawn from studies of *local and regional elites*. Thus, the data is limited to only a small proportion of the border populations under study.

<sup>4</sup> This case study has been published in full as a working paper, J. Grix and V. Knowles (2001) 'Euroregions and the Formation of Social Capital: The Case of the German-Polish Euroregion Pro Europa Viadrina', *Institute for German Studies Working Paper*, IGS/2001. The interviews refer to: interview with Klaus Baldauf, Special Commissioner for International Cooperation, Frankfurt City Administration on 25 July 2000 in Frankfurt/Oder; interview with Uwe Kolbe, Head of the Office for Property and Economic Development, Oder-Spree, on 23 August 2000 in Buskow; interview with Christoph Bruckhoff, Evangelischer Kirchenkreis, 25 July 2000 in Frankfurt/Oder.

<sup>5</sup> This type of analysis, sometimes termed the 'double hermeneutic', is not acceptable to those using a positivist epistemology, as they would not consider an actor's perception of his/her situation of relevance to the study or as something 'measurable'.

too. Select results from two unpublished empirical studies confirm that people with linguistic competence are far more likely to think positively about their neighbours and about cross-border exchange in the first place. For example, in a study attempting to understand Czech attitudes towards CBC with their German neighbours in Euroregion *Krušnohoří/Erzgebirge*, language is one of the most important variables.<sup>6</sup> Those with CBC experience and a knowledge of German were much more positive towards German-Czech relations and the past played less of a role in their assessments of this and the role of CBC. Almost 90% of those questioned have some degree of knowledge of the German language. In a further empirical study on the German-Polish border, language is once again seen as a crucial variable in subjective views of each other, especially when assessing the nature and the role of CBC.<sup>7</sup> Respondents with better linguistic skills were able to communicate and interact more freely, leading to them being far more optimistic on a number of issues than their counterparts who do not share their language abilities. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the Poles were far more likely to speak, read or understand the German language than the other way around, e.g., 41% of the Poles 'can make themselves understood' in German, while 21% of Germans could do the same in Polish. In addition, some 86% of Poles use German media sources either 'regularly' or 'now and then', whereas the figure for Germans using Polish media sources is 63%.

If, as I have discussed, interaction (in its many forms, business contacts, face-to-face relations etc.) is the starting point of the creation of social capital, then knowledge of a neighbour's language is essential in promoting the positive cycle of social capital formation.

As interaction takes place, specific networks between actors develop. In both the German-Czech and German-Polish Euroregions analysed in the studies cited there is significant empirical evidence to support the emergence of a strong network of political and cultural *elites* developing, among which CBC is seen as overwhelmingly positive and a driver of change in people's attitudes towards the 'Other'. This is not to deny the negative consequences of setting 'unnatural' borders by the establishment of Euroregions themselves, which necessarily 'includes' some people while 'excluding' others.

#### **The micro-dynamics of social capital formation**

If, as we have suggested, there is a relationship between social interaction or exchange, the creation of trust and trust relationships and access to resources or information, then the end stage of this cycle is a stock of social capital that can be drawn on by an individual who has built up trust relationships and has access to social resources or can wield influence. A person's or association's ability to access resources successfully will impact on the way they assess and invest in the networks that

<sup>6</sup> A Euroregion was chosen as the unit of analysis and respondents were sent a questionnaire especially designed for the purpose of gauging the role of CBC and the development of social capital in the area.

<sup>7</sup> This study, carried out by Dr Raimund Kraemer from Potsdam University, Germany, was conducted in the summer of 2000 for the Institute for German studies using the Euroregion 'Pro Europa Viadrina' (PEV) as an area of focus.

facilitated access in the first place. This circular relationship can be depicted as follows:

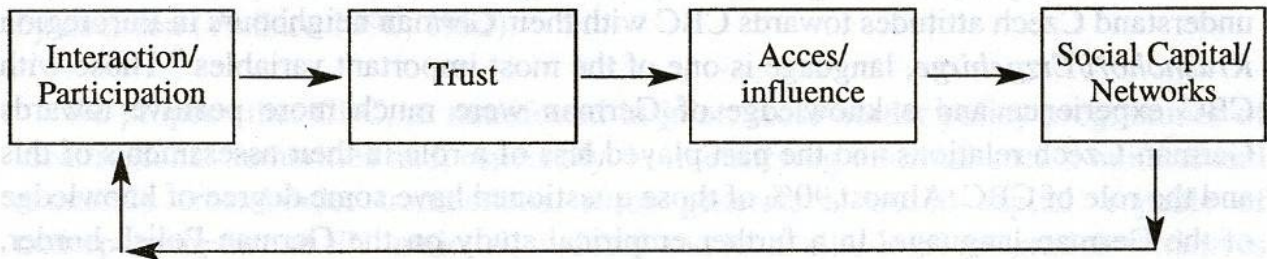


Figure 1. The Micro-dynamics of Social Formation

Social capital resides and is formed within set social, political and economic networks and structures. Social capital facilitates actions within and between these structures and networks.<sup>8</sup> It is within these established structures that participants ‘accomplish far more per unit of time devoted to a joint activity if they draw on capital resources to reduce the level of current inputs needed to produce a joint outcome’.<sup>9</sup>

Once networks and structures are in place and are seen to function, this promotes the type of behaviour necessary to uphold them. ‘Interaction’ here represents not only social interaction, but also the up-keep of, and experience gained within, a network of reciprocal relationships, including economic exchange, dealing with business partners and associations dealing with government - all of which could be seen as a source of trust.

It is clear that the multi-faceted nature of CBC, which by definition entails *interaction*, could – under the right circumstances – lead to trust generation, the first stages of social capital mobilisation.

#### Czech – German neighbourhood – the case of asymmetry

The main aim of the interview-based sociological research<sup>10</sup> made in the Czech part of Krušné Mountains/Erzgebirge Euroregion was to find out the intensity of cross-border co-operation in the section of the Czech-German border. The basic criterion for selecting respondents for this research was their active participation in advocating processes of integration and overcoming barriers to this cross-border co-operation at the local level. Another important factor for selecting relevant persons was their position in the structures of state administration and the local self-government system, in which decision makers have a stronger opportunity of influencing the course of the Czech-German cross-border co-operation.

<sup>8</sup> Coleman, *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> E. Ostrom. ‘Social Capital: A Fad or a Fundamental Concept?’, in: Dasgupta and Serageldin (eds.) *op. cit.*, p. 173.

<sup>10</sup> Carried out within the territory of the Czech part of Krušné Mountains/Erzgebirge Euroregion over the period between 1<sup>st</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> July 2000.

By virtue of its geographical centrality, its size, its influence in Europe's multilateral institutions, and its attractive socio-economic model, Germany is accorded a central "bridging" role in the new Europe. However, factors which have historically underpinned Germany's commitment to Europe's multilateral structures are also subject to change in the new Europe. This project is designed to assess whether those factors which underlay Germany's role in the strengthening of multilateral structures in Western Europe are now changing or eroding as Europe undergoes continent-wide reorganisation.

The select results presented below are drawn from studies of *local and regional elites*. Thus, the data is limited to only a small proportion of the border populations under study. Equally, people involved in CBC activities are usually positive about their effects on the "knitting together" of the two neighbouring countries. The point of the following section is simply to highlight the way in which a social capital approach can be of use to understanding the outcome of certain types of cross-border cooperation.

*Fundamental data of the Krušné Mountains/ Erzgebirge Euroregion*

**participating states: Czech Republic / Federal Republic of Germany**

*size : 4,673 km<sup>2</sup> number of inhabitants: 765 950, foundation date: August 1992, membership in the Euroregion: 78 % of municipalities (villages) and towns.*

The whole territory of the Euroregion embodies quite variant socio-demographic features. They are a result of varying historical developments in its individual parts. One of the dominant elements of this development in the Krušné Mountains foot-hills (Podkrušnohoří) is traditional heavy industrialisation on the Czech side of the border, the consequence of which had an almost immediate impact on the area of the Krušné Mountains. After 1990 this old industrial region went through a complicated process of economic transformation which resulted, in the social sphere, mainly in the loss of jobs for less qualified employees. Another crucial moment in its development was the post-war expulsion of the German-speaking population living in the border areas of the Czech lands and subsequent settlement of these vacated areas with Czech inhabitants (Luža 1964, Houžvička 2000a). The growth in the number of inhabitants living in the Czech districts of the Krušné Mountains /Erzgebirge Euroregion is evident from the following survey:

*Table 1* Development in the number of population in the Czech part of the Krušné Mountains Euroregion

District	1930	1950	1970	1985	1996
Chomutov	147,760	85,398	103,735	122,208	125,236
Most	127,424	101,199	117,189	119,513	119,895
Teplice	200,603	129,583	135,644	133,226	128,118

Sources: Statistický lexikon obcí ČSSR. Praha 1984 (Statistical Lexicon of Municipalities, 1984 Prague), Statistika Ministerstva práce a sociálních věcí ČR (Statistics of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic).

The new settlement in the Krušné Mountains area resulted, in the course of its development, in a qualitative social change since it brought the existence of the language divide symbolised by the state frontier between the former German Democratic Republic and Czechoslovakia, instead of a mixed-language territory.

All three districts of the Czech part of this Euroregion belong to the regions with the highest long-term unemployment rate in the Czech Republic. During the 90s, the short-term illegal migration of Czech employees to the Saxon Region in the neighbourhood has contributed to the solution of part of this problem.

Mountainous areas of the Krušné Mountains are among the least densely populated parts of the Czech Republic (with its 50 inhabitants per 1 km<sup>2</sup>). In spite of the unfavourable economic development in the Krušné Mountains foot-hills (Podkrušnohoří), where more than 50 % of the population of the Krušné Mountains was employed in industry, mainly in the mines, this area did not register a more significant drain of the population from these mountainous areas in the course of the 90s. However, the long-term urbanisation trend, i.e. leaving villages for towns and cities, continues. One of the most serious problems in this area seems to be the growth of socially weaker groups of inhabitants and a lack of identification of the population with this region or locality. This restructuring also concerns forestry and agriculture, which almost immediately influences the social structure of Euroregion inhabitants.

The economic weakness of the region is reflected among other things in the gross national product per inhabitant which only reaches 90 % of the whole-state average. In the Krušné Mountains Euroregion we can find the highest unemployment rate, which grew from 7.8 % to 11.9 % between 1995 and 1998 and is still growing, mainly due to the attenuation of lignite mining. In spite of this it is possible to register certain positive effects which have resulted from the competitive advantages of Czech economics (with cheap and qualified labour, mutual exchange rate of the Euro and the Czech crown, etc.), which leads to the transferring of some of the partial production capacities from the German to the Czech side. On the contrary, the qualified Czech employees push cheap labour out of work by advertising their offer in the German labour market, which causes social problems and tension there.

*Table 2* Unemployment rate in the Czech part of the Krušné Mountains Euroregion

District	1996	1999	2000 (October)
Chomutov	7.7	15.7	16.2
Most	9.4	16.5	21.5
Teplice	7	13.8	17.1

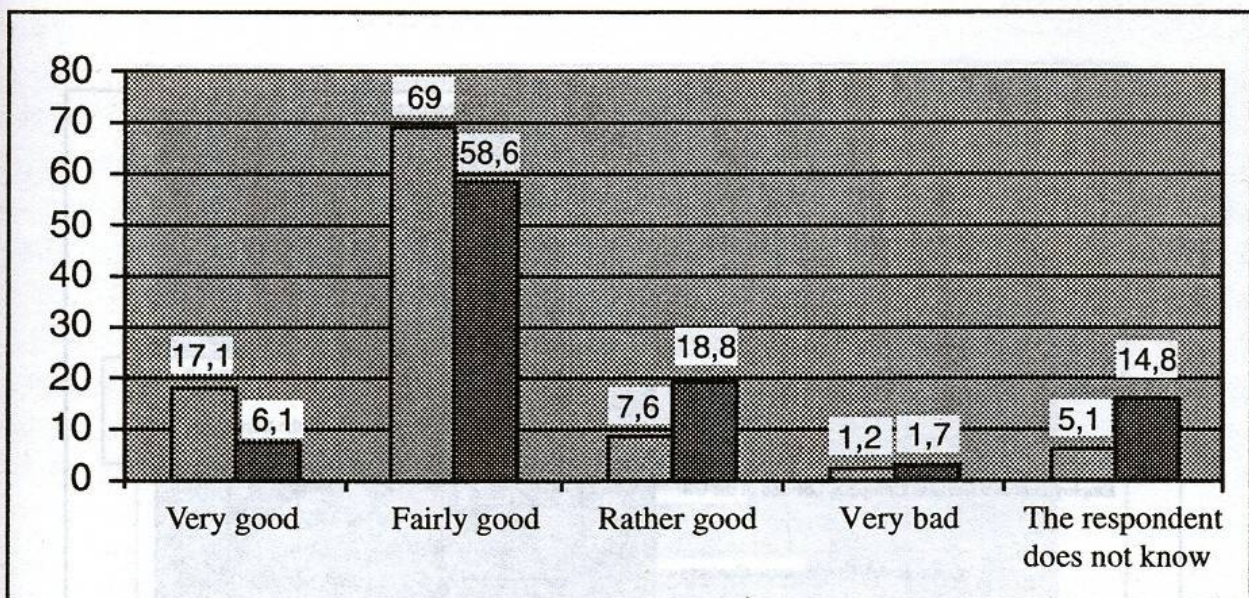
Source: Territorial Administrative Division of the Czech Republic Czech Statistical Office, Praha 1998, Sächsisch-tschechisches Entwicklungskonzept für INTERREG III/Phare CBC Dresden/Prag 1999



A comprehensive report evaluating the level of cross-border co-operation on the Czech-Saxon border reveals that in spite of some progress the cross-border co-operation between municipalities continues to oscillate between “resignation and optimism”; the positive expectation being significantly higher on the Czech than on the German side of the border.

The general evaluation of the intensity of cross-border co-operation still reveals a great number of deficiencies that only prove the facts certified by sociological research ( cf. periodical line of research activities analysing attitudes of inhabitants living in the Czech Border Land towards Germany; the team of the Institute of Sociology of Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic dealing with the research in the Czech – German Border Land, or the research carried out by a team under Prof. Dr. B. Müller – Müller 1999).

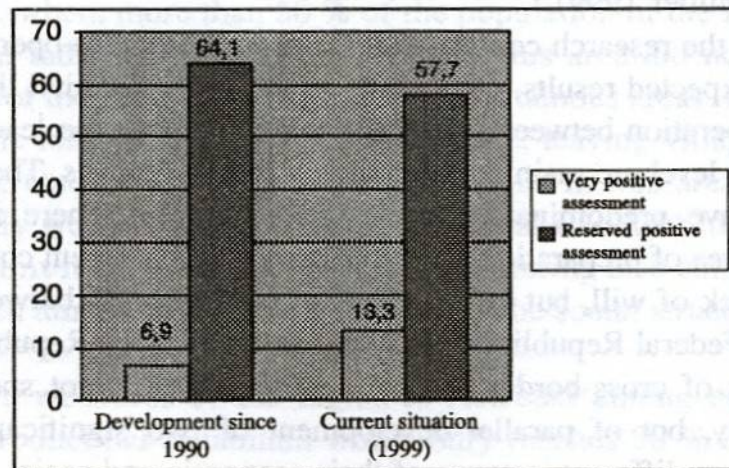
The results of the research confirm that the cross-border co-operation here has not yet brought the expected results, particularly in the sphere of civil life. Provided there are links of co-operation between towns and municipalities, the leading figures at the regional and local level are mainly their political representatives. The contacts existing between them have predominantly a personal character. There is no regular co-operation in the area of preparation and exchange of development concepts. This is not a result of any lack of will, but rather a lack of compatibility between administrative territories of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Czech Republic. In spite of the growing intensity of cross-border co-operation ties, we cannot speak of any cross-border community, but of parallel development of two significantly different and specific nations (i.e. different in terms of their economic and social systems, their life styles and standards, as well as cultural life and other factors).



Graph 1 Quality/level of Czech-German relations (left Euroregion, right nation-Wide October 1999  
Source: Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of the ČR / Sotres-Factum Agency

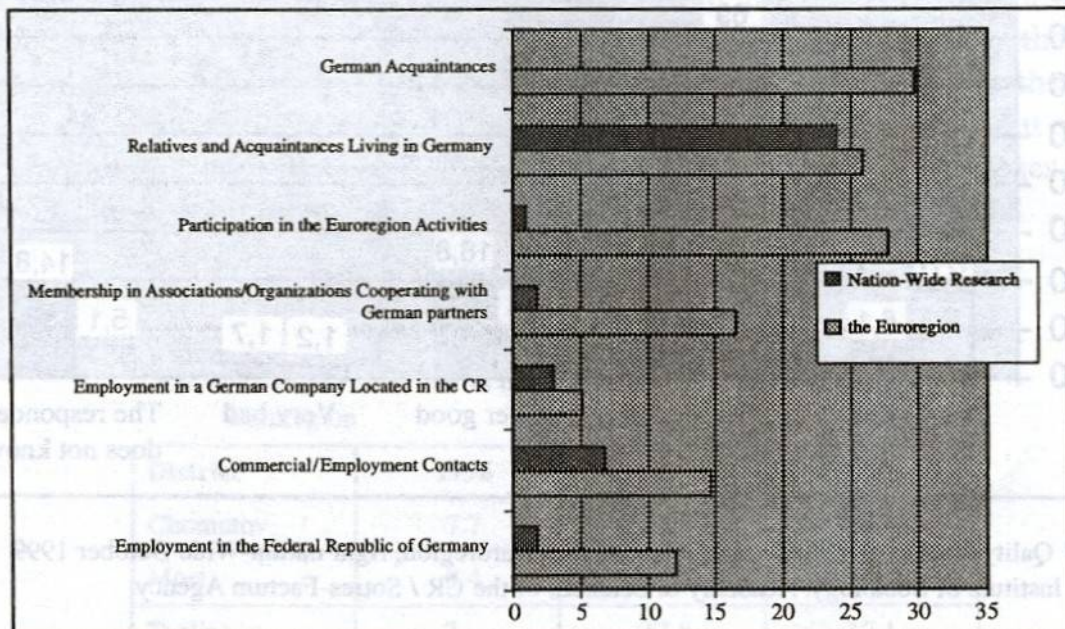
It is evident from the respondents’ replies that the prevailing majority of Czech population opinion evaluates official relations between the Czech Republic and the FRG as peaceful and ordinary. The positive assessment of the relation in the border areas of

our country is much higher than in case of the nation-wide research in which two-thirds of all respondents were mostly positive. The measured value of 86 % in our research is evidently a result of the fact that the respondents of this sample are, on the one hand, professional participants in the Czech–German co-operation, on the other hand they are employees of the state administration and self-autonomous bodies concentrating on cross-border co-operation in their programmes. It can be seen from this comparison that the interviewed group embodies many of the characteristic features of opinion makers who, in general, have a positive approach to co-operation between both countries. The extreme opinions, those evaluating Czech – German relations either as excellent or quite bad, appear quite negligible in this long-term scheme. (Houžvička 1998)



Graph 2 Opinions concerning Czech-German relations

Source: Nation-wide research carried out by the Sofres-Factum Agency, May 1999



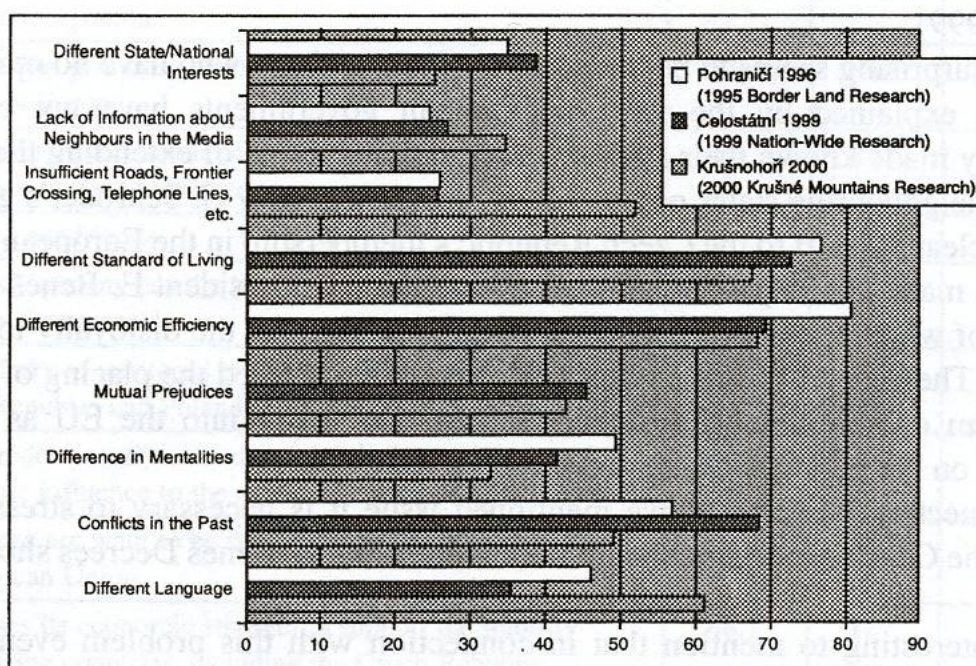
Graph 3 Personal contacts and co-operation with the Germans

Source: Institute of Sociology Academy of Sciences of the ČR Sofres Factum 1999 / Elites of the Euroregion Krušné Mountains / Erzgeling 2000

Comparing the results of the Krušné Mountains Euroregion research with those of the nation-wide research carried out by the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Republic Academy of Sciences (in co-operation with the Sofres-Factum Agency - Houžvička 2000b) we can see that the respondents within this Euroregion exhibit a significantly stronger intensity of contacts with Germany in every respect. The geographical proximity of the border and personal engagement (affinity) of people also play an important role in this research. In case of entrepreneurs (i.e. more than 5 % of all respondents), their economic activities rank highly among other motives. In this connection it is necessary to mention relevant results of nation-wide research activities which show repeatedly that the Czechs maintain most frequent relations with Germany (i.e. around 40 %), Austria (14.7 %) and the USA (14 %), while those with other countries are developed on a small-scale basis.

The 1999 nation-wide research gave the following motives of a travel as most frequent: a trip (35%), shopping (21 %), business trip (19 %), visit to relatives or friends (16,2 %). In respect to the nation-wide importance, the North Bohemian inhabitants, in whose region the Krušné Mountains Euroregion is located, exhibit the highest frequency of contacts.

In comparison with the whole nation average there is an exceptionally high proportion of those respondents who take part in the work supporting the development of this Euroregion (27,8 %), as well as members of associations or societies having German partners. From the figures provided we can reach the conclusion that professional contacts of this group of respondents are reflected in the individual level of forming a cross-border civil community. It is evident that this group of people has a great potential and can initiate Czech-German co-operation at both local and regional levels. The potentials of this group, however, cannot be overestimated as it is a group of the local elite (top people), quite small by virtue of the number of members.



Graph 4 Obstacles to Czech-German co-operation (proportion of the responses stressing the factor of “considerable influence”).

Source: Institute of Sociology Academy of Sciences of the ČR The Czech Border Regions research 1996–2000

Comparing opinions of leading figures of the Czech–German co-operation in the Krušné Mountains Euroregion and attitudes of its ordinary citizens it can be seen, within the nation-wide average, that there are distinct, or even rather striking differences. The people who have had practical experience with cross-border co-operation place an emphasis on knowledge of their neighbours' language, while the factor of the conflicts of the past is considered as a minor obstacle. Similar facts were discovered in 1994, when the team of the "Pohraničí" research compared opinions of two minor corpuses in the border land area and in the interior of the Czech Republic. It was evident that the practical experience of meeting the German population in the border areas led to mitigating fears and prejudices on the one side, and to more tolerance to the "otherness" of their neighbours. Opinions of the inhabitants living in the interior appeared to be more conservative in terms of the surviving image of the typical German as an opponent or rival.

The opinion that *the main obstacle to the development of Czech-German relations is a different standard of living and efficiency of both economic systems* is represented by quite a high figure. The economic inequality of the countries will presumably play important part even in the future, although it has been declining since 1993. In the period from 1993 to 1998 it was constantly in excess of 80%.

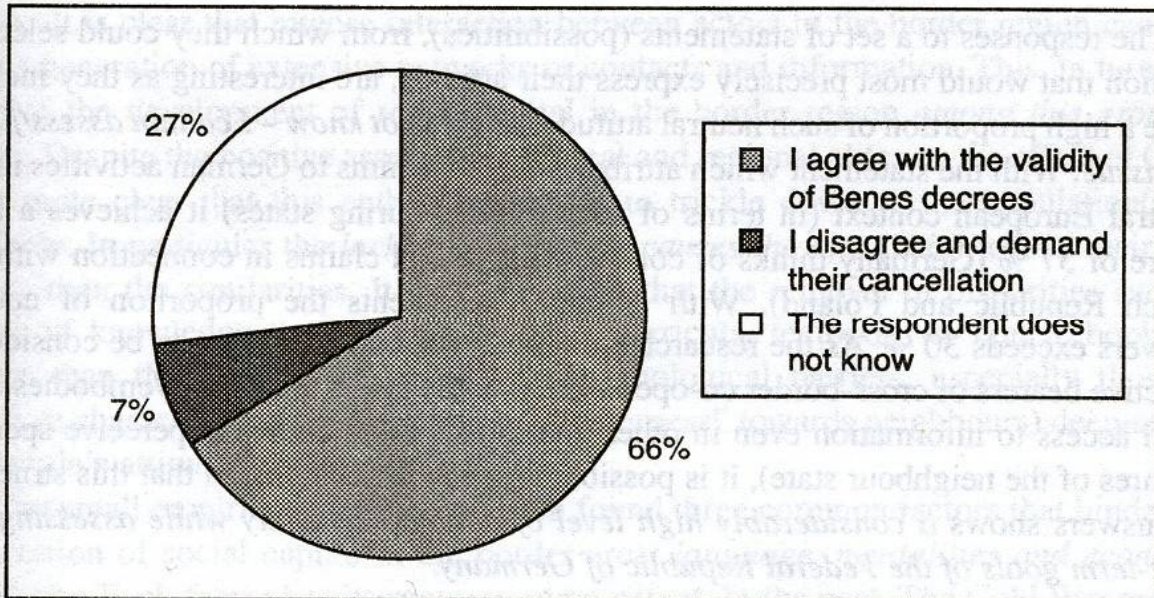
#### **Interests and motives of German support for the Czech Republic's entry into the European Union**

Nearly 60% of all respondents are of the opinion that Germany supports the Czech Republic in its efforts to enter the European Union. Similarly, in the nation-wide study of May 1999, 60% of all Czech respondents stated that they were satisfied that Germany had become our ally after the Czech Republic entered the NATO (Sofres Factum 1999).

Quite surprising seems to be the number of respondents who have no opinion at all. It can be explained by the fact that German governments have not clearly and sufficiently made known their attitude concerning the issue of extending the European Union to neighbouring states of Central Europe. It was only G. Schröder's government that gave clear support to the Czech Republic's membership in the European Union and refused to make this dependent on the re-evaluation of President E. Beneš decrees on the basis of which the Sudeten Germans were punished for the disloyalty to the Czech Republic. The general public in the Czech Republic regarded the placing of conditions in the form of abolition of the decrees onto their entry into the EU as a form of blackmail on the part of Germany.

In connection with the above mentioned issue it is necessary to stress that two-thirds of the Czech general public think that President E. Beneš Decrees should remain valid.

It is interesting to mention that in connection with this problem even in further research activities carried out during the last three years (Research of Cross-Border Co-operation Bearers at the level of municipalities – Zich 2001) such repeated opinions that cross-border co-operation does not lead to the revival the Sudeten German issue at the local and regional levels.



Graph 5 Attitude to the Maintaining of Validity of President E. Beneš Decrees

Source: Sofres-Factum Opinion Poll, May 1999

Table 3 Motives of the German Support for the Czech Republic's Entry into the European Union

	Yes	No	I do not know
Germany is interested in political and economic dependence of the Czech Republic and has its own intentions.	27.2	35.4	32.3
Germany wants to maintain its own affluence to the detriment /at the expense of other countries, including the Czech Republic.	19	43	31.6
Germany enforces, without reservations, the idea of European integration.	41.1	15.2	38.6
Germany makes primarily an effort to achieve economic dominance in Europe.	23.4	41.1	30.4
Germany is interested in our achievement of prosperity and extension of the stability zone.	50	14.6	30.4
Germans are our friends.	51.3	6.3	36.1
Of all states Germany has the largest influence on our entering the European Union.	34.8	17.1	43
Germany thinks of territorial profits in connection with the Czech Republic and Poland.	8.9	26.6	57
Germany predominantly extends its political and economic influence to the east.	34.2	19	40.5
Germany does not want to be the eastern border of the European Union.	36.1	15.2	42.4
Germany uses its economic strength to support the stability of neighbouring countries, including the Czech Republic.	48.1	12	34.2
As a whole it is of great advantage to Germany.	68.4	2.5	22.8

Source: Institute of Sociology Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic Research Elites of the Euroregion Krušné Mountains / Erzgelingne 2000

The responses to a set of statements (possibilities), from which they could select an opinion that would most precisely express their attitude, are interesting as they include quite a high proportion of such neutral attitudes as *I do not know – I cannot assess/judge this issue*. With the statement which attributes negative aims to German activities in the Central European context (in terms of minor neighbouring states) it achieves a high figure of 57 % (Germany thinks of conquests/territorial claims in connection with the Czech Republic and Poland). With all other statements the proportion of neutral answers exceeds 30 %. As the research team used respondents who can be considered as active bearers of cross-border co-operation, (i.e. the group that shows/embody very good access to information even in other questions and an ability to perceive specific features of the neighbour state), it is possible to reach the conclusion that this structure of answers shows *a considerably high level of doubt/uncertainty while assessing the long-term goals of the Federal Republic of Germany*.

This situation does not appear in our sociological research for the first time. Opinions concerning Germany are quite inconsistent in our society. It is presumably the result of pragmatic perception of Germany as a trustworthy and respectable neighbour with whom it is advantageous to develop co-operation. Equally, we can trace the influence of parallel “reminiscence” factors which have a strong impact on social consciousness. Social consciousness and *national identity* for Czechs have a strongly *historicist character* (due to the long-term effort and acquisition of the cultural and natural independence and repeated losses of national sovereignty in New Age history. This can be defined as a result of the competitive nature of their cohabitation with the Germans in the Czech lands on the one hand and the existence of a strong /mighty German state in the neighbourhood on the other hand.

Historic memory forms an emotive component of the attitudes of Czech society towards Germany and forms a sort of “vague background” of the new experience with democratic and prosperous Germany.

We can see the roots of the respondents’ attitudes to the assessment of the motives behind the Federal Republic of Germany giving its support to the Czech Republic’s entry into the European Union in this ostensible character of the confused *mixture of pragmatic realism, emotive-focused insecurity (disbelief) and vigilance*. We find one of the finding to be strongly positive – that one half of all respondents agree that the Germans are our friends and that Germany is interested in our prosperity stability, and that the Federal Republic of Germany makes use of its economic strength to giving support to neighbouring states. When asked about the lack of ulterior nature in these efforts, the respondents are not fully convinced.

#### **Concluding remarks**

This article has set out some ideas of how we can conceptualise CBC and its effects. Whilst far more differentiation regarding *types* of CBC and the sub-groups of people who are affected by it is needed, the ideas offered here give us a starting point in a barren wasteland of *explanatory* models of CBC and its effects.

Among border elites who engage actively in regular interaction with their neighbours, CBC is seen as a crucial driving force behind closer cooperation between

states. It is clear that intense interaction between actors in the border region can lead to the generation of extensive networks or contacts and information. This, in turn, can lead to the development of social capital in the border region *among this group of elites*. Despite the positive assessment of local and regional elites on the effect of CBC, it is quite clear that this enthusiasm is yet to trickle down to the population(s) as a whole. In particular the *lack of information causes the disparities* to win their way rather than the similarities. It is also evident that the removal of disparities such as depth of knowledge (language knowledge, curricula, textbooks or course books) is easier than the removal of social and psychological barriers, especially those of emotive character (such as the feeling of "otherness" towards neighbours) deep-seated in people's attitudes and opinions.

The small empirical studies cited each found three common factors that hinder the generation of social capital in the border area: *language, mentalities and economic disparity*. Each factor has its roots, to some extent, in the past. The Cold War era has left its mark on the acquisition of foreign languages, with Russian a favourite second language in most Soviet satellite states (with the exception of Romania); on the socialisation of citizens, their attitudes towards politics, politicians and institutions (Grix 2000); and, of course, on the economic situation of Poland, the Czech Republic and East Germany. Inadequate language competence (i.e., in the language of the direct neighbours), effects of socialisation (on German, Polish and Czech citizens) and economic difference all hinder the first stage of social capital formation: interaction.

However, these factors are very likely to change over time and CBC could provide one driver of change: language can be learnt (English is on the increase as a medium between different languages); the effects of socialisation in communist societies will diminish the further we get away from 1989/90, most probably in parallel with the stark economic disparities that still exist between the countries under study. Figure 1 above suggests the logical and directional relationship between interaction, trust generation, access to certain information channels or influence on specific events and, finally, the mobilisation of a stock of social capital. Therefore, the cycle of mobilising social capital *must* begin with social interaction, networking or participation in joint forums and so on. It is perhaps worth noting that this cycle takes time to work, but trust can be broken in an instant. There does not appear to be too much of a problem motivating local and regional elites to interact, as they are usually driven by the desire to cooperate. The problem, which remains to be fully researched, is to understand how to extend the social capital among the local and regional elite to the general population(s) on each side.

## References

- ANDERSON, M. (1998): Transfrontier Co-operation-History and tudory. In Brunn, G.-Schnitt-Egner, P. Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit. Theorie-Empirie-Praxis. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft.
- GRIX, J. (2000): East German Political Attitudes: Socialist Legacies versus Situational Factors-A False Antithesis, in German Politics, Volume 9, No.2 (August 2000), 109-124.

- GRIX, J. (2001): Democratization, Volume 8, no. 3, 189–210.
- HOUŽVIČKA, V. (2000a): Sudetoněmecká otázka a vztahy Čechů k Německu (The Sudeten German issue and the relations of Czechs to Germany- review of sociological research 1996-1999). *Mezinárodní vztahy (International Relations)* 4/2000, pp. 94–102.
- HOUŽVIČKA, V. (2000B): Postoje obyvatel České republiky k Německu (Attitudes of the Population of the Czech Republic toward Germany). *Mezinárodní politika (International Politics)* 2/2000, pp 26–27.
- HOUŽVIČKA, V. (1997): Euroregions as Factors of Social Change within the Czech-German Borderland. In Musil, J.-Strubelt, W. *Räumliche Auswirkungen des Transformationprozesses in Deutschland und bei den östlichen Nachbarn*. Opladen: Leske+Budrich.
- HOUŽVIČKA, V. (1998): Germany as a Factor of Differentiation in Czech Society. *Czech Sociological Review*, VI, (2/1998), pp 219–239.
- HYDE-PRICE, A. (2000): *Germany and European order (enlarging NATO and EU)*. Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press.
- JEFFERY, C. (ed.) (1997): *The Regional Dimension of the European Union. Towards a Third Level in Europe?* London: Frank Cass.
- KESSLER, M. (1999): Laboratory for European Integration. The Euroregions. *Inter Nationes, Basis-Info*, 14-1999/European Integration, p. 6.
- LUŽA, R. (1964): *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans (a study of Czech-German relations 1933–1962)*. New York: New York University Press.
- MÜLLER, B. (ed.) (1999): *Interkommunale Zusammenarbeit im böhmisch-sächsischen Grenzraum*. Dresden: IÖR Texte Nr. 131.
- ROSAMUND, B. (2000): *Theories of European Integration*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- SCHOLTE, J. A. (1993): *International Relations of Social Change*. Buckingham/Philadelphia: OUP.
- Sofres-Factum Agency: *Public Opinion Poll aimed on 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of establishing of the FRG*, Prague, May 1999.
- STONE, A.-SANDHOLTZ, W. (1997): European Integration and Supranational Governance, in *Journal of European Public Policy*, 4:3 September 1997, pp. 297–317.
- Territorial Administrative Division of the Czech Republic. 1998. Prague: ČSÚ-Czech Statistical Office.
- WALLACE, W. (ed.) (1992): *The Dynamics of European Integration*. London: Pinter.
- WOOLCOCK, M. (1998): Social capital and economic development: Toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework. In *Theory and Society, Renewal and Critique in Social Theory*. Volume 27/2, pp. 151–208.
- ZICH, F. (2001): *Bearers of Development of the Cross-Border Community on Czech-German Border*. Sociological Papers, SP 01:4. Prague: Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic.

#### PŘESHraniční spolupráce v teorii a praxi – případ česko-německého pohraničí.

##### Résumé

Současná odborná literatura tématu hranic a přeshraniční spolupráce jako faktoru probíhající evropské integrace nabízí omezené možnosti teoretického výkladu efektu komplexního působení integrujících se sociálních a ekonomických systémů sousedních států.

Článek se opírá o výkladový rámec vytváření sociálního kapitálu a s využitím dílčích empirických hloubkových sociologických šetření názorů příslušníků místních elit provedených na území euroregionů *Pro Europa Viadrina* (hranice SRN-Polsko) a *Krušnohoří* (SRN-ČR). Zkoumá intenzitu a dynamiku vytváření přeshraničních vazeb (networking), které postupně „sešívají“ území sousedících států, jejichž vztahy byly v minulosti poznamenány konfliktním vývojem. Studium mikroregionů poskytuje možnost hlubšího pochopení sociálních procesů změny probíhajících v území a představuje komplementární součást poznání procesů evropské integrace na makroúrovni, jak se projevují v postupně se modifikující podobě v závislosti na stupni prohlubující se kooperace členských států Evropské unie.

Většina dosud realizovaných výzkumů pohraničních oblastí vychází ze zkušeností západní Evropy, kde se podařilo v uplynulých desetiletích vypracovat funkční model propojování územních systémů s využitím



instrumentů přeshraniční spolupráce CBC. Zaměření na poznání mechanismů tvorby sociálního kapitálu částečně odstraňuje převládající deskriptivní přístup a nabízí možnost vhledu do probíhajících sociálních procesů iniciovaných geografickou blízkostí a postupným propojováním odlišných sociálních systémů pohraničních oblastí států střední a východní Evropy.

Empirické poznatky naznačují klíčovou roli sociální interakce pro vytváření sociálního kapitálu, který je možno mobilizovat pouze za předpokladu plynulého toku informací přes hranice. Předpokladem je jazyková kompetence aktérů, z níž se odvíjí dynamika neformálních osobních kontaktů, které jsou skladebnými prvky interpersonálních sítí a dynamizujícím faktorem procesu tvorby sociálního kapitálu. Určující roli hraje efektivní komunikační síť příslušníků lokálních politických a kulturních elit. Existuje prokazatelná souvztáhnost mezi sociální interakcí/výměnou a vytvářením potenciálu důvěry, který postupně přispívá k překonání vztahů ekonomické asymetrie, kulturní odlišnosti a historických resentimentů. Důvěra podporuje vytváření nových modelů chování směřujících k ustavení přeshraničního společenství, jako vyššího typu propojování sousedících prostředí.

Na dílčích sondách nabízejících možnost srovnání situace euroregionů v pohraničních oblastech České republiky, Spolkové republiky Německo a Polska hledá stať specifické momenty kumulace sociálního kapitálu (mj. důvěry) tvořícího nutnou podmínku dynamické proměny lokálních společenství jako přímého důsledku procesů evropské integrace na lokální a regionální úrovni. Dynamiku přeshraničního propojování určují (i omezují) především tři faktory: jazykové znalosti, odlišné mentality a ekonomická disparitnost/asymetrie. Případová studie se zabývá specifickou situací euroregionu Krušnohoří/Erzgebirge na hranici České republiky a SRN. Limitované výsledky CBC jsou ovlivněny jak ekonomickou inferioritou horských oblastí, tak nedostatky v sociální struktuře a negativními tendencemi demografického vývoje (řídce osídlení, odchod mladé generace do měst, stárnutí populace aj.). Přesto přeshraniční spolupráce poskytuje určitou šanci zvrátit negativní trendy marginalizace okrajového území státu.