

Cross-border cooperation and development in Czech Borderland

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Abstract:

In 1997, a new network of academically oriented institute workplaces was set with the objective to interlink their ongoing activities, and with a common research project called “Geogrant Pohraničí” (Borderland Geographical Grant). The content of the research was focused on the position of the borderland in the development of regions in the Czech Republic with special attention to its integration into European structures. Empirical inquiry, oriented towards gaining information about subjective attitudes of the population, has been becoming a more and more important method in borderland research. The character and orientation of the study determine the target group of subjects, which can best provide their subjective views on the situation. In their studies, the researchers in the Czech Republic are mainly interested in selected subjects, which include the border (its character, openness, effects), cross-border activities and cooperation, regional development, Euroregions. There are also other issues that attract comparatively less attention: foreign capital, ecological issues, cooperation between settlements, labour market and “pendlering” (cross-border commuting) or assessment of the socioeconomic situation.

Key words: borderland, cooperation, development, empirical research, population

1. Orientation of current borderland research

Borderland issues and monitoring the development in those areas belong to traditional fields of research in several scientific disciplines. These activities often overlap and affect the decisions in practical politics. In the past two centuries, studies of the borderland as well as social (or more narrowly understood, political) geography as a whole have undergone significant changes. In the 1990's, a **new orientation** in social geography shifted its focus onto the study of specific regional contexts, which was based on numerous works dealing with the social and economic differences caused by state or administrative borders, which appeared after the dramatic change of socioeconomic conditions (Maier 2000). It is the borderlands where European integration plays the role of an extraordinarily important element of the regional system and where it assumes specific forms.

During the 1990's, interest in these issues grew significantly especially in the Czech Republic, which resulted in the foundation of a specialized department within the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. The new unit has been concentrated

mainly on social changes in the Czech-German borderland region. In 1997, a new network of academically oriented institute workplaces was set with the objective to interlink their ongoing activities, and with a common research project called “**Geogrant Pohraničí**” (Borderland Geographical Grant). The content of the research was focused on the position of the borderland in the development of regions in the Czech Republic with special attention to its integration into European structures. Such issues as the importance of frontiers, border effect, the demarcation and definition of borderland zones, their potential, their regional development, cross-border cooperation and the stage of integration in the zones are closely explored from the theoretical, empirical and even practically political points of view.

The study of frontier issues is mostly concentrated on political and geopolitical matters with the borderline or the borderline zone proper at the very centre of attention. **Border** as a basic concept in our research can be defined in a number of ways: as the frontier in thinking (Huntington 1993, 1997), as the border between territories (Haggett 1965), as the demarcation line between two regions applying different policies, between two diverse economic systems or between two distinct standards of living (Meusburger 1975). In the following material, the term border is mainly used to mean the state boundary between two – in the international law – sovereign political bodies. In general, borders can be understood as discontinuities, and the areas that can theoretically be separated with the discontinuities constitute regional entities. The concept of border crossing also has to be mentioned, as it is a specific element of borders, combining the separating (isolating) functions with those of penetration (linking).

In Europe, the term borderland regions has existed since the foundation of modern states, and as “pressure zones”, they have always been characterised by both military and political engagement (Maier 1990). Unlike other regions, borderland areas are affected by the presence of the borders; in other words, they display the influence of the **borderline effect**. Its strength, orientation, and range depend on the border type, its function and on the characteristics of the neighbouring regions (Strassoldo-Graffenberg 1974, Martinez 1994, Seger, Beluszky 1993). The changes of the 1990’s facilitated higher penetrability of the border, thus making its contact functions much more significant. Parallely, the bridges between the centres also became stronger (East-West bonds).

In comparison with borders and borderland effect, **demarcation and definition** of borderland zones are paid much less attention, which also applies to monitoring and assessing the processes taking place in these specific areas. The determinative factor for demarcation and definition – and in some regions or localities also for socioeconomic development – is the character and function of the border. However, it is necessary to analyse and appraise the “unified” area at multiple levels: the borderline zone as part of the state, the borderline zone as part of the borderland (i.e. in relation to the adjacent areas), the borderland as a whole (i.e. its position at a higher level of the hierarchical system). Borderland areas are territories which are situated immediately at international borderlines, and whose economic and social structures are directly determined by the proximity of the borderline (Hansen 1981) – centripetal forces. Leimgruber (1980) opts for another approach that emphasizes what he terms functional relations outside the

borderland region – centrifugal forces. Homogenous and nodal regions, mental (perceived) and declared (planning, problematic, subsidized) regions can be listed as examples. There is also an unusual approach to their definition based on the subjective identification of the population (borderland identity), which is declared through empirical surveys, and the population's perception of the differences can function both positively (utilising cross-border opportunities) and negatively (weakening the bonds to the centre or inland).

While much more attention is traditionally paid to the kernel or concentration regions, the current trends stimulate interest in fields which are situated at the other pole of **geographical differentiation**. Not only in academic circles, but mainly in practical support to regional and local development (e.g. the EU policies to enhance its economic and social cohesion), the problems of “underdeveloped” areas (in Czech and European context often due to their position in the borderland) and cross-border cooperation, coordination and integration matters gradually prevail.

Borderland regions are characterised by **variety**, which is engendered by natural conditions, history and socio-economic development. Quite understandably, this leads to limiting generalisation and to individualisation of explanations based on contextual theory (Hampl 2000). In the research, it is necessary to distinguish two overlapping, but definitely not identical concepts: borderland position and peripheral position. Similarly, the scale distinction and also – at least in our circumstances – differentiation between homogenous and relation regions have to be emphasised. The borderline or, in other words, its nature to a certain extent determines the character of the regions, which can reflect the dissimilarity of the socioeconomic systems on either side of the border (polarity, isolation, separation) on the one hand, while they can form cross-border bonds based on similar conditions and comparative advantages (extent of contacts, coordination, integration) on the other. A usually typical feature of borderland areas is **peripherality**, which is determined by both the distance from the central regions and the usual lower degree of economic advancement and in some cases even backwardness (Lauko 2001). Other authors (e.g. Drgoňa 1999), however, stress the fact that in international regions the opportunities for socioeconomic progress grow due to cooperation between their parts.

There are two most commonly applied **approaches** to the study of the borderland: the “macroapproach” (mainly oriented to exterior aspects) and the “microapproach” mainly concerned with interior forces. Schamp (1995) fills the objectively existing gap with the term “mesoapproach” (between the two other levels), in which he focuses on the role of cross-border institutions, e.g. Euroregions. A similar duality can be traced in the realisation of cross-border practical policies, which are applied at two levels: the official politics scale (top-down course) and the every-day life scale based on bottom-up activities. The former can be understood as foreign affairs, the latter then reflects solving neighbourhood problems. However, the two levels have proved inseparable, and it should become a common strategy of the authorities to combine these two approaches including strengthening the role of regional policies.

Naturally, the importance and functions of borders are changing with evolution, which has been clearly shown by our gradual integration into the European Union. In the process, borderland areas elevate from their peripheral positions at the national

level to more central ones within integrating Europe. Regional cross-border cooperation then plays a dual role: it strengthens them and creates *their own identity* (Schabhüser 1993).

2. Cross-border cooperation and management of borderland regional development

Evropská charta územního plánování / European Chart of Spatial Planning (1983) sets the object for the coordination of international policies as opening the borders, facilitating cross-border consultations, sharing the infrastructure, etc. After a relatively long period of being run by individual states, the cross-border cooperation issues prevailed as a common European subject by establishing the *Association of European Borderland Regions (AEBR)* and by the ratification of *Evropská charta hraničních a přeshraničních regionů* (1981) / European Chart of Borderland and Cross-Border Regions, in which borderland regions are described as stones for building bridges for the process of European unification. According to this document, cross-border cooperation is to moderate the handicaps in borderland regions, to change their peripheral position and to improve the living standard of their population.

In *European Outline Convention of Transfrontier Cooperation Between Territorial Committees or Authorities* (1980), also known as the Madrid Convention, cross-border cooperation is defined as “all combinations of administrative, technical, economic, social and cultural measures that aim at strengthening and developing neighbourly relations between regions on both sides of the border, as well as at concluding particular contracts to solve problems which already exist or which could possibly arise in the regions”.

Originally, cross-border cooperation concentrated on relatively minor, specific problems engendered by the border: road network and traffic infrastructure, labour market, tourism and culture. It was only later on that the need for integrated, complex approach arose. **Spatial planning and regional politics** have become the major means of achieving that complexity. However, for a comparatively long time the decision making process about borderland regions' local problems remained in the centres of the states concerned. Competences decentralisation and subsidiarity as guiding principles started to prevail only gradually.

The efforts to lower the separating role of the state border as a barrier (only legal activities being considered) bring about cross-border links between parties of various definitions, organisations or individuals. On the one hand, cross-border activities improve the perception of dissimilarities, and simultaneously, they reduce the negative reflection of differences. These activities can assume various forms, which is documented by numerous examples from borderland regions in the world, Europe and the Czech Republic. The main part in these activities falls to cooperation at local and communal levels, which is often spoken about as “cooperation in small steps”, the necessary prerequisite of which is mutual trust between the cooperating parties. To a great extent, the successfulness of cross-border cooperation depends on concrete conditions. Drgoňa (2001) puts emphasis on the following:

- the existence of larger centres on both sides of the border,
- closeness, both in terms of distance and of similarities in history, culture, politics etc.,

- acceptable complementarity of differences, i.e. mutually complementary parts,
- the ability to formulate a sufficiently motivating vision of benefits for both sides.

Lezzi (1994) has dealt with **specifying** actual cross-border cooperation through analysing European borderland regions, and she distinguishes 6 or 7 stages: no relations / exchange of information / consultations / coordination (negative – concentrated just on moderating or solving problems; positive – aiming at a common goal) / cooperation / integration. Another classification scale to assess current forms of cross-border cooperation can be found in Slavík (2001), who lists the following for Slovakia: agreements between governments on cross-border cooperation, cooperation within the framework of Euroregions, cooperation between self-government and state territorial authorities and finally cooperation between Chambers of Commerce. So, it is the participating institutions that become the primary factor affecting the success, long-lastingness and effectiveness of the collaboration. The institutions can be, according to Zemko, Buček (2000), divided into those that are responsible for creating general conditions and rules (standards, regulations, etc.) for cross-border cooperation, and those that directly participate in the cross-border cooperation.

The process of cross-border cooperation itself runs in two directions: either from the bottom up or from the top to the bottom. The former includes functioning (existing, intensive) cross-border activities at the regional or even local level, which can result in forming common regions – **Euroregions**. This process can also be reversed, which happens in the cases, in which the foundation of the Euroregion becomes an impulse of development and successful cross-border cooperation. Thus Euroregions can be seen as both products and generators of cross-border cooperation (Halás, Slavík 2001). This observation is very true about the transforming countries of Central Europe, where there is a great number of concurring processes and the sequence of important phases in the process is often broken.

Euroregions can be defined as comprehensive international contacts (activities), often with common funding, management and institutions shared by all sides. They do not aspire (at least not as a rule) to become another level of public administration, but they rather tend to create a platform, where already existing bodies including representatives of the private sector meet. In terms of their legal form and status, there are several possibilities, nevertheless, some features are shared by all: Euroregions have their own permanent structures, their identity is separated from their members (e.g. settlement municipalities), they have their own clerical staff (although often insufficient), their own equipment, financial sources as well as their own decision making mechanisms. Euroregions' objectives can be seen as very varied, i.e. different authors emphasise different aspects: e.g. Šindler, Wahla, Lednický (2001) focus on learning about and understanding between neighbours, building up mutual trust, compensating for disadvantages of borderlands and their peripheral positions, and improvement in living conditions.

Working associations represent another type of cross-border structures, in which the authorities are allowed more independence. They rarely establish their own autonomous structures and do not usually make decisions separately from their members. In Europe, they are typical of the Spanish-Portuguese and Spanish-French border zones; in Central Europe the most illustrative example appears to be the Carpathian Euroregion and in the Czech Republic the Committees for Cooperation

with Upper and Lower Austria. Although these structures may in some cases exist for a comparatively long time, they generally tend to transform into classical Euroregions.

Our current knowledge of establishing cross-border planning structures from the bottom – as well as of the possible forms of cooperation – enables us to make a conclusion that the general strategy of formalised cooperation by itself is hardly likely to bring about successful regional development. Therefore, creating **open cooperative relationships and informal forms of communication** between towns, villages, authorities and other participants (including neighbouring/foreign ones) gains more weight as an active strategy in the organisation and management of the region.

The influence of regional cooperation on the integration processes between two immediate partners is limited at the local level. The real integration that can form a new, across-the-border awareness arises at the micro-level, often represented by **near-border communal corporations**. According to Becker-Marx (1992), a highly visible advantage of communal partners is their pragmatic (practical) closeness. It is exactly there where most cross-border problems and projects concentrate, which determines the great importance of cooperation between concrete partners from both communities. However, the competences of municipal authorities in international activities are ordinarily very limited and their means of realisation restricted. There are numerous examples of this type of cooperation to be found in the borderlands, and the forms, content, and intensity vary to a great extent. Nevertheless, it is possible, although perhaps in just a few cases, to classify the cooperation as forming a common conception or strategy, which can even be defined in a written document. Therefore, different levels of cooperation are to be assessed in relation to the overall effects of the changes and not just separately.

Parallely with collaboration in the borderline districts themselves, **transnational** cooperation on a much larger territorial scale started to develop in the 1990's, as it gradually transpired that this kind of cooperation could contribute significantly to socioeconomic cohesion, to preservation of natural living conditions and of the cultural heritage and to more balanced competitiveness of the European zone. These activities correspond with both the European Spatial Development Perspective – ESDP (1999), and the notion of transnational regionalism (Schmitt-Egner 1998), which distinguishes 10 degrees classifying gradually deepening common activities, including, among other things, the following :

- informal cross-border networks of individual and collective participants as results of permanent cooperation (degree 3),
- recognition and perception of the new circumstances by the local population (6),
- transnational regionalism as part of the horizontal cooperation and vertical integration structures (10)

3. Perceiving borderland and cross-border cooperation:

information from empirical inquiry

Empirical inquiry, oriented towards gaining information about subjective attitudes of the population, has been becoming a more and more important method in borderland research. It appears that attitudes, impressions, values and environment

affecting the emotional state of a person have to be regarded as a necessary prerequisite for successful development of a region, especially a borderland one (Kollár 2000). Concrete conditions then stimulate socioeconomic progress, create objective reality and influence its subjective perception by the inhabitants.

The character and orientation of the study determine the **target group** of subjects, which can best provide their subjective views on the situation. Perhaps the most frequently used target group is that of local, regional, but also state populace. The following studies can be selected as thematically relevant examples: the study of national identity (Kostelecký, Nedomová 1996); the study of reflection of the Sudetenland issues in the Czech-German borderland (Houžvička, Zich, Jeřábek 1997) or the assessment of the living conditions in the twin towns of Kraslice and Klingenthal (Jeřábek, Kučera, Müller, Přikryl 2000). Usually, the method of quota selection is applied, and the researchers aim at making the sample as similar as possible to the average population in terms of sex, age, education and residence.

Other groups of respondents can be defined as those of representatives of various institutions: local authorities represented by mayors, labour offices, selected business organisations (singled out according to size or other criteria, e.g. foreign capital interest). However, regional planning experts and local politicians may also be involved. Most of the above mentioned groups have played a role in the research within the Borderland Geographical Grant (Jeřábek ed. 2001). Of other Czech works we can exemplify the study of the Czech-Austrian and Czech-Slovak borderlands (Vaishar 1998) and "The Portrait of a German, an Austrian, a Czech and a Romany" (Zich 1996). Foreign works then include the study of regional identity called "Šumava without Borders" (Stallhofer 2000) and the analysis of the perception of the effects of changes in the society on a provincial town in the Czech-Saxon borderland (Heller 1995), which was published under the title "Klingenthal – quo vadis?" In these studies, the authors usually aim at achieving "the absolute coverage", i.e. involving all, or at least the majority of potential respondents of the target group.

Finally, there is a third approach that is, unlike the previous ones, based on deep, qualitative research. The biographic study of the region where the Czech, Polish and German borders meet in the Nisa Euroregion (Zich 2002), which utilises subjective statements of two generations of grandparents and their grandchildren, can serve as an example. The orientation towards narration prevails, and concrete lives are believed to provide information about the socioeconomic situation at the given time. Interpreting the narrations can then help characterise the structure and development of the respective society.

The borderland and cross-border cooperation subjects can be approached both in a complex manner, i.e. with the aim to cover many various spheres and relations, and more narrowly, i.e. with only some selected aspects, phenomena and processes in the focus of attention. The latter can be illustrated by the **empirical inquiry** based on analysing the answers to a questionnaire designed for borderland settlements mayors (Jeřábek ed. 2001), which is divided into three parts as follows:

- a) Overall characteristics of the borderland regions:
 - the position of the borderland in the regional development of the Czech Republic
 - the changes after 1989 and cross-border activities

- b) Institutional aspects of the socioeconomic development
 - the national, regional and local levels
 - the cross-border cooperation and Euroregions issues
- c) Situations in villages and towns from the cross-border cooperation point of view
 - the socioeconomic development at the local level
 - the cross-border cooperation at the communal level

A similar structure can be found in an opinion poll designed for the inhabitants of 16 microregions in the Czech borderland. Part 1 is concentrated on the population's stability, changes after 1989 and regional development (including labour market problems, transport accessibility and tourism). Part 2 deals with specific issues, such as the borderline, borderland and European integration.

In their studies, the researchers in the Czech Republic are mainly interested in selected **subjects**, which include the border (its character, openness, effects), cross-border activities and cooperation, regional development, Euroregions. There are also other issues that attract comparatively less attention: foreign capital, ecological issues, cooperation between settlements, labour market and "pendlering" (cross-border commuting) or assessment of the socioeconomic situation. Similarly, the interest is unevenly spread from the territorial point of view: besides holistic analyses of all Czech borderland, studies of the Czech-German or namely the Czech-Saxon borderlands and their Euroregions (Egrensis, Krušnohoří, Labe, Nisa) appear more often than those of other borderland zones.

The following part of this article is composed of the data gained from the empirical inquiries realised within the **projects**, coordinated mainly by the author:

- *Role pohraničí České republiky a význam hospodářské a politické spolupráce se sousedními státy pro integraci ČR do Evropské unie* (1998–99, for the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs),
- *Postavení pohraničí v regionálním rozvoji České republiky se zřetelem k zapojení ČR do evropských struktur* (1999–2001, Grant Agency of the Czech Republic), or from other Czech and international projects in which the author participated (*České pohraničí v procesech evropské integrace/Czech Borderland in European Integration Processes*, 1994–96, GA ČR; *Pohraničí jako prostor zprostředkování/Borderland as Mediating Territory*, 1997–99, Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt [German Federal Fund Environment Osnabrück]). The key subjects are the following:

A) The character of the borderline and its adjacent territory can assume various forms, as it changes in dependence on its location, socioeconomic situation, geopolitical conditions, etc. It also alters with time, but the presence of the borderline in a region always becomes a specific element of its development, which acquires another, new dimension affecting the region's advancement either positively or negatively.

Opinion polls conducted among inhabitants in Czech borderland microregions show that their perceptions of the state border do not vary significantly according to the neighbouring state. Expressed through commonly used terminology (e.g. Maier 1990), the prevailing feeling of the subjects is that the border is open and friendly (the opposites used being close and unfriendly). The third question offered two options: the border is either necessary or needless and most respondents opted for the former, but the opinions in the Slovak section were ambivalent, which can be interpreted as

questioning the very existence of the border. Penetrability of the border (the criterion being the number of border crossings in the section) is regarded as satisfactory in most sections of the Czech borderland, and the researchers obtained the most positive subjective evaluation in the Austrian and Bavarian sections. This phenomenon can be explained mainly as a result of the fundamental socioeconomic changes in the 1990's.

B) Unlike the evaluation in A, **the perceptions of the borderland regions** vary more significantly both in sections and selected microregions. The German and Austrian sections can serve as an example: there are several regions identified as peripheral and underdeveloped (the Šluknov, Aš and Jemnice districts), while the respondents can see great opportunities for development just in the Teplice region. The evaluation of cross-border contacts appears to be positive in all Czech borderlands, especially in the Saxon and Slovak sections, but the inhabitants of the Czech-Polish section perceive the contacts as limited. A high percentage of the respondents in most microregions feel that "the locality they live in is in the borderland": 70% in the Bavarian section (in the region adjacent to the Czech-Saxon-Bavarian fork even 88 %) in contrast with the Slovak section (39%) and especially with a third in the Hodonín district.

Each region has its own subjective and objective characteristic features, which make it individually different from the other ones. Mayors of settlements within the range of 15 km from the border describe the area as "*peripheral, lying outside the government authorities' sphere of interest*", although they are financially dependent on state subsidies, as the regional funds are very limited. The mayors are rather critical of or even pessimistic about the current socioeconomic growth, which is also clearly noticeable from their criticism of "*the bad social and economic structures, which restrict the development*". The pivotal problem of the entire Czech borderland (and probably not only of that area) is social development mainly understood as employment/unemployment issues. The situation is perceived as most burning in the south and east of the republic, while the southwest and quite surprisingly the northeast regions discern it more favourably. The second most important issue is the countryside and agriculture, which is accentuated the most in the Czech-Austrian borderland section. The mayors most often speak about "*the natural potential, historical monuments, tourism and spas*" as the specific features of their regions.

C) Opening the borders and socio-political changes create general conditions for the borderland population's opinions, behaviour and activities (Jeřábek 1996a). People on both sides of the Czech-German border welcomed the opening of the border for reasons of both general and individual nature – the latter being e.g. travel opportunities. Tourists also appreciate the radical change in the possibility to travel, as the respondents (in the Polish section) claim that after 1989 they visit the neighbouring countries "more often" or even "significantly more often", and they mostly visit the closest ones. The reasons given most frequently are short trips and shopping in both northern sections (the Saxon and Polish ones), but only trips in the Austrian section (Jeřábek 1997). The mayors also appraise the overall impact of the border opening in 1989 fairly positively (Jeřábek ed. 2001). The least favourable judgements of the development have been obtained in the Czech-Slovak borderland and, surprisingly, in the Bavarian section, too, i.e. at the extreme points of the assumed or perhaps real east – west polarisation of the Czech Republic.

At the local level, the importance of the changes is perceived much less favourably or even neutrally. The changes are most intensively felt in the Bavarian and Austrian sections and least strongly in the Polish one. There is also a correlation between the size of a settlement and the intensity of change perception: larger settlements perceive them more strongly. The concrete experience of the respondents can be divided according to various socioeconomic aspects, equally split between exogenous (external, caused by the neighbouring state) and endogenous (internal, caused by the changes in the economy and society of the Czech Republic). "The increase in German investments" can exemplify the former group, and "improvement in the general appearance of the village" the latter. In the Czech-German borderland, regional differentiation between the Saxon and Bavarian parts and between central and peripheral regions has been found (i.e. the West and Northwest regions / from the Tachov district to Karlovy Vary, and from Chomutov to Ústí n. L. in contrast with the Southeast and North regions. / Prachatice to Domažlice and Děčín to Liberec). The position of the West region, which is almost identical with the Egrensis Euroregion, is very special (Jeřábek 1996b).

D) The mayors perceive **the development in 1990's** quite diversely. The most positively valued general aspects of the socioeconomic situation at the communal level are environment, aesthetic appearance of villages and tourism. In contrast, the labour market situation, agriculture, social conditions and transport traffic are perceived as the most problematic ones. Overall, the Slovak section is evaluated the best, while both German sections (the Saxon and Bavarian ones) come out the worst (Jeřábek ed. 2001). Another empirical survey, which was conducted within the Borderland Geographical Grant among the inhabitants of selected microregions grouped according to the border section, yielded similar results. The respondents in the Czech borderland find the environment, technical infrastructure and the quality of information about local events most satisfying. On the other hand, they are quite critical of the opportunities on the labour market, roads, public transport and leisure time possibilities.

E) Cross-border activities and cooperation with neighbours received a new impulse after the social changes in the 1990's. One third of the settlements within the range of 15 km from the border cooperate with settlements in the neighbouring state (Jeřábek ed. 2001). In this respect, the German section is the most active one (the Borderland Geographical Grant polls show that almost every other settlement is involved), while the least activity is displayed by the Slovak section (only every fifth settlement). The reasons for establishing cooperation are most commonly defined as "the exchange of information and experience", "promoting understanding between the nations" and "solving specific problems in economy, environment, infrastructure, tourism and culture".

The mayors participating in the survey see the main obstacles to successful cooperation in the different purchase power of the inhabitants (compared to western countries), in insufficient exchange of information (mainly in the Austrian and Slovak sections) and in legal problems (with Saxony and Austria), although their effects are less intensive. The results of the research indicate that the conditions for promoting cooperation can be generally considered as prospective and strife-free, despite the fact that the differences between the Saxon-Bavarian-Austrian (the EU members) and the

Polish-Slovak (candidate countries new EU members) sections are perceived strongly. There are several ways to remove the obstacles to cooperation: better dissemination of information, offers to partake in activities, intensive contacts, sharing common interests (sport, arts, etc.), promoted economic cooperation or simplifying administrative procedures. Different administrative systems and occasional cases of insufficient information are not seen as obstacles to cooperation.

The obstacle specification is closely related to the character of cross-border cooperation. The mid-intensive form of cooperation, represented by "agreements and voluntary coordination of activities", slightly prevails (Jeřábek 1996b). The mayors regard tourism and leisure time activities (especially focused on the youth) as the most important area of cooperation. However, common respondents in the Czech-German borderland consider environment and conservation problems more material, which is perhaps a more realistic view. Every other respondent claims to have some knowledge about cross-border activities and events, but respondents from the eastern borderland display a lower degree of that awareness. Subjectively, the institutions that participate the most are the Euroregions and various leisure time associations (Jeřábek ed. 2001).

More intensive cross-border activities and possibly new contacts are to be expected. These activities constitute "hope" for the development of borderland villages and towns, but they are hampered in their realization by the absence of appropriate organisational structures. Euroregions are partly perceived as a means of integration at the regional level (the international dimension), partly as a tool for overcoming the disadvantages of peripherality or as a means of strengthening individual contacts between people from either side of the border. However, individual contacts – especially in the western borderland – are restricted by a language barrier, as our western neighbours speak very little Czech.

Last, but not least function of cross-border cooperation is at the broader, international level. The inhabitants (represented by the respondents) consider its role in promoting international cooperation and understanding quite important, and, at the same time, they largely prefer their own section. Cooperation with Slovakia is valued the most unlike cooperation with Poland, which is rather underrated.

4. Conclusion

In this part, it is appropriate to compare the aforementioned finds with the objectives formulated in Evropská charta hraničních a přeshraničních regionů / European Chart of Borderland and Cross-Border Regions:

1. Overcoming historical barriers involves removing distrust, lessening the importance of administrative borders, encouraging willingness to cooperate, and following the motto "Europe to the citizens".

Historical events related to the Second World War are not regarded as a barrier either to neighbourly relationships in general or to cross-border cooperation, although the current political proclamations give the impression of the opposite. The reasons for establishing cooperation are very often defined as "promoting understanding between the nations", and the subjective factor (the individual level, cooperation facilitating personalities) plays an important role. The quantity and quality of cross-

border cooperation correspond to the historical stage of development and the differences in current possibilities in Czech and the other countries.

2. ***Removing economic obstacles and the imbalance which exists between central and peripheral regions by enhancing exchange of goods and by strengthening local infrastructure.***

The Czech borderland regions which are usually defined as peripheral and underdeveloped got a new opportunity for development in the 1990's. The present and the near future will indicate to which extent the borders constitute a barrier or a mediating zone (the principle of diffusion). The steps under way denote improvement in technical infrastructure, which is a sine-qua-non for socioeconomic development. There are no major obstacles to intensifying cooperation despite the existence of significant differences between the sections situated on the EU member states border and the sections adjacent to the candidate states border. Until now, the cooperation has been oriented towards simple, temporarily profitable services and activities (e.g. wage labour), but this state of affairs will gradually change. When the border "falls", it will be necessary to abandon the regional political philosophy (strategy) for a larger-scale one and seek new productive specialised areas capable of being competitive.

3. ***The unification of European physical planning policies in order to stimulate development in relations between man and the environment, and to provide equal living conditions.***

In Western Europe, legal and organisational measures have been taken to unify the policies, both on bilateral and multilateral bases. The European Spatial Development Perspective, the Local Agenda 21 and following the principle of sustainable growth can exemplify these efforts. The political and economic changes are appraised fairly positively, but rather at the general level. Their evaluation at the regional/local levels is slightly worse, as the interests of particular participants often clash in concrete cases.

4. ***Strengthening cooperation and the efficiency of European institutions by multilaterally approving European and national plans and including the utilisation of Regionální fond k podpoře slabých regionů (The Regional Fund for Support of Underdeveloped Regions)***

The transformation of regional/structural policies into those of socioeconomic cohesion enables complex operation. Due to the fundamental changes in the socio-political situation, it is possible to use supportive means provided by both the national states and the EU to revitalise the areas in question. The funds supplied by the European Union are regarded as the main sources of financial support.

5. ***Borderland and cross-border regions act as a drive for regional development, and as fully functional construction units for the EU.***

Regional economic development plays an extremely important role in cross-border cooperation. Gradually, the Euroregions are gaining their positions of competitive pieces of the European "mosaic". It is there where everyday political, economic, social integration takes place. However, their relations to the state administrative structures have not been clearly defined, at least not in the Czech Republic.

6. ***The principle of equality in partnerships within the multifaceted regional framework respects, preserves and farther develops existing structures as well as it enables their proportionate representation.***

Both "hard" (permanent, official) and "soft" (informal, spontaneously established, representing groups with particular interests) structures participate in the cooperation. The current network of contacts facilitates various realization options which can be interconnected and combined.

7. *Solving concrete problems in international agreements and in forming the administrative system through unified laws combined with the use of practical legal groundwork.*

Currently existing differences in legal systems do not appear to be a barrier to cooperation, which can be illustrated by many concrete cases of cooperation at the local/communal level.

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PŘESHHRANIČNÍ SPOLUPRÁCE A ROZVOJ ČESKÉHO POHRANIČÍ

Résumé

Problematika hranic a sledování vývoje v pohraničí patří mezi „tradiční“ témata výzkumu různých disciplín, přičemž často přesahuje do roviny aplikační (praktické politiky). Se záměrem propojit dosavadní aktivity se v roce 1997 utvořilo společenství akademických převážně geograficky orientovaných pracovišť integrované výzkumným projektem „geogrant pohraničí“. Věcné zaměření výzkumu se soustředilo na postavení pohraničí v regionálním rozvoji České republiky se zřetelem k zapojování do evropských struktur. Zájem při řešení hraniční problematiky se v Česku orientuje především na vybraná témata, mezi nimiž se nejčastěji objevují: hranice (charakter, otevření, důsledky), přeshraniční aktivity a spolupráce, regionální rozvoj, euroregiony, v menší míře jsou zastoupeny okruhy typu zahraniční kapitál, ekologická problematika, spolupráce mezi obcemi, trh práce a pendlerství, či zhodnocení (vnímání) socioekonomické situace.

Stále významnější součástí hodnocení socioekonomického vývoje v pohraničí se stávají empirická šetření, orientovaná na získání informací o subjektivních postojích různých cílových skupin (obyvatelstva, představitelů struktur – např. územní samosprávy zastupované starosty obcí, úřadů práce, vybraných podniků či expertů). V rámci projektu jsme jich realizovali celou řadu, z nichž jsou dále uvedeny vybrané poznatky.

Posouzení charakteru státní hranice je – na základě názorů obyvatelstva příhraničních mikroregionů Česka, zastupující jednotlivé úseky hranice podle sousedního státu – poměrně málo územně diferencováno: hranice je vnímána jednoznačně jako otevřená a přátelská. Vnímání příhraničního území je naproti tomu poměrně výrazně odlišné. Například v úseku německém a rakouském lze identifikovat zejména oblasti periferní, zaostávající (Šluknovsko, Ašsko či Jemnicko), zatímco velké rozvojové možnosti převažují významně pouze na Teplicku. Pohraničí Česka – vnímáno starosty obcí v příhraničním 15 km širokém pásu – se jeví především jako „okrajový prostor, stranou zájmu vládních (republikových) orgánů“, kterému se na druhé straně nedostává prostřednictvím regionální politiky potřebné podpory.

Vývoj v 90. letech je starosty obcí vnímán poměrně diferencovaně. Ze všestranných aspektů socioekonomického vývoje na komunální úrovni lze nejlepší hodnocení zaznamenat u životního prostředí, estetického vzhledu obce a cestovního ruchu. Naproti tomu nejhůře je vnímána situace na trhu práce, v zemědělství, v sociálních poměrech a v dopravě. Obdobně hodnotí situaci i obyvatelé modelových mikroregionů: nejvíce jsou spokojeni s životním prostředím, technickou infrastrukturou a úrovní informovanosti o zdejších dění.

Úroveň přeshraniční spolupráce „odpovídá historickému vývoji a rozdílným současným možnostem“ Česka a sousedních států. Přeshraniční aktivity se sousedy dostaly po změně společenských podmínek v 90. letech nový impuls. Například na komunální úrovni zhruba třetina obcí (ležících do 15 km od hranice) spolupracuje s obcí v sousedním státu. Nejvíce je zapojeno pohraničí německé (na základě šetření „geograntu pohraničí“ téměř každá druhá obec), nejméně naproti tomu pohraničí slovenské (jen každá pátá). Jako důvody k navázání spolupráce se uplatňují především „výměna informací a zkušeností“ a „napomáhání porozumění mezi národy“, až pak následuje řešení specifických (odvětvových) problémů – např. v kultuře.

Za největší překážky spolupráce jsou starosty obcí příhraničního pásu označovány: rozdílná kupní síla obyvatelstva (především k „západním“ zemím), nedostatečná oboustranná výměna informací (zejména na rakouském a slovenském úseku) a legislativní problémy (se Saskem a Rakouskem), jejich působení však není příliš intenzivní. Podmínky pro prohloubení spolupráce můžeme tak celkově podle výpovědí posoudit jako bezkonfliktní a perspektivní, přestože je patrná častá odlišnost úseku sasko-bavorsko-rakouského (ke členským zemím Evropské unie) a úseku slovensko-polského (tedy k zemím kandidátským).

Za nejdůležitější obor spolupráce považují starostové obcí českého pohraničí cestovní ruch, turistiku a využití volného času (případně se zaměřením na mládež). Z institucí se na spolupráci subjektivně nejvíce podílejí různé zájmové organizace a euroregion. Euroregiony jsou vnímány jednak jako prostředek integrace na regionální úrovni (mezinárodní rozměr), jednak jako prostředek pro překonání periferní polohy (národní rozměr) či prostředek k posílení kontaktů obyvatel po obou stranách hranice (individuální rozměr).

Pohraniční regiony Česka, definované zpravidla také jako periferní a zaostávající, získaly v 90. letech 20. století novou rozvojovou šanci. Současnost a blízká budoucnost ukáže, do jaké míry pohraničí představují bariéru či prostor zprostředkování (princip sousedské difúze).