

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CZECH-SLOVAK BORDER AREA AND CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION AFTER 1993

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The aim of the paper is to present the development of the Czech-Slovak border region and the results of the socio-economic analysis in the Czech part of this border region. The analysis of the 30-year development includes the formation of the state border and the institutional base, a summary of border research, a model of the borderland and the characteristics of three specific parts of the borderland. Cross-border cooperation is presented by the development of Euroregions and European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation. The analysis of the socio-economic situation of the Czech part of the Czech-Slovak border area consists of objective and subjective perspectives. For the objective view, the partial results of the project focused on the inner and outer peripheries were used. The main output is the classification of border municipalities according to the degree of development or peripherality. The comprehensive indicator was based on the selected socio-economic indicators (population development, economic development and transport accessibility). The subjective view presents the results of several survey investigations carried out in three sub-areas with different target groups dominantly in recent years. The surveys explored the perception of the border and borderlands, the content and importance of cross-border activities and cooperation, and the role and importance of Small Project Funds.

Key words: borderlands, cross-border cooperation, Euroregion, European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, Small Project Fund, Czechia, Slovakia

INTRODUCTION

The Czech-Slovak border area represents – generally within the study of border areas – a specific territory. It includes the mutually peripheral territories of both states, peacefully established 30 years ago. Mutual relations in politics, economy, society and everyday life – determined by objective conditions and subjective factors – are usually described as above-standard.

The common border (and the adjacent territory) has, in a relatively short period of time, been transformed from a new more or less barrier effect into (once again) an easily passable area, as part of the European integration process. At the same time, in terms of the geography and cross-border cooperation, it is not a homogeneous area, but at least three relatively distinct parts.

Although the Czech-Slovak border area (on both sides) shows objectively certain signs of peripherality, these are compensated subjectively by a common history, similar mentality, close language and intensive individual contacts. Despite numerous critical assessments, this favourable development has been facilitated by support from the European Union through the European Territorial Cooperation

(Interreg) programme, with a focus on large (often infrastructural) and especially small people-to-people projects. It is their implementation that reduces the negative impact of distance from (national) centres and thus contributes to the strengthening of border areas and localities, but also to the interconnection of the Czech-Slovak border region.

THEORETICAL FRAMING – BORDERS, BORDERLAND AND CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

Borders and border regions are a particularly revealing place for contemporary science, especially in the current era of accelerated globalization (Anderson and O'Dowd 1999). This has been reflected in the design of the relevant discipline, reflecting the dynamism and multidisciplinary of social research (van Houtum 2021). Cross-border cooperation is defined as a set of relations between neighbouring regions on a common state border (Perkmann 2003). In particular, the inhabitants of border regions perceive this line not only as dividing but also as unifying (Del Bianco 2006).

The border region is a rather specific area, as it is in direct contact with the neighbouring region through the border. The contact between neighbouring regions is influenced by the border, or rather by its openness and permeability, and also by the character of the neighbouring regions (Dokoupil 2004). The permeability of the border by its nature determines the socio-economic and cultural development of the border regions and it is the permeability of the border that determines the degree or character of the so-called border effect, which has been addressed, for example, by Seger and Beluszky (1993) or Martinez (1994) and partly by Kolossov (2005).

There are many opportunities for cross-border cooperation, ranging from coordination and cooperation between public administrations, to the consolidation of mutual social relations and cooperation between companies. In many cases, the initiative for cooperation comes from local and regional actors (Müller et al. 2000). A frequent reason for initiating cross-border cooperation is also the desire to obtain additional resources offered by transnational institutions (Perkmann 2002).

Cross-border cooperation is now playing an increasingly important role in the regional development of border areas. It is no longer only the state as the main political actor, but also the European Union acting externally on border areas, as well as, for example, Euroregions, which represent one of the important forms of institutional anchoring of cross-border cooperation at the regional level (Havlíček et al. 2018).

In addition, it is possible to mention the relatively new term bordering, which could be translated into Czech as “proces hraničení”. According to Kolossov (2005), the process of bordering means that boundaries are not understood as permanent and unchanging. Scott (2012) defines bordering as a multilevel structure of a constantly ongoing process of re-territorialisation that happens at the level of ‘big politics’ through the establishment of physical borders or visa regimes, for example (Dančíšin 2016).

The term bordering includes at the same time the process of weakening the traditional border function, which we call de-bordering, but equally there can be processes of strengthening the border function, which we call re-bordering.

The recent Covid-19 pandemic has caused many changes in Europe. One of its main consequences was the temporary closure of borders in March 2020, which was introduced as a measure to prevent the uncontrolled spread of the disease. The national border has regained its role as a barrier to protect against the neighbour by restricting all flows across the border (Espinoza et al. 2020). These constraints made cross-border projects very difficult to implement (Šindelář 2023). The pandemic showed that national borders, which were already considered part of the European past, were firmly anchored in the minds of most politicians and citizens (Böhm 2021).

The Association of European Border Regions, the umbrella institution of the different actors of cross-border cooperation, states the following as the main motives and objectives of cross-border cooperation:

- *“changing the border from a dividing line to a place of multilateral cooperation between neighbours,*
- *overcoming various animosities and prejudices between people,*
- *strengthening democracy and developing local and regional structures,*
- *overcoming various national peripheries and isolation,*
- *promoting and raising living standards and adopting approaches leading to European integration”* (Guillermo 2018, p. 32).

METHODS AND DATA

To describe the Czech part of Czech-Slovak borderland we have chosen the analysis of data approximating the socio-economic situation and cross-border aspects of regional/local development. This more or less objective view is complemented by selected findings of a subjective nature from several surveys. The original maps of the Czech border region are also an integral part of the paper, conceived in territorial detail at the municipal level. In conclusion, we will outline the current “state” of the Czech-Slovak border region through a comparison of the presented information.

In the first step, we assess the socio-economic level of the Czech border region as part of the project “Peripheries of Czechia” (Jeřábek et al. 2023). By collecting relevant data, we focused on the so-called internal dimension in the thematic areas of population development, labour market and economy, transport accessibility and additionally housing and internet, as well as on the so-called external dimension reflecting cross-border aspects (small projects, cross-border transport accessibility and town-twinning). We used primarily the public database of the Czech Statistical Office, as well as e.g. the transport census (Ředitelství silnic a dálnic ČR 2020), information sources of transport operators and administrators of the Small (cross-border) Projects Fund.

The next part represents a kind of recapitulation or inventory of empirical investigations carried out in the Czech-Slovak border region. The oldest is a survey of the population within the so-called Borderland Grant (more Jeřábek, ed. 2001) carried out in 2000 in a total of 16 border micro-regions. Here we select the findings for Hodonín and Valašské Klobouky regions and partly also the trilateral Třinec region, in total the opinions of 1 435 responses from residents. Another level was a survey of mayors/mayoresses of municipalities from the 15 km wide border strip.

The essential source is an excerpt from a large-scale survey of mayors/mayoresses in border model territories of Czechia, specifically in two regions: the Beskydy and Pomoraví. From a total of 13 questions, we present the findings from three questions, while also using the possibility of comparison with the remaining studied areas: Nisa (CZ-Germany/Saxony-Poland), Šumava (CZ-Germany/Bavaria-Austria) and Silva Nortica (CZ-Austria). The central part is represented by the sources dealing with the *White Carpathians Euroregion*. The survey was conducted in 2021, focused on satisfaction and comments on the SPF and its current and future functioning. A total of 183 respondents answered 21 questions.

The last primary source of findings was a self-reported online survey with diverse stakeholders. The responses of a total of 22 respondents from both sides of the Czech-Slovak border area (14 from Czechia and 8 from Slovakia). Almost half of them were representatives of local governments, representatives of association of legal entities and public-benefit organizations. The questionnaire was structured into three thematic domains: public perception of the projects and their involvement in SPF activities, the functioning of the SPF during project implementation, individual perception of the border (Blanarsch 2023).

DEVELOPMENT OF STATE BORDER, BORDERLAND AND CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

Czech-Slovak relations, state border, borderland and cross-border cooperation are undoubtedly very specific – both in bilateral and (Central) European levels. Mental, linguistic and political closeness – confirmed by the common state formation, albeit peacefully ended 30 years ago – persists in various levels of the economic and social spheres and in the form of individual contacts of a formal and informal nature.

Before addressing the Czech-Slovak issue, it is necessary to return to the broader (Central European) context. The geopolitical and geo-economic development of Czechia and Slovakia after the break-up of Czechoslovakia can be divided into several periods. During the Mečiar government (1993 – 1998), Slovakia became an isolated state and began to lag behind in its integration into the European and international community. While Czechia, Hungary and Poland became members of the OECD in 1996 and NATO in 1999, Slovakia became a member of the OECD only in 1999 and a member of NATO in 2004. It is worth mentioning the cooperation of the Visegrad Four (V4 – CZ, SK, HU, PL), which was established in 1991 to promote cooperation between the V4 countries and the European Union (Halás 2014).

Passive cooperation within the V4 was resumed in 1998, and after the accession of all four countries to the EU in 2004, the group's foreign policy activities increased even further, and the group focused on promoting cooperation and stability in the wider Central European region. However, there is now a certain weakening of activities, due to different attitudes and views on some EU actions and the Ukrainian crisis.

State border

Every state border has certain specificities and this also applies to the border between Czechia and Slovakia. In the era of Czechoslovakia, it was a national border, except for the years 1939 – 1945, when it became the state border between the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and the Slovak State (Šlachta 1993 – 1994 and 1995 – 1996). After the division of Czechoslovakia and the creation of two

new states, the Joint Czech-Slovak Boundary Commission was established, whose task was to redraw, mark and survey the border. The Commission accomplished the difficult task in less than two years (September 1993 – June 1995). The course of the border was changed in 18 places compared to the original boundary line, the length was shortened from 285 km to less than 252 km, an area of 452.02 hectares was exchanged, and only in two locations was the population exchanged (U Sabotů settlement, Sidónia settlement) – Šlachta (1995 – 1996).

Despite the many parallels, the Czech-Slovak border separates two geographically quite different territories, which differ in morphology, demographic structure and settlement, different structure of the transport network, etc. (Halás 2005).

Borderland

The issue of cross-border cooperation is a relatively young topic for Czechia and Slovakia (for the Czech-Slovak border area). The beginnings can be traced back to the 1990s in connection with the collapse of the system of socialist states, the change of political regime and the efforts of Czechia and Slovakia to reintegrate and be accepted into European territorial structures.

The northern part of the Czech-Slovak border area consists of two regions with different functions. The differences are usually the impetus for cross-border activities and the development of cross-border relations, but in this case the relations were highly asymmetrical. During the era of Czechoslovakia mass migration of labour from region Kysuce to Ostrava region dominated. In the era of new states, the situation has changed to mutual ties, but with a lower intensity.

In the centre of the border, the White Carpathians form the boundary line. On the Moravian side, the region is more open to the interior, both physically and geographically, as well as through the lines of communication. On the Slovak side, the villages extend linearly towards the Central Považí region.

Spatial continuity is best preserved in the southern part of the Czech-Slovak border area, where the border river Morava is an important element. There is a specific settlement structure. A tri-town divided by the state border: Hodonín, Holíč and Skalica, which creates very good conditions for the formation of inter-settlement relations (Halás and Řehák 2008).

The changed situation after the division of Czechoslovakia became the impetus for the interest of experts in the Czech-Slovak borderlands (regions, districts and municipalities). Geographers significantly contributed to the research of the Czech-Slovak border region. In the Slovak part of the borderland these were mainly Halás (1999, 2000, 2002, 2004 and 2006), Slavík (2000), Slavík, ed. (1998), Slavík and Halás (1998, 1999 and 2005) and Spišiak (1996). The authors studying Moravian part of the borderland were: Řehák (1998a, 1998b, 1999 and 2001), Řehák and Daněk (1997), Marek (1999), Marek and Toušek (1998), Toušek (1999), Tomšíčková and Toušek (1999) and Vaishar and Zapletalová (2005). The most comprehensive research on the Slovak part of the borderland at the village level to date has been carried out by Halás (2005), and together with Řehák (Halás and Řehák 2008) they have also contributed unique joint research on the Czech-Slovak borderland (Fig. 1).

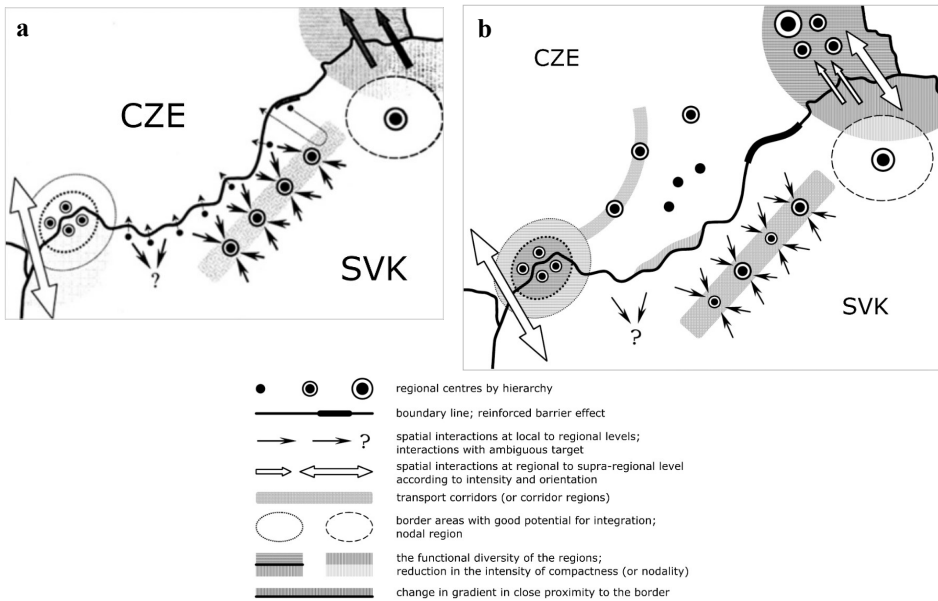


Fig. 1. Schematic graphic model of the Slovak-Czech border region

a – the situation before the division of Czechoslovakia (Source: Halás 2005),
 b – the situation at the end of the 20th century (Source: Halás and Řehák 2008)

Cross-border cooperation

Cross-border cooperation along the Czech-Slovak border is specific due to facts such as a common past within one state formation, historical ties, similarity of language and culture (Rajčáková and Švecová 2013). Some cooperation has been implemented in the past, but it gained new forms and intensity after the division and declaration of independence of Czechia and Slovakia and then in connection with the possibility to draw financial support from EU instruments.

In spite of many similarities on both sides of the border, the development of cross-border relations was delayed in comparison with, for example, the Czech-German or Czech-Polish borderlands, due to the political situation in Slovakia until 1998. Until then, there were no favourable conditions for the development of cross-border cooperation, and it can even be stated that in some cases this cooperation was deliberately hampered (Halás and Slavík 2001). This was due to the strong position of the state, which suppressed all processes that spontaneously emerged from local or regional initiatives, including cross-border ones. On the other hand, it was positive that it was not necessary to build mutual relations “from scratch”, but it was possible to build on the earlier “Czech-Slovak” ones.

A new era began in the late 1990s, when the institutional basis for cross-border cooperation between Czechia and Slovakia was belatedly settled. The Slovak Ministry of the Interior, under the auspices of the Council of Europe, held a series of initial international conferences on cross-border cooperation, the first of which took place on the Slovak-Czech border in Skalica and Strážnice in June 1999. In 2001, the Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Czech Republic on Cross-Border Cooperation was signed and

the Slovak-Czech Intergovernmental Commission on Cross-Border Cooperation was subsequently established in accordance with the Agreement¹.

Cross-border cooperation on the Czech-Slovak border was part of the transformation process in Central Europe. So far, the most frequent form of cooperation has been Euroregions. In Czechia, the process of establishing Euroregions lasted more than 10 years (1991 – 2002), including the first three being established in the Czech-Slovak Federal Republic. In Slovakia, for the reasons already mentioned, the establishment of Euroregions was postponed and, with the exception of the Tatra Euroregion (membership of Slovakia since 1996), the Euroregions were formed between 1999 and 2003. Thirteen Euroregions were created in Czechia, twelve in Slovakia and three of them on the Czech-Slovak border. They were among the last Czech Euroregions and among the first Slovak ones (more in Halás 2007). In 1999 the Euroregion Weinviertel-Jižní Morava-Záhorie² and later in 2000 the Euroregion Beskidy-Beskydy and the Euroregion Bílé-Biele Karpaty were established.

The Euroregions Beskidy-Beskydy and Bílé-Biele Karpaty have belonged to the model Euroregions from the very beginning with their activities and implementation of projects; examples include in the first case a quality website, information boards, in the second case the organisation of conferences, publications about cross-border cooperation and educational materials (Slavík 2023). The Euroregion Weinviertel-Jižní Morava-Záhorie had the best prerequisites for cross-border cooperation due to the nature of the border, its permeability, and the traditionally long-standing good contacts and relations. *“The process of the creation of this Euroregion is a prime example of the lack of legal norms in this sphere. Otherwise, it could not have happened during the official establishment of the Euroregion that the agreement was signed on behalf of the Slovak side by a previously unknown entity, the Regional Association of Záhorie (RZZ), which at the time of signing did not represent any municipalities and towns of Záhorie”* (Slavík 2004, p. 95). This specific situation influenced the development of the activities of the Slovak part of the Euroregion and its early demise. In addition to the above-mentioned three Euroregions on the Czech-Slovak border, in 2003 the cross-border region CEN-TROPE (bordered by the cities of Vienna, Bratislava, Győr and Brno) was established on the territory of four countries. In fact it was a kind of compensation for the planned, but not created The Vienna-Bratislava Euroregion.

A radical change in cross-border cooperation in Europe came about with the publication of the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council of the European Commission on the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation – EGTC (Nariadenie Európskeho parlamentu a Rady 2006). This document introduced a new spatial unit in the field of co-operation, the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), with the aim of facilitating and further promoting cross-border cooperation. On the 15th anniversary of the EGTC, a group of authors summarised the lessons learned from its development to date (Ocskay, ed. 2020). In contrast to Euroregions and similar cross-border associations, EGTCs are legal

¹ The Commission deals with 10 main areas of cross-border cooperation (minv.sk). In addition to the main agreement, agreements and contracts were gradually signed in the following years, which were more specialised in particular spheres of life. The settlement of the new border was also delayed by the approval of new laws on the state border (in Slovakia 1999, in Czechia 2001), which replaced the law in force since 1921 (Slavík 2023).

² The names of the Euroregions are taken from the AEBR membership database, the guidelines recommend using the original names of the member regions of each country. In the contributions of Czech and Slovak authors this was not followed, several variants were used for Euroregion Weinviertel-Jižní Morava-Záhorie. For two Euroregions it was simplified to a one-word name (Beskydy, White Carpathians).

entities that enable more effective cooperation by providing financial stability and, at least in theory, strong commitments of institutional support (Scott 2020). According to Durand and Decovillo (2020), in the developments to date, they are still very rarely used to their full potential when it comes to cross-border integration.

EGTCs in Slovakia are gradually being formed from the former Euroregions or new entities are being created. Between 2008 and 2023, 17 EGTCs were formed in Slovakia (List of EGTCs 2023), surpassing the number of original Euroregions. In Czechia, the dominance of Euroregions persists, with 5 EGTCs established so far. On the Czech-Slovak border 3 EGTCs have been created so far, in 2012 the EGTC Common Region based in Senica, in 2013 the trilateral EGTC Tritia with headquarters in Cieszyn and in 2022 the EGTC Great Moravia with headquarters in Trnava.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION OF THE CZECH PART OF THE CZECH-SLOVAK BORDER AREA

Objective reality

The level of the Czech (Moravian) border area in relation to Slovakia, however defined, is compared within the state at the local level, i. e. for municipalities. From the possible thematic areas, we applied population development, economic situation and transport accessibility. The result is a comprehensive indicator of development or peripherality. We start from the average value of Czechia, while when dividing into quintiles we mark the two worse categories as problematic or peripheral. Additionally, when creating contiguous areas to eliminate isolated cases, we set the category of municipality below average adjacent to peripheral (more Zich 2023).

In this paper, we present only the resulting map (Fig. 2), supported by 41 analytical maps (e.g. the current age index and/or migration over the last five-year period as part of population trends).

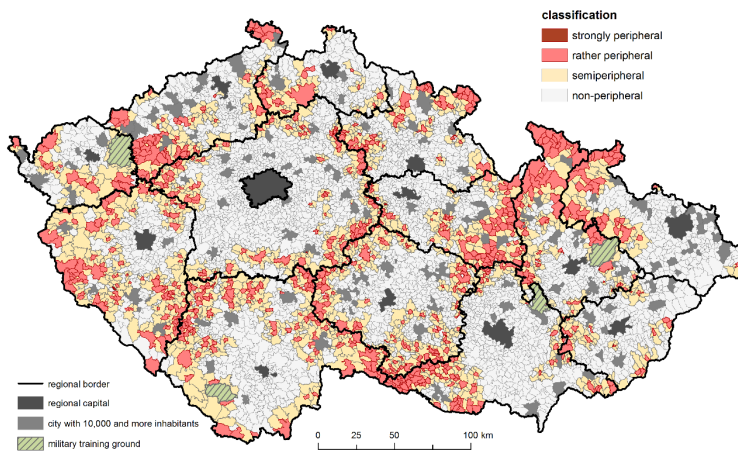


Fig. 2 Regard to peripherality in Czechia
Source: own processing and Jeřábek et al. (2023)

We identify – perhaps surprisingly – a relatively solid position of the area under consideration. The Czech-Slovak border area is not one of the problematic areas, which is somewhat contrary to earlier works on spatial differentiation (Illner 1995, see above). With the exception of transport accessibility, determined by orographic conditions and fragmented settlement structure, there is no major area negatively evaluated. Conversely, it is confirmed that below-average municipalities are concentrated at both state and especially county borders. It can therefore be concluded that the Czech part of the border area with Slovakia is not among the problematic areas of Czechia in terms of peripherality.

This internal dimension is complemented by the external dimension, which is dealt with in more detail. We have added “cross-border” themes (indicators), again presented selectively through one partial map (Fig. 3) and the resulting, comprehensive map (Fig. 4), which serves to define the outer peripheries.

Small-scale projects, often referred to as people-to-people or face-to-face projects, are implemented by a variety of actors (municipalities, schools, associations, etc.) and often form the basis for further cross-border cooperation. Using the database of the operational programme and FMP administrators, we analysed the entire past programming period (2014 – 2020/2022), with individual projects defined territorially according to the location of the applicant or partner (municipality). The chart provides information on the absolute amount of subsidy, while it is clear that municipalities in the north (Moravian-Silesian region) and south (South Moravian region) can also benefit from other cross-border programmes. There is a clear territorial differentiation, with clusters of active municipalities along the border as well as areas not involved in cross-border cooperation.

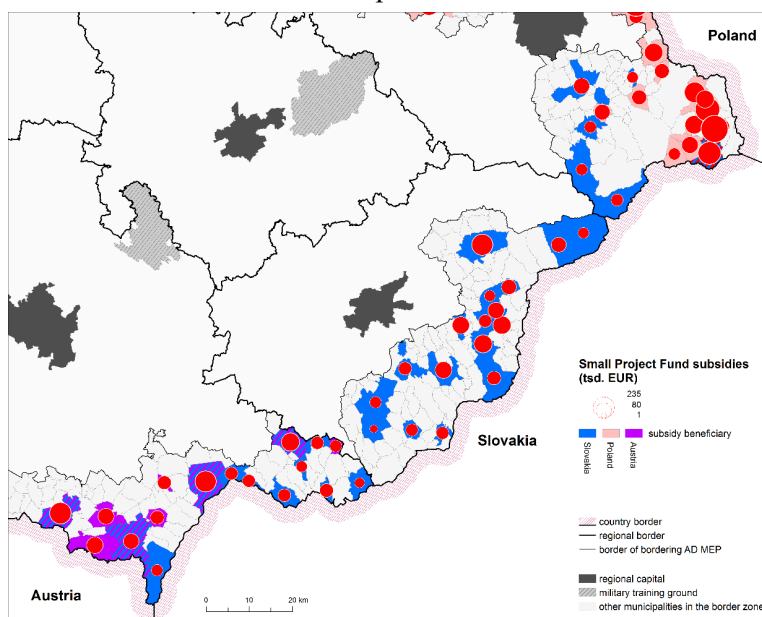


Fig. 3. Small projects Fund in the Czech-Slovak border area in the period 2014 – 2020/2022

Source: own processing and Jeřábek et al. (2023)

Explanation: AD MEP administrative district of a municipality with extended competence.

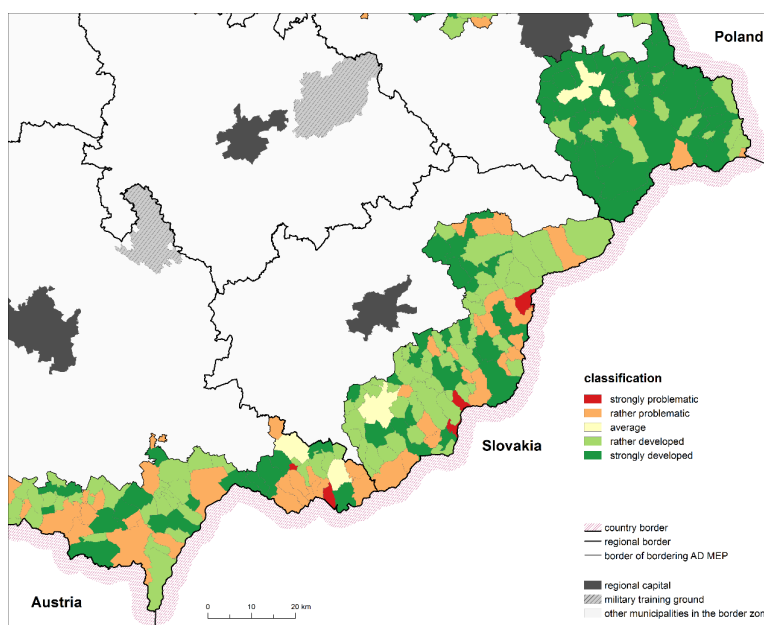


Fig. 4. Degree of peripherality of the Czech-Slovak border area

Source: own processing and Jeřábek et al. (2023)

When including transboundary aspects (external dimension), we start from the internal dimension (see Fig. 2), which – based on the Delphi assessment – accounts for almost half of the weight. The remainder is accounted for by small projects (see Fig. 3), border crossing congestion using the traffic census (2020), accessibility of the neighbouring territory by public transport and cross-border town-twinning. When interpreted, the favourable (in two degrees) situation of the Beskydy undoubtedly catches the eye, the diversity – with a predominance of positive assessments – of the rest of the border belt, where problem municipalities are relatively rare.

Subjective view

Border and borderland – perception and character

The first “topic” concerns the perception of the term “border” by residents (in more detail, Jeřábek ed. 2001). Roughly two-thirds of the Czech inhabitants of the Slovak section (in 2000) labeled the territory as “backward, marginal”, while the opposite variant was “territory with development potential”. Extreme values (compared to other border sections or microregions) were recorded in the Valašské Klobouky region (91 vs. 9%). The respondents of this part were significantly more critical than the overall sample. The answers to the question, focused on mutual contacts, sound more optimistic, again with the exception of the Valašské Klobouky region. There “only” six out of ten respondents expressed positive opinion. As far as territorial/local self-government, we offered the respondents the definition of a key problem for the relevant (in our case Slovak section of the bor-

der), corresponding to the situation at the turn of the millennium. As in the compared microregions, the greatest emphasis is placed on “social development, unemployment” (39%), followed by “rural areas, agriculture” (23%).

To the previous finding, we add some results from the latest survey (Blanarsch 2023). To the open question: “Do you see the border between the Czechia and Slovakia as a barrier?”, the vast majority of respondents answered negatively. They mentioned the almost identical cultural and social background of both sides of the border and the understandable language, in spite of fact that this may not be true for the younger generations. In a following question, respondents subjectively defined the border area. Most often they have specified them through administrative units (mostly border districts) or absolute distance (within 20 to 40 kilometres). The area of most intensive cooperation is considered to be the closest belt around the border, within a few kilometres and within an hour.

Cross-border activities and cooperation

We were also interested in the level of knowledge on the cross-border cooperation actions. Only 29% of the respondents in the surveyed section expressed positive opinion. Cooperation concerns economic and environmental issues, and transport is also significantly represented.

Table 1 illustrates the most frequent representation of projects implemented by local or municipal subjects, whatever the topic. The second position belongs to cultural activities, which corresponds to the tendency to create a cross-border community. The above-average representation of “different organisations” for the Beskydy section signals the diversity of entities participating in cross-border cooperation, which thus creates a kind of networking. Through the mayors/mayoresses of the municipalities, we also observed the importance of cross-border activities for the regional development. Fig. 5 shows a higher intensity in the Euroregion Pomoraví compared to the Beskydy Euroregion. It is clear that the majority of respondents has chosen the first category, so the overall rating is better than the average value.

Tab. 1. Content of cooperation/support from the actors / (in %)

| Category | Pomoraví section | Beskydy section | In total |
|-------------------------|------------------|-----------------|----------|
| Cultural events | 23 | 19 | 19 |
| Collective projects | 5 | 6 | 10 |
| Civil contacts | 8 | 2 | 7 |
| Municipality | 28 | 26 | 29 |
| Other organisations | 10 | 38 | 15 |
| Citizens working abroad | 0 | 8 | 10 |

Source: own survey.

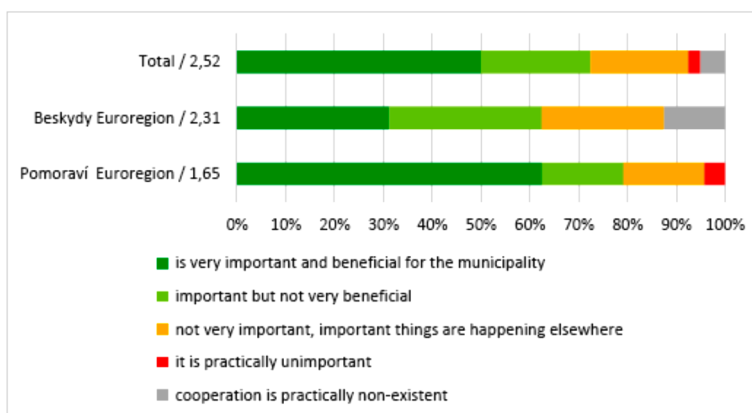


Fig. 5. The importance of cross-border cooperation for the development of municipalities in selected Euroregions in Czechia

Source: own survey.

Explanation: the summary assessment is based on data for two Czech-Slovak Euroregions (+ Austria and Poland respectively), but also for the other three (Silva Nortica – CZ/Austria-Bavaria, Sumava – CZ/Bavaria-Saxony, Nisa – CZ/Saxony-Poland) Euroregions.

The role and importance of the Small Projects Fund

The 21 questions were answered by a total of 183 respondents who have been, are or would like to become applicants for small projects (RBK 2021). We present the findings from the investigation of the Small Projects Fund Manager itself through several ideas representing some aspects of cross-border cooperation:

- About 2/3 of the respondents (institutions) have no experience with cross-border projects and FMP, the rest have some experience in various forms,
- Cooperation with one partner is most common, while every eighth entity does not have a permanent partner,
- The initiative of the Czech side is significantly more frequent, with a multiple choice of 89 vs. 29%,
- Financial support is considered to be absolutely essential. If support had not been obtained, more than 40% of subjects would not have implemented the project, or would have tried other forms of cooperation,
- Subjectively assessed, as many as 2/3 of respondents are “rather satisfied with the implementation of the FMP, only some things did not suit me”, followed by responses in the sequence of rather dissatisfied, dissatisfied to not having any experience (9%),
- The benefits of the FMP projects include (again with multiple choices) the exchange of experience and meeting each other (67%), followed by the preservation and development of natural and cultural heritage, as well as (in general) the extension of the possibility of activities that cannot be implemented from national resources (57% each). The possibility of implementing small investment projects is also valued (44%).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study of border region, including the Czech-Slovak case, provides a wide range of topics, approaches and levels for basic research and practical regional development policy. This corresponds to the involvement of diverse disciplines and actors, participation of specific target groups and the public, implementation of projects of different focus, etc. The aim of the contributions was to describe the genesis of the Czech-Slovak relations and the development since the 1990s and current situation in the common borderland.

If we analyse the relevant conceptual documents, both at the national and regional level, we can conclude that the cross-border issue is – from our point of view – underrepresented. For example, the Czech Strategy 21+ does not work with the concept of border area, and so we have to look for obvious territorial specifics in “related” concepts (economically and socially endangered territories, rural and/or peripheral territories). The approach of the self-government regions (as self-governing bodies responsible for “their” development) is not significantly different.

Simply stated, the periphery is usually far away, let alone the external links, whether to a neighbouring state or to an ‘internal’ administrative unit. Among the topics (sectors) of cross-border cooperation, transport issues are the most frequent: infrastructure of a more transit-oriented nature, as well as service/service of local reach. Cultural links can be described as strong, while economic links are relatively weak.

The European Union instrument, namely the Small Projects Fund under the Interreg programme, is of crucial importance for the Czech-Slovak border region, although it is often criticised for being too bureaucratic. It mainly includes so-called soft projects, oriented towards mutual exchange of experience and meetings (people-to-people, sometimes also face-to-face).

Cross-border cooperation usually takes place between permanent (identical) partners, when the mere knowledge, personal experience and the right “chemistry” facilitates the preparation, actual implementation and eventual implementation of the project. Overly complex or incomprehensible rules are evaluated negatively by project beneficiaries themselves (which subsequently leads to their violation), the lengthy approval process or the project clearance and the preparation of the final report. The most intensive cooperation occurs, both objectively and subjectively, in the nearest border belt within a few kilometres or reasonable time accessibility.

During the 30 years of independence of the new states, the Czech and Slovak borderlands went through several stages. Since 1993, the border has acquired a new character, which has caused complications especially for permanent residents, but also for vacationers. But that was resolved over time. The specific situation gradually approached the standard situation both in Europe and in other border sections of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Of course, all the events here took place with the significant contribution of the European Union, even before the joint entry into the EU in 2004. The entry into the Schengen system in 2007, with the exception of time-limited reasons caused by the political context (refugee crisis, covid pandemic), again “erased” the border.

However, the proximity, determined by language, mentality, kinship relations and, last but not least, the history of the common state, remains both on a general level and more intensely in the common border area. Apparently, so much so that many activities are carried out spontaneously, without the possibility (need) to seek

or use external support, whether through bilateral projects from European funds or e. g. in the context of the Visegrad Group. It depends mainly on the bottom-up initiative how the (cross-border) cooperation will take place in perspective. Thus, the term “above-standard relations” can still be legitimately used because of the real activities that are improving the situation here.

CONCLUSION

The aspiration of the paper was to describe the development of the Czech-Slovak borderland and cross-border cooperation with emphasis on the current situation in the Czech part of this borderland. To describe the socio-economic situation we used the map outputs of the project “Inner and outer peripheries of Czechia” (2020 – 2023). The outer peripheries can be basically identified with the border regions, and we looked at their level of underdevelopment vs. development. Contrary to the assumption, the level here – among others compared to other border sections – is better, as we do not identify problem areas of a larger scale in population and economic development. In terms of transport accessibility, the majority of the territory – in principle, it does not matter whether defined by border regions or administrative districts (SO ORP) – is equipped above average.

With the addition of cross-border aspects, there is a clear territorial differentiation, distinguishing between areas and/or localities that are active and prosperous (determined by objective conditions and supplemented by subjective factors) and those that are lagging behind, or with little or no connection to the neighbouring territory.

An integral part of the paper consists of findings from several surveys carried out in sub-areas (Pomoraví, White Carpathians and Beskydy) with different target groups, but also in different periods (2000, 2021, 2022 and 2023). While the respondents rate “their” territory as “lagging and marginal”, the relevant statistical data do not confirm this (see maps). They do not perceive the border itself as a barrier. The border here did not have the same function before 1989 as it was, for example, in the case of the southwestern border area of Czechoslovakia (the border with Germany and Austria). Undoubtedly, one can agree with the identification of the key problem of the Czech-Slovak border area, namely “(un)employment and rural areas”, which persists and can be considered a more or less permanent feature. As expected, individual contacts is a natural part of everyday life, which may lead to a weakening of the need to institutionalise or formalise cross-border cooperation. In contrast, mayors/mayoresses perceive cross-border cooperation as important, although they also question its benefits for the development of the municipalities (“not very beneficial”).

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VÝVOJ ČESKO-SLOVENSKÉHO POHRANIČIA A CEZHRANIČNEJ SPOLUPRÁCE PO ROKU 1993

Cieľom príspevku je predstaviť vývoj česko-slovenského pohraničia a výsledky analýzy v českej časti tohto pohraničia. Súčasťou 30-ročného vývoja je formovanie štátnej hranice, špecifiká pohraničia a cezhraničná spolupráca prezentovaná okrem iného euroregiónmi a európskymi zoskupeniami pre územnú spoluprácu. Analýza sociálno-ekonomickej situácie vychádza z objektívneho a subjektívneho pohľadu. Na deskripciu sociálno-ekonomickej situácie sme využili mapové výstupy projektu TA ČR „Vnútročné a vonkajšie periferie Česka“ (2020 – 2023). Vonkajšie periferie môžeme v zásade stotožniť s pohraničnými regiónmi, pričom sme sledovali ich mieru problémovosti vs. rozvinutosti. Oproti predpokladu je tunajšia úroveň – okrem iného v porovnaní s inými hraničnými úsekmi – lepšia. V populačnom a ekonomickom vývoji neidentifikujeme problémové oblasti väčšieho rozsahu. Z hľadiska dopravnej dostupnosti dokonca väčšina územia – je v zásade jedno, či vymedzeného pohraničnými krajinami alebo správnymi obvody s rozšírenou pôsobnosťou – je vybašená nadpriemerne. Pri doplnení o cezhraničné aspekty sa zreteľne uplatňuje územná diferenciácia. Vyčleňujú sa oblasti a/či lokality aktívne a prosperujúce (determinované objek-

tívnymi podmienkami a doplnené príp. korigované subjektívnymi faktormi) a zaostávajúce, resp. s nízkym až žiadnym napojením na susedné územie. Neoddeliteľnú súčasť príspevku tvoria poznatky z niekoľkých výskumov realizovaných v sledovaných oblastiach (Pomoravie, Biele Karpaty a Beskydy) s rôznymi cieľovými skupinami a v rôznych obdobiach (2000, 2021, 2022 a 2023). Zatiaľ čo respondenti hodnotia „svoje“ územie ako „zaostávajúce a okrajové“, príslušné štatistické údaje toto nepotvrdzujú (pozri obrázky). Samotnú hranicu nevnímajú ako bariéru. Tá tu napokon nebola ani pred rokom 1989, ako napr. v juhozápadnom pohraničí Československa. Nepochybne možno súhlasiť s identifikáciou hlavného problému česko-slovenského pohraničia, a to „ne/zamestnanosť a vidiek“, čo pretrváva a možno ho považovať za znak viac-menej trvalý. Podľa očakávaní individuálne kontakty sú bežnou súčasťou každodenného života, čo môže viesť (a často vedie) k oslabeniu potreby inštitucionalizovať, resp. formalizovať cezhraničnú spoluprácu. Oproti tomu starostovia/starostky vnímajú cezhraničnú spoluprácu ako dôležitú, hoci jej prínos pre rozvoj obce zároveň spochybňujú („nie veľmi prínosná“).



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