

EVALUATION OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN CZECHIA SINCE 1993: EUROREGIONS ON THE WAY TO AUTHENTIC CROSS-BORDER REGIONS?

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Evaluation of cross-border cooperation in Czechia since 1993: Euroregions on the way to authentic cross-border regions?

Thirty years of existence of independent Czechia are connected with growing cross-border cooperation (CBC) with neighboring states and decreasing importance of national borders. The accession to the EU meant a giant leap towards de-bordering, which was recently disrupted by a few crises. CBC, represented primarily by Euroregions, has its specifics in each analyzed border region. In the text, based on long-term research of CBC in the Czech borderlands, literature review, statistical data analysis, and own qualitative research, we look at the institutional dimension of cross-border integration and propose measuring the performance of Euroregions while focusing on their (INTERREG-funded) projects and the existence of functional working groups assisting in eliminating border barriers. The developed matrix singles out three groups of the Euroregions in the Czech borderlands with different levels of institutional activity.

Key words: cross-border cooperation, INTERREG, small projects, Euroregions and their performance, resilience, Czechia

INTRODUCTION

Since the splitting of Czechoslovakia on January 1st 1993, Czechia shares borders with four countries: Germany (819 km – 460 km with Saxony and 359 km with Bavaria), Poland (796 km), Austria (460 km), and Slovakia (252 km). Although the position of Czechia in the center of Europe predisposes to intensive cross-border cooperation (CBC), the greater part of its state borders is made up of geographical barriers such as mountain ridges and rivers. Together with economic, regulatory, linguistic, and cultural barriers, they hinder cooperation until now. Moreover, Czech border regions are not a monolith, and socioeconomic differences between them are observed (Svobodová et al. 2018 and Pászto et al. 2019). The border effect weakened after 1989, especially after the EU and Schengen space accession. Nevertheless, there were several manifestations of re-bordering combined with the Eurosceptic mood in the last years, specifically during the migration crisis, Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic (Opilowska 2021). These events challenged CBC subjects and the resilience of their cooperation (Andersen and Prokkoła 2021 and Hippe et al. 2023).

The evaluation of the operations of the Euroregions in the Czech borderlands is the primary goal of the text. We will focus only on the Euroregional cooperation because there is a lack of space to analyze other forms of CBC, such as EGTCs (European Parliament 2023) or working communities. We included general human-

geographical characteristics of the Euroregions, an analysis of their activities, and institutional bodies within CBI. The general characteristics update information developed by several scholars (Branda 2009, Krulík 2013, Jeřábek et al. 2018 and Elbel and Kopeček 2022). However, the institutional dimension of CBI is still underresearched in Czechia. We believe it is important to study CBI at this very moment of the ongoing polycrisis, as the resilience of CBC is challenged (Andersen and Prokkola 2021, Laine 2021 and Hippe et al. 2023). The studied dimension is epitomized by the activity of Euroregional working groups and also by the involvement of Euroregions in the INTERREG programme (both standard and microprojects) as lead beneficiaries or project partners within the programme period 2014 – 2020.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A borderland is a territory affected by the existence of a border. It is often perceived as peripheral from the standpoint of a state's central part. Usually, its economy lags behind the development of the core of a state. The EU has various tools to enhance cohesion in the borderland (Medeiros et al. 2021a). European history involves conflicting de-bordering and re-bordering processes (Klatt and Wassenberg 2017, Klatt 2020 and Böhm 2023). Since the formation of the EEC/EU in 1957, de-bordering connected to long-term political-economic strategies has been high on the European agenda. De-bordering was a logically frequent topic among scholars because of the trends of European integration in the last decades, e.g. multilevel governance, regional cohesion policies and paradiplomacy (Böhm 2019 and Kajta et al. 2023). They observed a frontierization of the inner EU borders caused by high border permeability and influencing economic, social and political elements. Re-bordering has become a popular topic over the past five years because of the crises mentioned above (Böhm 2021, Hennig 2021 and Medeiros et al. 2021b).

CBC, one of the central topics of border studies, has been recognized as an essential strategy for enhancing regional development, fostering economic growth, improving infrastructure and promoting cultural exchanges in European border regions (Böhm 2019 and Jakubowski et al. 2022). Euroregions are the most potent and frequent cross-border groupings of multilevel governance in the EU. Euroregions do not correspond to any legislative or governmental institution and do not have direct political power. Euroregions primarily ensure practical CBC and provide a service to cooperating entities that established them. They also provide consultancy or assistance with project preparation. Euroregions have a separate identity from their members, their administration, and technical and financial resources. They have an internal decision-making system. Euroregions and their joint bodies have no single joint legal personality, but entities gathering members from one country usually operate under a single umbrella – the national part of the Euroregion (Medeiros 2011 and Noferini et al. 2020).

Successful CBC depends on external (involvement of supportive legislative body and resources) and internal (skilled human resources, cultural affinity, slight socioeconomic asymmetry) factors (Jeřábek et al. 2018). The ideal state of CBC is CBI, which contributes to deterritorialization, encouraging the exploration of soft rather than harder spaces by cross-border planning (Braunerhielm et al. 2019 and Faludi 2018). In our text, we depart from the model of three interlinked CBI dimensions (van Houtum 2000, Sohn 2013 and Durand and Decoville 2019): the functional one studying cross-border flows, the ideational one analyzing the level

of mutual social trust between populations from either side of the border and the institutional one, resulting from the involvement of various stakeholders in cross-border structures and CBC projects. While we acknowledge the importance of the first two dimensions, we will focus on the institutional one in our text, which is relevant to our research goal.

Durand and Decoville (2019) observed six principal CBI patterns following the timeline of the EU membership. They observed that the institutional dimension drives CBI in the post-communist EU, including Czechia. The cross-border flows and trust are lower there than in the most integrated areas in the EU cooperation core. Although the pandemic-related re-bordering revealed a high level of cross-border flows in the Czech-German (Novotný 2022 and Novotný and Böhm 2022) and togetherness in the Czech-Polish (Böhm 2022, Kajta and Opiłowska 2022 and Opiłowska and Böhm 2022) borderland, we accepted this (institutional dimension-based) observation as a primary theoretical departure point for our article.

The CBC initiatives are supported by the INTERREG programme (although the name differed in some programming periods). These mostly bilateral programmes have had a substantial impact, helping to increase the number of CBC initiatives substantially (O'Dowd 2002) and engaging a wide range of actors. Since the late 1990s, Czech borderlands can profit from the INTERREG Germany/Bavaria – Czech Republic (BY-CZ), INTERREG Germany/Saxony – Czech Republic (SN-CZ), INTERREG Czech Republic-Poland (CZ-PL), INTERREG Austria – Czech Republic (AT-CZ) and INTERREG Slovak Republic – Czech Republic (SK-CZ) programmes, which provide funding for cross-border projects in six-year programming periods. Although the INTERREG programme was introduced to ease the completion and smoother functioning of a single market, it has also opened up opportunities for local and regional actors to engage in secondary foreign policy (Klatt and Wassenberg 2017 and Bloßfeldt 2023). Euroregions are one of the key recipients of EU funds for CBC. After CBC had been connected with EU funds via the INTERREG programme at the end of the 1980s, the number of cross-border initiatives and non-central governmental actors engaged in secondary foreign policy increased substantially, as evidenced by Perkmann (2003). Some authors (Scott 2000) consider working with the INTERREG programme as the primary purpose of Euroregions. Larger projects (usually lasting up to 3 years and with financial coverage of 80% of costs in the “new EU”) financed from the INTERREG program and implemented by Euroregions and other beneficiaries have helped to initiate numerous cross-border partnerships and have involved many people in CBC.

Microprojects under the INTERREG programme are funded to support local communities, businesses, and other organizations. They can cover various topics, such as tourism, environmental protection, cultural heritage, education and social inclusion. Micro-projects within SPF (Small Projects Fund¹) are often implemented by local organizations, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), public authorities and schools. They usually have a short duration of around 6 to 18 months and a usual maximal grant of up to €20,000 (max. 85% of all costs). They are also expected to have a strong local impact and contribute to the overall objectives of the INTERREG programme, such as improving regional competitiveness, innovation, and territorial cohesion (Chilla and Lampracht 2022).

¹ For the sake of simplification, we work with the term Small Projects Fund (SPF), despite this is not precise. There are also terms Micro-projects Fund or Disposition Fund used in various programmes.

The ongoing sequence of crises has underscored the utmost significance of resilience in border regions (Chilla and Lambracht 2022). The notion of resilience has prompted a shift in emphasis from reactive tactics to proactive strategies that promote the comprehensive capacity to rebound from adversity swiftly, adapt constructively to difficulties, and endure the sustained pressures that crises exert (Laine 2021). Generally, it is anticipated that borderlands possess a diminished ability to react positively to shocks and undergo transformative processes (Pascariu et al. 2020), partially due to their location at interfaces and their vulnerability to political instability. This same principle can be extended to their governance structures, given the convergence of different cultures, political systems, and economic traditions in border regions (Hippe et al. 2023). Koch (2021) contends that borderland resilience does not exclusively hinge on a specific geographical area but can be reinforced through interactions among institutions spanning borders. In light of the above-mentioned, investigating Euroregions, Czechia's most prevalent CBC structures, appears to be a pertinent challenge.

METHODS

The evaluative character of the article predisposes us to a thorough analysis of the literature, websites and materials from the Euroregions and other CBC subjects. Nevertheless, the article also contains original research focused on the institutional dimension of CBI with the employment of the following methods:

- analysis of the governance of the studied subjects and the level of sophistication of their institutions by means of monitoring the presence, amount and activities of particular working groups;
- analysis of active involvement of studied Euroregions in INTERREG-funded projects;
- analysis of the INTERREG-related performance of Euroregions (with a focus on the priority axis dealing with institutional cooperation);²
- semi-structured individual, direct, in-depth interview with three leading representatives of the Euroregions, conducted in April 2023;
- supplementary brief questioning on working groups and Euroregional activities, especially involvement in CBC projects, via e-mails to secretaries and project managers of the Czech parts of the Euroregions conducted in April 2023 (despite their response rate being relatively low, as we got 4 responses out of 13 Euroregions, the obtained answers served well to demonstrate specific issues).

Combining different methods and sources makes it possible to examine a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon rather than single cases. We focus primarily on Czech parts of cross-border subjects, but certain overlaps cannot be avoided. We work with the central hypothesis that the governance/CBI in the Euroregions is the deepest on the Czech-Polish border and weakest on the Czech-Austrian and Czech-Slovak borders. Subjects on the Czech-German border are in the middle. The hypothesis is based on the budget allocated to cross-border programs in the mentioned borderlands, the length and intensity of cooperation, and the authors' experience as CBC researchers. Sometimes, the functioning of a CBC

² Relevant data were found on the official webpages of particular INTERREG programmes and Euroregions.

subject depends on personnel composition and various acquaintances and relationships.

In connection with a theoretical foundation built on Durand's and Decoville's (2019) findings, we will compare institutional structures and main activities of Czech parts of Euroregions. In our article, we are going to raise the following partial research questions:

- Are there any major differences between the institutional structures of the studied CBC entities?
- Are there any significant differences between the scope of their activities?
- If yes (expected), what are those differences, and how do they influence the work of studied CBC entities?
- In which types of projects do Euroregions engage? Do they also work outside their primary assignment, which means supporting institutional CBI?

RESULTS

Specifics of Euroregional functioning

There are currently 13 Euroregions in Czechia (see Fig. 1³ and Tab. 1⁴), which are members of the Association of Euroregions of the Czech Republic. In 1991, the first Euroregion involving post-communist territories, Euroregion Nisa⁵, was founded and modelled after the Euroregions on the German-Dutch border. In the subsequent waves, Euroregions were created on the German-Czech, Czech-Polish, Czech-Slovak, and Czech-Austrian borders. They were also created within the preparation of border regions for EU accession through the Phare CBC programme. The first Euroregions were established in the Czech-German borderland between 1991 – 1993 (Nisa, Labe, Egrensis, Šumava) – then Germany was the only neighbor, already the EU member. In the next wave of 1996 – 1998, the Euroregions on the Czech-Polish border were created: Glacensis, Pradéd, Těšín Silesia and Silesia. In 1999 – 2002, Euroregions on the Czech-Slovak and Czech-Austrian borders were added: Pomoraví, Beskydy, Bílé Karpaty and, lastly, Silva Nortica (Branda 2009). There was one unviable project of Euroregion Dobrava on the Czech-Polish border in the early 2000s (Krulík 2013). Moreover, Euroregion Pomoraví renewed its operation after years of inactivity caused by the management of the SPF by the non-Euroregional entity.

The basis of the member base of each Euroregion is made up of municipalities. They are members either individually or as members of associations of municipalities or microregions (Bílé Karpaty and Těšínské Slezsko). Most Euroregions are interest associations of legal entities or associations of municipalities (Egrensis and Pradéd). They allow other entities to become their members if they are from the given Euroregion and they identify with the goals of the Euroregion. In addition to municipalities and their unions, the other members of the Euroregions in Czechia

³ The figure shows not only Euroregions, but also several municipalities which are members of two Euroregions. Moreover, it depicts EGTCs and semi-formal cross-border initiatives.

⁴ The table, depicting the number of municipalities of each Euroregion, include only their member municipalities which pay membership fees.

⁵ The official names of the cooperating entities mostly involve names in both/all involved languages. For the sake of simplification, we use just their Czech names – Euroregion Nisa, rather than Euroregion Neisse-Nysa-Nisa.

are mainly chambers of commerce, universities, companies, civic associations and organizations dealing with nature protection. The organizational structure of Euroregions has two levels, national and cross-border (see Branda 2009).

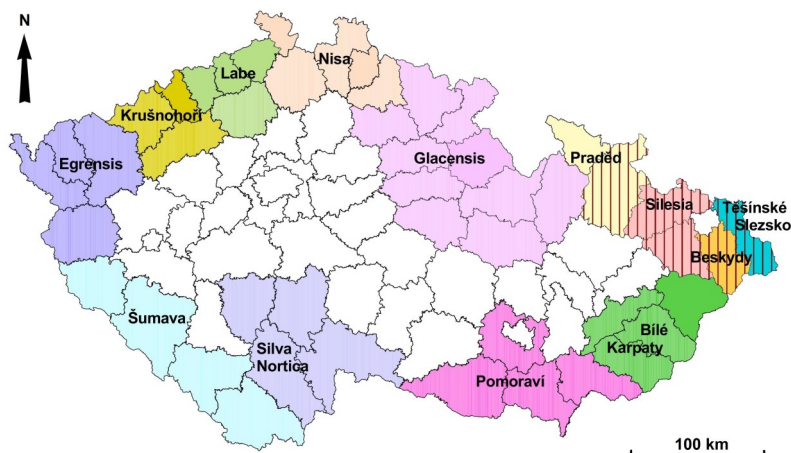


Fig. 1. Map of the studied Euroregions and other regional forms of CBC

Source: Own elaboration.

Tab. 1. Basic data on the Czech parts of the studied Euroregions (2021)

Euroregion	Year of establishment	Partner state	Area in km ²	Population	Municipalities
Nisa	1991	PL, D	2 493	425 683	129
Labe	1992	D	1 161	521 567	64
Krušnohoří	1992	D	1 375	282 261	65
Egrensis	1993	D	2 252	254 336	70
Šumava	1993	D, AT	3 150	146 235	85
Glacensis	1996	PL	2 052	262 770	107
Praděd	1997	PL	1 797	115 954	67
Těšínské Slezsko	1998	PL	781	318 190	43
Silesia	1998	PL	1 252	467 180	53
Pomoraví	1999	AT, SK	1 508	612 372	67
Beskydy	2000	SK, PL	979	174 275	63
Bilé Karpaty	2000	SK	1 434	233 206	78
Silva Nortica	2002	AT	1 633	255 487	36

Source: CZSO (2021).

The vast majority of Euroregions were created before the factual constitution of the Czech regional self-administrative units (kraje), so municipalities established and controlled them. One can say that with some minor exceptions, caused by the transfer of important local politicians from the local to the regional self-administration (as was the case of Martin Půta, former mayor of Hrádek nad Nisou and current president (hejtman) of the Liberec Region and the Czech part of the Euroregion Nisa), the municipalities have retained the control over the Euroregional governance structures.

All the Euroregions have been responsible for implementing the SPF in the framework of INTERREG programme, which have created the dominant part of the agenda of all of them, yet to varying extents. Especially the representatives of the more active Euroregions, who have set up working groups or commissions composed of experts on the subject from both (or all three) sides of the border, mind the synonymization of their work with the administration of the SPF, as they sometimes hear mainly from the representatives of the central ministries. All of the interviewed representatives of the Euroregions quoted one of the senior officials of the Czech Ministry of Regional Development: “Without micro-projects, you would end up in the Labour Office (Unemployment) Registry.” Euroregions – despite being primarily the distributors of microprojects – have the authority to endorse their micro-projects, a practice that is quite prevalent. Importantly, the evaluation of these micro-projects is carried out by impartial assessors, and the Euroregional secretariat's representatives refrain from participating in the final decision-making process, thereby avoiding any perceived conflict of interest.

Euroregional working groups

Most Euroregions have also established permanent cross-border working groups or commissions (also known as EUREX in the Euroregion Nisa) composed of volunteering experts on the subject from both (or from all three) sides of the border (see Tab. 2). Most of the studied Euroregions do not have clear information about their working groups, hence, thorough work with search engines was needed to get some information, usually from outdated documents. It was also mentioned in the methodological part that most Euroregional secretaries did not provide any information about their working groups.

The most complex system of working groups is in the Euroregion Nisa, where there are 15 relatively specific working groups (e.g. in transport, there are separate groups for road transport and rail transport). These working groups allow participants to acquire new knowledge, skills and experience. However, many Euroregions tend to cumulate several similar topics into one working group (e.g. Euroregions Labe, Těšínské Slezsko or Silva Nortica). Some Euroregions do not have permanent working groups and establish working groups only ad hoc for individual current problems (e.g. Silesia, Beskydy or Praděd). For the sake of completeness, it should be added that Euroregions also develop their activities outside of the working groups (e.g. in the language area and youth work). Generally, many working groups were established in the years of euphoria connected with the creation of Euroregions. Many do not operate nowadays, but we can find significant differences between Euroregions. Also, a cross-border disproportion can emerge. For example, in Euroregion Praděd, working groups operate only on the Polish side. We also observe some reactivation of working groups or even their larger equivalents within the scopes of INTERREG projects, such as the project In Contact – Cross-border Cooperation despite Obstacles with the involvement of EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation) Novum and Glacensis and Nisa Euroregions. Specific working groups focused more on ad hoc principles exist in several Euroregions, e.g. in Silesia. There are groups focused on establishing EGTC in the region or implementing development strategies connected with drawing money from the EU funds.

Euroregions develop cooperation most often in tourism. According to the analyzed focus of the working groups, the environment, transport, and culture are also

significant areas. Other working groups are active in the economy, sport and education. The Euroregions Krušnohoří and Silva Nortica have working groups focused on social affairs and agriculture. The Euroregion Nisa is the only one to develop cooperation between libraries and statistical offices. Euroregion Pomoraví has no functioning working group yet because the institution retrieved its activity in 2022.

Generally, in Euroregions Nisa, Krušnohoří, Labe and Egrensis, their working groups seem to have the highest activity. In Euroregion Glacensis, they have been just installed thanks to the project. The same plan was identified in Těšínské Slezsko.

Tab. 2. Working groups of the studied Euroregions (2021)

Working group focus	Euroregion (bold font means active group)
Tourism	Beskydy , Bílé Karpaty, Egrensis , Glacensis, Silva Nortica, Krušnohoří , Labe , Nisa , Šumava, Těšínské Slezsko
Transport	Egrensis , Glacensis, Silva Nortica, Krušnohoří , Labe, Nisa , Šumava, Těšínské Slezsko
Environment	Bílé Karpaty, Egrensis, Silva Nortica, Krušnohoří , Labe, Nisa , Šumava, Těšínské Slezsko
Culture	Egrensis, Silva Nortica, Krušnohoří , Labe, Nisa , Šumava, Těšínské Slezsko
Economy	Egrensis, Silva Nortica, Krušnohoří , Labe, Nisa , Šumava, Těšínské Slezsko
Sport	Silva Nortica, Krušnohoří , Labe, Nisa , Šumava, Těšínské Slezsko
Education	Glacensis, Egrensis , Krušnohoří , Labe , Nisa , Šumava, Těšínské Slezsko
Crisis management	Egrensis , Silva Nortica, Krušnohoří , Labe , Nisa
Public health sector	Silva Nortica, Labe, Nisa , Těšínské Slezsko
Human resources	Bílé Karpaty, Silva Nortica, Krušnohoří
History	Nisa , Glacensis
Territorial development	Egrensis , Labe , Glacensis, Těšínské Slezsko
Social affairs	Silva Nortica, Labe, Krušnohoří
Agriculture	Egrensis, Silva Nortica, Krušnohoří
Libraries	Nisa
Statistics	Nisa

Source: Branda (2009) and the websites of studied Euroregions.

Project activities

Usually, cooperation of institutions and communities creates an integral part of the INTERREG programmes – most commonly, it was priority axis no. 4. This priority axis had a budget of approximately one-fourth of the whole INTERREG costing in Czech borderlands (2014 – 2020) with the exception of INTERREG SK-CZ, which has only one-ninth of entire programme budget and it is focused mainly on communication between citizens and public administration. All SPFs in particular Euroregions are financed from the priority axis no. 4.

INTERREG CZ – PL had the largest budget in the studied axis (€57 mil.) from all programmes in the Czech borderlands divided into 87 large-scale projects. The above-average activity was traceable in Euroregion Těšínské Slezsko and especially in its Polish part, represented by Stowarzyszenie Rozwoju i Współpracy Regionalnej Olza. The Euroregion was involved in eight projects in priority axis 4. Among them were also projects focused on regional specifics such as monitoring air pollution (i-AIR REGION), preserving cross-border flows during pandemics (MODEL.GO), or uniting a so-called divided city (Český Těšín/Cieszyn INEurope). Euroregions Těšínské Slezsko and Glacensis were involved in 6 small projects. The Těšínské Slezsko Euroregion was also involved in four projects in priority axis 2, promoting tourism. The Euroregions Silesia and Glacensis also used the cooperation axis 2 to foster tourism. The Silesianka initiative was composed of two projects, which helped construct three lookout towers and connect them with existing ones into one tourism product. Euroregion Glacensis engaged in two projects, largely aiming to mark and promote a tourist ridge route following the border and building 11 lookout towers. Euroregion Glacensis had the highest number of micro-project beneficiaries (302, the average number was 177). On average, other Euroregions were involved in 3 micro projects except for Euroregion Praděd, which implemented seven micro-projects, all focused on tourism promotion. Euroregion Silesia also coordinated a large-scale project to increase voluntary fire brigade equipment in the borderlands.

It is also important to look at the priority field in which the (Czech-Polish) Euroregions decided not to engage directly, utilizing their direct involvement as the project partner. It was the cooperation in education which universities mainly used. The lack of interest caused this priority axis has not emerged in the 2021 – 2027 programme.

INTERREG BY-CZ had the budget for institutional cooperation of €28 mil., divided into 43 projects. Both Euroregions, Egrensis and Šumava, are similarly active, as they – next to the joint administration of small projects – administer two own projects in the institutional cooperation domain. Moreover, Egrensis participated in 4 (1 BY-CZ, 3 SN-CZ) micro-projects, whereas Šumava has not used this opportunity. Unlike the Czech-Polish or Czech-Saxon Euroregions, there were no projects in other priority fields with the direct involvement of Euroregions.

INTERREG SN-CZ had in this priority axis aimed at promoting institutional cooperation the budget of 36 mil. EUR divided into 45 projects. Euroregion Nisa is the most active entity and the activity of Krušnohoří, Labe and Egrensis is average. An exciting project of Euroregion Nisa is ALiZi: area of cooperation Liberec – Zittau: support of mutual cooperation, development and prosperity focused on the collaboration of important cities of relatively peripheral Three-border Region. Except for this, Euroregion Nisa got involved in two other projects, fostering institutional cooperation in this Euroregion. The Euroregions Labe and Krušnohoří were engaged in one large-scale project promoting institutional collaboration. They were also involved in one project fostering cooperation in the education field. Euroregion Egrensis also got involved in one project promoting tourism cooperation. Euroregions Labe and Nisa are also most active in small projects. Euroregion Nisa is known for its accent on statistics, which was connected with the micro-project Statistical Yearbook of the ERN. Euroregion Krušnohoří was involved in 7 small projects.

INTERREG AT-CZ had the budget for institutional cooperation of €20 mil. divided into 25 projects. The activity on the Czech-Austrian border is generally low. Silva Nortica takes part in the project Euroregional strategy AT-CZ 2021+. No involvement in a small project was found. Except for this, we were able to identify only one more large-scale project – also by Silva Nortica – promoting cross-border tourism. However, the information on the web page contained only identification of the project lead-partner. Hence, it is possible that there were other projects in which Euroregions were in the position of one of the project partners.

INTERREG SK-CZ had an institutional cooperation budget of €10 mil. and we failed to identify any large-scale project implemented by the Euroregion. Direct involvement of the Czech-Slovak Euroregions in small projects is also weak. Only Euroregion Beskydy prepared 3 projects oriented more toward the propagation of the region and tourism.

Conducted interviews and desk research revealed that the scale of activities undertaken by individual Euroregions differs substantially. Historically, we can observe a specific north/south division: the more active Euroregions are those located on the northern borders of Czechia, and more concretely, the Czech-German and Czech-Polish ones, whereas the Czech-Slovak and Czech-Austrian Euroregions are the less active ones. There are various reasons for this, yet money could be named as a common denominator here. As the Czech-Polish and Czech-Saxon Euroregions acted as administrators of the SPF in their territories, the Euroregions on Czech-Austrian and Czech-Slovak borders shared this task with different bodies. The obligations linked with the SPF management asked for the recruited full-time staff members, who could have also conducted other duties in their Euroregional secretariats. Once these people obtained this unique expertise, their experience was often employed for developing their projects implemented by the Euroregions.

As the Euroregion is a voluntary association whose prominent members are municipalities, the membership fees of these members represent the essential source of income. In most cases, the annual contribution for municipalities is set at a specific rate per inhabitant. Traditionally, Euroregions Nisa and Glacensis used to have these fees higher than other Euroregions, which was later mirrored by the increased abilities of these Euroregions to submit, pre-finance, and implement their projects.

CONCLUSION

It was found that all Czech Euroregions are based on similar legal solutions, and their main activity is the administration of SPF. The development of Euroregions in Czechia has significant regional differences caused not only by geographical position and neighboring countries but also by the number and human and social capital of their employees and cooperating actors, networked mainly by working groups cooperating with Euroregions. We can say that INTERREG programmes have been the principal incentives forming the shape of these cross-border entities. Different approaches to managing micro-projects allowed building strong institutions, mainly in the Czech-Polish and Czech-German (Saxon) borderlands. In contrast, the development paths of Czech-Austrian and Czech-Slovak CBC entities differed. Hence, a North-South division of the Czech Euroregions can be formulated, mainly caused by the institutional strengths of the Northern, Czech-Polish and, to a lesser extent, Czech-German Euroregions. The strength of the Czech-Polish and Czech-German Euroregions can be partly co-caused by the existence of estab-

lished catchment areas of cross-border flows (from Czechia to Germany or from Poland to Czechia), as showed by previous scholarship (cf. Novotný and Böhms 2022 and Opiola and Böhms 2022). Still, we believe the main reasons is the long-term activity exceeding the mere SPF management. Thriving Czech-Polish cooperation shows that the new-new EU regional CBI can be relatively intensive, minimally at least in terms of Central Europe, and match the old-new EU regional CBI. Sometimes, we can observe significant institutional activity differences between the national parts of one Euroregion. For example, the Czech part of Euroregion Nisa and the Polish part of Euroregion Pradęd show intense activity while their counterparts behind the border do not. The very active Bavarian part of Euroregion Egrensis overshadows the Czech part, which works average.

We believe our findings could be summarized in the following attempt to categorize Czech Euroregions using Tab. 3. In this table, we used X in bold font for the situations when the Euroregion implements more than 5 large-scale or micro-projects plus in the Euroregions with active working groups. The small x is used for less than 5 micro-projects/large-scale projects and situations when the working groups are re-animated. The resulting table informs us on generally three principal groups of Euroregions: the most active are northern ones, active in submitting their own (both large-scale and small) projects and running working groups. We believe Těšinské Slezsko, Glacensis, Nisa, Labe, and Krušnohoří could be classified here. The second group is formed by Pradęd and Silesia, which have weaker Czech Euroregional secretariats regarding the number of employees, which limits their capability to run more own projects and working groups, Euroregion Egrensis and Šumava. The third group comprises Euroregions, which almost exclusively focus on implementing small projects – Silva Nortica, Beskydy and Bílé Karpaty. Re-animated Euroregion Pomoraví stands at the moment out of all those categories.

Tab. 3. Classification of CBI in the studied Euroregions

Euroregion	Small Projects-Fund management	Own small projects	Own large projects	Active working groups
Nisa	X	X	x	X
Labe	X	X	x	X
Krušnohoří	X	X	x	X
Egrensis	X	x	x	X
Šumava	X	x	x	
Glacensis	X	X	x	X (reactivated)
Pradęd	X	x	x	
Těšinské Slezsko	X	X	X	x (in preparation)
Silesia	X	X	x	
Pomoraví				
Beskydy	X	x		
Bílé Karpaty	X	x		
Silva Nortica	X			

Source: Own elaboration.

In the field of institutional cooperation, most of the analyzed Euroregions are quite active. The real difference was observed in the inclusion of Euroregions in projects, which go outside of the mere institutional cooperation, mainly in the

Czech-Polish borderland, where the very active involvement of mainly the Euro-region Těšínské Slezsko and, to a lower extent, also Silesia and Glacensis, was observed in the field of tourism.

We have also observed that some Euroregions resigned from other ambitions than mere administration of microprojects' schemes at the expense of implementing their initiatives, as was confirmed by conducted interviews. It could have several causes: most commonly, the low membership fees and generation change in the managing structures of Euroregional secretariats were mentioned.

Generally speaking, institutionally strong Euroregions, whose activities go beyond the mere micro-projects administration, are authentic cross-border entities that can face sudden re-bordering. It was demonstrated during the Covid-19 pandemic when, for example, Euroregion Těšínské Slezsko successfully advocated for measures to ease the lives of cross-border commuters after the insensitive border closures were ordered by the central governments (Opiola and Böhm 2022), ensuring thus a considerable level of resilience of cross-border flows.

It should be remembered that Euroregions are heavily dependent on the INTER-REG funds. All Euroregions are responsible for managing micro-project schemes, giving them the primary income source. However, most Euroregions – mainly the Northern ones, also implement their projects entirely depending on financing from the INTERREG programme. The planned change of the approach to the management of micro-projects, applied from the 2021 – 2027 programming period in the Saxon-Czech programme, based on the lowering of the number of Euroregions directly responsible for the implementation of the micro-projects, will decrease the eligible amount for funds for Euroregions, which will probably change the organization of their work.

Despite an existing scholarship analyzing scalar arrangements of CBC partnerships (Noferini et al. 2020, Kaucic and Sohn 2022), they most commonly focus on the CBC structure. We claim that our – yet institutional dimension-based, though combined – way to measure the performance of CBC entities constitutes a novel approach, which could be applied for the sake of their comparative analysis, benchmarking and benchlearning. We plan to use this matrix on broader geographical and institutional scope, as we think it can be an appropriate instrument to study the long-term resilience of cross-border cooperation.

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Hynek B o h m, Artur B o h á ě, Łukasz W r ó b l e w s k i

HODNOCENÍ PŘESHHRANIČNÍ SPOLUPRÁCE V ČESKU OD ROKU 1993: NA CESTĚ K AUTENTICKÝM PŘESHHRANIČNÍM REGIONŮM?

Třicet let existence samostatného Česka je spojeno s rostoucí přeshraniční spoluprací se sousedními státy pod záštitou EU a klesajícím významem státních hranic. Vstup do EU znamenal obrovský skok směrem k dlouhodobému de-borderingu, který byl narušen migrační krizí, brexitem, pandemií Covid-19 či drobnými pohraničními incidenty, jež reprezentovaly re-bordering. V textu autoři sledují nejen vývoj přeshraniční spolupráce v Česku, ale též její institucionální dimenzi optikou hraničních studií a humánní geografie. Fungování institucí je pro přeshraniční kooperaci a vědomí její prospěšnosti mezi lidmi klíčová. V textu je zkoumána existence více či méně sofistikovaných institucí, reprezentovaných existencí a fungováním pracovních skupin a jejich efektivitou jako příjemců projektů, ať jde o velké INTERREG projekty či mikroprojekty. Článek si klade za cíl analyzovat přeshraniční spolupráci a přeshraniční integraci v českém pohraničí a představit jejich současné trendy. Primárně jsou sledovány české části euroregionů, nicméně vzhledem k jejich přeshraniční povaze nelze vyloučit určité přesahy. Text vychází z dlouhodobého výzkumu přeshraniční spolupráce v českém pohraničí, včetně literární a statistické analýzy dat a vlastního kvalitativního výzkumu. Analýza statistik se zaměřuje zejména na dostupné informace o velkých INTERREG projektech a mikroprojektech spravovaných euroregiony. Rozebrána je též existence a funkčnost pracovních skupin. Využity byly metody sekundárního a kvalitativního výzkumu. Zjištěné informace byly porovnány s teoretickými předpoklady a pro jednotlivá pohraničí a jednotlivé euroregiony byly klasifikovány podle jejich institucionální aktivity. Lze konstatovat, že nejlépe fungují euroregiony na česko-polské a česko-saské hranici, kde má přeshraniční spolupráce dlouhodobou tradici, kde je alokováno nejvyšší množství finančních prostředků a euroregiony fungují jako výhradní administrátoři Fondu malých projektů. Průměrné fungování institucí bylo zjištěno na hranici s Bavorskem. Nejslabší institucionální dimenze pak byla identifikována na hranici s Rakouskem a Slovenskem, kde dokonce Euroregion Pomoraví načas přerušil činnost. Institucionálně silné euroregiony, v nichž funguje vlastní projektová aktivita a setkávání pracovních skupin, jsou pak autentickými odolnými přeshraničními entitami, které jsou schopny čelit nenadálému re-borderingu, jako tomu bylo v době pandemie Covid-19 a ne zcela citlivých uzavíráních hranic nařízených centrálními vládami států.



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