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Forward

The long decade between 1990 and 2004 has brought about fundamental changes in European geopolitics. In parallel with the emergence of the neoclassical school of economics and the ever more neoliberal dominance in politics at global level, as well as the evolving integration of the European Communities, the bipolar world order suddenly collapsed: the allies of the Warsaw Pact changed their political regime when they established the basis for democratic transition. The fall of the symbolic Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall, and the independence (re-)gained by many Central and Eastern European nations created the hope of the re-unification of the continent and the elimination of the administrative borders, thus providing evidence to Fukuyama's eschatological prediction on the end of history.

The transformation of the regimes enabled the new independent countries to re-define their international politics, to re-establish their bilateral contacts, to soften border controls and to adapt European values and *acquis*. Between 2004 and 2013, eleven post-communist countries joined the EU, and later on, the majority of them entered the Schengen zone that created fundamentally new conditions for cooperation, mutual trust building and reconciliation. The free movement of goods, persons, services and capital creating the conditions for lively interactions was a brand new experience for the citizens of the above-mentioned countries.

Until 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic led to border sealing everywhere in the world, the two-fold integration of the EU-13 (i.e. their integration in the European polity and their intensified mutual contacts detectable through the increase of the volumes of bilateral trade, cross-border labour migration, the new examples of cross-border residential mobility and the proliferation of twinnings between municipalities and institutions, as well as the mushrooming of cross-border cooperation structures) increased remarkably. These new phenomena have created both a fertilising environment for joint developments and a favourable atmosphere for re-designing bi- and multilateral relationships based on mutual trust and recognition, maybe experienced for the last time in the medieval ages.

In this special volume offering a kind of balance of the last 30 years, border scholars of six former communist countries give their contribution to the above picture. The studies can be classified into two groups: on the one hand, there are articles which provide an overview on the changes of the role of borders and the evolution of cross-border cooperation (CBC) in one of the Central and Eastern European countries; on the other hand, other authors use case studies to illustrate the changes that the given border area has experienced since 1990. The first group of studies includes the presentation of the history of borders and CBC in Poland by Jaroslaw Jańczak (professor of political science at Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań and at the Collegium Polonicum in Ślubice); in Czechia by Artur Boháč (Assistant Professor at Technical University of Liberec); and in Hungary by Melinda Benczi (PhD candidate at the University of Sopron and strategic planner and project manager of CESC) and Gyula Ocskay (secretary general of CESC). Director professor Volodymyr Ustyomenko and Alevtyna Savchenko Senior Researcher (State Institution V. Mamutov Institute of Economic and Legal Research of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine) apply a different approach: they give an explanation on the evolution of the legal background of CBC providing the frames for everyday activities; the concrete examples of CBC illustrate the progress in legislation. Elena Grad-Rusu, University Teaching Assistant (Babeş-Bolyai University) examines the Romanian-Hungarian border with special attention paid to the utilisation of EU funds, while Martin Lačný, Assistant Professor (University of Prešov), selected the Slovak-Ukrainian border as a case study area.

By the publication of the six studies, on the one hand, we would like to give a panorama on the progress of cross-border cooperation in the post-communist countries which, of course, cannot be compared to those western European structures that have been evolving since 1958, the year when the EURegio was established – thanks to the steady democratic and trustful environment. When presenting the results achieved so far, on the other hand, we also would like to deliver the main message of CBC: encouraging local actors to start cooperating with a long-term perspective – similarly to the western European examples.

Together with inviting the Reader to take note of the following studies, I also hope that the useful experiences published in this volume will be beneficial for border scholars and will motivate other scholars to implement similar research projects in the topic of CBC.

The Editor

STUDIES

Jarosław Jańczak

Cross-border cooperation across Polish borders: Tthirty Years of cross-border Eldorado?

Abstract: The article overviews cross-border cooperation across Polish borders in the last three decades. Deeply rooted in conflictive border legacies and border shifts in the first half of the twentieth century, they quickly became locations of symbolic reconciliation with neighbours and functional cooperation aiming at economic development. The non-linear character of these processes resulted from the changing political environment in the region.

Keywords: Polish borders, de-bordering, re-bordering, CBC

JEL code: H7, H70, I2, I20, J6, J61, R1, R10, R5, R50, Z1, Z18

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1. Introduction

Intensive cross-border cooperation (CBC) is one of the main achievements of economic and political transformation and the European integration process in Central and Eastern Europe. Despite numerous similarities, (sub)regional peculiarities can be detected between specific states, revealing diversified models and modes of interactions across borders. Poland seems to be an interesting case in this context. Its borders have been a matter of decades-long concerns due to their (re)location(s), and symbolised - together with their (final) recognition - new, friendly relations with neighbours being a part of the continental integration process. Currently, her borders are of dual status: some are internal, others are external Schengen borders, which strongly influences processes observed there. While some have been objects of long-lasting de-bordering, other reveal (re)hardening in the last years.

The aim of this chapter is to overview the changing status of the Polish borders in the last three decades in the context of political, economic and social processes in Central and Eastern Europe and framed by the European integration dynamics. It is divided into six sections. After the introductory remarks the historical context of Polish borders is sketched, which is followed by their roles and perceptions after 1989. Further, the impact of the entry to the EU on border relations is presented. The last chapters test a wide spectrum of actors involved in CBC across different Polish borders, which allows a critical border reflection taking also the COVID-19 pandemic into consideration.

2. Borders in Polish modern history

To understand the last thirty years of CBC across Polish borders it is necessary to briefly overview the border legacy and border culture of contemporary Poland. The former can be understood as the history of borders, the latter as a set of beliefs of roles and functions played by borders in its history.

The border legacy of contemporary Poland shall be traced back to the reappearance of independent Poland and as a result of the First World War and territorial debates framing this process (*Went-Ilies* 2014) – the question of whether her new spatial shape shall follow the Jagiellonian model (a multi-ethnic empire located in the eastern part of the continent) or the Piast model (an ethnically and culturally homogenous nation state placed more in the western part). The

interwar territorial shape integrated both, but Polish independence was marked with border conflicts with almost all of its the neighbours and the strong presence of ethnic minorities in border regions (Ślusarczyk 1996). Consequently, Poland fought “border wars” with Germany in the west, Czechoslovakia in the south, the Soviet Union in the east and Lithuania in the north. The two peaceful (but very remote and short) pieces of the border were shared with Romania and Latvia. The Second World War brought Poland external decisions of shifting the borders westwards and causing enormous population replacement. Poland lost its eastern provinces (called *Kresy* – the Borderlands) and was offered German regions in the north, west and south as compensation. The German population escaped or was expelled, the space (officially labelled as *Ziemia Odzyskana* – the Regained Territories) was filled with Polish refugees and expellees, mainly from the lost eastern pre-war outskirts (Ślusarczyk 1996). The communist period was characterised by generally closed borders, concessioned and limited cross-border contacts and an official rhetoric of “friendship boundaries”. With regard to its three neighbours, the Polish-Eastern German border was closed (except fromm the 1970s), and a fear of Western German territorial revisionism was present even after the official recognition of the border line in 1970. Until this time, the feeling of “temporality” had been dominant on the Polish border side (Sakson 2001). Poles and Germans were generally isolated and official Polish communist propaganda stressed “eternal enmity” between the two nations alongside with “communist friendship” between communist Poland and Eastern Germany. The Polish-Czechoslovak border was the most permeable and the less sensitive one, with existing cross-border contacts strengthened by linguistic proximity. The Polish-Soviet border remained generally closed and its history and location was largely eliminated from the public discourse, similarly to the pre-war legacy of the Polish eastern provinces.

Border culture can be understood in the above described context as a set of beliefs related to borders and present in the Polish cultural and social discourse. At least two shall be recalled: fluidity and the defender syndrome. The former is related to frequently changing border location and associates Polish national territory with the place where Poles currently live, and not necessarily with specific space (Eberhardt 2004). The latter gives an interpretative context to understanding the role that Poland plays with regard to borders – the role of defender. Being historically located at the edge of the western civilisation, Poles see their eastern border as a barrier for protection against external threats – Mongols (Bojko 2020), Turks or Bolsheviks trying to invade the West. This narration was shortly reversed after 1945 when Poland became a flank protecting the Eastern Camp against the imperialist west, but its traditional meaning reappeared in the modern manifestation with the entry to the EU and the Schengen area.

3. Borders of Poland and the collapse of communism

The collapse of communism brought internal freedom to Poland, but regionally and continentally resulted in drastic changes in the Polish geopolitical situation and border relations. One major factor is that Germany was reunified and this strongest European state became Poland’s direct neighbour (the 467-km-long border follows the Neisse and Oder Rivers). Poland was pressing on “final” recognition of the common border as it was afraid of German territorial claims. This materialised soon in the form of the treaty in 1990 and the German policy of being a peaceful and reliable pillar of the European integration. In 2013 Czechoslovakia disintegrated, giving Poland two neighbours in the south (796 km of the border were shared with Czechia and 541 with Slovakia – both in mountainous areas), similarly to the Soviet Union, where the old territorial order was replaced by borders with Ukraine (535 km), Belarus (418 km), Lithuania (104 km) and the Russian Federation (Kaliningrad Region - 210 km). The change in international politics was assisted by domestic political and economic transformation. The former resulted in decentralisation, the creation of authorities at local and regional levels equipped them with numerous competences, including cooperation with foreign partners. The latter introduced the free-market economy, which led to booming private initiative (this was the only way of creating

income for many individuals under the circumstances of complete breakdown of the previously dominant centrally planned system).

The new situation had significant consequences for borders. First of all, at the state level, it resulted in a long-lasting tendency of de-bordering by softening border regimes – allowing individuals to cross the borders and (more and more) freely circulate across them. Second, a group of local and regional institutional actors (local and regional authorities) became very active in creating cross-border contacts. Third, individuals became one of the most visible elements of the border landscape, especially with regard to local cross-border trade, smuggling, economic exchange, etc. Most of the border crossing points were quickly covered with so-called “bazaars” – open-air markets attracting millions of visitors and customers from the other side of the border. All those tendencies initiated the process of transforming the Polish borders from remote and underdeveloped edges of the national territory into dynamic and intensively developing bridges to the neighbouring states and communities. The boundary form started to change into a frontier form (*Kristof* 1959). This was realised the most intensively with the European Union’s enlargement in 2004.

4. Polish borders and the European integration

Polish borders and CBC in the 1990s were very quickly influenced by the pro-western dimension of the Polish foreign policy, materialised in attempt to join the European Union. This was visible at several levels:

First of all, prioritisation of the “horizontal” over “vertical” cross-border links. Trying to be the bridge between both parts of the continent, Poland focused on infrastructure, emphasising – especially economically – western and eastern borders. This changed only in the 2010s.

Second, the most obvious way to join the western structures was “through” Germany. The Polish-German border became the most significant border in state politics. Building successful CBC on this specific border, established in the context of continental integration, was meant to prove reconciliation between both states and nations and serve as an example of new, cooperative and peaceful relations between former enemies. At the same time, it was a test for economic cooperation, using existing asymmetries in production costs and unemployment level to achieve a synergetic effect. Consequently, enormous stress was put on two types of cross-border initiatives: social-cultural (bringing previously separated Poles and Germans together, teaching their neighbours’ language, building trust and creating human contacts), and infrastructural (creating cross-border infrastructure enabling individual and business actors to operate across the border).

Third, a more general tendency to establish cross-border cooperation was also visible on the southern and eastern border, especially in the context of openness towards the new neighbours. This process was driven especially by local and regional institutional actors, as well as by individuals.

Forth, the initial de-bordering was deepening on the western and southern border, but over time, the process turned into regress at the eastern border. On the west and south, together with the eastern enlargement of the EU on May 1st 2004 and Schengen zone enlargement on December 2007, the border regime softened and border controls were eventually eliminated. At the same time, however, progress in integration was limited by tightening the border regime on the Polish eastern border, being the external border of the EU. This resulted in gradual re-bordering and complications in CBC development (*Branka et al.* 2020). The situation changed only when a visa-free regime was introduced for some of the neighbours.

Fifth, the role of European Funds has been crucial for development of CBC on the Polish borders. Starting from the EU accession moment, it was the INTERREG programme that fueled joint projects over borders and involved various types of actors. However, the foundations had been laid even earlier, together with the PHARE programme and its CBC component (*Dotzblasz-*

Raryczk 2010, 36), serving not only as a source of financing but first of all a source of CBC know-how. For many local actors it was the period of creation and institutionalisation of the first contacts across the borders and taking advantage of the western experience. The reports presenting Polish participation in the INTERREG programme in the years 2007–2020 outline a very interesting picture. The component A (*15 lat* 2020) has been divided into six operational programmes, between Poland and Mecklemburg-Vorpommern, Brandenburg, Saxony, Czechia, Slovakia and Lithuania. Additionally, the programmes Poland-Belarus-Ukraine and Poland-Russia support these borderlands from the European Neighbourhood Instrument. Over the years, almost 0.5 bln. euros were spent on the Polish border side on numerous projects. Two categories (23% of the total budget each) seem to dominate among the supported projects: cultural and historical legacy, and transportation infrastructure, symbolising the (re)construction of human connections and mutual accessibility. Further 9-9% were spent on tourism development and security by each, 8% each on environmental protection and regional institutional cooperation, 7% on education and labor market, 6% on small project facility, 4% on cooperation networks and local initiatives, and finally 2% on competition and entrepreneurship.

Probably the most significant institutional aspect of this phase of CBC development on the Polish borders was the creation of Euroregions. They very quietly covered the entire borderland and became the most important form of cooperation, remaining so today.

Table 1. Euroregions along the Polish borders

No.	Euroregion	Est.	Border
1	Nysa	1991	Poland/Germany/Czechia
2	Karpacki	1993	Poland/Slovakia/Ukraine/Hungary/Romania
3	Sprewa-Nysa-Bóbr	1993	Poland/Germany
4	Pro Europa Viadrina	1993	Poland/Germany
5	Tatry	1994	Poland/Slovakia
6	Bug	1995	Poland/Ukraine/Belarus
7	Pomerania	1995	Poland/Germany/Sweden
8	Glacensis	1996	Poland/Czechia
9	Niemen	1997	Poland/Lithuania/Belarus
10	Pradziad	1997	Poland/Czechia
11	Bałtyk	1998	Poland/Russia/Lithuania/Sweden/Denmark
12	Śląsk Cieszyński	1998	Poland/Czechia
13	Silesia	1998	Poland/Czechia
14	Beskidy	2000	Poland/Czechia/Slovakia
15	Puszcza Białowieska	2002	Poland/Belarus
16	Łyna-Ława	2003	Poland/Russia

Source: Author's own work

Euroregional cooperation (*Table 1*) was initiated on the Polish-German border in 1991 and in the following decade spread to the southern and eastern borders, forming one of the most visible manifestations of the Europeanisation process. After their establishment, many of the Euroregions (especially on the eastern border) entered into the phase of silencing, sometimes even for a longer period of time.

Another advanced form of CBC is the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) (*Table 2*). Despite initial skepticism of the central authorities, the relevant EU regulation was introduced into the Polish legal system in 2008 (*Dolżblasz & Raryczk 2010, 201*). Four of the EGTCs in the EU were established on the Polish borders in recent years, exclusively on the

southern border, developing further previous Euroregional ties (e.g., CETC-EGTC Ltd. involves partners from Sweden, Hungary and Croatia and is aimed at the construction of a transport corridor) (*Skorupska 2017*).

Table 2. EGTCs along the Polish borders

No.	EGTC	Est.	Border
1	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation TRITIA Limited	2013	Poland, Czechia, Slovakia
2	UWT TATRY z ograniczoną odpowiedzialnością EZÚS TATRY s ručením obmedzeným EGTC TATRY Ltd.	2013	Poland, Slovakia
3	Central European Transport Corridor Limited Liability European Grouping of Territorial Co-operation (CETC-EGTC Ltd.)	2014	Poland, Sweden, Hungary, Croatia
4	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation NOVUM Limited (EGTC NOVUM Ltd.)	2015	Poland, Czechia

Source: Author's own list based on the List of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (2021)

Border twin towns form another interesting phenomenon on the Polish borders. They are understood as smaller urban settlements placed on one side of the state border directly next to a similar urban structure on the other (*J. Jańczak 2018, 396*). In case of Poland, their existence is influenced by the setting and shifting of borders (as a result of the First and Second World Wars) and dividing towns into separate ones. They are often described as European integration laboratories – spots where the European ideas can be tested on a micro scale (*Gasparini 1999–2000*).

There are five pairs of the border twin towns on three Polish borders, namely: Frankfurt (Oder)–Słubice, Görlitz–Zgorzelec, and Guben–Gubin along the German (all of them divided in 1945); Cieszyn–Český Těšín at the Czech (divided in 1920), and Terespol–Brześć at the Belarusian border (divided in 1945).

The towns located on the Polish-German border became very quickly central spots of local dimension of the relations between both states and nations. They were previously separated (also with regard to ethnic homogeneity on both sides), but they started to boom economically after 1989, especially because of the significant differences in labour costs and prices of specific services and products. This process very quickly contributed to the emergence of cross-border commuters (Poles working in Germany) and cross-border customers (mainly Germans doing shopping in Poland). Similarly dynamic fields of cooperation were culture, education and social issues, which were designed to bring the inhabitants of the borderland together. This resulted in numerous cultural projects (festivals, celebrations, etc.), as well as institutional cooperation in the field of education. Moreover, civil society continually developed across the borders.

The towns located on Polish-Czech border, Cieszyn–Český Těšín, also mirror the attempts of intensive cooperation. In this case, the involvement of central authorities was much lower (as the southern dimension was not prioritised over the first two decades after the collapse of communism). Furthermore, the presence of a Polish minority on the Czech side, as well as local Silesian identification, combined with cultural and linguistic proximity, facilitated bottom-up interactions of individuals, alongside commercial contacts and local authorities' cooperation.

The towns Terespol and Brześć, located on the Polish-Belarusian border, represent another dynamic. The commercial character of cross-border contacts is only partly developed because of political tensions between both neighbouring states and existing normative and institutional differences.

5. Border actors and CBC

To understand the dynamics of CBC on the Polish borders over the last three decades, a brief overview of the involved actors seems to be crucial. Following the concept of cross-border governance, the exclusive competences of states with regard to external relations have been partly delegated to four groups of actors: the European Union, local authorities, business and civil society. Assuming that the EU level has been creating institutional and financial framework for cooperation, the other actors fill this context with content.

The CBC policy of the Polish state has been marked with the intention to create good relations with its neighbours. The original focus was placed on the western border followed by allocation of political support and financial resources. The policy of reconciliation with Germany and entry to the European Union resulted in numerous infrastructural projects, especially highway (currently four crossings at the border) and railway connections. Higher education initiatives, especially construction of the Collegium Polonicum (CP - joint academic institution of the European University Viadrina (EUV), Frankfurt (Oder), Germany and the Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland, which educates students and creates bilingual intellectual cross-border elites) can serve as an example (*Eksperyment* 2016). In 1991, the EUV was (re)established in the German border town of Frankfurt (Oder), bringing an academic spirit to the borderland and becoming the first German academic institution open to students from Poland. In 1998, the CP was established on the Polish side in Słubice, offering several study programs allowing joint education for Poles and Germans. The success and further evolution of both institutions illustrate the changing dynamics of the Polish-German border: exceptional until 2004, they lost potential students' interest and national politicians' attention with the new opportunities and challenges after the eastern enlargement of the EU. The following years resulted in their border-oriented (re)profiling.

The years after 2004 have also been characterised by a relocated focus towards the eastern border (being a part of the Poland-led initiative of the Eastern Partnership) (*Korosteleva* 2014). This resulted in intensification of the cooperation with Ukraine at the beginning of 2010s and the promotion of initiatives leading to introduction of the visa-free local border traffic (implemented since 2009 and applied to residents of a 30-km stripe adjusted to the border line on the Ukrainian side). This was employed also towards Russia (Kaliningrad Oblast) in 2012, resulting in significant increase in human traffic, massive commercial and touristic contacts and booming local economies in the border area resulting from enormous influx of Russian customers (*Piekutowska-Kamiński-Wakuluk* 2014). It covered the entire area of the Kaliningrad Region and specific counties of the north and north-eastern Poland, including the metropolitan area of Gdańsk. The agreement was suspended in 2016 (*J. Jańczak* 2015) (the official reason was security concerns related to the NATO summit and World Youth Day 2016) and the previous status has never been reintroduced, despite vivid and loud protest of local actors, especially local authorities and local businesses on the Polish side. In the case of Belarus, a local border traffic agreement was signed in 2010, but it could not enter into force because of political tensions between the two states.

During the last decade, thanks to the “Central European shift” in Polish foreign policy after 2015, strong cooperation between these states was promoted within the European Union. This resulted in intensification of the infrastructural projects of “vertical” direction – connecting the north with the south of Europe across the Polish southern border. In 2021, three highway border crossings existed there and are to be supplemented with three others that are under construction or whose plans have been prepared.

Regional and local authorities form the next group of actors that created and developed CBC on the Polish borders over the last years. The INTERREG financial support pushed them to create joint projects with partners from the other border side. Again, the most intensively this was visible on the western and southern borders (*J. Jańczak* 2008). The process was labeled as “institutional pragmatism” in the first years, where implementing public investments using European resources

was more important than real outcomes for strengthening cross-border ties. The requirement of creating a “cross-border effect” (*Dolzbłasz & Raryczk* 2010, 73) through joint projects pushed the actors into more border-oriented activities, instead of using the façade of border-rhetoric containing their own objectives. Gradually, joint projects were supplemented with joint policies and institutions.

One of the most dynamic aspects of local and regional cooperation on the Polish-German border is education. Especially the Polish-German border seems to be saturated with educational institutions, offering second language classes, student and teacher exchanges and joint groups and programs at kindergarten and school levels. Local authorities are usually the key actors in creating and managing this offer. At the same time, despite long-lasting efforts and successful promotion of the neighbour’s language, there is a trend that English is preferred by local pupils and by their parents because it might promote global opportunities, hence education is not limited to the local cross-border context (*B.A. Jańczak* 2017). Additionally, asymmetric relations are visible here; namely, slightly over 50% of pupils take German language courses in Polish border regions and under 1% of German pupils take Polish language courses (*B.A. Jańczak* 2017, 152-153).

Business contacts and relations are the most visible and the most immediate effect of border liberalisation. Individuals and companies take advantage of differences in prices and labour costs. The trade boom of the 1990s was altered with the eastern enlargement of the EU. First of all, trade barriers were eliminated on internal EU borders, what resulted in the disappearance of small smugglers (so-called “ants”) who earned their living by circulating several times a day through the border with Germany, Czechia and Slovakia and carrying allowed amounts of specific products. This phenomenon remains on the eastern border today. The free flow of workers resulted in the creation of a visible group of cross-border commuters.

Citizens’ involvement is another component of the creation of CBC processes on the Polish borders. It has been manifested at two levels (individual and civil society) with a different focus on different borders. With regard to the individuals, attempts have been made to create contacts between previously separated communities on the borders earlier witnessing population replacement (especially with Germany, Czechia, and the Russian Federation). Though commercial relations appear to have gone very smoothly, the non-commercial context has been more problematic. In the case of the German border, enormous resources have been invested especially into teaching the neighbour’s language in order to enable individuals to communicate with each other. Still until today, despite several successes in the field, the density of social contacts is often evaluated as only partially successful. Language cleavage is not the case on the Czech and Russian borders, but with regard to the latter, the political situation and tight border regime have resulted in social segregation. On other borders, historical links have often been reestablished (*Babiński* 1997).

The second form is the cooperation of civil society entities across the borders. Along most of the borders, NGOs from both sides intensively cooperate, but this depends on general civil society development level in specific states. On the German border, this cooperation is the most advanced. Two examples of civic organisations, SłubFurt (*Kulczyńska* 2011) (combining the border twin towns’ names: Słubice and Frankfurt) and Gubien (Gubin and Guben), represent the case: CBC activists from both sides decided to tighten cooperation in their border twin towns by establishing twin structures on both sides of the border and involving the border citizens in joint cross-border initiatives (*Musiał-Karg* 2009).

The Polish-German border has been an interesting place of cross-border migration in recent years. Until 2004, Germany was the main destination of Polish labour migration (which later altered in favor of the UK), targeting mainly the western provinces. After 2011, when the transition period ended, numerous Poles started to settle down in the severely depopulating German towns and villages close to the border, usually in the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, bringing new demographic and economic spirit there (*J. Jańczak* 2017). At the same time, 122,000 Poles commute to work across the border on an everyday basis (which is one of the highest numbers on the EU borders) (*Eurostat* 2019).

6. Conclusions – Polish border, COVID-19 and the prospects for CBC

The CBC across the Polish borders outlined above has been challenged by the global pandemic in 2020 and 2021. COVID-19 has had significant consequences for borders. The first officially registered case on March 4th 2020 was an inhabitant of the Polish-German border region who had returned from Germany. The first reaction of the Polish central authorities was to close down this border and designate six crossing points for traffic (and several additional ones for pedestrians), as well as suspending public transport connections across the borders. Several-kilometer-long queues of lorries, cars and long queues of pedestrians appeared. This led to protests. At the end of March, a 14-day quarantine obligation was introduced for returnees, which strongly affected border commuters. Poles living in Poland and working in Germany were forced either to resign from/suspend their work or to stay on the German side. The first option could result in undermining the material bases of many families, the second option meant physical separation from them. Massive protests were organised, supported by German regional authorities and businesses employing people from Poland. At the beginning of May, the quarantine obligation was canceled by the Polish government (*J. Jańczak 2020*).

The Polish-Czech borderland also experienced a rapid process of re-bordering that limited not only everyday contacts, but also prevented Polish labour commuters from going to their workplaces on the Czech side. As Hynek Böhm claims, ‘we may expect continuation of cooperation in the context of the divided town Český Těšín/Cieszyn, as there seems to be the sufficient critical mass of borderlanders/regionauts and also cross-border commuters’ (*Böhm 2020*, 85). The interdependence developed over the last decades have contributed to further cooperation because of functional reasons. At the same time, the Euroregional structures are strongly involved in problem solving and local citizens, especially in Český Těšín – Cieszyn, could express their wish to go back to “normality” through reopening the border (*Böhmet al. 2020*).

During the pandemic, the Polish-Ukrainian border represented problems characteristic of external borders of the EU. On March 15th 2020, Poland closed its borders to foreigners. Ukrainians with work permits could enter Poland; however, for some period of time border crossing points were closed down on the Ukrainian side. The situation was discussed not from the perspective of cross-border relations, but in terms of the significance of the Ukrainian labour force on the Polish labour market (*Piechowska 2020*).

The general picture of CBC relations revealed by the pandemic showed that the existing cross-border ties are too significant to be cut off – their suspension (considered by the central authorities as a solution for combatting against the spread of the virus) have been politically, economically and socially painful for local and regional actors. Consequently, alternative forms (especially testing) have been introduced and practiced in the period after the border closing and reopening. The above achievement proves, at the same time, the advancement of the CBC building process across the Polish borders, making the sides hardly separable in most cases.

The above-outlined overview of the changing status of the Polish borders in the last three decades clearly presents significant changes: they moved from “margins” to “bridges” and “new centres”. Strongly embedded in the context of European integration, they have undergone political, economic, social transformations and fluctuating legal and political constraints that have influenced various actors in their cross-border involvement. The question is, however, about the future: what recommendations shall be offered to actors constructing Polish borders in the next decades? It seems that – following the multilevel nature of governing borders – local and regional stakeholders shall be more vocal in Warsaw (and neighbouring states’ capitals) as well as in Brussels with regard to borderlands’ perspectives and interests. The German-Polish border alongside its economic cohesion, needs new institutional and political impetus (for example in the form of an EGTC) as well as more sensitivity about environmental issues; the Czech-Polish,

Slovak-Polish and Lithuanian-Polish borders need further saturation with infrastructure and joint development projects; the Polish-Ukrainian border needs new instruments for overcoming the separating nature of the EU external border; while at the Polish-Belarusian and Polish-Russian borders a much better political environment in interstate relations needs to be created to take advantage of their enormous and mainly unused potential.

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Artur Boháč

State borders and cross-border cooperation in Czechia in the post-communist era: Trends and developments

Abstract: *This article deals with the topic of the border status and cross-border cooperation in Czechia in the last 30 years. Special attention is paid to the EU integration process and its impact on the Czech borders and borderland and to the COVID-19 pandemic, which revealed the durability of state borders despite the widely promoted idea of a borderless Europe. The text is theoretically based on the concepts of de-bordering and re-bordering and perceives borders as dynamic and socially constructed phenomena.*

Keywords: *border regions, cross-border cooperation, Central Europe, COVID-19*

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Introduction

Czechia often claims to be a bridge between the East and the West. Still, Czechia lies outside the main European axes between Berlin and Moscow and Paris and Istanbul in a geopolitical sense. Its current economic and political fate lies predominantly in the cooperation with neighbouring states, Germany, Poland, Slovakia and Austria. Nowadays, the relations with these states are cooperative in the EU and NATO (except Austria) and state borders between Czechia and the mentioned states are unquestionably mutually respected and permeable. Functioning cross-border cooperation (CBC) is represented by institutions such as Euroregions and European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). The situation on the borders was different in earlier history and several troubles emerged there even in the post-communist era. The main goal of this text is to characterise the change of border status and permeability in the last three decades in Czechia through the lens of border studies and political geography. Special attention is paid to the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on border issues, borderland and CBC. The article is theoretically grounded in the paradigms of de-bordering and re-bordering; and it is based on an analysis of relevant primary and secondary documents and personal experience of the author as a Czech citizen living alternately in Ostrava (CZ-PL borderland) and Liberec (CZ-PL-D borderland). Generally, except for a theoretical section, the text is structured chronologically and deals with all important events until the end of 2020.

Theoretical basis

State borders epitomise a manifestation of state authority, specific administrative and legal system in the territory (Paasi 1999). They are based on treaties between states and they are usually marked with boundary symbols. A borderland is a territory affected by the existence of a border. It is perceived as a peripheral from the standpoint of the central part of a state and usually its economy lags behind the development of the central part of a state. The unemployment rate tends to be higher there. In their widest definition, inner border regions (Euroregions) make up 40% of the EU's territory and 37% of the EU's population. The EU has various tools to enhance the cohesive situation in the borderland (Medeiros *et al.* 2021).

For a long time, the study of borders perceived state borders as static entities, physical phenomena represented by precise lines. The intensifying process of globalisation is usually connected with a weakening of various borders and this is trackable primarily on the example of state borders. Border infrastructure and regime naturally influence various relations in space,

predominantly in the borderland. The social construction, Fredrik Barth's concept of "us and them" (Opilowska 2020, 4) and the effect of borders are not overlooked by border scholars, who do not consider borders as something given and precise. The concept of re-bordering and de-bordering allows for the analysis of how borders affect the perception of space, its appropriation, organisation of territoriality and the mobility of people and goods. De-bordering and re-bordering are usually connected with some long term political-economic processes; however, with a migration crisis and COVID-19 pandemic, nowadays we experience the process of re-bordering. 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, as Böhm (2021) states. Re-bordering has become a popular topic over the previous five years because of the European migration crisis, Brexit and COVID-19 pandemic (Klatt 2018, Medeiros et al. 2020, Opilowska 2020).

Characteristics of the Czech borders

Czechia shares borders with Germany (810 km), concretely Bavaria and Saxony, Poland (762 km), Austria (466 km) and Slovakia (252 km). The borders of Czechoslovakia, especially the Czech part of the state (the future Czechia) were anchored in the borders of a historical Czech kingdom. Its borders were predominantly determined by mountain ridges that surround the heartland of the Czech state, called Bohemia. The current Czech borders are mostly natural, with the exceptions of the Eastern part of the Czech-Austrian border and the Moravian-Silesian part of the Czech-Polish border. These borders can be perceived as natural barriers for transport, communication or military operations. Their border effect was strengthened by the post-war population ethnic exchange and the related decline in the borderland population (Vaishar-Zapletalová 2009, 90). There are a few exceptions in the territories which were incorporated into the historical territory of Czechia after World War I, e.g. the Hlučín Region, Valtice Region and Western Vitoraz Region, and which were lost, e.g. the eastern part of Teschen Silesia.

World War II brought the expulsion of ethnic Germans from Czechoslovakia and their replacement by Czech, Slovak and Romani newcomers from various regions of Central Europe. The population transfer affected almost all of the Czech borderland except the Czech-Slovak border and the eastern part of the Czech-Polish border. The former ethnic German territory called Sudetenland has its own social and economic climate, including frequent social-pathological phenomena and high support of extremist political parties (Vaishar-Zapletalová 2009, 91).

According to the Ministry of Regional Development (2013), the districts (LAU1) with an above-average unemployment rate are Liberec, Vsetín, Opava, Znojmo, Sokolov, Děčín, Most, Chomutov, Bruntál, Teplice, Hodonín, Šumperk, Karviná, Ústí nad Labem, Jeseník, Semily, Karlovy Vary and Český Krumlov. These districts, with one exception, lie along the border. The Ministry of Regional Development (2013) also defines socially disadvantaged districts and they are almost the same as the districts mentioned above (Svobodová et al. 2018, 572-573). Nevertheless, it is inaccurate to characterise the Czech borderland as one unit. We can distinguish (post)industrial and highly urbanised northwest and the northeast borderland with structural problems and high emigration towards the central parts of the state from predominantly rural and moderately urbanised rest of the borderland, with small and medium-sized towns with an ageing population and dozens of attractive tourist and nature protection sites, which can be a limiting factor in the infrastructural and industrial development of the region. The economic situation of each border regions is different and these differences are affected significantly by the neighbouring country and its economy.

The Czech-Bavarian and Czech-Austrian borders formed part of the Iron Curtain and were impermeable and strictly guarded. Many settlements in the border area were intentionally destroyed. The Czech-Saxon and Czech-Polish borders were internal boundaries of the Eastern Bloc and were also guarded, but they were partly permeable with local border traffic for the

inhabitants from the municipalities within 15 km from the border, at the few selected border crossings on the border with Poland. The border with Slovakia was an internal border with administrative and statistical importance.

The transformation period

The fall of the Iron Curtain and the Eastern Bloc and the new impacts of globalisation and the vision of future accession to the EU meant a great transformation in the character of the Czech society and borders. The borders of Czechoslovakia became a relevant subject of the research conducted by geographers and economists. It was possible to experience relatively free travel to the Western states, including Germany and Austria, after more than 40 years. Particular local border traffic was introduced along the tourist routes across the borders with Germany and Austria, then the external borders of the EU. Unfortunately, the post-socialist transition led to more significant economic disparities between the borderland and central regions of the state that have not been diminished even by the European regional policy.

CBC was supported both by public institutions and special entities, such as Euroregions or co-working communities. Nowadays, almost all municipalities in the borderland are members of Euroregions which were established in Czechia since 1991. The first Euroregions were established on the border with Germany. Thirteen Euroregions make up about two-thirds of the territory of Czechia. These are the Euroregions of Bohemian Forest, Egrensis, Erzgebirge, Elbe and Neisse on the Czech-German border, Neisse, Glacensis, Praděd, Silesia, Teschen Silesia and Beskids on the Czech-Polish border, Beskids, White Carpathians and Pomoraví on the Czech-Slovak border, and Pomoraví, Silva Nortica and the Bohemian Forest on the Czech-Austrian border. The main goal of the Euroregions was to boost cross-border contacts and cooperation through microprojects¹, and to prepare Central European borderlands for EU accession before 2003 (*Branda 2009*). Despite massive formal involvement in CBC and Interreg (or PHARE) programmes, in the above cases one can identify three main barriers to cooperation: lack of shared identity, language and mentality differences, and economic disparities. The only Euroregion in Czechia with a significant cross-border identity is Teschen Silesia, typical of its specific culture and dialect, mixing Czech and Polish words. Both the size and structure of the budgets of the Euroregions are varied.

In 1993 the federal republic of Czechoslovakia peacefully split into two states, Czechia and Slovakia. The territory was divided along the existing border between the Czech and Slovak parts of the former federation but this border was unclear and, in some cases, it cut through villages or across access roads. The successor states founded a compromise via negotiation and financial compensations for the people who were dissatisfied with incorporation into another state. The most delicate problems were connected with two settlements on the borderline. The settlement U Sabotů² had historically been part of the Czech municipality Javorník. However, it had social and cultural ties to Vrbovce and the nearby Slovak town Myjava, and its inhabitants voted for inclusion in Slovakia in a referendum. The settlement Sidonie, more precisely, its right shore of the former border river Vlárka, part of a Czech town Brumov-Bylnice, had originally been part of the Slovak municipality Horné Srnie but was incorporated into Czechia as a replacement for U Sabotů (*Filipko 2007*). The last treaty determining the borderline entered into force in 1997. Economic, social and political mutual relations in the borderland were separated. These facts led to the increasing marginalisation of the already peripheral Czech-Slovak border mountainous and rural area, which was farthest from the trends coming from Western Europe (*Řehák 2007*). The newly established border with new border crossings was permeable for the citizens of Czechia and

¹ People-to-people, civic association and social integration projects, e.g. common cross-border international competition for pupils, tourist publication, Christmas markets, etc.

² Nowadays known as Šance within Vrbovce municipality

Slovakia only with their ID cards. Inhabitants of border areas on both sides faced complications until the Schengen area accession in 2007. Generally, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and then the EU accession improved mutual relations between Czechs and Slovaks on the level of both authorities and citizens. The Czech-Slovak border is special because of many mixed marriages, properties and businesses on both sides of the border.

Czech-German relations and on a smaller scale Czech-Austrian relations in the 1990s were affected by the expulsion of ethnic Germans from Czechoslovakia and attempts of the Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft to review this act, which are sensitive initiatives especially for the inhabitants in the borderland. The reaction to these efforts in Czechia was connected with the establishment of nationalist Czech borderland clubs (*Zich* 1998). The image of (West) Germany as an enemy of the Czech nation was presented by Communist propaganda. The Czech-German declaration signed by the Czech and German government in 1997 and the establishment of the Czech-German Fund for the Future meant alleviation of the tensions and the beginning of the CBC also had a positive effect on collaboration. From an economic point of view, the Czech-German border became the most important because of the inflow of German capital to Czechia.

The Czech-Austrian border became a conflict zone due to the Czech nuclear power plant located in Temelín, 50 km from Austrian territory. Austrian citizens and their political representation were against the construction of the power plant and they strove for impeding the Czech accession to the EU. The most active voices were articulated by the politicians of the Upper Austrian State, the Freedom Party of Austria and various civic associations. A formal truce between the Austrian and Czech governments, under the auspices of the EU commissioner Günter Verheugen, was signed in the Austrian town Melk in 2000, where the Czech government undertook to comply with safety measures in the power plant and to inform Austrian authorities about all incidents in the power plant, while the Austrian government committed not to block the Czech accession to the EU and to prevent blockades on the Czech-Austrian border (*Böck-Drábová* 2006). The agreement is not binding and it did not ultimately end the protests and blockades on the border crossings; however, these occurred with less intensity after the Czech accession to the EU, most often in connection with several failures, building modifications in the power plant or the nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima, Japan. Austrians also protested against another Czech nuclear power plant located in Dukovany, 32 km from the Czech-Austrian border. The protesters enjoyed the support of Czech ecological activists. To a lesser extent, there were protests against Temelín in Germany, especially in Bavaria, without blockades of the border. Nowadays, the situation with the Czech nuclear program can be considered as resolved.

The Czech-Polish border, especially its eastern part, experienced a massive wave of cross-border shopping tourism at the beginning of the 1990s. Many Czechs went to the markets in Cieszyn or Rybnik and took advantage of the weak Polish currency. Peaceful relations were occasionally disrupted by acts of vandalism committed by Polish or Czech nationalists connected with the question of Teschen Silesia (Těšínské Slezsko, Zaolzie) (*Boháč* 2017). Fortunately, old hatred has weakened with the ageing of the inhabitants, predominantly Poles, who perceive the loss of Zaolzie as an injustice. The Eastern part of the Czech-Polish border should be considered as a special case because population transfers were not extensive and 10% of the indigenous Polish minority live in Teschen Silesia. This minority is active through its organisations such as the Polish Association for Culture and Education (PZKO) as a part of an umbrella organisation for Poles living in Czechia: the Congress of Poles in the Czech Republic. They are also very active in CBC with Poland.

Membership in the EU and Schengen area

On 21 December 2007 the Czech Republic joined the Schengen area, by which the country's membership in the EU became full-fledged. Border checks at the land borders and on intra-Schengen flights were cancelled. Politicians from Austria, Germany, Poland and Slovakia met up

at common border crossings and greeted the event as a step towards a united Europe. The elimination of border checks at the internal borders was accompanied by measures involving extensive cooperation of all member states applying provisions of the Schengen acquis in many aspects, such as setting a standard visa regime, improving coordination between the police, customs and the judiciary system and taking additional steps to combat terrorism and organised crime. All borders of Czechia became internal borders of the Schengen area, thus epitomising only administrative and psychological barriers. Czech borderland and border settlements became bridges between nations and laboratories of European integration where two societies are in regular contact. Especially, so-called divided towns are worth mentioning, e.g. Český Těšín/Cieszyn (PL), České Velenice/Gmünd (A), Vejprty/Bärenstein (D). Besides, some border towns gradually extended their influencing areas and began to give an impression of one urbanistic unit, e.g. Jířikov/Ebersbach-Neugersdorf, Varnsdorf/Seifhennersdorf and Grossschönau (D).

The membership in the EU brought the possibility of using the Interreg A programme funds focused on CBC, which supports cooperation between NUTS III regions from at least two different member states that are located along the borders. It aims to tackle common challenges identified in the border regions and to exploit the growth potential in the borderland. Czechia takes part in five Interreg A programmes along its five state borders. The border with Germany includes the sections with Bavaria and Saxony. Each programme has its specific funding priorities³ with cross-border impact. Interreg A projects work with a higher amount of money and longer period than microprojects and suitable applicants are public and private research institutions, public administration entities and non-profit organisations or EGTCs. Interreg A programmes brought about, for example, the building of bicycle routes between Czechia and Austria near the Pálava region, new marked tourist paths between Czechia and Germany in the Bohemian Forest or joint projects of Czech and Polish schools. Everyday cross-border activities of health specialists, firefighters and policemen are beneficial for the peripheral areas.

Several Czech regions became active members of EGTCs in the 2010s. The purpose of EGTCs is to widen the cooperation between their members on a local, supranational and international level through the realisation of various cross-border projects and programmes. An EGTC may act as an independent legal entity and have members from at least two member states or one member and one neighbouring country. They may include local or regional authorities, bodies governed by public law or member states as members (*Böhm et al.* 2016). The EGTC TRITIA is a grouping formed by the Moravian-Silesian Region (CZ), Opole Voivodeship (PL), Silesian Voivodeship (PL) and the Žilina Region (SK). The EGTC NOVUM is a grouping composed by the Liberec, Hradec Králové, Pardubice, and Olomouc Regions (CZ), the Lower Silesian Voivodeship (PL) and several ecoregions. The priorities of these EGTCs, with Czech participation, usually involve transport, economy, tourism and environmental protection. Another type of cooperation with a perspective of transformation into EGTC is semi-formal cross-border initiatives such as CENTROPE and Danube-Vltava. CENTROPE is a grouping of the South Moravian region (CZ), the city of Brno (CZ) and various Austrian and Hungarian regions and cities. Danube-Vltava is a grouping of the Pilsen and the South Bohemian Regions and the Region of Vysočina on the Czech side and various German and Austrian regions and associations.

There are various permeability indices regarding cross-border public transport on the Czech borders. The highest permeability can be witnessed at the Czech-German border, then on the Czech-Austrian border because of its economic importance and solid traffic infrastructure. The Czech-Slovak and the Czech-Polish borders suffer from the lowest permeability of cross-border public transport, except for the border sections between the Moravian-Silesian Region and Silesian and Opole Voivodeships, where the presence of the indigenous Polish minority on the Czech side

³ Priorities predominantly deal with institutional cooperation, education and human resources, tourism and environmental protection. The budget for all Interreg A border projects for the period 2014–2020 is EUR 675 million, CZ-Saxony 157 million, CZ-Bavaria 103 million, CZ-A 98 million, CZ-SK 90 million and CZ-PL 226 million (*Plašilová* 2019).

and high population density ensure higher permeability, (*Medeiros et al.* 2021). The strong border effect on the Czech-Polish border is observable in the intensity of traffic for all means of transport (*Drápela & Bašta* 2018). Low permeability on the Czech-Slovak border is caused by its marginality and unfavourable physical-geographical conditions of the border region. The reason is similar on the Czech-Poland border, along with the historical fact of the expulsion of the ethnic Germans on both sides of the border and following resettlement.

Idyllic de-bordering under the auspices of the EU started to be endangered by growing euroscepticism in Czechia and the vision of the so-called Czexit, inspired by the British Brexit. Isolationist, localist and nationalist discourse became more robust with the start of the European migration crisis and several terrorist attacks in 2015. Several EU members imposed temporary border controls because of these events. This was not the case for Czechia, which was not an attractive destination for the immigrants and experienced only relatively minor problems with the transit of the immigrants heading to Western Europe through the Czech territory. However, random inspections were imposed on the Czech-Austrian border in 2015 and also large manoeuvres of the Czech army and police on the borders with Austria took place. Their goal was to justify the preparedness of the Czech security forces and the cooperation between soldiers and policemen for a border closure in case of a shift of the main Balkans migration route. Twenty former border crossings served as nodal points for Czech security forces (*Kottová* 2015). In 2015 and 2016 short-term blockades of the borders with Germany and Austria (Germany – Cínovec/Altenberg, Dolní Poustevna/Sebnitz – together with the German supporters of PEGIDA, Kraslice/Klingenthal, Austria – České Velenice/Gmünd) were organised by the supporters of Czech nationalist political parties as a protest against migration policy of the EU and the liberal approach of the German, Austrian and even the Czech governments (*Novinky* 2016).

Several protests were organised during recent years against the Polish Turów power plant and nearby lignite mine located only a few kilometres from the Czech border. These facilities cause water, air, noise and light pollution on the Czech side of the border. Czech, German and Polish environmental activists and everyday people from the borderland were involved in protests. The protests were held at the so-called Trojmezí (Three-borders) of Czechia, Poland and Germany near the town of Hrádek nad Nisou. The last big rally in August 2020 was against the enlargement of the mine and the plans to prolong the mining activities in Turów until 2044. Besides, the Czech government is dissatisfied with the Polish attitude of decision-making without waiting for the conclusions of bilateral consultations. Czechia is attempting to obtain justice from the European Commission or the European Court of Justice (*Lazarová* 2020).

The era of the COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 is a respiratory infection that has spread around the world since the end of 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic, which officially came to Czechia in March 2020, led to many setbacks conducted by the states, including limitations or closures connected to cross-border contacts. This reterritorialisation was in contrast to the EU policy of open internal borders. In March 2020, the EU criticised massive COVID countermeasures in cross-border regions, rather promoting a European dimension of a struggle against the pandemic. Total border closures strongly affect people living in a borderland, especially commuters and people with family members on the other side of the border. This complication was most apparent on the Czech-Slovak border, where many mixed families live, and in the Czech-Polish region of Teschen Silesia, where many indigenous Poles live on the Czech side. Moreover, cross-border shopping and tourism were also cancelled. The tri-national railway running through Czechia, Poland, Germany, Czechia and Germany again on the route Liberec–Seifhennersdorf in the Euroregion Neisse, operated by the German private company Die Länderbahn, remained operational, but travellers were not allowed to get off the train outside their own country. The first Czech measures against the pandemic were soft and included temperature checks or quarantine for people arriving from high-risk countries. Before

the COVID-19 breakout, 60,000 Czech commuters (the so-called ‘pendlers’) were dependent on daily or maximally weekly cross-border commuting: 37,000 to Germany, 12,000 to Austria, 2,300 to Slovakia and 700 to Poland and vice versa (especially for Slovaks and Poles). The closure of borders with Germany and Austria was approved on 14 March 2020 and Poland and Slovakia also closed their borders with Czechia. A ban on the entry of foreigners came into force. Border closures in Czechia are usually due to the state of emergency. Most pendlers had to choose whether to stay in their home or find accommodation in the host country because of the quarantine obligations. Exceptionally, only a few could cross the borders with a negative COVID-19 test and well-based justification of the entry (employment in health or social services) and only a few border crossings continued to function. Border closures meant a threat for the local and regional economies in the Czech border areas. Closure of the borders brought to mind the dark memories of the Iron Curtain age and the government’s regulations were similar to those of Communist governments, resulting in similar fear of foreigners, who were suspected to be potential disease carriers. Border closures were implemented without consultations with existing cross-border institutions. They had to react to unilaterally adopted decisions and they attempted to protect the rights of pendlers (*Böhm* 2021). Czechia reopened its borders with Germany and Austria on 13 June 2020 and the Czech-Slovak border was reopened by both sides. Pendlers, as well as everyday citizens in the borderland, organised protests against the restrictions.

The most intensive protests on the Czech-Polish border took place in the divided town Český Těšín/Cieszyn in a region of traditionally strong cross-border cultural, educational and economic interactions. Banners with the message ‘I miss you, neighbour’ were erected on both sides of the border along the river Olše/Olza. Protests were also held in border-crossing Náchod/Kudowa Zdrój, which is vital for Polish workers commuting to the Škoda Auto factory in Kvasiny or JUTA textile factories in north-eastern Bohemia. Several Euroregions, e.g. Teschen Silesia, used lobbying strategies targeting the central governments and attempted to alleviate strict border measures that damaged both employees and employers. The Polish side was strict in controlling the border. Polish soldiers with machine guns were determined to shoot, as evidenced by a case near Opava (*iDNES* 2020). The citizens’ initiative Soboty pro sousedství/Samstage für Nachbarschaft/Soboty dla sąsiedztwa/Soboty pre susedstvo, whose Facebook group counts 1,700 members, became very active and well known in the borderland of Czechia. The group organised meetings along the border every two weeks. In spring 2020 unique protest meetings were held in the Czech-German border area based on common picnics with respect to the closed border. Groups of Czechs and Germans were a few metres from each other, they ate, talked and sang under police supervision. Such meetings took place in Klíny, where they were followed up with meetings of dissidents during the socialism or in Trojmezí even with a Polish presence. In Trojmezí there was a celebration of the Czech and Polish EU accession with the participation of mayors of nearby municipalities Hrádek nad Nisou (Czechia), Bogatynia (Poland) and Zittau (Germany) under the supervision of armed Polish soldiers. On 12 June Poland opened the shared border with Czechia, but the Silesian Voivodeship, severely affected by the pandemic, was closed until 29 June. Border openings were publicly celebrated. The tourism and event industry was heavily affected, and many tours and festivals were cancelled or postponed. Many people did not feel comfortable travelling abroad, even travelling to nearby destinations beyond the border. In September, the situation became unfavourable again and the Czechs were affected by the measures of all neighbouring states except Poland. Slovakia approved measures for Czechs, who had to stay in quarantine when entering Slovakia. Similar measures were adopted by Germany, but the Czech pendlers were granted an exception. Poland introduced mandatory quarantine on 28 December with an exception for the Czech pendlers.

Conclusion

The text showed that CBC under the auspices of the EU in the last 30 years helped prevent quarrels and conflicts between the Central European states and promoted the reconciliation connected with

the injustices of the turbulent 20th century. The Czech borderland was positively affected by various European programmes promoting de-bordering before and especially after the Czech accession to the EU. However, the economic situation is far from ideal in some marginal regions facing gradual depopulation. Joint cross-border identity in the Czech borderland is still rare. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic challenges the pillars of European integration and has the worst impact on border regions. The Czech borderland is no exception. The pandemic is still not under control. A re-bordering process associated with suspicion of neighbouring countries as zones of infection can become something common in a long-term perspective despite the efforts of cross-border institutions and associations. Böhm (2021) assumes that economic problems connected with the COVID-19 pandemic will lead to lower budgetary incomes of municipalities and regions, limiting their budget dedicated to non-essential CBC support. The number of submitted projects for Interreg funding decreased in 2020. Nevertheless, the author hopes that COVID countermeasures only a temporary issue and the process of CBC will continue with similar or even greater success.

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Martin Lačný

Perceptions on cross-border cooperation in the Slovak-Ukrainian borderlands

Abstract: *The article overviews the development of legislative and executive framework for CBC in the Slovak-Ukrainian borderlands. Subsequently, it summarises the findings of research on the perceptions of local CBC actors regarding migration and social interaction, barriers to CBC, assessment of CBC policies, expected impacts of CBC and the implementation of the Association Agreement of EU with Ukraine.*

Keywords: *Slovak-Ukrainian borderlands, Association Agreement, cross-border cooperation*

JEL code: *F15, F59, Z13*

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Introduction

The opportunity for partnership countries to conclude the Association Agreements with the EU, including agreements on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (AA/DCFTA), has become a crucial new component of the EU's offer under Eastern Partnership. The combination of sectorial reforms and the adaptation of the *acquis* together with the opening of the internal EU market under a comprehensive agreement turned the AA/DCFTA into a unique integration type of agreement within the existing contractual practice of the EU with third countries, which is comparable with the EEA type of agreement (with Norway, Iceland, and Lichtenstein). Thus, contemporary research on cross-border cooperation (CBC) along the external borders of the EU within border studies has included the Association Agreement between the EU and the neighbouring country as one of the exogenous factors of the EU policies that create opportunities for the development of CBC between regional and local actors along the Union's external border.

Based on the EU's existing contractual practice, as well as the experience of the Visegrad Four (V4) countries in implementing Association Agreements, one may estimate that Ukraine will need about 10 years at least to fully meet its own legislation with the EU *acquis* and to implement the provisions of the AA. The length of this transitional implementation period will, first and foremost, depend on the political will of Ukraine's leadership to implement the difficult reforms required by European legislation and policies as well as on Ukraine's administrative capacity to carry out the reform and implementation process (*Duleba 2019*).

Slovakia's accession to the EU in the course of 1999–2004 tightened up the border regime and generated restrictions on CBC at the border with Ukraine compared to the pre-accession period. However, CBC with Ukraine represents an important source for economic development of Slovakia. According to the projection made by the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Slovakia (SR), if Ukraine becomes part of the EU single market, in line with the normal scenario, the turnover of the bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian foreign trade will at least double and first of all it will create additional impetus for economic development for the regions in Eastern Slovakia bordering Ukraine and contribute to balancing disparities between Western and Eastern regions of Slovakia (*Duleba 2005*).

Changes in the regulations of border crossing along Slovak-Ukrainian state borders, 1993–2017

The regime of Slovak borders has changed in the course of the following periods: a) 1993–2004 – the bilateral intergovernmental regime of the border with all neighbouring countries except Austria, which had been a member of the Schengen Area since 1995. In this period a special border

regime was established between Slovakia and the Czech republic, which in the course of the split of Czechoslovakia signed a bilateral Customs Union Treaty in accordance with the provisions of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), lasting from 1993 until both countries entered the EU in 2004; b) since 2004 – after Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary became EU member states and part of its common market, a community regime of the border between the EU and Ukraine was established; c) since 2007 – after Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary became members of the Schengen Area, their citizens were free to travel throughout the Schengen Area and cross internal borders at any place without delay or control. This also applied to foreigners, such as Ukrainians, with the Schengen visa. At the external borders of the Schengen Area (including airports) a border check valid for all Schengen states was carried out; d) a new border regime came about after the signing of the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement as well as an agreement on a visa-free regime between the EU and Ukraine.

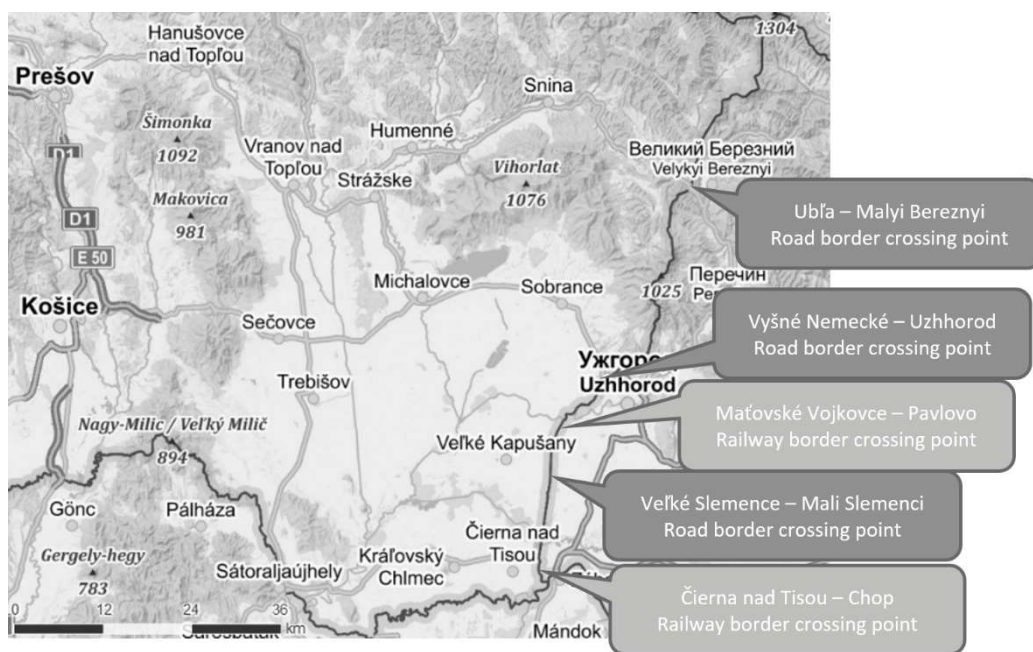


Figure 1. The Schengen border between Slovakia and Ukraine and border crossing points

Source: Mapy.cz

The EU-Ukraine AA was signed in June 2014 and its implementation began in November 2014, with the implementation of the DCFTA itself starting on 1 January 2016 (unilateral autonomous EU trade preferences were applied as early as 2015). Since then Ukraine has had to fully implement the AA – if we take into account the transitional periods, this will happen in 10–15 years, which means by the horizon of 2027–2032. The liberalization of EU-Ukraine trade within the DCFTA covers all areas of trade, including services, copyright protection, customs, public procurement, energy, technical standards, trade dispute resolution, competition protection and more. The DCFTA in general offers Ukraine a framework for modernising its trade relations and for economic development by the opening of markets via the progressive removal of customs tariffs and quotas, and by an extensive harmonisation of laws, norms and regulations in various

trade-related sectors, creating the conditions for aligning key sectors of the Ukrainian economy to EU standards.

The visa requirement has been lifted against nationals of Ukraine who hold biometric passports and are travelling to EU countries for a maximum of 90 days for business, tourist or family purposes, beginning on 11 June 2017. However, the introduction of visa-free travel in itself does not mean automatic freeing up of security regulations on the Slovak-Ukrainian border. Citizens on both sides are still subject to border checks, despite the cancelled visa obligation. Visa-free travel also does not give Ukrainian citizens the right to work within the EU, which may dissuade some Ukrainians from a long-term stay in Slovakia. Nevertheless, in the wake of the visa-free regime, reports of the Slovak Central Office on Labour, Social Affairs and Family show that there has been a significant increase of Ukrainians working in Slovakia. At present, the majority of the incoming Ukrainian workforce is employed in the more developed regions of Western and Central Slovakia (only a maximum of 20% of them work in the Prešov and Košice regions), mostly on short- and medium-term contracts up to 24 months as operators and installers of machinery and equipment, or as skilled workers and craftsmen (*Lačný* 2019).

The Slovak-Ukrainian border regime, including conditions for cross-border cooperation (CBC) between regional and local actors, has been following the dynamics of a changing intergovernmental framework since the early 1990s. The windows of opportunity for regional and local CBC actors on both sides of the border have been opening and/or closing accordingly. In order to understand the state of play and prospects for Slovak-Ukrainian CBC, it is essential to identify both opportunities and obstacles for CBC actors generated by the evolving supranational as well as intergovernmental framework for Slovak-Ukrainian relations.

In summary, the border relations of Slovakia gradually went through the processes of liberalisation or de-bordering for the neighbouring countries that are currently part of the Schengen Area. The nature of the Slovak-Ukrainian border has fundamentally changed since Slovakia's accession to the EU and the Schengen Area. Recently we can identify two key exogenous factors determining the political opportunity structure for CBC and trans-border regional development on the Slovak-Ukrainian border as a part of the EU external border: 1) EU CBC programmes, including the programmes of the European Neighbourhood Policy; and 2) the national policies of the Slovak Republic as an EU member country and Ukraine as a neighbouring country sharing an EU external border. As documented by results of the research projects EXLINEA (*Scott & Matzeit* 2006), EUDIMENSIONS (*Büchner & Scott* 2009) and EUBORDERREGIONS (*Final Report* 2015), understanding of the particular political opportunity structure may contribute to building capacities of CBC actors to make the best use of opportunities brought about by AA/DCFTA and thus consequently to boost economic development of the Slovak-Ukrainian borderlands.

Evolution of cross-border cooperation in the Slovak-Ukrainian borderlands

The representatives of Slovak local authorities and self-governments in Eastern Slovakia were first active in launching interregional cooperation with neighbouring partners from Poland, Ukraine and Hungary in the early 1990s and expected successful CBC to promote the revitalisation and development of Eastern Slovakia. They also thought that a lack of governmental investment in the transport and communication infrastructure of the region and support for private business and educational and cultural programs in Eastern Slovakia could be at least partly compensated for by the activities of the Carpathian Euroregion as the main CBC initiative on the Slovak-Ukrainian border. These expectations were increased due to the fact that some Western financial institutions showed a readiness to support the Carpathian Euroregion (*Duleba* 1993). However, CBC within the Carpathian Euroregion did not meet the expectations of Eastern Slovakia from the beginning of 1990s. In the period 1993–1998 the Slovak government under Vladimír Mečiar adopted a negative attitude towards the participation of Slovak local government

representatives in CBC, arguing that first a legislative framework should be created in terms of appropriate competencies of local governments to develop CBC with foreign partners. Even though Slovakia signed the European CBC framework convention of the Council of Europe in 1994, it came into force only in 2000. Furthermore, Slovakia finished concluding bilateral treaties on CBC with respective neighbouring countries only in 2001, whereas before 2000 it signed its only CBC treaty with Poland in 1994 (treaties with the Czech Republic and Ukraine followed in 2000 and with Hungary in 2001) (*Duleba* 2014). This was due to the fact that the Slovak government of Mikuláš Dzurinda that came to power after the September 1998 parliamentary elections changed Slovakia's policy towards CBC with the participation of Slovak regional and local authorities. Thanks to the principal reform of public administration in Slovakia, self-governing regions also acquired broad competencies in the area of CBC. As a result, the eastern Slovak regions of Prešov and Košice were allowed to sign accession agreements and became members of the Carpathian Euroregion in November 1999 (*Duleba* 2019).

In addition to multilateral CBC activities, the regional and local authorities of the two eastern Slovak regions that share the Slovak-Ukrainian border with the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine established a bilateral network of contacts with their Ukrainian counterparts. The Prešov Region concluded bilateral agreements on cooperation with the following Ukrainian regions: the Transcarpathian Region, Ivano-Frankivsk and Lviv. The Košice Region signed a bilateral cooperation agreement with the Transcarpathian Region. Moreover, the following agreements have been made on the level of administrative districts of Slovakia and Ukraine: Michalovce–Uzhhorod, Prešov–Uzhhorod, Košice–Uzhhorod and Snina–Velyky Berezny. In total fifteen Ukrainian and Slovak cities concluded partnership agreements, including the capital cities of Kyiv and Bratislava (*Vel'vyslanectvo Ukrajiny* 2019). The above agreements are aimed at helping to improve people-to-people as well as business-to-business contacts in the Slovak-Ukrainian borderlands.

These bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian inter-regional and local arrangements became possible thanks to the intergovernmental agreement on CBC which was signed on 5 December 2000 and entered into force on 29 January 2001 (*Dohoda* 2001). Under the agreement the governments of Slovakia and Ukraine committed to consult each other on any legal, administrative or technical problems that could hinder the development and smooth running of CBC, support activities of local and regional authorities to initiate and develop CBC, and provide financial resources to local and regional authorities, within the limits of their capabilities, for initiating and developing CBC (Art. 4). The agreement includes an exact list of sectorial areas in which regional and local actors are authorised to establish and develop CBC: a) regional development and spatial planning; b) transport and communications (passenger transport, roads and motorways, airports, waterways, etc.); c) cross-border trade; d) energy; e) nature protection (protected areas, recreation centres, parks, etc.); f) protection and rational use of water resources (elimination of pollution, construction of waste water management plants); g) protection of the environment (air pollution, noise reduction, etc.); h) education, training, research and science; i) health care (use of healthcare facilities by residents of the neighbouring territory); j) culture, leisure, sport (theatres, music festivals, sport centres, youth centres, etc.); k) mutual assistance in case of natural disasters and other disasters (fires, floods, epidemics, earthquakes, etc.); l) tourism (tourism support projects); m) problems of workers in the border regions (transport, housing, social insurance, taxation, employment, etc.); n) economic cooperation (joint ventures); o) other cooperation projects (waste management, communal economy, etc.); p) agricultural development, and q) social care (Art. 9).

With the aim of promoting and coordinating CBC, Article 7 of the agreement established the Slovak-Ukrainian Intergovernmental Commission on Cross-Border Cooperation, with the right to set up working groups to address specific issues. The Statute of the Commission that specified the scope of its activities, organisational structure, budget and procedures was adopted at the first meeting of the Commission on 6 May 2004, in Zemplínska Šírava (Slovakia). The Commission is co-chaired by the Deputy Interior Minister of the Slovak Republic and the Deputy Minister of Ukraine on Regional Development, Construction, Housing and Communal Services and it has

become the main institutional intergovernmental platform for the coordination and development of CBC on the Slovak-Ukrainian border.

It might thus be concluded that the evolution of supranational and national frameworks for CBC at the Slovak-Ukrainian border has been positive in the course of the last three decades in terms of creating a positive political, legal and institutional set up for the CBC activities of regional and local actors. EU-Ukraine and bilateral Slovakia-Ukraine relations have developed in a progressive way, as they have gradually eliminated obstacles and generated more opportunities for CBC on the common border. However, the practice of Slovak-Ukrainian CBC shows the rather limited capacities of regional and local CBC actors to fully use the opportunities available. The main problems of Slovak-Ukrainian CBC at national and regional levels relate to financing and planning. The EU's multilateral programme to support CBC at the borders of Slovakia, Hungary and Romania with Ukraine does not take into account the specific conditions and needs for the development of CBC between regional and local actors on the Slovak-Ukrainian border. The Intergovernmental Commission for Cross-border Cooperation has no direct impact on it. At the same time, the governments of Slovakia and Ukraine have not been able to create an intergovernmental financial instrument to support CBC. The Commission allows for coordination and common activities of the two governments, but, without a financial instrument, it has limited opportunities to implement the achieved agreements. It is capable of delivering in some cases related to border management, but hardly at all in the case of cooperation between regional and local actors. At the same time, neither the Intergovernmental Commission nor the regional authorities are in a position to jointly plan the territorial development of borderlands. They lack institutional and human capacities, financial resources and often political will (*Duleba* 2019).

Research on perceptions of local CBC actors

Research on CBC on the Slovak-Ukrainian border was not included in any of the major research projects (such as EXLINEA, EUBorderConf, EUDIMENSIONS, EUBORDERREGIONS, etc.) which have been implemented in recent years in the European area. The research project titled the "Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine and Cross-border Cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine: Implications and Opportunities" (AASKUA, APVV-15-0369), implemented by the Institute of Political Science at the University of Prešov in 2016-2019, aimed to cover this gap. The research primarily focused on CBC between Slovakia and Ukraine in the context of existing experience/practice, including identifying the political interests of the actors involved, their preferences/motivations, perceptions and strategies at three vertical levels: transnational (EU), national (Slovakia, Ukraine), regional (Prešov and Košice self-governing regions, Transcarpathian region) and local (towns and municipalities in the Slovak-Ukrainian borderlands).

The aim of the research on the local level was to survey the perceptions, preferences, motivation and strategies of local actors residing in towns and municipalities of the Prešov Self-governing Region (PSK) and the Košice Self-governing Region (KSK) in Slovakia and the Transcarpathian Region (ZOU) in Ukraine, from the viewpoint of their ability to take advantage of the structure of the political opportunities created by exogenous factors for establishing CBC mechanisms, including an assessment of existing experiences and practices. The standardised questionnaire started from questions that were the subject of the largest and most complex study of CBC on the external border of the EU, carried out within the EXLINEA project. Obviously, the local specifics of the Slovak-Ukrainian CBC were projected into the content of questionnaire, which was structured into six basic categories focused on (1) *migration and social interaction* (the level of migration/emigration between Ukraine (UA) and SR, the numbers arriving for work across the border, the amount of social interaction between SR and UA); (2) *identifying barriers to interaction and CBC* (barriers in the sense of the current state of infrastructure, the level of support from local and regional self-government, local state administration, governments,

businesses, the non-profit sector, international organisations, economic-geographical conditions, etc.); (3) *perceptions and ideas about residents on the other side of the border, the impact of more intensive cross-border interaction, the impact of conditions on the Slovak-Ukrainian border for cross-border interaction*; (4) *assessment of CBC policies* (the effect of CBC policies, the activity of local participants in cross-border interaction or cooperation, experience with the drawing of European funds (Eurofunds) for the development of CBC, the importance of Eurofunds for Slovak-Ukrainian CBC); (5) *expected impacts of CBC* (assessment of results of interactions between SR and UA); (6) *expected effects of the AA of the EU with Ukraine* (a comparative assessment of the impacts of this AA, the impact of this agreement on CBC, the impact of the visa-free regime of UA with the EU on relations and/or CBC, the opening of new areas of integration beyond the framework of the AA). Particular items within a specific category of questions were structured so that they were answered in this same construct (i.e. on social interaction, on barriers to CBC, on perceptions and ideas about the people on the other side of the border, on CBC policies, on the expected impacts of CBC and the AA of the EU with Ukraine), and thus they could acquire a similar psychological “weight” in the mind of the respondent.

Respondents

Data collection took place from November 2017 to January 2018 and was primarily focused on surveying the positions of a wider circle of local CBC actors (representatives of municipalities in border areas, local economic actors, representatives of ethnic minorities and churches). A total of 400 residents were surveyed: 200 respondents in the border districts of the Prešov and Košice Regions in Slovakia and 200 respondents on the Ukrainian side of the border in the Transcarpathia Region. For non-interventional studies (surveys) ethical approval was not required. All participant data have been anonymised, however, these alterations have not distorted the scholarly meaning. The sociodemographic characteristics of respondents are presented in *Table 1*.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents

	Slovakia (N = 200)		Ukraine (N = 200)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Gender				
Women	106	53	107	53.5
Men	94	47	93	46.5
Age				
18–25	22	11	76	38
26–40	72	36	63	31.5
41–60	79	39.5	49	24.5
Over 60	27	13.5	12	6
Education				
Secondary	118	59	48	24
University	82	41	152	76

Source: Author’s own calculation

Slovak respondents came from the following towns and villages: Belá nad Cirochou, Biel, Cejkov, Čel'ovce, Čičarovce, Čierna nad Tisou, Hlivišťa, Jasenov, Kazimír, Košice, Kráľovský Chlmec, Krásnovce, Kuzmice, Lekárovce, Ložín, Makovce, Michalovce, Michal'any, Palín, Papín, Parchovany, Pčoliné, Petrovce, Porúbka, Prešov, Pusté Čemerné, Ruská Poruba, Sečovce,

Snina, Strážske, Tibava, Trebišov, Veľké Kapušany, Veľké Trakany, Veľký Kamenec, Vyšný Hrušov, Zalužice and Zboj.

In the ZOU respondents came from the following villages and towns: Baranyinci, Berehovo, Chop, Drahovo, Koritnyany, Kostryna, Lalovo, Mali Slements, Mali Bereznyi, Mukachevo, Perechin, Poliana, Ruski Komarivci, Seredne, Storozhnytsya, Surty, Svalava, Synevyr, Turie Remety, Uzhhorod, Velky Bockov and Vynohradiv.

Type of data and method of analysis

For the purpose of measuring perceptions, attitudes and opinions a 7-point multi-item Likert scale (Walker 2010) was used for each group of questions. For evaluating the answers of Slovak and Ukrainian respondents to the given questions a descriptive analysis, including average values and standard deviations, was used. To determine whether there were any statistically significant differences between two independent samples, the T-test was used. The assumption of consistency of variance was verified using Levene's test. In the case of skewed data normality, the differences in the mean values between the two groups (Slovak and Ukrainian respondents) were further analysed using nonparametric alternatives to the T-test – Mann-Whitney U test and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov two-sample Z test (Pacáková 2009).

As it has been assumed that in the majority of cases differences would occur between the replies of Slovak and Ukrainian respondents, statistical testing was used for verification of the most significant differences at the level of significance (p-value) of 0.05.

Furthermore, where possible, Pearson's correlation analysis (Pacáková 2009) was used in order to evaluate the relations between the replies of Slovak and Ukrainian respondents in the case of particular factors in the scope of various groups of questions.

Research findings⁴

The perceptions of respondents in regard to migration and cross-border social interaction during the period of empirical data collection did not indicate concerns regarding significant changes in cross-border migration. The introduction of a visa-free regime with Ukraine had no significant impact on local actors in assessing the overall level of migration of Ukrainians to Slovakia or of Slovaks to Ukraine. Although the level of migration subsequently increased significantly during 2018-2019, it can be deduced from the answers of the respondents that in the perceptions of (mainly Slovak) local actors, however, migration does not raise any significant attention or concerns. There was a significant difference between the answers of Slovak and Ukrainian local actors in the case of a more sensitive perception of migration by Ukrainian respondents, namely in regard to the settlement of Ukrainians in the PSK and KSK and the commuting of Ukrainians to work in Slovakia. However, there is no overload of the labour market in Slovakia by Ukrainians. In terms of social interaction, the perceptions of both groups of respondents indicate a naturally higher rate in border areas compared to interaction with regions more distant from the border.

Visa-free travel and its impact on migration are a positive impetus for the future development of CBC. Also elsewhere respondents (in particular Ukrainian respondents) indicate in their answers a positive perception of the effects of the visa-free regime, which in their opinion will expand the possibilities for legal as well as illegal economic cooperation and support an influx of labour migrants from Ukraine to the Slovak border areas (which has been perceived more

⁴ Due to space reasons we present the summary of research findings here. Detailed results including both descriptive statistics and correlation analysis are available in Lačný, M.-Polačková, A. eds. (2019): *Cross-Border Cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine: Volume IV: Perceptions of local and regional actors*. University of Prešov Publishing, Prešov.

positively by Ukrainian local actors than by Slovak local actors). In summary, even though the introduction of the visa-free regime only partially supported the inclusive functions of the border, the perceptions of local CBC actors point to adequate (not excessive) dynamics of migration and social interaction in the Slovak-Ukrainian borderlands.

Respondents were asked to identify barriers to CBC, understood as conditions or activities that hinder or restrict the free movement and interaction of people, capital, goods, services, ideas, etc. In individual partial areas (infrastructure, border-crossing, level of CBC support, general and economic-geographic conditions as barriers), the total mean values of responses ranged around the middle of the scale between the “no barriers” situation, which corresponds to the permeability of the border between two regions of the same country, and stating an “insurmountable barrier”. We can summarise the factors perceived by local actors on both sides of the border as the most significant barriers to CBC: *corruption, bureaucratic procedures, treatment and approach of customs officers, lack of support for CBC from national governments, ministries and government agencies, insufficient rail connections as well as low purchasing power in nearby markets across the border*. On the other hand, local actors in the particular sub-dimensions identified the following as relatively low CBC barriers: *telecommunications* (telephoning, postal mail, Internet access), *support for CBC by NGOs, differences in religion, language and culture, proximity/availability of border crossings, the size of nearby markets on the other side of the border*.

Perceptions on the inhabitants from the other side of the border are generally assessed as relatively positive. According to Slovak respondents, Ukrainian citizens are mainly *hardworking, sincere, open and productive*. Ukrainian respondents see Slovaks mainly as *peaceful, hardworking and productive people with a European culture*. The differences between the perceptions of Slovak and Ukrainian respondents are statistically significant in the case of five factors. Ukrainian respondents consider Slovak citizens to be *wealthy, peaceful, disciplined people with a “European” culture* to a greater extent than Slovak respondents consider Ukrainians to be so. Slovak respondents, on the other hand, say that Ukrainian citizens *tend to be more corrupt*, more so than Ukrainian respondents say about Slovaks.

The most significant difference in the perceptions of Ukrainian and Slovak local actors relates to *support from European (international) organisations, especially the EU*. Slovak respondents see this as largest obstacle to CBC among the monitored factors, while for Ukrainian respondents this represents one of the lowest barriers. However, this finding indicates the need to strengthen EU support for the Slovak border regions and to target a communication campaign to support CBC, especially in the direction of Slovak actors and local communities in the districts of the Prešov and Košice Self Governing Regions on the Slovak-Ukrainian border, since Ukrainian CBC actors are at present rather satisfied with the support from the EU.

The responses by local actors to the open question of how to remove barriers for the development of CBC illustrate the above list of barriers fairly consistently – the answers focus on the role of responsible institutions (i.e. central institutions at the national level, followed by regional and local authorities, as well as EU authorities). The recommendations formulated by local CBC actors on both sides of the border include *improvements in border-crossing facilities, infrastructure, roads and higher number of customs officers*, as well as the request to *eliminate corruption*.

In the opinion of local actors on both sides of the border, more intensive cross-border interaction has a rather positive impact on the local economy/society; however, the responses of Slovak and Ukrainian respondents differ statistically significantly across some of the assessed factors. The replies of Slovak respondents are slightly more neutral than those of Ukrainian respondents, while the perception of more intensive cross-border interaction by the Ukrainian respondents is more positive. Slovak respondents rated *completely open borders within the wider Europe and to immigrants from Ukraine working in Slovakia* as the relatively least positive impact of more intense CBC (at the level of a slightly negative evaluation). On the other hand, both Slovak and Ukrainian respondents see a more positive impact of intensified cross-border interaction in

cooperation between universities, research institutes, etc., in cultural interaction and in terms of local exports to the other side of the border.

In addition, it needs to be noted that the opinions also predominate among respondents on both sides of the border that *both countries benefit from mutual cooperation*, and that *both border zones benefit from greater interaction*.

Respondents assess *the effectiveness of particular CBC policies* as largely positive, with the exception of *national CBC policies*, which are perceived significantly more critically than other CBC policies. Local actors on both sides of the border consider as the most effective *the policy of cultural cooperation, education and research cooperation policy, CBC policies of NGOs and the European Union's CBC policy*. They consider as relatively less effective (on the level of neutral evaluation) *cooperation policies on environmental issues and natural disasters, cooperation policies on organised crime, cooperation policies on migration and a trust-building policy*, while we typically find a slightly more critical view among Slovak respondents. The CBC actors consider *minorities and their organisations, cultural associations, NGOs, universities and research centres* as the most active. In their view, *private businesses, local and regional state administration* are the least active (on the level of neutral or moderately critical assessments).

The mutual partnership of Ukraine, Slovakia and the EU is generally perceived by respondents rather neutrally, and the perceptions of Ukrainian respondents sound significantly more positive in the case of the question of whether *the EU is a reliable partner for Ukraine*, or whether *Ukraine is a reliable partner for the EU*, as well as if *Ukraine is a reliable partner for Slovakia*. The slightly positive responses of Slovak and Ukrainian actors do not differ significantly in the question of whether *Slovakia is a reliable partner for Ukraine*. At the same time, perceptions regarding the partnership of Ukraine, Slovakia and the EU are a relatively significant predictor of attitudes regarding the effects of cross-border economic interaction, CBC and the impacts of the implementation of the AA of the EU with Ukraine. In general, it is also true that local actors who consider Ukraine or Slovakia to be a reliable partner express mostly a medium-strong tendency to positively assess the impacts of various forms of cross-border economic interaction and CBC. Slovak and Ukrainian actors who perceive the EU to be a reliable partner for Ukraine do not typically conclude that the implementation of the AA should benefit primarily the EU, but believe that from its implementation should benefit primarily Ukraine and/or Slovakia.

The predominantly positive perception of the EU-Ukraine AA effects also correlates positively with the assessment of the effectiveness of CBC policies. Slovak respondents who positively evaluate the impact of the AA on local, regional, or national CBC policies also show a moderately strong tendency to positively assess both the effectiveness of local and regional CBC policies and the effectiveness of national CBC policies. Ukrainian respondents who positively assess the impact of the EU-Ukraine AA on local, regional and national CBC policies show a moderately strong tendency to positively evaluate the effectiveness of local and regional CBC policies, but only a weak tendency to positively assess the effectiveness of national CBC policies.

In the case of questions about Ukraine's European integration, the slightly sceptical opinions of Slovak local actors contrast with the mostly optimistic answers of Ukrainian respondents. We see here a stronger contrast especially in the opinions on statements such as *Ukraine will sooner or later become an EU Member State*, or *the EU is sufficiently strong and determined to support Ukraine on the path of European integration despite Russian opposition*. We observe minor differences in the predominantly neutral attitudes of Ukrainian and Slovak local actors regarding whether *Slovakia is sufficiently strong and determined to support Ukraine on the path of European integration despite Russian opposition*.

At the same time, both Ukrainian and Slovak respondents indicate that the time has now come to integrate beyond the AA (mainly in regard to the abolition of roaming fees). The eventual opening of talks with Ukraine on entry to the Schengen Area met with a positive response from Ukrainian respondents, while Slovak local actors were largely neutral on this topic. We therefore deduce that topics related to integration beyond the AA are currently seen rather positively, i.e. as possible promoters of CBC and regional development of borderlands.

Conclusion

The conventional aim of CBC is to remove barriers and other factors that contribute to the separation of political entities. However, in terms of the Slovak-Ukrainian border, the openness of the border may well be an admirable objective, but it has to be borne in mind that the co-operation practices at the external border of the EU, characterised by a constant juggle between access and control, have to face a very different reality from the EU's internal borders, where the cooperation aims to build cohesion and blur divides. The present research findings revealed that the local CBC actors on one hand perceive the positive impacts of more intensive cross-border interaction and CBC on the respective borderlands and are interested in that the conditions on the Slovak-Ukrainian border should be gradually approaching the conditions on the EU's internal borders. On the other hand, the CBC actors in Slovak-Ukrainian borderlands face barriers comparable to the situation typical for the border regime during the pre-Schengen era of Slovak borders with Poland, Hungary and/or Austria. The situation at the Slovak-Ukrainian border is recently determined mainly by the gradual implementation of the AA/DCFTA and the subsequently changing nature of the border.

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Elena Grad-Rusu

Exploring cross-border cooperation in Eastern Europe: What kind of initiatives have developed in the Romanian-Hungarian border area?

Abstract: *Since the beginning, the European Union has believed and promoted the idea that an increase in cross-border cooperation contributes to enhanced European integration. This means that cross-border cooperation supports sustainable development along the EU's internal and external borders, helps reduce differences in living standards and addresses common challenges across these borders. The aim of this paper is to examine the cross-border initiatives between Romania and Hungary with a special focus on the INTERREG projects, which have provided new sources of funding for cross-border activities and regional development in the Romanian-Hungarian border area. In this context, the cooperation has intensified in the last two decades, especially since Romania joined the EU in 2007. The research proves that cross-border projects and initiatives represent an important source of funding for this type of intervention, when no similar funding sources are available.*

Keywords: *Cross-border cooperation, Romanian-Hungarian border area, INTERREG programmes, border regions*

JEL code: *H79*

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Introduction

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the rise of globalisation and to the ways in which regions develop and interact. It has been suggested that we are getting closer to a world where regions and states are replaced with regions between states (*Ohmae* 1993). In this context, also regionalisation gained a new meaning, i.e. it is the process which creates new flows and spaces across state borders, where the old governmental model is no longer a determining factor (*Perkmann* 2007). These new challenges determine extended spatial flows, international connections and more comprehensive actions (*Amin* 2004). Cross-border cooperation can be seen as a vehicle for the new reality, which promotes 'border-free' areas.

The continuous evolution of the European Union has also generated challenges at its borders and intensified territorial cooperation. This influences the way people in border regions live, challenging them or raising new opportunities for them. These inhabitants, representing at least one third of the total European population according to the data of the Association of European Border Regions, have seen and experienced the progressive opening of borders to the flow of people, goods and capital (*Decoville & Durand* 2018). In this regard, regionalisation and the new perspectives of the frontiers have determined the introduction of new institutional structures and processes such as cross-border programmes (*Prokkola* 2011).

The importance of regions in terms of territorial development gained importance in Western Europe as early as the adoption of the Treaty of Rome, in 1957, which discussed the need for strengthening economic units in order to ensure their harmonious development by reducing the gaps between different regions (*The Treaty of Rome* 1957). One year later, in 1958, the "Euregio" was created between the Netherlands and Germany. It is a pioneering Euroregion since it represents the first Euroregion created in Europe⁵. The first Euroregion carried out several actions aimed at stimulating cross-border cooperation and exchanges in areas such as:

⁵ see: Euroregions. URL: <http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/en/resources/territories/euroregions/>.

- socio-cultural cooperation;
- socio-economic development: actions aimed at improving socio-economic structures on both sides of the border;
- inter-municipal cooperation (twinning, police cooperation, etc.);
- advice for citizens;
- inter-regional cooperation (exchange of ideas and experiences with other border regions)⁶.

In this context, Euroregions are intensively studied as good-practice examples of cross-border cooperation. The main goal of cooperation across borders in the EU – be it about cross-border, transnational or interregional ways of cooperation – is to create a network of functional and harmonious border regions. Beyond the economic advantages, the process should strengthen the social and cultural dimensions of cross-border areas. In doing this, borders are no longer seen as barriers, but more as resources for development, bridges or contact places (*Newman 2006*). Therefore, cross-border cooperation can be studied in terms of motives in collaboration, difficulties, opportunities or frequency, in which a higher frequency is perceived as an indicator of cross-border integration and identification (*Bufon 2003*).

Also, the territorial cooperation is one of the main elements of a successful EU cohesion policy. As concerns Romanian borders, cross-border cooperation programs interconnect Romania with neighbouring countries and create the possibility for their peoples to communicate on topics of common interest (*Ardeleanu 2010*).

Romania became involved in cross-border cooperation programmes in a time similar to the start of EU accession negotiations. In order to present more recent data, during the 2014-2020 programming period, through the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, as managing authority or national authority, Romania managed 12 European territorial cooperation programmes, programmes that take place both at internal borders and at the external borders of the European Union⁷. In this regard, it is important to mention that Romania has developed cross-border cooperation programmes not only with other European Union member states like Hungary and Bulgaria, but also with its non-EU neighbours of Ukraine, Moldova and Serbia.

Methodology

The aim of this paper is to examine cross-border programmes and scalar dimensions of local cooperation in the Romanian-Hungarian border area, where cooperation has intensified, especially since Romania joined the EU in 2007. Along with other financing sources for border regions, mainly the INTERREG projects examined in this paper, such programmes have provided a new framework for cross-border cooperation and regional development. After 30 years of experience, INTERREG continue to be one of the key instruments of the European Union in supporting cooperation across borders⁸, being also seen as a concrete way of cross-border regionalisation at European level. As a consequence of investing in European border areas through projects, cross-border cooperation has become one of the most popular subjects in border research today.

In this regard, this paper focuses especially on the field of cooperation and presents examples of cross-border cooperation projects between Romania and Hungary from 2007. Also, besides the examples, the number of financed projects and available funds are presented and analysed.

⁶ see: Euregio. URL: <http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/en/resources/territories/territoires-niveau-regional/euregio-0/euregio-1/>.

⁷ see: Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, Territorial Cooperation Programmes. URL: <https://www.mlpda.ro/pages/programedecooperareteritoriala>.

⁸ see: About Interreg. URL: <https://interreg.eu/about-interreg/>.



Figure 1. The border regions that are part of the INTERREG V-A Romania-Hungary programme

Source: <https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/eligible-area/>

How cross-border programmes help the development of the Romanian-Hungarian border area

Cross-border initiatives assume the intensive and determined work of the officials and other stakeholders. Through this kind of projects, the people involved can develop expertise and networks. The main goal of cross-border cooperation is the economic development of the regions, but other advantages with economic, social or cultural perspective are also present.

The first step for the development of a cross-border cooperation strategy is to carry out a territorial analysis of the area affected by the programme. This analysis should include sectors of development, indicators, datasets and other additional qualitative and quantitative information on higher territorial units. The lack of statistical data at NUTS 3 and LAU 2 levels (main territorial levels involved in cross-border cooperation programmes) and different methodologies of data collection and indicator development can lead to difficulties in comparing the data between Romania and Hungary in certain domains, such as the delineation of the marginalised areas.

In this perspective, the main purpose of a cross-border strategy is to identify how, when and where a programme could, or should, intervene in order to impel the development processes and to improve sustainable economic growth that will improve the quality of life of the local people living in the area.

Even if we analyse an internal European border, we still will face differences due to the fact that Hungary belongs to the Schengen area, while Romania is not yet part of it.

A further factor generating diversity in the cross-border region is the so-called territorial capital, highlighting specific problems and potentials that may increase the competitiveness and attractiveness of a given area (ROHU CBC 2021, 12).

Even though both national entities are former communist states, Hungary joined the European Union earlier than Romania, in 2004. Even so, the Romanian-Hungarian cross-border cooperation across the 450 km long border started as early as in 1996, when the European Commission – for the first time in its history – extended the eligible area of the Phare CBC

programme to a border region located between two candidate countries. Thanks to the fact that the programme was successfully implemented, the European Commission maintained the availability of funds. Thus, until 2003, the cross-border projects at the Romanian-Hungarian border received financial support through the PHARE CBC programme (*HURO CBC 2011*). Through these common projects, important facilities were developed in the border area, including the modernisation of border-crossing stations and roads, as well as the realisation of business infrastructure development projects. As it is still true today, environmental protection was also the subject of numerous initiatives; the projects in this field mainly focused on water management⁹. The particular character of the landscapes, protected areas, water basins and ground water reserves represent one of the special advantages of the borderland.

Between 2007 and 2013, more than EUR 211,006,439 were awarded to projects and more than 3 million people were reached through 452 selected projects. Considering the precise data, the statistics show significant achievements:

- transport - 280 km of roads and bicycle paths constructed/reconstructed;
- communication - 3,468,078 people reached by joint communication initiatives;
- environmental protection - 72 joint environmental protection and management actions implemented;
- business – 12,911 businesses involved in cross-border co-operation projects;
- tourism - 130 tourist attractions developed;
- Research & Development, Innovation - 24 new research and/or technical centres established;
- education and labour market - 15,474 people participating in joint education and training;
- health care and risk prevention - 34 health care institutions developed;
- cooperation between communities - 156,783 people participating in joint events (*HURO CBC 2014*).

By fulfilling the objectives of these projects, the cross-border cooperation programme tried to reduce the physical barriers between the two neighbouring countries, opening up new ways for cooperation based on their characteristics. Looking at the results of the projects, one might say that future interventions need to be made based on the linkages between the observed needs, envisaged interventions and programme indicators. By taking into account all these facts, better project results, territorial and social impacts can be achieved.

As a continuation of the above objectives, the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme was approved by the European Commission on 9th of December 2015 for the period of 2014-2020. The programme area covered the same eight counties (NUTS III regions) as the previous one: four counties in Romania, namely Satu Mare, Bihor, Arad and Timiş and four counties in Hungary, i.e. Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Hajdú-Bihar, Békés and Csongrád¹⁰.

By the end of December 2020, the total value of contracted interventions of cross-border cooperation between the analysed countries amounted to around EUR 175 million ERDF, representing 119 projects (*ROHU CBC 2021*, 29). In terms of thematic priorities, the largest amount was spent on social inclusion projects, followed by environment protection & resource efficiency, while less money was spent on improving the efficiency of public administration. Cross-border projects, like borders themselves, can be seen from an extended perspective because of their multitude of key characteristics, starting with political aspects of the borders, but focusing also on economic, natural, environmental or socio-cultural aspects.

⁹ see: Hungary-Romania Cross-Border Co-operation Programme 2007-2013. Cross-border co-operation on the Hungarian-Romanian border has a strong foundation to build on. URL: <http://www.huro-cbc.eu/en/overview/>.

¹⁰ see: INTERREG V-A Romania – Hungary Programme, Eligible area. URL: <https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/eligible-area/>.

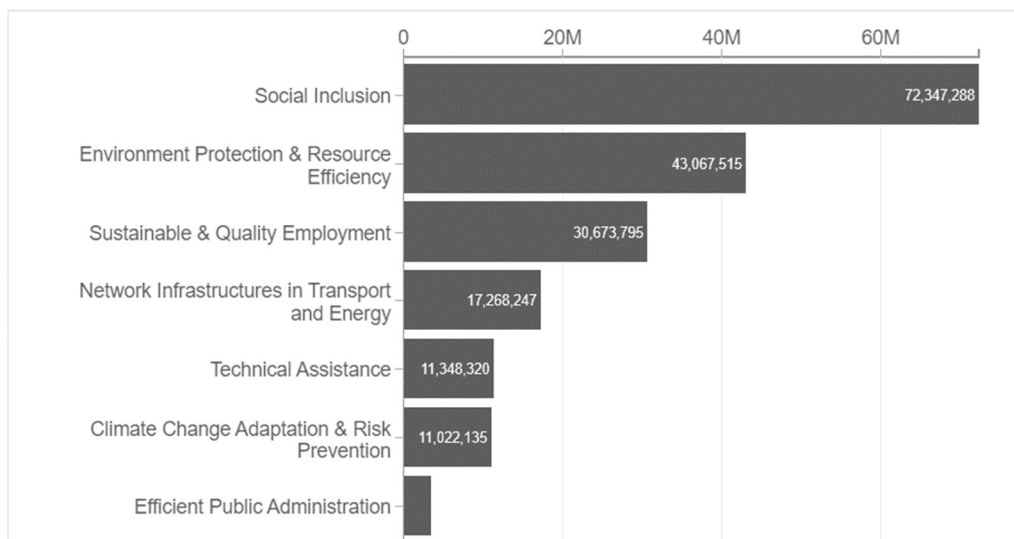


Figure 2. Financial information of INTERREG V-A Romania-Hungary programme budget by priority axes

Source: (EC 2014)

The actual status of the programme in total values, updated on 30 April 2021, involves 53 finalised projects and an absorption rate of 25.92% ¹¹, but more projects are still in the implementation phase (from the total of 119 contracted projects) and the final indicators will be available in about two years after the end of the programming period.

Through this Programme, non-refundable funding was allocated, in a competitive manner, within the framework of public calls for proposals for joint cross-border projects:

- Joint protection and efficient use of common values and resources (Cooperating on common values and resources) – EUR 48.50 million;
- Improving sustainable cross-border mobility and removing bottlenecks (Cooperating on accessibility) – EUR 34.99 million;
- Improving employment and promoting cross-border labour market (Cooperating on employment) – EUR 55.07 million;
- Improving health-care services (Cooperating on health-care and prevention) – EUR 57.03 million;
- Improving risk-prevention and disaster management (Cooperating on risk prevention and disaster management) – EUR 9.55 million;
- Promoting cross-border cooperation between institutions and citizens (Institutions and Communities cooperation) – EUR 4.01 million¹².

As examples of projects through this specific cross-border cooperation programme, we can mention:

- Improving Quality Management of Cross-border Rivers: the Criş (Körös), Mures (Maros) and Tisa (Tisza);

¹¹ see: INTERREG V-A Romania – Hungary Programme. The actual status of the programme in total values. URL: <https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/programme-status/>.

¹² see: INTERREG V-A Romania – Hungary Programme. Programme Overview. URL: <https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/programme-overview/>.

- Eco trans system - eco-friendly cross border transport in the Socodor Ketegyhaza area;
- Cluster for Geography, Heritage and Sustainable Development in the Bihar–Hajdu Bihar Crossborder Area;
- Improving cross-border cooperation between public institutions of Nădlac-Sântana-Elek-Doboz;
- Developing common solutions for increasing the drinking water quality;
- Common challenges – common solutions: institutional development in the field of tourism;
- Cross-border youth community;
- Let's celebrate our traditions together;
- Joint development of the voluntary emergency response and disaster management capacity in the eligible border area;
- Creating a joint tourist destination in the cross-border area of Lugașu de Jos and Komádi, through cross-border protection of natural heritage values along the Crișul Repede Valley;
- Cross-border health co-operation for effective prevention and better quality medical services and efficient rehabilitation and recreation in Békés and Arad counties¹³.

The above are just a few examples of the contracted projects from the last years. We included examples from different fields of cooperation, just to prove that the cross-border cooperation between these two countries includes multiple topics and area of collaboration.

Analysing the general objectives, activities and results of the cooperation projects financed through this period, we can conclude that both sides of the border face similar difficulties in the economic sphere, namely low innovation capacity, low productivity and low effectiveness of business support services. In order to reduce these difficulties, more projects should be implemented. Taking small steps should begin, but it is essential to increase the spending of the European funds, especially by implementing cross-border cooperation projects targeting integrated development. A functional approach is mandatory in cross-border and transnational Interreg programmes and leads to specific projects of territorial cooperation (*Mehlbye & Böhme* 2018).

Looking at the evaluation made by the two involved states and especially by the European Commission, more focused concentration of the funds and narrower number of priorities with limited matching of the eight involved counties are recommended for the next period. In terms of effectiveness, the earlier launch of the calls and a more simplified system for project evaluation, contracting and monitoring may improve the positive impact of the cross-border cooperation programme (*ROHU CBC* 2021, 30). Regarding the second aspect, one can conclude that this needs to be recommended also to the Romanian authorities involved in managing European funds in order to raise the accession degree to over 50% of the available funds, at least.

We might add to these aspects that better knowledge and experience of the beneficiaries will enable them not only to identify the appropriate calls in due time, but also to implement sustainable projects. This can be achieved only by investing in capacity building and experience-exchange programmes.

Concerning the future cooperation programme between Hungary and Romania, it will include the same eight counties that constituted the programme area before:

- on the Romanian side: Satu Mare, Bihor, Arad and Timiș;

¹³ see: INTERREG V-A Romania – Hungary Programme. Financed projects. URL: <https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/lists-of-financed-projects/>.

- on the Hungarian side: Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Hajdú-Bihar, Békés and Csongrád-Csanád¹⁴.

Three years ago, on 2 May 2018, the European Commission adopted a proposal for the next Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period 2021-2027 (*EU 2020*). It forecasted simplifications and concentration of resources and a reduction of thematic policy objectives from 11 to 5, as follows:

- A smarter Europe - innovative and smart economic transformation.
- A greener, low-carbon Europe.
- A more connected Europe - mobility and regional ICT connectivity.
- A more social Europe - implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights.
- Europe closer to citizens – sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas through local initiatives (*Reppel 2019*).

When designing the framework for future regional development and cooperation interventions, we should also take into account the challenges that appeared in the beginning of 2020, namely with the COVID-19 pandemic. This health crisis quickly transformed into an economic one and impacted also cross-border cooperation. As is already known, the area of this particular cross-border cooperation programme is characterised by relatively low innovative capacity, structural weaknesses of the business sector, low performance of knowledge intensive economic activities, growing exposure to labour market exclusion of certain vulnerable groups, including low-skilled workers and the youth, and increased ageing of the population (*ROHU CBC 2021*, 38).

This means that the perspectives and purposes of the new cooperation projects should include actions addressing these difficulties, because, considering the challenges the world is already facing, the pandemic will have an important and long-term impact on the cross-border area. This will boost regional differences, as in times of crisis the more competitive player has better chances to survive and better ability for fast recovery. However, what can really make a difference and increase the potential of the cross-border area is to create and to adopt national policies in both countries which are able to support development in compliance with the European strategies at regional level.

Conclusions

The cross-border cooperation programme between Romania and Hungary represents a huge opportunity for the development of the border area and it has multiple factors that can lead to success. For example, we mention that both have a similar political administrative system: with NUTS 2 as statistical-administrative regions, NUTS 3 as counties, and LAU 2 referring to the local administrative units. Due to the dimension of physical advantages (a green border), there are significant population clusters that are located very close to the border (among them Debrecen and Oradea); thus, it is appropriate to involve them in projects for the sake of economic development or the cultural and touristic perspective. Moreover, Romania and Hungary participate in other cooperation programmes as well (e.g. Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, Interreg Europe, ESPON, Urbact, etc.). By exploiting the diversity of financial resources, better results can be obtained if stakeholders react and work together in order to reach joint priorities in a broader context than now.

Besides the many advantages, there are also barriers that might limit cooperation, like the fact that Romania and Hungary have different Schengen status, different currencies (Romanian Leu, Hungarian Forint), different types of taxes and differences in the administrative grids and in

¹⁴ see: INTERREG V-A Romania – Hungary Programme. Eligible area. URL: <https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/eligible-area/>.

the delivery of certain public services. One can also add the problems stemming from undeveloped economic and transport infrastructure.

This suggests that the complexity of the border should be taken into consideration when making common efforts to conceptualise cross-border cooperation and regional development. By these means, it should be possible to raise the number of advantages and to improve the practices of cross-border cooperation on different scales.

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**Ukraine's experience and prospects of cross-border cooperation:
Legal and economic parameters in the light of sustainable development**

Abstract: *The article provides a general overview of the course of forming Ukraine's legal and policy basis for cross-border cooperation in connection with economic development. Specific attention is given to its cross-border cooperation with the neighbouring Eastern European countries in the frameworks of bilateral treaties, the Madrid Outline Convention and the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. Their cooperation within four Euroregions, supported by the EU European Neighbourhood Instrument, is observed. The complex of cross-border cooperation advantages, shortcomings of their realisation and the current prospects for cross-border cooperation advancement in the light of sustainable development are characterised.*

Keywords: *cross-border cooperation, sustainable development, Madrid Outline Convention, EU-Ukraine Association Agreement*

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Introduction

Ukraine's favourable geographic position in the middle of the European continent and, thus on the cross-roads between Asia, the Middle East and Central Europe has always been a lucky chance and a tricky challenge. Historically, wealth and progress were brought to its territory as well as wars and destruction through numerous migration and trading routes.

At the end of the Soviet era, Ukraine was one of the richest Soviet Socialist Republics and shared borders with 5 member countries of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) – Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania – and thus it gained considerable benefits while exploiting the extensive transport infrastructure (railway, highways, river and sea as well as aviation transport systems) that crossed its territory in all geographical directions. As known, the CMEA aimed to establish close economic relations between its members and coordinate their concerted actions in the foreign market (*Orlik* 2009). Those times are 30 years back; the new European political agenda and the EU factor have not changed the endeavour of the neighbouring Eastern European countries to cooperate beyond their borders.

Currently, cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and the above countries, based on the international and domestic law norms, is considered an instrument of the regional and even macro-level development, regarding sustainable development as a common goal. However, the potential of cross-border cooperation is not used appropriately; new prospects in Ukraine's legislative improvements and experience are deemed to be decisive for boosting cross-border cooperation.

Formation of Ukraine's legal basis for cross-border cooperation

Cross-border cooperation of modern Ukraine with its Eastern European next-door neighbours stems primarily from the international treaties on good neighbourly relations and cooperation, laid out in the early 1990s, soon after Ukraine gained its independence, and in the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities of 1980 (Madrid Outline Convention) (*CoE* 1980).

The Madrid Outline Convention is equally binding for 39 European states and it entered into force for Ukraine and Poland in 1993, for Hungary in 1994, for Bulgaria in 1999, for the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic in 2000 and for Romania in 2003. Ukraine and all these countries

made commitments to facilitate local and regional authorities in establishing cross-border cooperation, among other ways, by means of bilateral or multilateral agreements between them within the scope of their respective powers defined by domestic laws. Cross-border actors are encouraged to make agreements on matters of common regional, urban and rural development, environmental protection, improvement of public facilities and services and mutual assistance in emergencies, etc. To act more efficiently, they may choose to set up transfrontier associations or consortia. In parallel, the states are obliged to eliminate obstacles to cross-border cooperation and to grant the necessary facilities to the involved local and regional authorities. Though the granting of facilities shall be subject to the state's rules of control or supervision, this must by all means respect international relations and the national policy. No doubt, the Convention, even if it had not ratified yet by the Eastern European countries, was carefully considered when they concluded their bilateral framework treaties on good neighbourly relations and cooperation.

The list of such Ukraine's treaties is opened by one made with Hungary in 1991 (*Treaty* 1991). These are followed by treaties between Ukraine and Poland (*Treaty* 1992a), Ukraine and Bulgaria (*Treaty* 1992b), Ukraine and Slovakia (*Treaty* 1993) and Ukraine and Romania (*Treaty* 1997). All these treaties confirm the political will of their interested parties to build their relationships based on traditional friendly relations between the peoples of these states on the grounds of mutual respect and sovereign equality and with regard to political and economic transformation in the states themselves, in Europe and around the world. They affirm a common desire to transform Europe into a continent of peace, security and cooperation on the principles of freedom and democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms. In the treaties the partners guarantee the faithfulness to their obligations arising from the norms and principles of generally accepted international law and, above all, the Statute of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act, and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, and reinforce their aim to give a modern dimension to their relationship and cooperation.

Specific provisions of these treaties establish the mutual commitments to maintain contact and promote the development of cooperation between the potential cross-border actors and participants – public authorities at various levels, administrative-territorial units, twin cities, public organisations, and legal entities as well as individual citizens.

For instance, Articles 8–10 of the Treaty on the Foundations of Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation between Ukraine and the Republic of Hungary of 1991 constitute the Parties' determination to promote contacts between public authorities and administrations, regional and local self-government bodies and their heads on a permanent, regular basis. The states make a commitment to contribute to the expansion of contact between their citizens on an individual basis and through the state and other organisations as well as to the development of mutually beneficial bilateral cooperation in the field of economy, providing favourable economic, financial and legal conditions for entrepreneurial and other economic activities. The encouragement of cross-border cooperation in all areas of relations is marked within this framework.

It is noteworthy that the Treaty on Good Neighbourly Relations and Cooperation between Ukraine and Romania of 1997 directly refers in Article 8 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities and establishes the commitment to encourage and maintain direct contacts and mutually beneficial co-operation between their administrative-territorial units, in particular those of border areas. Particular attention is paid to the promotion and support of the Euroregions "Upper Prut" and "Lower Danube". Both states expressed their commitment to invite the administrative-territorial units of other interested states to join the Euroregions' activities and underlined their intention to work towards the inclusion of this cooperation in the framework of the corresponding activities of the European institutions. In fact, the properly regulated cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and Romania is of specific relevance – the state border, with a total length of 613.8 km (the longest one when compared to Ukraine's borders with Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) includes 292.2 km along the rivers and 33 km along the Black Sea. The latter characteristic – the maritime border, opens the strategic opportunity for Ukraine and its neighbours on the land borders to widen their

cooperation and also involve Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey and Georgia. For the purposes of management of the Ukraine-Romania cross-border relations, the Intergovernmental Working Group on Cross-Border and Interregional Cooperation was established.

To implement the other aforesaid interstate treaties in the part of cross-border cooperation establishment, the Government of Ukraine concluded three specific bilateral treaties on cross-border and interregional cooperation – with Poland in 1993 (*Agreement 1993*), with Hungary in 1999 (*Agreement 1999*), and with Slovakia in 2000 (*Agreement 2000*).

In particular, the Agreement between the Governments of Ukraine and Poland of 1993, sticking to the common aim of strengthening and developing friendly and good neighbourly relations, concentrates on enhancement of cooperation on the interregional level. It supports the establishment and strengthening of relations between the regional state administration and regional self-government bodies of both states (in Ukraine these are the rayon state administrations and the rayon radas)¹⁵. In order to promote the development of regions, cities and rural areas the two governments defined a number of fields of mutual interest: construction and spatial planning of the territories; transport; utilities; industry; trade; agriculture (enhancing agriculture, processing and marketing of agricultural products); nature protection (national and landscape parks, territories and recreation facilities); environmental protection (control of water, air and soil pollution); education and vocational training, in particular teaching in Ukrainian and Polish as second languages in schools, especially in the border areas; culture and art; health care; tourism and sports; mutual information assistance in case of catastrophes and environmental disasters (epidemics, floods, fire incidents, disasters and traffic accidents); etc. In fact, they cover all possible fields of interrelations, and this list is not exhaustive. The governments authorised the regional state administration and regional self-government bodies with the competence to enter into agreements on the matters specified above, in respect of international treaties and national legislation. This shall especially be applied to contracts for the supply of goods or services, as well as the establishment of joint ventures, societies, associations and foundations. To ensure cooperation efficiency the regional state administration and regional self-government bodies may establish joint coordinating bodies for interregional cooperation and also design their joint activities. The higher level body envisaged by the Agreement, namely the Joint Intergovernmental Coordinating Council for Interregional Cooperation, governed by the states, was established in 1995 and its main tasks are: development of interregional and cross-border cooperation between the countries; development of infrastructure of the Ukrainian-Polish section of the state border; and development (spatial planning) of border regions. The Coordinating Council guides the work of specific commissions for various tasks: on spatial planning of border regions; on checkpoints and border infrastructure; on cross-border cooperation; on prevention and counteraction to offenses when crossing the Ukrainian-Polish state border; on rescue and protection of the population in emergency situations.

The Ukraine-Hungary and Ukraine-Slovakia treaties on cross-border cooperation are equipped with similar provisions, and the room for manoeuvre of the cross-border cooperation actors is wider as it is not limited by local administration and self-government bodies of a definite level. The bilateral Ukrainian-Hungarian Intergovernmental Joint Commission on Cross-Border and Border Cooperation and the Ukrainian-Slovak Intergovernmental Commission on Cross-Border Cooperation contribute considerably to the multilevel decision-making process aimed at consolidating the parties' efforts and relevant resources.

In addition, the intergovernmental agreements on cooperation in various fields of joint activities – economy, trade, transport, cross-border mobility, security, emergency, nature protection, science and technology, etc. – also contribute greatly to the development of cross-border cooperation. As proof, the Agreement between the Government of Ukraine and the

¹⁵ Ukraine's rayon state administrations and the rayon radas work in 119 rayons as established by the Government Order "On reorganization and formation of the rayon state administrations" of 16.12.2020 No. 1635-p (*Government Order 2020*).

Government of the Republic of Hungary on Economic Cooperation of 2007 (*Agreement 2007*) aims at developing and intensifying economic, industrial, technical and technological cooperation on a mutually beneficial basis as well as strengthening the cross-border cooperation between oblasts or regions. It foresees the participation of regional and local authorities alongside with the executive power bodies responsible for economic policy, government agencies, professional organisations, business associations and chambers in the realisation of bilateral economic interests and in the promotion of interregional and cross-border cooperation at the international level. The Joint Intergovernmental Ukrainian-Hungarian Commission on Economic Cooperation meets to coordinate the decision-making process when implementing this Agreement. In 2020, its areas of discussion included joint border development projects, credit lines for infrastructure projects and the coordination of pandemic response efforts (*Kelly 2020*).

Euroregions' experience: brief overview

The Madrid Outline Convention, the bilateral treaties and the subsequent interstate structures became the basis for the creation of cross-border associations of local and regional authorities in the form of Euroregions. Ukraine's cross-border actors take part in four Euroregions, which in different combinations unite all the Eastern European countries. The first one – the Carpathian Euroregion, was founded in 1993 in Hungary by the bordering local and regional authorities of Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary and Ukraine. The cross-border Association “Euroregion Bug”, established in Ukraine in 1995, includes the local and regional authorities of Poland, the Republic of Belarus and Ukraine. The “Lower Danube” Euroregion was set up in Romania in 1998 by the local and regional authorities of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine. The “Upper Prut” Euroregion was instituted in 2000 in Romania to unite a group of other bordering local and regional authorities of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine. All these Euroregions operate on the basis of particular agreements between their members and have the legal status of non-governmental organisations. They cooperate within the frames of their strategies and plans, which shall meet the population needs and comply with the national development policies and strategies in various fields and with the EU Social Cohesion Policy, European Neighbourhood Policy, and Eastern Partnership Policy. The EU European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) provides them with the significant assistance and support via the programmes “Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine”, “Poland-Belarus-Ukraine”, “Romania-Ukraine”, and “Black Sea Basin”. For instance, in relation with the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2014-2020 “Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine” ENI Programme 2014-2020 helped the local cross-border actors realise the project entitled “Infectious diseases have no borders” with EU funding of EUR 998,798.74 to improve the material and technical base of infectious disease departments of the Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County Hospital and University Teaching Hospital (Nyíregyháza) in Hungary, Regional Children's Hospital (Mukachevo) and Regional Clinical Infectious Hospital (Uzhhorod) in Ukraine (*HUSKROUA 2019*). Currently, all the above ENI programmes are being updated in the course of rounds of consultation with the programmes' representatives; the Interreg NEXT (Neighbourhood External) instrument is planned to be applied in the coming years.

Cooperation within Euroregions should be recognised as an ambitious endeavour. Although all the abovementioned Euroregions have sustainable socio-economic and environmental development, parameters of which are defined by the UN, EU and Ukraine's strategic agendas as a major aim to achieve, they also have some individual peculiarities and special objectives. They have to consider the complexity of specific regional characteristics, opportunities and challenges and meet the particular needs of the local population. The comprehensive analysis of their practice demonstrates that they have different results and not always definite perspectives, mostly because of the inconsistency and insufficient quality of their management as well as the lack of financial resources – especially in terms of their own co-financing – needed for their efficient work. Nowadays, their success mostly depends on the EU expertise and financial support, which indeed

should not be the only decisive factor; also their own resources and the capacities of cross-border actors are essential to establish and maintain sustainable cross-border cooperation.

Cross-border cooperation advantages

On the whole, almost 30 years of Ukraine's cross-border cooperation experience allows the regional and local cross-border actors as well as the central state power bodies to summarise the wide range of its advantages and the responsibility which it can entail. Successful cross-border cooperation can result in the synergy of social, economic and environmental advantages. And this unbreakable "social, economic and environmental triad" is in the core of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (*UN* 2015), the EU response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (*EU* 2017) and the Sustainable Development Goals of Ukraine for the period till 2030 (*Decree* 2019). Cross-border cooperation can provide positive impacts on the competitiveness of the regional and local economy and through this, on the local population's quality of life.

The very general list of the benefits of cross-border cooperation may include, among others: the minimisation of effects of administrative and institutional, legal, physical and cultural barriers between the cooperating territories, actors and population of different countries; joint tackling of their common problems; and harnessing of their untapped potential to overcome possible disparities and ensure sustainable development (*ECA* 2019). More specific characteristics of advantages can start with the improved cross-border transport accessibility of cooperating territories, which provides an increase in freight transport and the flow of goods, which is important, for the functioning of the EU-Ukraine Free Trade Area Agreement and the consistent growth of trade and capital turnover, among other benefits. It allows for the accessibility of services, the increase in overall human mobility and, in particular, passenger traffic volumes, including foreign tourists whose regular visits can become an additional source of revenue for both local citizens and the state budgets. Transport accessibility of the territories, cooperating across borders, can be a decisive factor also for domestic and foreign investments. The latter can stimulate and support the development of different objects of economic activities of all types of actors that are important for the regional and local economy in the areas of industrial production, agriculture, tourism, recreation and other kinds of economic activities; small and medium-sized business development; nature protection (including forests); basic and innovation infrastructure development – roads, including highways and roads constructed for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as those connecting remote settlements and public service establishments; IT communication; water and energy (oil, gas, electricity) supply systems, etc. The social advantages of well-developed cross-border cooperation can be identified in a number of dimensions: increased opportunities for employment of the local population, improved professional capacities of employees and higher competitive salaries; the reduced emigration of population when searching for jobs; the increased quantity of modernised services for local population and guests from abroad, including health care, insurance, banking, education, etc.; intensified human mobility, know-how and cultural exchange to find new solutions to existing common problems; protection of the natural environment; population growth; the trust building within the domestic territories, participating in cross-border cooperation, and in the cooperating territories of different states, etc. Moreover, efficient cross-border cooperation may cause a perspective synergy effect in the result of deepening of the international division of labour in cooperating neighbour regions and mutual interconnection of national processes of production and reproduction; this can have a considerable macroeconomic effect on the whole territory of Ukraine and Europe. On the whole, inherent cross-border cooperation potential can help simultaneously meet many challenges facing territories of different countries, with which territories of different countries are not able to cope separately, and exploit the various advantages of each cooperating territory and country, successfully multiplying them.

Currently, cross-border cooperation potential is not used by Ukraine in the proper way. Accordingly, a number of national-level strategic and programming documents take this issue into consideration and define the relevant priorities, objectives and tasks.

Recent developments and prospective steps

Ukraine's National Economic Strategy for the period up to 2030 (*CMU 2021a*), on the grounds of a comprehensive audit of the national economy, has the objective to ensure effective regional development also by means of the advancement of cross-border cooperation and defines the task to increase the level of capacity and activity of its actors to develop and boost mutually beneficial interaction with its European partners, which can help overcome the effects of economic crisis. The State Strategy of Regional Development for 2021–2027 (*CMU 2020*) determines the general vector of sustainable development of Ukraine's regions. Cross-border cooperation is considered by the Strategy as an instrument of regional development, strengthening the regions' competitiveness and Europeanisation of all relevant processes. Ukraine's participation in the EU's cross-border cooperation programmes for 2021–2027 and ensuring its interaction with the EU in the course of preparation and realisation of new Eastern Partnership Territorial Cooperation Support Programmes are defined as important components.

To implement the objectives and tasks of the two above-mentioned strategic documents and Ukraine's international commitments, the State Programme for the Advancement of Cross-border Cooperation for 2021–2027 (*CMU 2021b*) was recently adopted by the government. It is aimed at consolidating the efforts and concentrating the resources of actors and participants of cross-border cooperation in order to promote the balanced socio-economic development of Ukraine's regions and increase their competitiveness. The State Programme's priority areas of activities are: 1) implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and the Danube Transnational Programme in Ukraine; 2) realisation of cross-border cooperation projects and programmes, including those of the European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg) for 2021–2027, supported through the "Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument"(NDICI); 3) ensuring the development of border infrastructure in the mountainous areas of the Carpathians; 4) ensuring the development of institutional capacity of actors and participants of cross-border cooperation (including associations of local self-governments, regional development agencies, civil society organisations, European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation and other forms of cross-border cooperation). Based on that, the State Programme delineates fine main tasks, realisation of which will be provided in the frames of the approved Action Plan, and it is amended with the list of Indicators of monitoring of its implementation. In particular, it is foreseen to reduce the unemployment rate in border regions of Ukraine to 6% in 2022 with a further downward trend of 0.2% annually; exports and imports of goods and services in border regions of Ukraine are expected to increase by 5% annually; about 600 new enterprises are supposed to be created in 2022 and a further upward trend is awaited; Ukraine taking a place in the top 50 world ranking for the World Bank Logistics Efficiency Index is forecast; the length of constructed and reconstructed roads shall be about 1,531 kilometres by 2022 with a further upward trend; at least three Euroregional Cooperation Groupings are planned to be established by 2022 and a further upward trend is expected; etc. Indeed, the indicators established by the State are not perfect; they can become reality when the development of cross-border cooperation is well-managed, sufficiently financed and properly regulated.

Cross-border cooperation actors as well as the research institutions (including the V. Mamutov Institute of Economic and Legal Research of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine) and civil society organisations were involved by the Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine in the elaboration of the State Strategy of Regional Development for 2021–2027 and the State Programme for the Advancement of Cross-border Cooperation for 2021–2027. The Ministry's and the participants' analysis of the status of

Ukraine's cross-border cooperation, provided as the basis for further decision-making, revealed the necessity of improving the legal frames of cross-border cooperation, especially regarding the importance of applying the provisions of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement that include Chapter 27 "Cross-border and Regional Cooperation" in Title V "Economic and Sector Cooperation" (AA 2017). Ukraine's commitments under Protocol No. 2 to the Madrid Outline Convention concerning interterritorial co-operation (CoE 1998) and Protocol No. 3 to the Madrid Outline Convention concerning Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (ECGs) (CoE 2009) are not realised properly either, since their ratifications which took place in 2005 and 2013 were neither at regulatory nor at practical levels.

Firstly, the Law of Ukraine "On Cross-border Cooperation" of 2004 (amended in 2018) (*Law No. 1861-IV*, 2004) will undergo thorough improvements. This work is foreseen by the State Programme for the Advancement of Cross-border Cooperation for 2021–2027; and a first draft of amendments to this Law is being elaborated and discussed by the national authorities, research institutions and interested stakeholders. Apart from the Law "On Cross-border Cooperation", for the solid background of the cross-border cooperation and with regard to the Association Agreements' Title V "Economic and Sector Cooperation", it is necessary to revise also the acting legislation on foreign economic activity, on border control, custom services and taxation, on employment, on public-private partnership, on scientific and technical activities, on innovative activities, on state regulation in the field of technology transfer, on science parks, etc. Most of them were adopted before the enactment of the Association Agreement and are not up-to-date to be used for the mutual benefit of Ukraine and its European partners, for supporting the joint efforts on sustainable development.

Sound legislative improvements, eliminating the current gaps and shortcomings, as well as better administration of cross-border cooperation should diminish the obstacles to the appropriate application of the Association Agreement and of the bilateral treaties on cross-border economic activities between Ukraine and the Eastern European states. The renewed and well-applicable legislation will open the way to the development of Euroregions, Euroregional Co-operation Groupings and European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation. Up to now no Euroregional Co-operation Groupings have been established upon the initiative of or with the participation of Ukraine. And of the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation with limited liability, TISZA¹⁶ (established in 2015) is the only EGTC uniting efforts of the Ukrainian and Hungarian regional authorities. It is worth multiplying its experiences on the territory of Ukraine.

We consider that the realisation of this perspective can be tangibly boosted by the planned Ukraine's presidency of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region¹⁷ between November 2021 and November 2022. As an EU initiative, endorsed in 2011, uniting fourteen countries – nine EU Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Germany, Romania, Slovenia) and five states outside the EU (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Ukraine), it is a powerful macro-regional strategy aimed at enhancing cooperation between the involved countries or territories by mobilising their local and regional actors to align policies and funding and to identify common issues, solutions and actions. Its four pillars – connecting the Region, protecting its environment, building prosperity, and strengthening the Region, – and the key priority areas concern the complexity of interrelated matters reflecting the Region's peculiarities and interests. The list of the key priorities cover: 1) mobility (movement of people and goods, corridors across Europe); 2) energy (secure sources, diversification, especially renewables, reduction in emission, efficiency); 3) water quality (pollution, ecosystems) and quantity (navigation, risk prevention and management); 4) biodiversity (precious natural heritage as a source of wellbeing and prosperity); 5) socio-economic development (decent jobs, growing

¹⁶ see TISZA European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation with limited liability. URL: <https://tiszactt.hu/en/home/>.

¹⁷ see EU Strategy for the Danube Region. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/danube/

welfare, appropriate framework for creativity and investments, increasing IT potential); 6) education and capacity (active modernisation of education in schools and universities, of training and administration with inclusion of all citizens); 7) preserved and developed culture and identity (rich cultural heritage, tourism potential); 8) strengthened security (personal security and protection, fight against organised crime and corruption); etc.

Regarding this profound framework, the scope of Ukraine's responsibility with a view of the forthcoming presidency of the Strategy is overwhelming. Therefore, its implementation constitutes a stunning challenge for Ukraine as the first non-EU country to preside over the Strategy. At the same time, it offers a unique chance for our country and for Ukrainian and Eastern European cross-border cooperation actors to realise a remarkable breakthrough in cross-border cooperation and economic advancement. As is said: the only difference between where you are and where you want to be is the steps you haven't taken yet. The goals of sustainable development of the European continent with Ukraine in its heart are worth common efforts.

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Melinda Benczi – Gyula Ocskay

The evolution of cross-border cooperation in Hungary

Abstract: *The present study gives an overview of the de-bordering processes around Hungary that have taken place during the last 30 years and their impacts upon cross-border relationships and cooperation in both economic and social terms. A synthesis is provided on some of the examples of Hungarian innovation in cross-border cooperation as well as on recent developments stemming from the border closures during the pandemic.*

Keywords: *cross-border cooperation, changeover, border permeability, economic transformation, EGTC*

JEL code: *H79*

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Introduction

One of the authors of this study grew up in the final decades of the Hungarian communist regime. His first visit to France was taken place in 1989, when as a member of a group of young people he had the opportunity to take part in the global youth festival celebrating the 200th anniversary of the Great French Revolution. The journey to Paris started at the Austrian-Hungarian border, where after spending two and a half hours in the queue, the passengers of their Lada (a typical communist-bloc car) were obliged to unpack everything from the boot and wait for their stuff to be precisely inspected; then they got the stamp in their passport, packed everything back into the car and continued their trip.

The second station was at Passau, at the Austrian-German border, where the scenario was the same: two and a half hours in the queue, unpack, reload, get the stamp and go. The group arrived at the border crossing of Strasbourg and Kehl at midnight. There was nobody there except for a French border guard sleeping in the cabin, with his hat pulled down over his eyes and legs crossed on the desk. Then, a lively but quiet dispute started in the car on what to do: if the passengers wake up the border guard, he would surely become very angry and the unpacking and reloading game will re-start; but without having a stamp in the passports it is forbidden to cross the state border and the group may be expelled. Finally, the driver just released the brake and the car rolled into the territory of France without any declaration...

Even though the other author of this study grew up two decades and a changeover later, her early border crossing experiences were still very similar; for younger generations it might be unimaginable how the border crossing was impeded and was characterised by hostile suspicions and a terrifying atmosphere in the communist countries before the regime transformation in 1990. Not only those borders shared with the neighbours along the Iron Curtain but also those between the allegedly friendly people's republics were guarded strictly. The access to a passport was administratively encumbered, the people crossing the border were suspected of performing something illegal, and very often, the passengers found themselves in humiliating and terrifying situations in order to discourage them from further travel.

With the transformation of the regime and the accession to the EU (and the Schengen zone), these phenomena became reminiscences of the past and the Hungarian borders have gradually been softened, movement became free (or at least much freer than before) and different forms of cross-border cooperation have been mushrooming along each border section. Until 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, it seemed that the era of closed borders would come to an end and the obstacles hindering integration of the Central European space would be eliminated.

In this study, we give an overview on the de-bordering processes around Hungary taking place during the last 30 years and its impacts upon cross-border relationships and cooperation. At

the end of the study, we reflect on the recent developments stemming from the border closures during the pandemic.

Changing macro-level conditions for cross-border cooperation

During the communist era, cross-border mobility was impeded in Hungary. After the end of WWII a strict visa regime was put in place, and the fact that the State Security Service (later on: the State Security Ministry) was assigned to issue passports for individuals clearly demonstrates the political aspect of the procedure. Besides the passport (whose utilisation was geographically limited), the passenger had to apply for specific travel authorisation for each journey signed by the local or workplace-based representative of the Communist Party. Local border traffic represented the only exception, enabling border citizens living in a distance of 15 km, later 20 km (in the case of Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia) from the borderline or in the settlements defined by the bilateral agreement (in the case of the Soviet Union) to cross the border with a special traveller's certificate valid for half a year with restricted justification of travelling (*Bencsik* 2003; 2015).

After the uprising in 1956, the strictness of the border regime has gradually softened but travelling abroad, especially to the western European countries, was still hindered by different administrative procedures, e.g. the passports were valid only for one journey, for every further travel, the passenger had to apply for another exit visa; the communist parties hindered the development of shopping tourism with administrative measures in order to maintain the domestic budgetary balance (*Horbulák* 2017); the so-called blue passport allowing for western European journeys was denied to politically unreliable persons; the total amount of western European currencies to be carried was dramatically limited in order to prevent a longer stay in the capitalist countries; the state operated a broad network of spies targeting Hungarian emigrants and their guests, etc. At the same time, in the 1970s (1972 was when the citizens gained the right to travel) tourism among the communist countries began to grow; entry with the so-called red passport was allowed with a 30-day limit, although the border control remained very strict and humiliating. The right of travelling was incorporated in Hungarian legislation in 1978, and in January 1988 the government inaugurated the so-called 'world passport', by which the Hungarian citizens were enabled to visit every country in the world (*Bencsik* 2003).

Cross-border mobility and cooperation even with the 'brotherhood nations' was not promoted. Those initiating cross-border inter-organisational or inter-municipality partnership had to apply for preliminary approval of the national authorities and the approval was not automatically issued (*Rechnitzer* 1999).

The system transformation started in Hungary, among the first former communist states, in 1989. The first free elections were held in April 1990 and the new democratic government started its work in May. The country opened its borders to international trade and the Hungarian economy became one of the most open economies in the world. Thanks to milestones such as the EU and NATO accession processes started in 1994, the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*, the joining of the EU (2004) and the Schengen zone (2007) along with some of its neighbours, new world of free movement and cooperation has been created. All the above developments resulted in a paradigm shift in border regimes. One of the most symbolic events of this paradigm shift affecting Europe as a whole was the so-called Pan-European Picnic, which was organised at the Austrian-Hungarian border in August 1989, where the border control was temporarily suspended and hundreds of East German citizens were allowed to escape through Hungary (*Hzic & Brand* 2020, 1). This was an event which later was identified by the then German Chancellor Helmut Kohl as the one that 'knocked the first brick from the Berlin Wall.' (*Gioielli* 2020, 2)

Paradigm shift in practice in Hungary

Improvement of the physical permeability of borders

As *Hardi* (2001) claims ‘states, border regions, and the characteristics of the state border all influence each other’. When analysing borders, it is essential to keep in mind *O’Dowd’s* (2010) observation on “epochal thinking” which often tricks analysts into projecting the current state and status of the borders back to past times. However, one of the many compelling attributes of state borders is that while they exist, they seem eternal and unchangeable but in fact their exact location, their permeability, their functions and assigned regulations continuously change. This is especially true for Hungary and its neighbours. Even though the geographical location of the borders of Hungary has been more or less¹⁸ unchanged since the Paris Peace Treaties signed in 1947 (*Olti 2008*, 203), the number, the location and the type of the border crossings drastically changed since then. In some cases, even the states on the other side of the border have changed.

In 1990 Hungary had 51 border crossings altogether, meaning that on average every 43,4 km there was a border crossing (*Arcanum 1992*). A mere 3 years later, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, this number had risen by 15% and Hungary had 15 border crossings with Slovakia, 14 with Austria, 10 with Romania, 6 with Slovenia and 5 each with Croatia, Serbia and Ukraine respectively.

In the past three decades this tendency has been intensified. Currently, there are 127 operational road border crossings on the Hungarian borders, which is a 250% increase compared to 1990 (*Table 1*). Thanks to this, the average distance between border crossings has fallen to 17,4 km. Numerically, the largest number of border crossings can be found on the Slovakian-Hungarian and the Austrian-Hungarian borders (37 road and 9 rail in the former case and 39 road and 7 rail in the later), however, in terms of density, the border section with the most border crossings is the Austrian one (on average every 7.9 km), followed by the border shared with Slovenia with an average of 10.2 km.

Table 1: Number of road border crossings per border in 1990 and 2021

Country in 1990	Road border crossings (1990)	Country in 2021	Road border crossings (2021)
Austria	8	Austria	39
Czechoslovakia	16	Slovakia	37
Soviet Union	6	Ukraine	5
Romania	7	Romania	22
Yugoslavia	14	Serbia	8
		Croatia	7
		Slovenia	9
Total	51	Total	127

Source: own elaboration

The construction of the numerous new border crossings and the rebuilding of formerly existing ones were accompanied by a significant increase in the cross-border traffic. While in 1985 only 5 million Hungarian people crossed the border to travel abroad and 15 million foreigners travelled to Hungary, by 1993 more than 10 million travelled abroad and 40 million visited Hungary (*Tiner 1995*, 290). In 2004 36.5 million border crossings were registered, a number which continuously grew, by 2013 reaching 62.7 million. In 2019 from non-Schengen

¹⁸ Smaller modifications have been made based on bilateral agreements especially connected to water management investments, e.g. along the rivers Ipoly/Ipeľ, Sajó/Slaná and Ronyva/Roňava.

neighbouring countries 54.6 million people crossed the border, but the number of travellers from Austria, Slovakia and Slovenia is estimated to be much higher.

Economic impacts of system transformation

Due to the increased permeability of the borders seen above, the separating role of state borders was also weakened and the economic ties between Hungary and its neighbours have been strengthened. This paradigm shift “[offers] a particularly serious chance and alternative to the future of the peripheral border regions’ (Baranyi 2012, 108) especially through the intensification of cross-border trade.

While in 1938 Germany was the biggest export (27.4%) and import (30.1%) partner of Hungary, followed by Austria (export 18.3% and import 11.5%), Italy (export 8.5% and import 6.3%) and Romania (export 4.0% and import 9.8%) as the wheels of history turned, Hungary’s most important foreign trade partners also changed. In 1949 the Soviet Union was the biggest export (24.9%) and import (21.4%) partner, followed by Czechoslovakia (export 10.1% and import 10.3%) and the United Kingdom (export 8.1% and import 13.2%) (Köves 2003, 637).

In the decades of socialism, the Soviet Union and East Germany were the main trade partners, so much so that the small Comecon countries’ imports only amounted to 48.6% in 1970, 44.5% in 1980 and 49.5% in 1988, and export rates were at similar levels; 49.7% in 1970, 49.0% in 1980 and 42.7% in 1988 (Köves 2003, 639).

After Hungary and its neighbours switched from a planned to a market economy, autarchy was replaced by the liberalisation of international trade and the opening towards the world economy (Köves 2003, 640). The latter was manifested directly and above all in the intention of integration into the European Community and in the process of institutionalisation of integration that began almost immediately after the system transformation (Köves 2003, 640). This is a change that is visible in the territorial distribution and the amount of Hungarian foreign trade.

By the mid-1990s three-fourths of Hungary’s trade was already carried out with market economies. Meanwhile, the proportion of Hungary’s imports from the former republics of the Soviet Union fell from a peak of more than one-fifth in the early 1990s to less than one-tenth at the turn of the 21st century. Between 2003 and 2009 the share of foreign trade with neighbouring countries fluctuated between 15 and 18%, amounting to EUR 13.7–26.5 billion (Majoros 2010, 78). While in 2003 the highest share of export (41%) and import (38%) activities was with Austria, by 2016 the trends had changed and a more versatile and balanced picture was attained: among the neighbouring countries Hungary’s export rate to Romania was the highest (17.3%) with Slovakia (16.7%) and Austria (16.6%) coming very close (Table 2) (Szendi et al. 2017, 38).

Table 2: Hungary’s most important partner countries in terms of trade in 2019

Country	Import (EUR)	Export (EUR)
Germany	26.3 billion	30.2 billion
Slovakia	5.2 billion	5.6 billion
Italy	4.5 billion	5.6 billion
Romania	n/a	5.5 billion
Austria	6.4 billion	5.0 billion

Source: KSH 2020

To put it differently: of the top five, three are neighbouring countries. At the same time, as a consequence of the opening of the internal EU borders, the external borders became more closed, especially the Ukrainian one, where cross-border traffic even decreased due to the stricter rules between 2004 and 2014.

Social impacts of open borders

The political-economical-physical changes characterising the past three decades left a mark on the societies living in these areas as well, though the argument probably would stand the other way around, too. Hungary is in a unique situation since ethnic Hungarian minorities live in the neighbouring countries, often right on the other side of the border. Consequently, these Hungarian communities – as well as the Slovenian, Slovak, Serbian or Romanian communities living in Hungary, in smaller, but still important numbers – have the potential to form a bridge between the two relevant nations (*Komac & Vizi* 2019, 15).

According to the 2011 census, 131,951 German, 35,641 Romanian, 35,208 Slovakian, 26,774 Croatian, 10,038 Serbian, 7,396 Ukrainian and 2,820 Slovenian people lived in Hungary, for a total of 249,828. At the same time more than 2.2 million ethnic Hungarians live in the neighbouring countries: 1,227,623 in Romania (2011), 458,467 in Slovakia (2011), 253,899 in Serbia (2011), 156,600 in Ukraine (2001), 90,000 in Austria (2013), 14,048 in Croatia (2011) and 10,500 in Slovenia (2011).

These communities play a crucial role not only in terms of providing a good basis for people-to-people cross-border cooperation projects but also because they represent the core of cross-border commuters and relocating communities. The importance of cross-border commuting has rapidly increased with the enlargement of the European Union and the Schengen area. Although the extent of cross-border commuting is not comparable to that of certain Western European countries, it is remarkable in terms of its growing trend. In 2004, 16,790 people commuted to neighbouring countries (mostly Austria), while the number of incoming commuters was 14,089. However, as border interoperability increased, more and more people from border settlements began commuting to neighbouring countries. In 2011, more than 27,000 people commuted daily to neighbouring countries, 83% of them to Austria (*Kiss & Szalkai* 2018). In the case of Slovakia, the enlargement of the Schengen area and the abolition of border controls, the introduction of the euro and the rapid growth of the Slovak economy, and in the case of Romania, the unfavourable socio-economic conditions of the border settlements and the recovery of the Romanian economy in recent years may have contributed to the increase (*Kovács et al.* 2015, 244).

As a quite new phenomenon, several thousand Slovakian citizens re-settled in Hungary, around the two biggest Slovak cities, namely Bratislava and Košice (*Jagodič* 2010; *Lampl* 2010). Due to the huge differences between real-estate prices (*Balázs - Bajmócy* 2018) and the easy accessibility of these two cities from the Hungarian side, many Slovaks have bought or built a house there after selling their flat in a block in Košice or Bratislava (*Šveda et al.* 2019). The two cities whose urban influencing area was truncated by the nearby border may regain their territorial capacities thanks to the development of their cross-border suburban area (*Varga –et al.* 2018). A similar but much weaker example of cross-border residential mobility can be observed in the Hungarian neighbourhood of Oradea (Romania) as well as along the Austrian border.

Due to the peace treaties ending the two world wars, some 60 towns found themselves in similar situation as Košice, Bratislava or Oradea: by losing their 360-degree urban influencing zones, the maintenance of their services became uneconomical, meaning a gradual shrinking in the settlement hierarchy of the larger region (*Hardi et al.* 2009). The opening of the borders resulted in the partial rehabilitation of the former influencing zones and the cautious re-building of former intermunicipal ties – across the borders.

Main aspects of cross-border cooperation in Hungary

In theory, cross-border cooperation can take place on the state, regional or local level. However, in practice in Hungary it seems that the national level is the rarest form, since it is the most difficult type to realise due to its complexity (*Fejes* 2003, 104). In principle, the association of the local

and regional self-governments is a right laid down in the Fundamental Law (Article 32(1) (k)) according to which in the case of local affairs and within the confines of the law, every local self-government may (1) associate with other local governments, (2) establish interest representation alliance, (3) cooperate with local governments and (4) join international municipality organisations.

In relation to Hungary, the conditions for the development of border regions differ from country to country (*Balogh & Papp* 1998). In general, the leaders of the seven neighbouring countries (with a few exceptions) support cooperation in their political statements. However, since the majority of the neighbours, similarly to Hungary, have a rather centralised administrative system, this factor leaves little room for manoeuvre, and the diplomatic statements sometimes only remain statements (*Süli-Zakar et al.* 2001).

The manifestation of cross-border cooperation has a temporal dimension regarding how long the common pursuit of a goal persists. Usually, the shortest form is a cross-border project which mobilises at least two – but often more – partners from both sides of a border (*Rechnitzer* 1999). Most often the local actors join forces over an identified problem that is perceived on both sides of the border and come up with a joint potential solution which is mutually beneficial for both regions. A successful cross-border project (1) goes beyond a local problem that could be solved within the given state, (2) cannot be implemented without the involvement of partners from both sides of the border, and (3) its sustainability is also guaranteed by territorial proximity.

Cross-border projects are essentially carried out to weaken the separating effects of the borders and to contribute to stronger cohesion and more intensive cross-border cooperation. This can be done in several ways, through the establishment of stand-alone infrastructural elements or the organisation of ad-hoc events such as the exchange of experiences or people-to-people festivities. The organisation of regular events takes a longer time-line and ensures deeper and more persistent cooperation. The strongest integration can be achieved by implementing a cross-border infrastructural development project which, in parallel, introduces a permanent cross-border service. In the case of Hungary, cross-border projects were supported by the EU for the first time in 1995, within the framework of the so-called Phare CBC programme, thanks to Austria joining the EU. Originally, the fund was dedicated to the external borders of the EU but from 1996, the calls became available also for border regions situated between two accession countries, namely Hungary and Slovakia as well as Hungary and Romania (*Kruppa* 2003; *Lados* 2006). Between 2000 and 2020 more than 4,000 cross-border projects¹⁹ were realised targeting Hungary's border regions, focusing on preservation and valorisation of natural and cultural heritage; the construction of cross-border transport infrastructure; the improvement of conditions for business development in remote border areas; and the development of interinstitutional and people-to-people relationships. However, it is a common experience that the local stakeholders use these funds especially for their own purposes and the vast majority of them are missing a real cross-border character and impact. Numerous monitoring reports highlight that within the framework of cross-border projects 'the partnerships were maintained only for the duration of the projects' (*EC* 2016, 17), '[m]ost projects have been implemented in isolation from each other' (*EC* 2016, 24), 'the programmes had important impacts at immediate and intermediate levels, but low cross-border effects' (*EC* 2007, 13), because the beneficiaries 'tended to view CBC as simply another source of funding' (*EC* 2007, 19). Therefore, they have realised but domestic developments (*EC* 2007, 20). In order to ensure this aspect, institutionalised forms of cooperation are important (*Rechnitzer* 1999).

In the case of Hungary, the first wave of cross-border cooperation was dominated by the state level: the Hungarian government signed bilateral treaties on good neighbourliness and cooperation with the neighbours. These treaties identified those governmental bodies responsible for operating

¹⁹ Source: www.keep.eu a database built by the Interact Programme, with the support of the European Commission. The database covers the 2000–2006, 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 periods.

joint committees involving politicians and civil servants focusing on different topics of the treaties.

The second wave started in the mid-1990s, when the proliferation of twinnings between municipalities was observable. The majority of these twinnings were initiated between municipalities based on the same ethnic origin, the functional similarity (e.g. among large cities or border municipalities) or a shared historic background (e.g. the identical naming of the municipalities, the common legacy of the so-called ‘population exchanges’ following WWII, etc.). It is worth mentioning that intermunicipal cooperation is complicated by the diverse administrative grids of the participating countries: while in Hungary and Slovakia the municipalities usually are identical with the settlement level, a municipality may include several settlements: in Romania 4–6, in Croatia 5–10, in Serbia even 20.

The millennium brought about the emergence of euroregions along every border (*Figure 1*).

Although the Carpathian Euroregion, as the first one, was established in 1993 by Hungarian, Polish and Ukrainian regional authorities (Slovak and Romanian partners were allowed to join in 1997 only), the number of such structures saliently increased between 1999 and 2004, when they reached the number of 18 in total (*Kuthi & Nagy 2005*). The basis for the creation of the euroregions was given by the Madrid Outline Convention, signed and adopted also by the Central European countries. However, nowadays the Danube-Kriş-Mureş-Tisa Euroregion is the only one which performs at European standards, implementing larger regional projects and playing a major integrating role at the Hungarian-Romanian-Serbian tri-border area. The DKMT Euroregion is also a model from the point of view of participatory governance, including in its structure the representatives of universities, chambers and civil associations. Other euroregions have been dissolved or developed further to an EGTC (*Medve-Bálint & Svensson 2013*).

Partly thanks to the involvement of the former MEP István Pálfi in its preparation, as well as his popularising activities, Hungary was among the first Member States adopting the EGTC Regulation in 2007 and its amendments in 2014. Since 2011, the Hungarian government financially and professionally supports the creation and operation of the groupings which currently amounts to approximately 500–600 thousand euros on a yearly basis. As a result of the above conditions, nearly one third of the groupings established so far in the EU have Hungarian members (*Figure 2*). More precisely, 25 groupings were established with Hungarian members (one of them has already dissolved, and the Hungarian member withdrew from another one), and 21 of them have their seat in Hungary. The groupings cover all the borders except with Austria and Serbia (in the case of Serbia, the legislative background for full membership is missing, so 8 municipalities take part in the Banat–Triplex Confinium EGTC as observers), and they implemented more than 100 projects, the total value of which amounts to more than EUR 80 million. At the same time, the performance level of the EGTCs varies: some of them have outstanding performance while others do not show any mark of existence (*Törzsök & Majoros 2015*). Currently two of them are in the dissolution phase while others are playing a pioneering role in terms of cross-border integration.

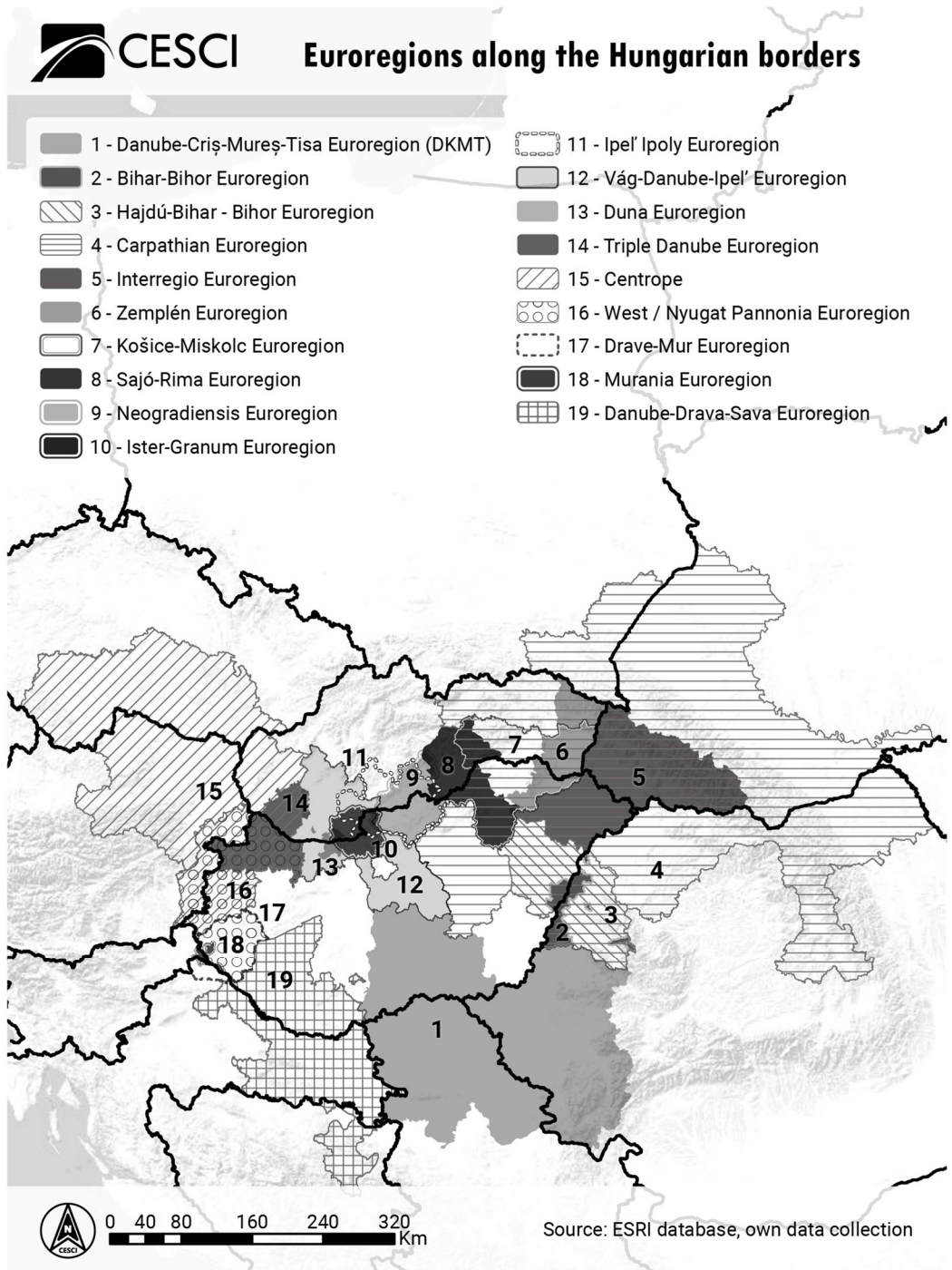


Figure 1: Euroregions around Hungary between 1993 and 2008

Source: CESCI (Viktória Jánosi)

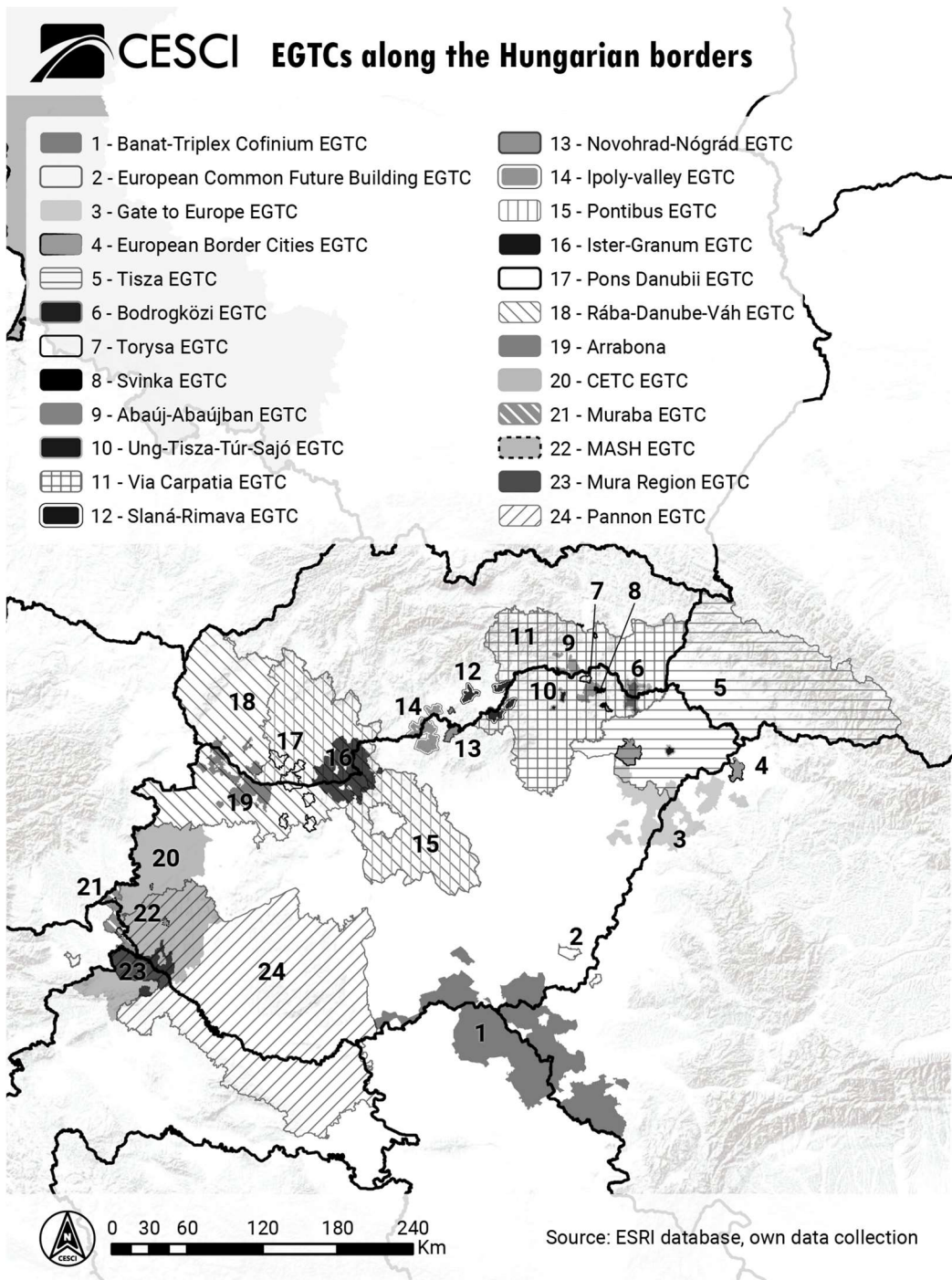


Figure 2: EGTCs around Hungary in 2020

Source: CESCI (Viktória Jánosi)

Examples of Hungarian innovation in CBC

During the years preceding the pandemic, Hungarian actors and their partners from abroad involved in CBC managed to pioneer in different fields.

The border that is the most frequented by EGTCs in Europe is the Slovak-Hungarian one, and these EGTCs offer several examples of organisational innovation. One representative of the groupings is an observer member of the Interreg CBC programme's Monitoring Committee (MC). The small project fund is managed by two regional level EGTCs: the Rába-Danube-Váh in the western and the Via Carpatia in the eastern border section. The total budget of the fund amounts to EUR 13.6 million and it is distributed based on the decision of the two regional level MCs established for the purposes of the fund (*CoR* 2020). The Ister-Granum EGTC, which has its seat in Esztergom (Hungary), takes part in the implementation of a ferry construction project as the Slovak (!) beneficiary, and it will be in charge of operating the ferry port in Slovakia after its inauguration. Since 2012, the same EGTC has been developing a cross-border network of local producers including nearly 600 partners, a cross-border retailing system and a cross-border label. The Pons Danubii EGTC has launched and operates a regional bike sharing system and takes part in the development of a smart and environmentally friendly integrated cross-border public transport system between Komárno and Komárom (*CoR* 2020).

The Novohrad-Nógrád EGTC was established with a view to managing one of the first cross-border geoparks labelled by the UNESCO. Although the grouping is under dissolution now, having implemented several infrastructural and soft projects it served as an example when setting up the Karawanken EGTC managing the Geopark Karawanken/Karavanke at the Austrian-Slovenian border.

The Tisza EGTC was the first grouping involving a third-country member, namely the regional council of the Transcarpathian region from Ukraine. Taking into account the incomplete legal background, the management of the grouping became one of the main engines of the Europeanisation of the relevant Ukrainian legislation. Currently, the grouping implements two quite large projects amounting to EUR 7.5 million in total. One of them aims at constructing the first solid waste management plant in Transcarpathia; the other targets the recultivation of the collapsed salt mines located in Solotvyno from where salt is washed into the second largest tributary of the River Danube: the Tisza (*CoR* 2020). This means that the EGTC not only plays an important role in the Europeanisation of the Ukrainian borders but actively takes part in the modernisation of the western borderland of the country.

In 2012, the Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI) established the so-called 'EGTC atelier', convening the managers and directors of the Hungarian groupings 3–4 times a year. The meetings, currently organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, facilitate information sharing and exchange of experiences in order to improve the quality of the Hungarian groupings' performance. In 2021 CESCI launched the EGTC monitor²⁰, which is an information platform dedicated to the Hungarian groupings. The platform gives a comprehensive picture on the legal, economic and policy background and the performance of the EGTCs.

Thanks to the above innovations, the groupings have an increasing significance in cross-border integration around Hungary offering new perspectives for cooperation.

Impact of COVID-19 on CBC in Hungary

While 2020 was planned to revolve around the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Schengen Agreement and the 30th anniversary of Interreg, designed for 'encouraging regions and countries to tackle challenges they can solve only by working together'²¹, now it is clear that the year passed

²⁰ <https://egtcmonitor.cesci-net.eu/en/>

²¹ As declared on the webpage of Interreg: <https://interreg.eu/interreg-30-years-together/>

entirely differently. The COVID-19 pandemic provoked a sudden, uncoordinated but universal closure of the borders of nation states within the EU. Even though the decision of closing the EU's external borders was at first made during an online meeting on the 17th of March 2020 where the leaders of the 27 member states were present, the decision of individual countries to close their borders was made in an uncoordinated way.

Hungary closed its borders that same day, however, by 26th March crossing the border had been made possible for cross-border workers and landowners. Since then, three waves have been fought which brought along a wide variety of measures in an attempt to stop the virus. These decisions directly and immediately affected the majority of those nearly two million commuters who cross national borders on a daily basis to work (though of course not only them), causing significant setbacks to their lives (*Medeiros et al. 2021*, 1). Undoubtedly, the pandemic seriously challenged cross-border cooperation along the Hungarian borders, too. Especially the implementation of cross-border developments and projects, particularly small-scale intermunicipal and interinstitutional ones, was dramatically hindered by the restrictions to free movement. The Managing Authorities of CBC programmes reacted in a flexible way, postponing joint events or organising them online and modifying the project budget. Although many events had to be postponed or cancelled, the effects of the pandemic have not endangered the sustainability of well managed cross-border structures. The achieved results can be considered a guarantee for future developments.

Conclusion

In our study we tried to give a panorama of the 30-year history of cross-border cooperation of Hungary. Obviously, this panorama must be superficial, due to the limits of an article. The daily work of the committed stakeholders on the ground generates a much more colourful picture. The main message of this article was the fundamental change of the conditions for cooperation following the collapse of the communist bloc. It is salient, to note how the energies repressed by the Communist Party until 1989 erupted from the 1990s and – equipped with the tools and advantages offered by the Euro-Atlantic integration – resulted in a lively world of CBC.

Due to their later commencement, the Hungarian examples of cooperation are not as mature as their western European counterparts; and the authors have to admit that the 4,000 projects implemented so far have modest results in terms of cross-border integration. At the same time, compared to the situation described in the starting anecdote of the article, the softening of the state borders contributing to the building up of mutual trust (at different levels, though) has resulted in a favourable atmosphere facilitating us in overcoming the traumas and bad memories of the past and in developing a real friendly environment in the heart of Europe. There is no need for anything else but to release the brake...

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BOOK REVIEWS

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**Eduardo Medeiros (ed.) (2021): Territorial Impact Assessment.
Springer, Cham**

In 2019, the United Kingdom's Regulatory Policy Committee – an independent body sponsored by the Government – published its opinion on the Department for Exiting the European Union's impact assessment on the piece of legislation that would provide the domestic legal basis for the UK's withdrawal from the EU. Among the many issues the Committee raised, including the fact that the Department for Exiting the European Union's impact assessment was unable to quantify the impacts on trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland due to a lack of data, it noted how the Government did not intend to monitor or evaluate the ongoing impacts of the legislation that would enact the Withdrawal Agreement between the UK and EU. The Committee's opinion, therefore, 'recommends that the Department set out a monitoring and evaluation plan that would address those gaps and track impacts that are currently too uncertain to assess', and in light of the Withdrawal Agreement's inclusion of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland it stresses how this 'is particularly the case for the new Protocol, where appropriate monitoring and evaluation (for example more detailed monitoring of trade flows) could support appropriate decision-making on the future of the Protocol and of the UK's future trade arrangements' (Regulatory Policy Committee 2019, p.14). What the Committee's opinion highlights, given the enormity of what the UK's departure from the EU would mean, is not only the crucial need for proper impact assessments of public policy and legislation, but also for impact assessments that can reveal the territorial implications of policy and legislation: *Territorial Impact Assessment* (TIA).

In this regard, Eduardo Medeiros' edited volume represents a major contribution to the field of impact assessment, addressing the significant absence of a dedicated manual to the specific and crucial area of *territorial* impact assessment, made available through an international publisher. This collection of scientifically sound essays forms a rich and vibrant compendium that is ideally placed to equip policy and decision-makers, as well as relevant experts, academics and practitioners with an invaluable resource. It is structured to offer the reader a critical understanding of the (comparatively young) history of the development of territorial impact assessment (TIA), with the first part setting out the foundational role of European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (ESPON) methodologies, while also presenting Medeiros' own methodology – TARGET_TIA – before outlining TIA methodologies for cross-border contexts in the second part, and concluding in the third part with methodologies seen as alternatives to some of the more mainstream approaches considered at the beginning of the volume.

There are a number of characteristics that run through the entire collection and give it a vitality that keeps the reader engaged, even as it moves from one potential TIA methodology or field of application to another. One of those is the fact that the various methodologies are presented not as merely theoretical constructs that work perfectly on the page of the scientist's notebook, but as systems that have been tested in relation to a range of policies, policy contexts *and territorial realities*. The reader is aware of this because each chapter in the book provides evidence of that testing and how it serves to further develop particular methodologies and the wider field of knowledge of Territorial Impact Assessment, with the authors acknowledging their methodology's potential shortcomings as well as their added value. From the very outset, this volume also reveals itself not to be an uncritical exposition of impact assessment in general or TIA in particular, with Medeiros noting in his introduction to the collection, for example, how the

Quick_Check TIA methodology had been excluded from the volume for not being viable, sound and relevant. In this sense, this is indicative of a concern that is present throughout the book, which is to highlight the need for TIA to supersede or be offered equivalent standing to Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), while also underlining the responsibility to protect the integrity of TIA methodologies by not promoting the use of ‘quick, dirty and shallow TIA methodologies’. A further creative tension that runs through the volume is that between the meta and the micro, the search for methodologies that can be applied across a vast landscape (i.e. the European Union) alongside calls for methodologies to be designed attuned to the differences of the local, or the “bottom-up” versus the “top-down” perspectives. These are not necessarily contradictory positions, but rather reflections of the vibrancy that arises from the exposition of multiple experiences in the development and application of TIA methodologies alongside one another in the same rich volume.

The first part, therefore, sets out what are described as “mainstream methodologies”. It begins with Medeiros’ exposition of his TARGET_TIA methodology, which he developed as a consequence of the deficiencies he found when applying the ESPON TIA methodologies already in existence to the measurement of the impacts of EU Cohesion Policy in Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Norway. To illustrate how TARGET_TIA can be used as an effective tool to measure territorially sensitive impacts in different territories (and in a way that is a common feature in all the chapters that follow), the author uses the example of the evaluation of the main ex post territorial impacts of EU Cohesion Policy in Portugal and Spain from 1989 to 2013, taking the reader through the main steps and stages of its application. Medeiros notes how it is a methodology that has been used to assess territorial impacts at different territorial scales – national, regional and cross-border – and that it has been designed for use in all evaluation phases: ex ante, mid-term and ex post. There is a clear need for a TIA methodology able to cope with the complexities of the cross-border dimension, for example, but one that does not itself become overly complex and time-consuming, which the TARGET_TIA does not appear to be given its implementation via a spreadsheet whose domains can be tailored to different territories and subjects of evaluation.

The following two chapters present two of the ESPON methodologies referenced by Medeiros in the development of his TARGET_TIA methodology. Roberto Camagni sets out the TEQUILA methodology, while in her chapter Maria Prezioso offers the reader the Sustainable Territorial Economic/Environmental Management Approach (STeMA). In a particularly illustrative way, Camagni’s chapter highlights how Medeiros’ volume helps the reader to understand the historical context for TIA methodologies, as he recalls his first-hand experience as Italy’s representative on the Committee on Spatial Development, which was fundamental to the production of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP). Camagni notes efforts at the EU level to find a common approach to TIA in order to provide a more robust assessment of the impacts of EU policies and funding programmes across the EU landscape, of which the TEQUILA methodology would be one of the results. However, in presenting the methodology and its capacity to include the ‘cultural and identitarian’ dimensions of any geographical space, Camagni rightly highlights the need for territorial impact assessment that brings to life the specificities of different regions across the EU, rather than a form of assessment that flattens the diversity of experiences of any given policy which, for the author, should ultimately be an assessment of how successful a particular policy or programme is in contributing to the goal of territorial cohesion. He also offers a powerful conclusion that warns against what he sees as the omission of territorial or spatial concerns from core EU policy debates, which implies a detachment from the everyday concerns of citizens and their lived realities.

In her chapter, Prezioso sets out in a comprehensive fashion her STeMA methodology, which is designed to take into account the diverse nature of spaces, but despite the complexity of its design, is based on ten hypotheses that can be easily communicated to students and users. Again, illustrative of what occurs throughout this edited volume, the author notes how the methodology is now in its third version, having been refined as it has been adopted at the highest levels of regional and national policy-making, and as it has been applied to the assessment of policies with

the widest reach, such as the Europe 2020 Strategy and the use of its associated ESIF budget. Having taken the reader through the practical applications of her STeMA methodology, thereby underlining how the methodologies presented in this book are not merely theoretical constructs, Prezioso ends her chapter by correctly pointing out that the ultimate responsibility for decision-making does not lie with this methodology; indeed, however complex or sophisticated the TIA methodology employed may be, decision-makers can always ignore the results, and in any case, the decision is always theirs. Likewise, and as Marot, Golobič and Fischer highlight in the concluding chapter to the volume's first part, the omission of relevant stakeholders from the development and application of TIA methodologies will inevitably result in "top-down", highly quantitative, but ultimately incomplete and unsatisfactory assessments. To address this shortcoming, the authors present the results of the ESPON and Territorial Impact Assessments (EATIA) project, which looked to furnish regional and local stakeholders with a qualitative bottom-up approach to TIA that is simple to perform and understand. Among the very positive and striking elements of the approach outlined in this chapter is its participatory and collaborative nature, which was evident in its elucidation by the authors, and it is significant how, among the case-studies presented, Slovene participants remarked on the TIA providing them with a neutral space to consider policy and governance issues. However, the authors also conclude their chapter with some sobering and frank observations suggesting, for example, possible resistance at national and regional government levels to adopting a collaborative TIA methodology.

Territorial impact assessment for cross-border cooperation programmes is the theme of the second part of Medeiros' edited volume. It begins with a reflection by Unfried, Kortese and Bollen-Vandenboorn on the experiences of assessing the impacts of EU and national legislation in the German, Dutch and Belgian cross-border regions, as part of the pioneering work of ITEM (the Institute for Transnational and Euregional cross-border cooperation and Mobility), based at Maastricht University. Conscious of how those who live and work in cross-border territories can be impacted by the introduction of European and national legislation, policies and programmes, the ITEM team has been developing a bottom-up approach to cross-border impact assessment that is built on collaboration with stakeholders in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, including practitioners in border regions, cross-border entities and experts from a range of organisations dealing with cross-border aspects of taxation, social security and health insurance, among other issues. The authors rightly highlight that one of the fundamental factors giving rise to the need for cross-border impact assessment is that while there may be an impetus at the EU level to achieve cohesion, barriers are created as individual Member States transpose EU directives into national legislation in ways that give rise to divergences between neighbouring jurisdictions. Crucially, and what is essential to capturing cross-border realities, the authors also stress that a cross-border impact assessment cannot be implemented in the border region of one state, but must cover the cross-border territory, even if the legislation or policy under consideration has been developed with a focus on a single jurisdiction. Moreover, Unfried, Kortese and Bollen-Vandenboorn note the importance of assessing the impacts of legislation, policies and programmes on the development of cross-border cooperation and cross-border governance structures, and raise the question as to the feasibility of a comparative approach to assessing the quality of cross-border cooperation and the impacts of policies on that cooperation. Their suggestion that efforts to reach a common understanding of a methodology that would allow partners from different cross-border territories to adapt it to their particular circumstances is underpinned by a fundamental belief: that the expertise on cross-border impact assessment can be found in the cross-border regions themselves, and it is from there that any common understanding should be forthcoming.

Gyula Ocskay's chapter – the second in this part of Medeiros's volume – reinforces the value of a bottom-up approach to cross-border territorial impact assessment, and to how such an assessment needs to focus on potential impacts in the quality of cross-border cooperation itself. Reflecting on the accumulated experience of the Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI) in cross-border cooperation and impact assessment, Ocskay acknowledges the bottom-up approach of the methodology developed by ITEM in the sense that it looks at the impact

of legislation from the perspective of a specific cross-border territory, while the CESCO methodology assesses the impact of cross-border interventions themselves. The CESCO methodology is bold in its single focus on cooperation, effectively ignoring evidence of impacts in the economic performance, environmental and social conditions of border areas. Like others in this volume, the author is refreshingly frank in his highlighting of the general failings of cross-border cooperation programmes, whose impacts in terms of cross-border cohesion are generally not sustainable beyond the respective periods of funding, while also arguing that EU Cohesion Policy itself sustains borders and creates artificial barriers to cooperation. In this regard, and with what could be suggested to be some justification, Ocskay is of the opinion that the indicators set for EU Cross-Border Cooperation programmes do not necessarily encourage genuine cross-border cohesion and cooperation. Ocskay's chapter captures and presents the reader with the rich complexity of the cross-border dimension, employing to good effect the concept of "soft spaces" to deterritorialise approaches to cross-border cooperation, and to highlight the value of looking at borders as the impermanent results of the spatial behaviour of border citizens, thereby stressing the need for a bottom-up approach to cross-border impact assessment.

In the concluding chapter to this second part of the volume, like the authors of the previous chapters Ferreira and Verschelde underline the need for legislation be assessed for its cross-border impacts so that it is not "border blind". The authors of this chapter reflect on the efforts at an EU level to develop TIA methodologies that can be effectively deployed in the cross-border dimension, and that can offer EU policy-makers reliable assessments of the effectiveness of EU policies and programmes, and in particular those related to territorial cohesion and cross-border cooperation. Here the reader can sense the creative tensions between the search for a methodology that can be applied to allow for comparability across the European space, and those (such as CESCO's set out by Ocskay in the previous chapter) which highlight the uniqueness of particular cross-border territories. That creative tension becomes more evident as Ferreira and Verschelde appear to dismiss ITEM's methodology because it is deemed not to have been developed to be applicable to *any* cross-border region. They conclude their contribution by making a clear and legitimate call for all administrations with legislative powers to embed cross-border TIA into their processes, while also highlighting the value of this edited volume in presenting a number of potential methodologies.

The final part of Eduardo Medeiros's volume, which is dedicated to alternative models and complementary approaches to TIA, brings into sharp focus the living nature of the development of territorial impact assessment and the contexts to which they are being applied. In their chapter, Böhme, Lüer and Holstein offer the reader a fascinating insight into the territorial foresight approach to impact assessment, which combines elements of territorial impact assessment and foresight approaches. Recalling in some ways elements of the methodologies presented by the ITEM team and Gyula Ocskay in the previous part, the territorial foresight approach relies to a significant extent on participative elements, recognising how different places and their citizens envision different futures faced with the same policy or challenge. As in so many other instances in this volume, and what gives it so much added value, the authors set out how the methodology they are describing has been developed and tested in a variety of contexts, of which the authors then give concrete examples. Contrasting to some extent to Böhme, Lüer and Holstein, the chapter by Lavallo et al. sets out the LUISA methodology, which is for comprehensive, EU-wide use and primarily in relation to the assessment of the impact of EU policies. That contrast becomes apparent as the methodology relies on EU policies to provide its baseline scenarios, but what also comes to the fore in this chapter is how its authors (like others in this volume) are taking part in exciting living laboratories for the development of TIA methodologies, and are present in vital meeting places for policy-makers and those involved in the evolution of impact assessment methodologies, as exemplified by the Knowledge Centre for Territorial Policies (KCTP). In their chapter, Dvouletý, Blažková, and Potluka set out how a territorial impact assessment that made use of a large dataset underlines the need for the local to be at the forefront of the design of policy interventions and their accompanying funding programmes. They pinpoint the need for the local

to shape interventions in order to maximise the potential of a policy's success, while also offering an honest synthesis of the political tensions that may underlie evaluations of EU cohesion policy, where any resolution will have significant impacts for regions across the EU: whether EU cohesion policy should focus on lagging regions, or on supporting more competitive regions. The final chapter in this volume sees Neto and Santos proposing new guidelines for TIA applied to regional smart specialisation strategies (RIS3) that will ensure a more integrated and multidimensional approach. Their contribution alerts readers to the complexities in the factors that need to be taken into account when undertaking a TIA of RIS3, particularly in light of the fact that RIS3 is not accompanied by its own funding instrument. This means that any TIA of RIS3 must rely on data coming from projects funded by a range of different thematic and regional operational programmes.

Each part, and each chapter in this volume edited by Eduardo Medeiros, makes an invaluable contribution to the vital effort to understand how legislation, policies and funding programmes are shaping the landscape in which we live. It represents a vital resource – a manual – for all those concerned with the search for methodologies that can help us to measure impacts in a manner that is sensitive to territorial variations, including those with a cross-border dimension. Medeiros has not only been successful in achieving the overarching objective of presenting readers with an accessible presentation of the most relevant TIA methodologies currently available, but he has also done so in a manner that offering us a clear sense of how these methodologies are the product of evolving interaction with the realities they seek to assess, and of the tensions that exist between the search for overarching methodologies and those that are the product of local specificities. It is a remarkable contribution to the field of Territorial Impact Assessment.

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Martin Guillermo Ramirez

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Gyula Ocskay (ed.) (2020): 15 years of the EGTCs. Lessons learnt and future perspectives. Central European Services for Cross-Border Initiatives, Budapest

For someone who has followed European developments on cross-border cooperation (CBC) for more than two decades, it has been a pleasure going through this book, with an excellent selection of authors who are well-known and authorised voices on CBC, its instruments and policies. I have marked plenty of pages for a deeper reading and future advice. There are also very interesting maps and tables, but something has particularly drawn my attention throughout the whole book: its specific approach towards the future, offering very valuable clues about the meaning of EGTCs for the future development of cross-border cooperation. Most chapters of this book were most probably finished during the pandemic, as well as its edition and its presentation (finally online during the *Border Forum* in Paris on 9-10 November 2020), and the present review too. This pandemic, in its first stage, meant closing borders and stopping cross-border cooperation. But very soon a cross-border reality emerged, and CBC was on most political agendas (at least for some time): labour market, business, study, civic society, and many cross-border interactions, even in essential services, were interrupted every time that a border crossing was declared closed. Even at the external borders, but particularly within the EU, there are several million people crossing borders every day for work, for study, for whatever reason. They have growing exigences, demanding simplification of procedures, cross-border provision of public services, as well as the systematization and security of their jobs, and of business and research across the borders. These growing cross-border communities are in need of instruments for keeping the sustainability of their cooperation and guaranteeing the survival of these activities after lockdown and during reconstruction.

The first of these instruments was probably the Madrid Outline Convention of the Council of Europe from 1980. Then there was the second but probably the most important instrument, Interreg in 1990. And then, the most “revolutionary” one arrived in 2006 (better tuned in 2013). After a long process of analysis and discussion by the EU institutions and European border and cross-border regions to design a legal instrument for CBC within European public law, the EGTCs were born. The first regulation came into life and, up to now, almost 80 structures have been created, with different levels of competence, tasks, and types of support. They can be more or less powerful, but they can be growingly found all over Europe, and particularly in some borders. This is perhaps due to the fact that available instruments before were not sufficient. Now it seems to be a good time to make a deep review like this book is doing, from different perspectives, adding enormous value to other revisions made by the EU institutions or some individual EGTCs. I have found very interesting analyses that deserve a read for those who want to know more about the legal aspects of EGTCs, the evolving interpretation of this tool, their role in building Europe, in cross-border integration, planning, governance, etc. Please let me go now through the different chapters, with the aim of drawing your attention and perhaps to stimulating you to read some of the contributions in this book.

In the foreword, the Hungarian Minister of Justice explains the high appreciation of this instrument in her country, its added value and perspectives.

Then, in the first chapter, Dr. Marcin Krzymuski, a legal expert with a deep knowledge of the cross-border Polish-German area, explains the institutionalization of CBC through EGTCs and provides a very interesting overview of the performance, structure, funding procedures, etc. This chapter could be very inspiring for those who already have experience and want to know more, but even for those who are learning about EGTCs for the first time. They can find very useful information on how to form one, how to build it, etc.

Gyula Ocskay, editor of the book and Secretary General of Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI), proposes an interesting change in the interpretation of the EGTCs. He refers to the initial intention of the founding fathers to implement European territorial cooperation. But when we observe the situation on the ground, EGTCs are very often considered to be multipurpose or with even changing purposes, or pursue an integrated action. And they could either act as an instrument to provide a certain service, or assume the institutional representation of the cross-border area. So, at the end of the day, 15 years of EGTC-driven integration might be summarised in the will of their primary users, boosting integration with their neighbours, and looking for greater flexibility, adaptability, visibility and representation through the EGTCs.

Prof. James W. Scott, a world authority on border studies at the Karelian Institute of the University of Eastern Finland in Joensuu, explains the role of the EGTCs in the institutionalization of CBC as a more sophisticated way of cooperation. He also draws our attention to the fact that, in times of crisis, populism and growing nationalism, cross border cooperation remains a holder for the spirit of open borders and cooperation.

Sara Svenson (Halmstad University), who cooperates frequently with CESCI (see the excellent overview of the EGTCs around Hungary edited in 2016 by Ms Svenson and Mr Ocskay), highlights some of the major challenges for EGTCs after reviewing three relevant cases (SK-HU, RO-HU-RS and DK-SE borders). And she stresses that EGTCs are not an end in themselves but the facilitator of territorial cooperation and integration.

Frédéric Durand and Antoine Decovill, researchers at the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER), warn that EGTCs do not seem to have been used to their full potential yet, especially in terms of cross-border integration. And there are different reasons for that. They are quite critical, and probably they have touched some of the “hot potatoes” here. Sometimes EGTCs could be created in an opportunistic way, just to get Interreg funding or to secure jobs. Or as a discussion forum for other issues, but not for strengthening cross-border cooperation, which should be its main purpose. Perhaps here we can see a lack of political will. And the other way round: when there is political will, we can see that CBC operates well, whether through EGTCs, through euroregions or whatever. Of course, EGTCs make it possible to do more things.

Next comes a very interesting overview by Mátyás Jaschitz, Director of CESCI, on the role of CBC in spatial planning. Actually, everything started for CBC with the planners, when they voiced that it was not possible to progress in European integration without planning across national boundaries and without some minimum common standards. So, it is very interesting going at the very start of the issue.

Prof. Eduardo Medeiros, another well-known researcher on cross-border issues at the University of Lisbon (see its work on Cross-Border Impact Assessment, or on “covidfencing effects” together with other authors in this book), explains the EGTCs as a tool for cross-border multilevel governance, which is another very interesting point. They are not an *El Dorado* for CBC and could become “fast food” EU policy tool due to their immediateness.

Peter Ulrich, researcher at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), writes about the power of EGTCs to provide participatory governance, analysing four practical cases (three operational EGTCs: Galicia-Norte de Portugal, South Tyrol-Tyrol-Trentino, and Strasbourg-Ortenau; and one under construction: TransOderana) and announcing a deeper publication very soon (already published in *Nomos* in 2021). He also discusses the social dimension of EGTCs and CBC, and the relevance of the active participation of the civil society, the provision of social services, and social innovation in cross border regions that can be implemented through the EGTCs.

Alice Engl, researcher at EURAC, writes from the perspective of minority studies about the role of minorities in cross-border cooperation. She distinguishes between legal, political, and socioeconomic layers of CBC in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural contexts.

Jean Peyrony, the Director General of the *Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière* (MOT), discusses “competences or just tasks for EGTCs?” He talks about the re-activation of this debate

during the negotiation of the the Aachen Treaty, and the relevance at the light of the role of borders and CBC during the present pandemic.

Estelle Evrard, researcher at the University of Luxembourg, fosters “spatial justice” in EU borderlands, and she explains how former front lines have been converted into interfaces and laboratories for European integration. So, good CBC could add enormous value, and a very sustainable value, to the EU integration process, beyond borderlands.

As you can see, there is a lot of food for thought in this publication, a really interesting set of readings that I would recommend you browse through whether you are a practitioner, a scholar, or just someone interested in this very particular tool for European integration.

Dóra Szendi

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György Kocziszky (ed) (2021): Northern Hungary

The Centre for Economic and Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences launched a series of monographs on the regions of the Carpathian Basin in 2003. This book series includes besides the introduction of the seven Hungarian regions, also the historical-natural-geographical, socio-economic conditions of the Zakarpatska Oblast (Kárpátalja), Southern Slovakia, Burgenland, Délvidék, Southern Transylvania and Banat, Székely Land and Vojvodina.

The authors of this monograph are analysing the situation of the statistical region of Northern Hungary as the final volume in the series (after Southern Transdanubia, Western Transdanubia, Central Hungary, Northern Great Plain, Southern Great Plain, Central Transdanubia).

Located in the north-eastern part of Hungary, the statistical region nowadays comprises three counties, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Heves and Nógrád, bordering Slovakia in the north, Central Hungary in the west, and the Northern Great Plain in the south and south-east, with the north-south-eastern natural borderline of the Tisza. The region covers 13,433 km², 14% of the territory of Hungary. Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County accounts for 54% of the region's area, Heves County for 27% and Nógrád County for 19%. The North-Hungarian Planning and Statistical Region was established under the Act XCII of 1999 in accordance with the European Union's territorial support and statistical analysis system (NUTS).

The monograph emphasize that 13% of the region's territory belongs to the protected areas of national and local importance, which is almost 22% of the total protected areas in Hungary. The administrative borders of the three counties, which were once part of the historical Felvidék, have been redrawn several times in the last 150 years, partly due to the Trianon diktat and partly due to the so-called administrative reforms. The region has a predominantly small and sparsely populated settlement structure, and its population has been monotonously decreasing since 1989. A significant part of the book is dedicated to the historical and traditional development of the region, regarding industrial, economic policy, innovation, settlement structure history. Since the second half of the 19th century, the region's economy has been dominated by industry, mainly heavy industry (mining, metallurgy, heavy machinery). The favourable natural geographical conditions (ore, coal deposits, timber resources) has determined the direction of the region's technical and technological development, its manufacturing industry, its skills and employment structure, and its commercial and income conditions. The organic development and spatial structure of the economy was disrupted by the First and Second World Wars. It lost significant areas of its former raw material deposits, transport network and markets.

The region's economy was able to recover relatively quickly from the shock of the Trianon diktat, despite the fact that its raw material resources had been lost outside the new borders. By the mid-1920s, the region's GDP per capita had reached pre-war levels. The region's heavy industry and the technical and technological innovations made by industrial companies played a major role in this.

The post-World War II economic policy, which was based on the idea for a "country of iron and steel", led to serious imbalances and distortions in the structure of the economy. During the period of forced industrialisation, 18% of national investment (1949-1968) came into the region, concentrated mainly in the Sajó valley, Gyöngyös, Kazincbarcika and Tiszaújváros.

Vocational and higher education in the region also served the development of heavy industry. The three technical faculties (Faculties of Earth Science and Engineering, of Materials Science and Engineering and of Mechanical Engineering) of the Miskolc Technical University for Heavy Industry (1949) provided the region's higher education workforce, with nearly 80% of graduates finding employment in the region.

The short-lived attempt to introduce a new economic mechanism (1968-1971) did not bring any significant change in the economic and social composition of the region. This is underlined by the fact that even the Fourth Five-Year Plan (1971-1975) paid particular attention to the region's heavy industry. During this period, the continuous steel casting plant in Ózd, the stainless steel rolling mill at the Lenin Metallurgical Works, the reconstruction of the Salgótarján Metallurgical Works, the capacity improvement of the Gagarin Thermoelectric Power Plant (Gyöngyösvisonta), and the construction of the 750 kV transmission line between the Tisza Thermoelectric Power Plant and the border of Hungary were put into operation. Cement plants with a capacity of 1070 tonnes were commissioned in Berente and 1600 tonnes in Hejőcsaba. During the same period, the second stage of the PVC plant of the Borsodi Vegyi Kombinát, the Olefin plant of Tiszai Vegyi Kombinát, with a capacity of 250,000 tonnes of ethylene and 125,000 tonnes of propylene per year, started to work.

However, the wasteful use of resources has worsened the region's productivity and economy. A significant proportion of investment in the national economy continued to be channelled into resource-inefficient heavy industries, and the political and economic leadership of the industrial region of Borsod and Nógrád continued to lobby for investment opportunities, with varying degrees of success.

Because of the distorted economic structure and low productivity, the region's economic situation has gradually deteriorated since the late 1970s. By the boom in the world oil prices, the extraction of the region's coal basis became increasingly unprofitable. The country's deteriorating equilibrium and currency shortages meant that the most necessary technical and technological developments were not carried out, which inevitably made the end products less competitive on the market. The vicious circle of declining value for money, deteriorating productivity and lack of development led the region into a recession that the economic policy was unable to address.

After the regime change, the low-processing level metallurgy, the one-sided mechanical engineering industry, which mainly supplied for Soviet exports, and the poorly structured construction, textile and food processing industries lost a significant part of their traditional markets. Most of the attempts at privatisation in the early 1990s and at attracting domestic and foreign capital proved unsuccessful. The efforts to restructure the region, which started in 1988, have changed direction more than once parallel with government cycles. Since the early 1990s, a number of concepts, strategies and programmes for regional, county and sub-regional development have been drawn up, but most of them have remained on the shelves of desks due to a lack of resources, commitment or elaboration.

Substantive changes to the region's economy and infrastructure began in the early 2000s. The M3 motorway was built and international component manufacturing companies moved into the region. The region's service sector started to develop. Its tourist capacity has expanded and enriched, new attractions have been created and the number of nights spent in the region has increased. The public and higher education sector has continued to develop. The historic Christian churches have played a major role in the renewal of public education in two waves (early 1990s and after 2000).

This promising process was interrupted by the 2008 financial crisis, but it gained momentum again after 2012. A number of tourism (e.g. Hollókő, Mezőkövesd-Zsóri, Miskolc-Tapolca, Diósgyőr, Eger) and energy developments (e.g. Gyöngyös-Visonta) were carried out, and new production plants were created (e.g. Gyöngyös, Miskolc, Tiszaújváros, etc.). The cultural life of the region has been revitalised (e.g. Bartók Plus Opera Festival, CINEFEST Miskolc International Film Festival, Fesztiválkatlan, etc.).

In addition to the natural geography of the region, the monograph aims to provide an insight into the region's history, cultural history, demographic and religious composition, economic and social conditions, and changes in its spatial structure.

The final chapter aims to answer how far the positive social and economic processes that started in the region can be sustained. What will be the direction of the region's intelligent specialisation, can it provide the necessary skilled workforce, research and development

infrastructure, to what extent and at what pace can the region's businesses integrate into the supply chain network and, last but not least, how will the region's population experience these changes? The editor of the monograph is György Kocziszky, professor emeritus at the University of Miskolc, Faculty of Economics, Institute of World and Regional Economics, and member of the Monetary Council of the Central Bank of Hungary. A sum of 37 authors have contributed to the creation of this monograph, which gives good insights into the regions development from the historical ages until nowadays.

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Examples:

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Alchian, A.-Demsetz, II. (1972): Production, information costs and economic organisation. American Economic Review (XII.) 2. pp. 775-795.

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