

CONTRIBUTION TO THE SURVEY OF THE AREAS ALONG BORDERS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Abstract: The paper analyses the situation in the geographic research of the Czech borderlands and theoretical backgrounds in the geographic study of boundary and frontier after the fall of "Iron curtain". The geography can have, and to a certain extent has, an important role as a discipline, which is able to achieve a *synthesis* of the acquired knowledge, especially from sociology and economy. One of the projects that has been trying to achieve such a synthesis, is the study supported by the "Grant Agency" of the Czech Republic with a title: "*The position of the borderland in the regional development of the Czech Republic with regard to the involvement of the Czech Republic in the European structures*". The study deals with the representative aspects of the area along the Czech-Polish border and with the model territory of the surroundings of Český Krumlov and Upper Austria.

Key words: geographic survey of borders, border effect, Czech borderland.

1. INTRODUCTION

The survey of the borderland, or the areas along the border as well, used to take up a very peripheral place in the geographic branches during the period of the communist rule in the Czech Republic, or in the former Czechoslovakia as the case may be. It was concentrated mainly on the thematic sphere of completion of the settlement of the borderland after the World War Two (for example Slezák 1978). Forced displacement of the German inhabitants, number of which amounted to more than 90 % of the population at many places in the borderland, left deep traces and problems in the borderland which the communist regime of that period had to cope with. Most of the

processes and trials that took place within the completion of the settlement could not be described in a detached point of view until the years following 1989 (for example Bičík, Štěpánek 1994; Kastner 1996; Havlíček 1999). Since the fall of the "Iron curtain" and the communist censorship at the beginning of the 90 s, the branches of economy, sociology and especially geography have been experiencing a fairly great interest regarding the areas along the borders. The Czech borderland is not an exception in this trend at all. This formerly neglected territory started to be in the centre of interest not only of the geographers from the Czech Republic, but also of the ones from the neighbouring countries (Germany, Austria, Poland and Slovakia). In addition, last but not least, it is necessary to mention in this connection also the interest for the part of the European Union.

What was the development like until now and what are the latest trends in the research of the areas along borders of the Czech Republic? What are the differences between the individual parts of the Czech borderland? What is the contribution of geography, and especially of the social geography, to the development of the territories along the borders? It is obvious that this contribution can only outline the issue in question and serves only as a guide or initial point to a further study of the phenomenon of the borderland and the development thereof.

2. THE AREA ALONG THE BORDERS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC IN A GEOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Borders of a certain territory, and the area along borders connected therewith, always constituted an important area of the public interest in the history. The effect of the borders influences more or less the territory in question and creates specific parameters that shape the area along the borders. Geography, and especially social or humanist geography, has been inquiring into the phenomenon of a border already for several decades. The geographers in the Czech Republic started to inquire into this issue more intensively again, as it was already mentioned, after the fall of the "iron curtain" at the beginning of the ninetieth. Dokoupil (1997) states that ". it is necessary to recognise the function of a borderline that divides neighbouring borderlands, to describe the contingent change of this line and the influence of a border onto the region itself, i.e. the "border-effect", and to present further expected development in the region along borders.". However, the regional development in this connection includes also a dimension that goes across borderlines, and therefore it is not a matter of one state only. This situation is supported also by the interest in the borderland showed by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs which financially supports the joint project of the geographers and sociologists from several academic places of work from the whole Czech Republic. European Union and especially the German geographers have started to inquire into the areas along the Czech borders quite intensively as well. One of the first euroregionsl (Egrensis) along the border of the former iron curtain came to existence

just upon the incentive of the German part (Maier, Jurczek etc.). After that, many other euroregions came to existence along the borders of the countries of the Central and Eastern Europe. On the basis of the ideas concerning the euroregions, and fairly high financial support for the part of the European Union in the INTERREG programmes, they include the territories within European Union and the PHARE CBC particularly for the outer areas along borders near the borderlines of the EU arise more and more new initiatives. The PHARE CBC programme is spread also in the borderland of the Czech Republic and is administered on a nation-wide basis by the Czech Ministry of the regional development. Thus this area along the borders becomes a "laboratory" of the Czech Republic as for approaching the European Union, and the knowledge acquired in these spheres, once it is generalised, will help to make the entry of the Czech Republic into the European Union easier. The necessity to determine the role of the borderland in the regional development, both in the direction inwards within the Czech Republic as well as in the opposite direction towards the neighbouring states, has been coming into prominence. The geography can have, and to a certain extent has, an important role as a discipline, which is able to achieve a *synthesis* of the acquired knowledge, especially from sociology and economy. One of the projects that has been trying to achieve such a synthesis, is the study supported by the "Grant Agency" of the Czech Republic with a title: "*The position of the borderland in the regional development of the Czech Republic with regard to the involvement of the Czech Republic in the European structures*". This project propounds several questions, hypotheses and topics of the research of the areas along the borders and the development thereof as of the beginning of the 90 s. What is the character of changes in the borderland of the Czech Republic? Can we talk about a different border-effect of the Czech borderland? What is the influence thereof onto the social-economic development of the areas along the borders and what is the impact thereof? As for the more specific topics of the research, we can also mention the questions such as: What is the direction of the evolution of the inhabitants in the borderland of the Czech Republic? What is the course of development of the mobility of employment across borders? What is the regional allocation of investments, including foreign investments, like? What is the influence of the transeuropean networks onto the borderland of the Czech Republic?

Subsequent discussion about the conception of the project, especially at the level of the fundamental research as well as the theoretical contribution, resulted in designating five primary initial points upon the study:

- a) theory of the demarcation of a borderland,
- b) the *border effect* and its manifestations,
- c) specific aspects of a borderland in a regional development,
- d) position of a borderland in the processes of integration, and
- e) geographic potential of a borderland.

An attempt to define a *natural region and natural border* and the *potentiality to re-establish the natural "over-border" regions* will be made as well within the scope of this survey of the borderland. Another important characteristic of the area along borders is the marginality thereof. The major part of the territories along borders show similar

characteristics as the peripheral areas and we often come across a statement in literature saying that a *borderland is a periphery at the same time*. As for the areas along the Czech borders, we can agree with this statement with the exception of the area around Ostrava and the brown-coal mining district in Northern Bohemia. The demarcation of the areas along borders is still the major problem upon the survey thereof. It is necessary to create as comprehensive parameters as possible and not only to focus on the political demarcation (districts, regions, etc.), as we are used to, or on a certain distance from the borderline. As for the other problem-causing spheres upon this research we can mention also: the impact of the border onto the national identity, the role of the areas along the border in the process of globalisation, transit function of the borderland, border as a line dividing different socio-economic parameters, etc.

The areas along the Czech borders have been also going through a process of integration into the European structures, and social difficulties of such a development as well as the readiness to unify the activities across borders are connected therewith.

3. CZECH BORDERLAND

Not only the Czech part of the borderland but also the neighbouring areas along borders in Germany, Austria, Poland and Slovakia will be taken into consideration in the following brief analysis of the areas along the Czech borders. The borders of the existing districts or towns define the territory concerned, especially for practical reasons (statistical indices). From the geographic point of view, we can divide the borderland into three areas differing from each other. Firstly, it is the Czech-Polish borderland that was not affected by the presence of the iron curtain. In this connection it is necessary to mention that also the Saxon borderland was not a typical barrier during the period of the cold war; it became a part of united and integrated Germany and thus also of the European Union already in 1990. Secondly we can mention the Czech border with the European Union, i.e. particularly with Austria and Germany, and thirdly the quite newly established territories along the Czech-Slovak borders (as of the year 1993). All three mentioned regions show largely different development, which is influenced mainly by the political-economic parameters. The processes in the Czech-Polish and the Czech-Austrian borderlands have been chosen as the examples of the analyses.

3.1. The representative aspects of the area along the Czech-Polish border

This borderland is characteristic especially for the fact that the borderline was quite well permeable as of the end of the World War Two and it did not come to the construction of the iron curtain here. In this connection, it is also necessary to mention that even the Saxon borderland was not a typical barrier during the period of the cold

war and that it became a part of the integrated and united Germany already in the year 1990. The Polish borderland shows mainly rather sparse population with quite a high rate of employment in agriculture and in the textile industry. In the eightieth and at the beginning of the ninetieth (1980 - 1991) we could observe particularly a decrease of population, mostly in the range of 5-10 % (see Picture 1, p.). The regions on the Polish side of the borderland that were situated further from the border, showed an increase of the number of inhabitants by about 2 %. Also, in the sixtieth and seventieth we could observe a similar trend. Before the World War Two almost the whole part of the Germans populated this area. After they had been pushed out in 1945 and in the following years, the completion of the settlement of this area was only partly succeeded. Large parts of this borderland pertained to the peripheries already before the year 1945 and this fact was subsequently reflected in their development. The problems of marginal areas can be outlined for example in the phenomenon of unemployment (see Picture 2, p.). According to the information recorded in 1996, the unemployment in the Czech part of the borderland was relatively low (about 5 %). However, at that time the unemployment in the Czech Republic was at a very low level overall. At present the unemployment here may range from about 10 to 15 % and still has a rising tendency. The rate of unemployment in the Polish part of the borderland represents much more serious problem. In 1996 the rate ranged from about 20 to 25 %.

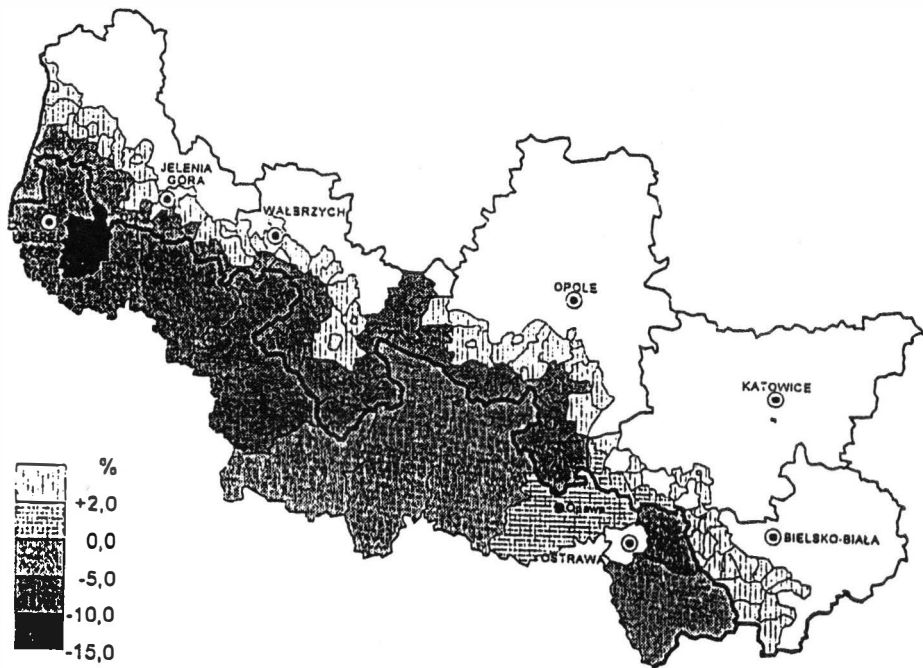


Fig. 1 Variation in the number of inhabitants in the areas along the Czech-Polish border between the years of 1980 and 1991.
 Source: Heffner 1998, p. 49

Although we are talking about a borderland with one and the same country, yet the Silesian borderland shows different parameters. This situation is caused mainly by the coal-field of Silesia that ranges along the both sides of the state border. In the Czech Republic, the districts of Opava, Ostrava, Karviná and Frýdek-Místek define this region. The entire area is particularly industrial with the view to the heavy industry. The state border represents an important dividing line in the development of the number of inhabitants within the monitored period (1980-1991). On the Czech side (with the exception of the district of Opava) we can observe a decrease in population by about 5 % (see Picture 2, p.). On the contrary, the increase on the Polish side is by more than 2 % most of the time. As for the unemployment the situation is very similar to the one in the previously mentioned region, but the Polish side shows a lower rate of unemployment (about 10 %). In spite of the fact that along the Czech-Polish borderland mostly the peripheral territories of the both states are involved, this area has been going through a dynamic development within the processes of transformation of the both states.

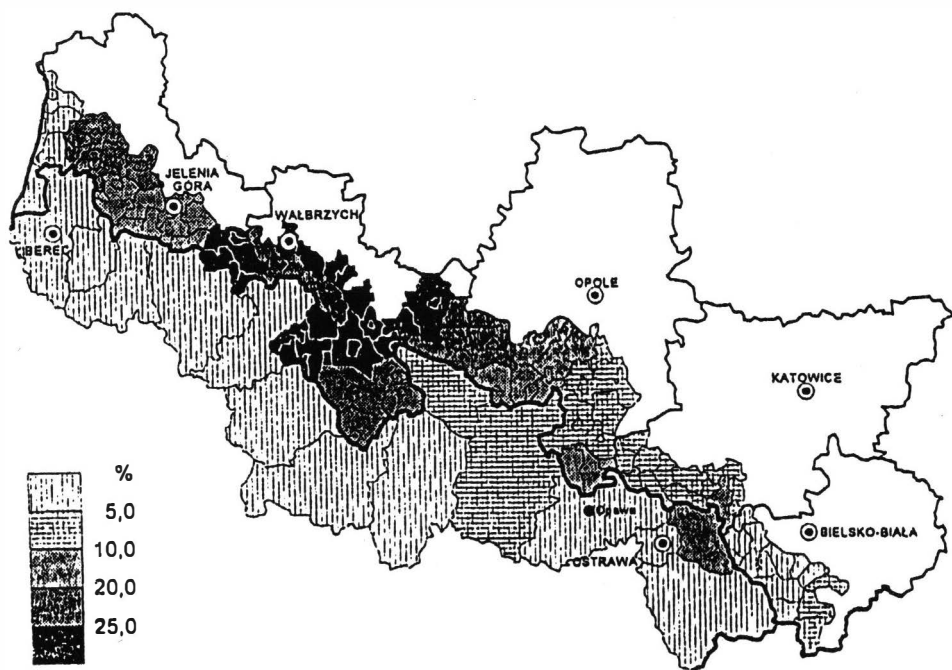


Fig. 2 Unemployment in the area of Czech-Polish borderland in the year 1996.
Source: Heffner 1998, p. 89

3.2. Model territory of the surroundings of Český Krumlov and Upper Austria

The area along the borders between Southern Bohemia and the Upper Austria shall serve in this study as the example of a Czech borderland neighbouring with European Union. Particularly the district of Český Krumlov on the Czech side and all of the Upper-Austrian districts neighbouring with the Czech Republic (Rohrbach, Urfahr-Umgebung and Freistadt) shall be involved. This territory shows approximately the same physical and geographical conditions on both sides of the border and also a very similar historical development till the World War Two. When the War was over, the iron curtain across Europe was built and this also created a very strong barrier across this area. After the fall of the iron curtain in 1989, this borderland went through many major changes that are noticeable especially on the Czech side. When Austria joined the European Union in 1995, this borderline became also the outer border of the EU with stricter frontier controls (Agreement of Schengen) on the Austrian side. What has been the course of this dynamic development of the transformation as of the beginning of the ninetieth? After the barrier-character of the border between the former Czechoslovakia and Austria vanished, we could start observing another increase in population in the areas along the borders concerned. This phase was, however, not as striking as the first one in the seventieth (see Picture 3, p.). A great change is noticeable especially with the towns in the peripheral areas on the Czech side where mainly decreases of population used to be recorded in the earlier periods of time. In the ninetieth these towns have been showing a more considerable increase of population most of the time. The increase was brought about particularly by the fact that already decayed houses were reconstructed by younger people who subsequently did not mind commuting to work in Český Krumlov or Kaplice. On the contrary, a considerable decrease has been noticed in the smallest towns with the population amounting to less than 50 inhabitants. The borderland in the area of Novohradské hory (mountain range on the Czech side) in the easternmost corner piece of the territory concerned has been recording the biggest decrease in population already traditionally. The growth of population in the central towns on the Czech side has also started to stagnate compared to the previous periods. On the contrary, as for such fairly central towns in the Austrian borderland, the number of population thereof is still increasing. Strong suburbanised tendencies are noticeable once again in the surroundings of Linz. On the Austrian side there are only four towns showing rather bigger decrease of population out of which only one (Windhaag bei Freistadt) is situated directly on the state frontier. The reopening of this border in 1989 brought about an increase of the attractiveness of this, for the Austrian circumstance rather peripheral territory, fact of which is demonstrated also by the growth of the number of inhabitants in the area along this border. The stagnation of the population in the Austrian towns along the border in the direction to the south-west of the "Dam of Lipno", which has been lasting for already two periods, is another specific phenomenon in this case. There isn't any road or railway crossing point in the area in question.

The reopening of the border brought about an enormous increase of the traffic across the border, especially the automobile traffic. The situation was the same all along

the area where the iron curtain used to be. Altogether three frontier crossings for the automobile traffic (Dolní Dvořiště/Wulldowitz, Studánky/Weigetschlag and Přední Výtoň/Guglwald) are situated in the territory concerned. The biggest and the most important of them is the one in Dolní Dvořiště/Wulldowitz which showed an increase of the number of cars by almost 600 % at the turn of the eightieth and ninetieth (1989/1990)! In 1989 the border was crossed by more than 500 thousand vehicles (583,920 cars) altogether and in the following year the number already amounted to almost 3.5 million (3,345,548 cars). In the course of the ninetieth, we can observe either stagnation or a partial decrease of the density of traffic.

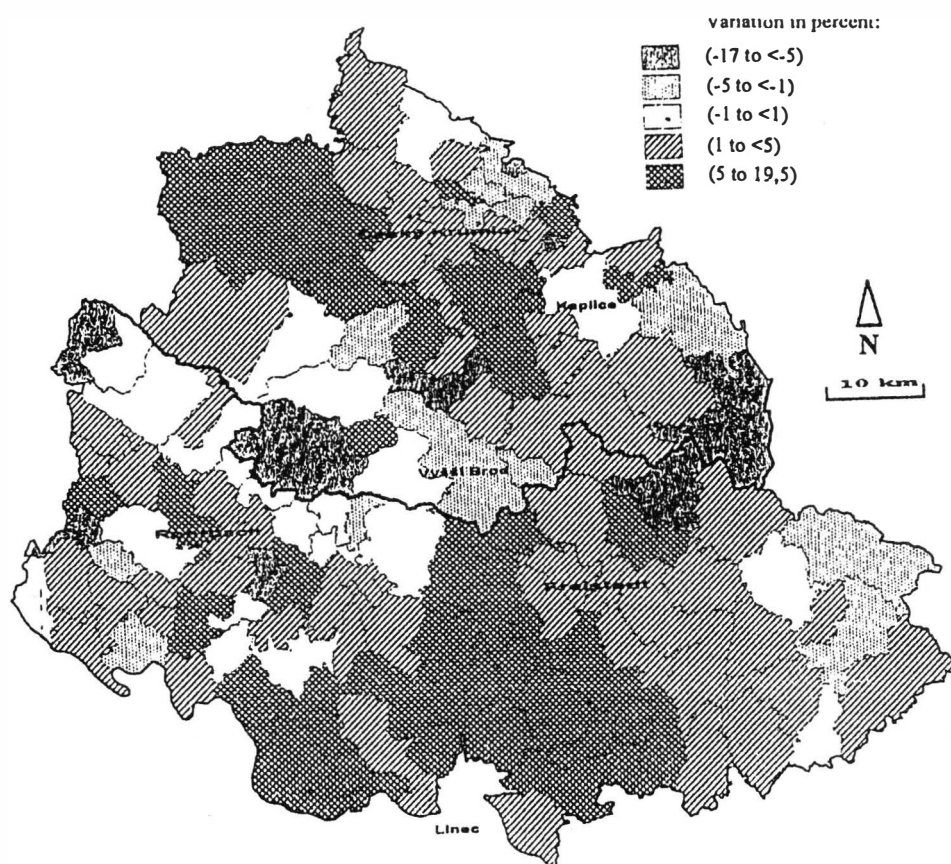


Fig. 3 Variation in the number of inhabitants in the towns around Český Krumlov and the area around the border of the Upper Austria between the years of 1991 - 1997.
Source: Czech Statistical Authority 1999, Oberösterreichische Landesregierung 1999.

What is the behaviour of the local inhabitants with regard to the proximity of the state border? Are there any contingent differences in the behaviour of the Czech and

Austrian people? According to the research in the form of questionnaire which was made with the inhabitants along both sides of the state border in 1994 the following information was found out. A trip across the border is most often done once in three months, mostly for one day only. However, the numbers of Czech citizens who spend more than one day in Austria is twice as high as vice versa. Almost 80 % of the people, who crossed the border, used cars and the remaining number of travellers used especially buses. Railways have just an inconsiderable role for the transport of people across the border. For the Austrian people domiciled along the borders sightseeing was the most common reason for a trip to the Czech Republic. However, it is necessary to mention that most of these trips were also connected with shopping and a meal in a restaurant. For the inhabitants of the district of Český Krumlov, however, shopping and recreation were the most important motives for leaving their country.

There are various strategies of an across-border development in the area along this border. In addition to the above-mentioned programmes INTERREG and PHARE CBC, this territory is a part of the *Bayerischer Wald-Šumava-Mühlviertel Euroregion* that was established in 1993 as a voluntary community aiming for the support of the "across-border" activities in this region.

4. CONCLUSION

The recent geographic survey of the area along the Czech borders is a matter of the last ten years only. During this period of time, we managed to acquire a lot of new information, to create incentives for a more valuable development of the borderland. In spite of these particular successes, the Czech geographers are waiting for a more comprehensive basis for the survey of the areas along borders. The project of the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic called: "*The position of the borderland in the regional development of the Czech Republic with regard to the involvement of the Czech Republic in the European structures*" seems to me to be one of the chances how to fill this gap. Moreover, I consider this project to be a great chance how to realise the synthesis of the already accomplished particular projects at the micro-regional level. Political borders and the areas along borders are one of the special-interest spheres in geography because we can find here not only a space phenomenon but also a dynamic process with specific rules in a borderland. Therefore, I believe that much more attention should be paid to the study of these points at issue in the Czech geography than it was so far.

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Resume

Příspěvek k výskumu pohraničních oblastí České republiky

Výzkum pohraničí nebo také přihraničních oblastí zaujímal v období komunistické nadvlády v Česku respektivě v bývalém Československu v geografických oborech velmi okrajové místo a koncentroval se hlavně na tématickou oblast dosídlování pohraničí po 2. světové válce. Po pádu "železné opony" a komunistické cenzury od začátku 90. let dochází v ekonomii, sociologii a hlavně v geografii k většímu zájmu o přihraniční prostor. České pohraničí není v tomto vývoji žádnou výjimkou. O toto dříve opomíjené území se začali zabývat nejen geografové z Česka ale i ze sousedních států (Německa, Rakouska, Polska a Slovenska) a v neposlední řadě je nutné zde také zmínit zájem ze strany Evropské unie. Do popředí vstupuje nutnost stanovit roli pohraničí v regionálním rozvoji, a to jak směrem dovnitř v rámci Česka, tak i směrem ven k sousedním státům. Geografie při tomto procesu může vést a do jisté míry i vede významnou roli jako vědní obor, který je schopen provést *synlézu* získaných poznatků

a to převážně ze sociologie a ekonomie. Jeden z projektů, který se o tuto syntézu pokouší, je studie podporovaná Grantovou agenturou České republiky pod názvem: "*Postavení pohraničí v regionálním rozvoji České republiky se zřetelem k zapojení ČR do evropských struktur*". Následná diskuse o koncepci projektu a to především v rovině základního výzkumu jakož i teoretického přínosu vyústila v pojmenování pěti hlavních výchozích bodů při studiu příhraničního prostoru:

- a) teorie vymczení pohraničí,
- b) hraniční efekt a jeho projevy,
- c) specifika pohraničí v regionálním rozvoji,
- d) postavení pohraničí v integračních procesech a
- e) geografický potenciál pohraničí.

Z geografického pohledu je možno rozdělit pohraničí na tři od sebe se odlišující oblasti. Za prvé je to česko-polské pohraničí, které nebylo "postižené" přítomností železné opony. Při této příležitosti je nutné zmínit, že také saské pohraničí nebylo "klasickou" bariérou v období studené války, ale již v roce 1990 se stává součástí sjednoceného Německa a s tím Evropské unie. Za druhé je možné jmenovat českou hranici s Evropskou unií tedy konkrétně s Rakouskem a Německem a za třetí se jedná o poměrně nově vzniklou (od roku 1993) česko-slovenskou příhraniční oblast. Všechny tři jmenované regiony vykazují převážně odlišný vývoj, který je ovlivňován hlavně politicko-ekonomickými parametry. Jako příkladové analýzy byly vybrány některé procesy v česko-polském a v česko-rakouském pohraničí.