

REFLECTIONS ON THE POSITION AND LIVING CONDITIONS IN THE CZECH-SAXON BORDERLAND – EXAMPLE OF A NEW INNER BORDER IN THE EU

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Abstract: After the dramatic social and economic changes in the early 1990s, the research into the borderlands has been growing in importance. The recent enlargement of the European Union has now become another strong impulse for its intensification. The Czech state border turned into an inner one and its role has been becoming less and less important ever since. The area's population, its companies and institutions have been adjusting to the new situation by both utilizing its advantages and overcoming its potential disadvantages. The extent to which a region is successful in its integration into the European structures is mainly dependent on its major players' ability to adopt the EU's general principles. This paper presents some selected finds from the authors' own empirical studies that provide answers to those questions. The subjective perceptions obtained in the enquiry outline the problems of the geographical position, describe the current living conditions, specify the human potential and characterise the cross-border relations.

Key words: Borderland, Czechia, Saxony, living conditions, position, potential

1. THEMATICAL INTRODUCTION – NEW SITUATION IN THE CZECH-SAXON BORDERLAND IN 1990'S

Research into borderland areas can be considered a traditional activity in geography and it has gained in importance since the changes in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 and 1990. The nature of the border between then Czechoslovakia and its western neighbours, i.e. Germany and Austria, gradually changed from more or less closed to open (see e.g. Dokoupil, 2004).

Sociologically, the Czech-Saxon borderland can be characterised as an area in which people do not feel much cohesion and solidarity as the majority of them are not the indigenous population. As a result, the views on "the others" are mainly based on prejudice and stereotype, and this sort of approach has been even enhanced by the relatively recent formation of a language barrier. Not even the official, government

initialised partnership/friendship between the two "socialistic brethren countries" after the War – then DDR and CSSR – could change these attitudes much. Cross-border activities and relations were rather superficial, while deeper individual contacts occurred just rarely.

Both directly and indirectly, the local population, businesses, and institutions confront the new situation that – through the "borderland effect" (Havlíček, 2004) – brings positive and negative aspects into their lives. Opening the border enables free movement for tourism, shopping, and economic and cultural cooperation, but on the other hand, it has caused a dramatic rise in traffic load, and in crime with an overall decline in law and order. As the Czech Republic became a member of the European Union, the German – Czech individual and general relationships were given a new impulse: the so-called outer border became an inner border. The Czech Republic joined as a full member on May 1, 2004; however, it has been denied some "freedom" that other members have (e.g. there is no free movement for Czech labour as mainly the neighbouring states are afraid of losing job opportunities to Czechs).

Naturally, the new conditions triggered the development of the bottom–up cross-border cooperation, while the top-bottom "flow" was not perceived by the leading politicians so positively out of fear that the "integrity" of the new state formation might be eroded. Many studies (Jeřábek, 2003) indicate that the motivation for cross-border cooperation springs from both the spiritual sphere (e.g. getting to know each other, and understanding each other) and the economic interests (making the best of competitive advantages, extending the markets, etc.). Specific development can also be traced in the focus and character of cross-border cooperation, as undemanding, isolated events (e.g. school exchange schemes following the motto "people-to-people") have gradually been replaced with systematic, long-term projects (e.g. creating a common plan for tourism).

It has become clear that the official analysis of the situation in the Czech-Saxon borderland, which is focused on local development (problems), cross-border cooperation forms, and intensity and on development-restricting factors cannot be complete without the local population's views. Intended effects will hardly be achieved without engaging local inhabitants in decision-making. For that purpose, it is necessary to take into consideration the objectives (intentions) of the various participant groups as well as the preparedness of the public. In such a specific and problematic region as the borderland, these are the very steps that gain vital importance: obviously much more so than in other "unproblematic" ones (e.g. core or growth regions). The interconnection/integration of the two parts on each side of the border is definitely a long-term process with many potential conflicts (Jeřábek, 2004).

2. METHODOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION – SUBJECTIVE PERCEPTIONS AS PART OF THE AREA'S ASSESSMENT

Analyzing and evaluating a territory have developed gradually, while the approaches and methods have been changing or extending. Only recently have the sociological (empiric) enquires, the purpose of which is to find out the inhabitants' opinions about various aspects of the socio-economic development in a concrete area (at national, regional and local levels), gained sufficient importance. Their advantage is that the subjective perceptions of the social setting (so-called soft data) can complement the

statistical figures on certain issues or they can provide new points of view. Using the same questions in different areas will then enable the researchers to make comparisons thus coming back from sociology to geography. Unlike assessment through objective statistical data, the other subjective approach has been utilised in this paper at multiple levels including the international one. That means that it is only the information of subjective nature that is presented here, and the data are related and compared to one another. The respondents are usually chosen through quota selection method according to sex, age, education and the size of the place of their permanent address with the goal to obtain a representative sample of the population.

The first of the enquiries used in this paper was originally designed for obtaining feedback on the Development Programme in the Teplice District and it represented one of the ways to involve the citizens in preparing the document's final version. The field enquiry proper was conducted with support from the District Authorities in 1997, 1998 and 1999, and the numbers of respondents taking part in each round were 333, 376 and 367. The questionnaire consisted of the following topic question groups:

- ♦ general relations within regional development including the role institutions play in that process
- ♦ perception and evaluation of the borderland position and cross-border relations
- ♦ assessment of the overall socioeconomic situation (and its components) in the settlements and the entire district
- ♦ concrete measures and locally specific issues.

The second study to be presented in this paper was based on research that was done within the "Borderland Geogrant" project. Thanks to the cooperation with the Technical University Dresden (TUD), the data obtained in the Czech part were combined with opinions from the other side of the border (Kowalke, Jeřábek, Schmidt 2004). The enquiries, which were focused on various issues and on various respondent groups (citizens, tourists, mayors, and managers in companies with foreign capital), were carried out in 1999, 2001 and 2003. In the last enquiry, which was done in the Elbe/Labe Euroregion, the authors deliberately raised the number of settlements located immediately near the border. The entire subject group consisted of 523 respondents in the Czech part (the Teplice, Ústí n. L., Litoměřice and Děčín Districts) and 804 respondents in Germany. The questionnaire, prepared by both Czech and German researchers in collaboration, included four topics:

- ♦ bonds to the place of residence
- ♦ job and work conditions
- ♦ working abroad and foreign workers in the Czech Republic
- ♦ border area, cross-border contacts, European integration

Our last resource of subjective data on the perception of the situation in the Czech-Saxon borderland was a survey conducted in the peripheral parts of the CR in 2003. Ústecké Krušnohoří (defined as four villages in the Ore Mountains in the Ústí n. L. District) was selected as one of the model areas. In that poll, there were 244 respondents who answered questions about the following issues:

- ♦ the settlement and population stability, migration and working conditions
- ♦ the landscape, the settlement's functioning and the identity of the inhabitants
- ♦ European integration.

Despite the differences in definition, size and level of the model areas, the results of our enquiries can be used for the analysis of the selected aspects in the local and regional development typical of the borderland and of the peripheral zone. The fact that the topics in the enquiries are similar or even identical will provide sufficient opportunities for

comparison, so this paper may be understood as a summary of the finds. Some of them have already been published both in the CR and abroad (see Bibliography).

3. GEOGRAPHIC POSITION – THE CZECH-SAXON BORDERLAND IN TERRITORIAL CONTEXT

An area's position in the borderland as an objective factor affects its socio-economic development both positively and negatively. It is necessary for the region to overcome the disadvantages of its peripheral location on the one hand, but it can also make use of the proximity of an advanced economy/country on the other side of the border. The Teplice District inhabitants (1997) obviously welcomed (the answer options had 5 degrees and the mark was 2.11) the opening of the border, which, in our enquiry, was represented by much more intensive contacts with Germany. Having to give reasons for their options, more than one third of them mentioned the freedom to travel, while a roughly identical percentage of them appreciated new openings for cooperation and business.

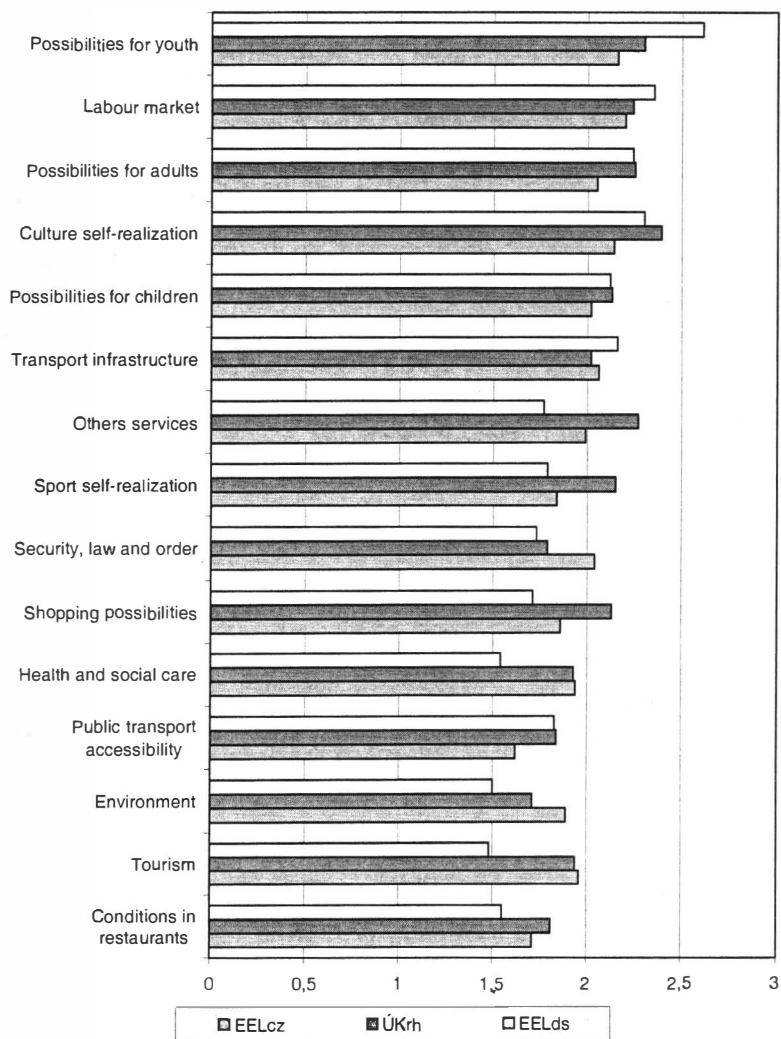
This aspect also characterised the specifics of the Teplice District at two levels (the Czech Republic and the north-west of Bohemia). Apart from balneology, which the respondents mentioned most frequently, and the industrial nature of the District, its position within the region was considered an advantage as "the area capitalises on its location on the E55 interstate road including the border crossings to Germany" (one third of the respondents' multiple option answers). In the second enquiry (1998) the respondents reflected on the area's importance at the local level, and the advantageous communications position reappeared.

The ongoing construction of Motorway D8 to connect Prague and Dresden will definitely have an impact on the current traffic on Road E55 even though the motorway's route will not lead through the Teplice District. The true nature of the effects is predicted to be quite complex, and for that reason the authors have tried to obtain subjective views on at least several of them. Analyzing the results of the 1998 enquiry shows that it is mainly the zone in immediate vicinity of the thoroughfare that would benefit from diverting the heavy truck traffic. Many respondents were of the opinion that there would be a "decrease in traffic load" as well as an "improvement in living conditions along the thoroughfare" (66 respectively 56 % of positive answers on a three-grade scale). The changes would also influence positively the local crime rate and prostitution, which now make especially the town of Dubí very infamous. The expected reductions in economic activities and in the number of foreign tourists were not felt unambiguously.

4. LIVING CONDITIONS IN THE REGION – THEIR DEVELOPMENT AND CURRENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

Physical environment and particular socio-economic situation determine the development of individual aspects of reality as well as that of the area as a whole. There

is little doubt that breaking points and transitional periods play a role of great importance in the process. These periods are characterized by radical changes that bring a high degree of dynamism in the society and its economy after a long period of "peace" or even stagnation. The 1990s definitely qualify as one of those periods.



Graph 1 Contentment with living conditions. Source: the authors' own enquiries (2003, 2004)

The effects of the new situation after 1989 on life in the settlement were not perceived by the respondents either negatively or positively (the enquiry of 1997 in the Teplice District). The total mark on a 5-grade scale, calculated as an average of the marks in all the sub-ratings was 2.56, i.e. almost precisely between "two" and "three". A significant fraction of the respondents actually claimed that the transformation had not

reflected on everyday life in the settlement (over a fifth of the respondents on average). The greatest positive effects of the changes were acknowledged in business enterprises, retail and tourism. Over one third of the respondents thought that there had been negative effects on housing, and traffic; more than a half of them felt some deterioration in the social security, and a third saw negative aftermaths in agriculture (a third of those described them as "very negative").

General security, closely related to crime, ranked the lowest of all fields, as, in the Teplice District, most respondents gave it mark "four" and another third of them labelled it with "three". It is only slightly better that they predicted the future development in this field.

For comparison, some results of the research conducted in the Elbe/Labe Euroregion in 2003 and in Ústecké Krušnohoří in 2004 have been included in this paper. Apart from assessing the level of individual satisfaction, we also focused on the real situation and on cross-border cooperation, but it is just the first topic that is dealt with here. Using a similar scale (satisfied – 1, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied – 2, dissatisfied – 3), we could register comparable results in similar questions. The final mark, calculated as an average of 15 marks received in all items, approached mark 2. It was mainly catering (in restaurants), environment and recreation facilities that invariably obtained good marks and positive assessment. In those, as well as other fields (e.g. health care and other services) the situation in the German part of the Elbe/Labe Euroregion was subjectively perceived as the best. On the other hand, leisure activities for various age brackets and job opportunities/labour market received the worst marks. Strangely, the ratings are reversed here: the German respondents were more critical than Czechs, whose evaluations were fairly positive.

The respondents from Ústecké Krušnohoří (as defined above) were least happy with other (unspecified) services, sports facilities and shopping opportunities. An explanation for the differences in the respondents' subjective perceptions could be found in the settlement structures and in the economic activities, in which a mountainous area (Ústecké Krušnohoří) cannot obviously compete with a higher administrative unit that includes large towns and centres (the Elbe/Labe Euroregion).

5. HUMAN POTENTIAL – IDENTITY, STABILITY/MOBILITY, MIGRATION AND LABOUR MARKET

The population of the north and north-west of Bohemia is said to be rather unstable, without "roots", which characteristics engender a high migration turnover (the total of immigrants and emigrants) and consequently low regional/local identification (patriotism).

Our hypothesis assumed that the intensity of the relation to the territory would be indirectly proportional to the area's size, i.e. the larger the territory the looser the ties. In our research, we differentiated 8 levels: from the local/communal one to the European one. The unquestionably best results were obtained in the enquiry carried out in the Teplice District (1997): half of the respondents marked their relations to the vicinity, i.e. the settlement, with "one", and the total average was 2.52.

Generally, our respondents identify more with Bohemia and the Czech Republic (3.95 respectively 4.06) than with the north and north-west of Bohemia. Later studies corroborate the previous finds: it is the regional level of the territory that the respondents identify the least with.

Within our respondent groups in the Elbe/Labe Euroregion (2003) and in Ústecké Krušnohoří (2004), about half of the respondents said they had moved at least once in their lives. The most frequent reasons given for moving were – similarly to other parts of the Czech Republic – of family nature. The strong family bonds and their local patriotism were expressed through such statements as "I have my family here/there; there are my friends/acquaintances here/there" and "it is my home, I know it here/there". Only one fifth of the respondents were considering moving out of the region, and they mainly had job-related reasons: not enough job opportunities. A small percentage of them were dissatisfied with the quality of services.

A complex analysis of the labour market would take up too much space and would make this paper unreasonably large. Nevertheless, we have decided to include a burning issue of cross-border employment, as it is important not only for research, but even more so for international politics. After the political changes of the 1990s, the geographical situation of the Czech Republic, and especially that of the Elbe/Labe Euroregion, has enabled the country to join the European labour market. The following data can show to what extent this is only an initial stage or making use of new opportunities.

Table 1 Real and potential participation in the international labour market (%)

Specification	ČR	ELE/CZ
Respondents themselves	4	6
Family member	11	16
Friends/acquaintances	24	23
Respondents' intentions	6	9
Foreign employment in over 1 year	71	85
Influence of CR's membership in EU	6	6

Source: the authors' own enquiry (2003)

The proximity of the German border and the fact Germany is an old EU member reflected on a higher intensity of cross-border employment in the Elbe/Labe Euroregion in comparison to the whole Czech Republic in all items with the exception of friends and acquaintances. Only a relatively small percentage of the respondents intended to work abroad in the future, but their plans would not be realized within a short period and even the membership in the EU would not change those opinions (the enquiry took place in 2003, i.e. before the CR joining the EU)

6. EXTERNAL RELATIONS – THE IMPACT OF THE BORDER, CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION, THE ELBE/LABE EUROREGION

The following part of the paper deals with the current level as well as the prospects of cross-border cooperation between North Bohemia and Saxony. Unlike in the previous

enquiries of 1994 and 1996, the respondents in the Teplice District saw the greatest obstacle to cross-border cooperation in the language barrier: four out of ten respondents put it in the first place. The second factor was the different purchase power of the currencies, and the differences between the national mentalities finished third. Other circumstances (with the exception of historical events) were not perceived as obstacles to cross-border cooperation. Even the different prices of goods, which had appeared so important in the early studies, evened out.

Most respondents thought that the level of cross-border cooperation corresponded with historical development and with the different possibilities on either side. They also expressed their optimism by stating that "it will progress as it is beneficial for both parties". However, some subjects considered cross-border cooperation insufficient and gave their reasons: economic and technical differences between the two countries. Apart from the expected spontaneous growth, a quarter of the respondents assumed that the Czech and German governments would provide support to cross-border cooperation, which should concentrate on environment, nature conservation and mainly on regional economic growth. Every other respondent also thought that the most appropriate form of cooperation was to fully inform the other side about the events and activities.

Foreign capital as a phenomenon typical of the post-socialistic era has already become a common part of everyday life. Its manifestations can be evaluated at both the general level, e.g. within the CR, and at the regional one on the basis of the "field" data. It is really surprising to see the discrepancies between the two levels.

Table 2 Foreign capital in the Teplice District and in the Czech Republic (average)

Opinion	TP	CR
Foreign capital is necessary for restructuralization	1.41	1.7
It is a natural phenomenon in market economies	1.58	1.9
It is a symptom of global capital concentration	1.9	1.52
The CR is becoming easy prey for multinational corporations	1.86	1.65
Economic means are a way to achieve political goals	2.00	1.52
Temporarily, the CR has become a target or a means for expansion to the East	1.68	1.69
The government's approach to this issue is unsatisfactory	1.69	2.12

Scale: 1 strongly agree – 1, I partly agree – 2, I completely disagree – 3.

Source: the authors' own enquiry, 1998

The figures show that the inhabitants understood foreign capital as a natural factor in the restructuralization of the Czech economy. In the Teplice District the feeling was even stronger than in the entire CR as only 5 % of the respondents there would not like to accept foreign capital for the restructuralization. It is apparent that its effects on the economy, society and regional development were well known there. 40% of the respondents in the Teplice District expressed their disapproval of the government's policies to foreign capital, but that feeling was only shared by a fifth at the national level. It is necessary to admit that the government's approach has improved significantly since then, and that the government is now often criticized for being overly supportive, which often encourages misuse (some corporations leave after the tax relief has expired).

Many settlements in the Teplice District acknowledge their belonging to the Elbe/Labe Euroregion and the same applies to the Krušnohoří/Erzgebirge Euroregion west of the ELE. Euroregions, initiated from the EU, started in the CR as a concrete reaction to the new socio-economic situation after 1989, but it cannot be said they have been accepted unambiguously. In a quiz about domestic and international institutions and

activities in regional development (1997), it was the ELE that achieved the highest score: almost a half of the participants were aware of its existence and 50% of those remembered an event or activity initiated by the ELE. Euroregions' activities are appreciated, as almost half of the population see them as a means of overcoming the disadvantages of peripherality within the national state (the inner aspect) or a tool for establishing individual contacts with people on the other side of the border (the outer aspect).

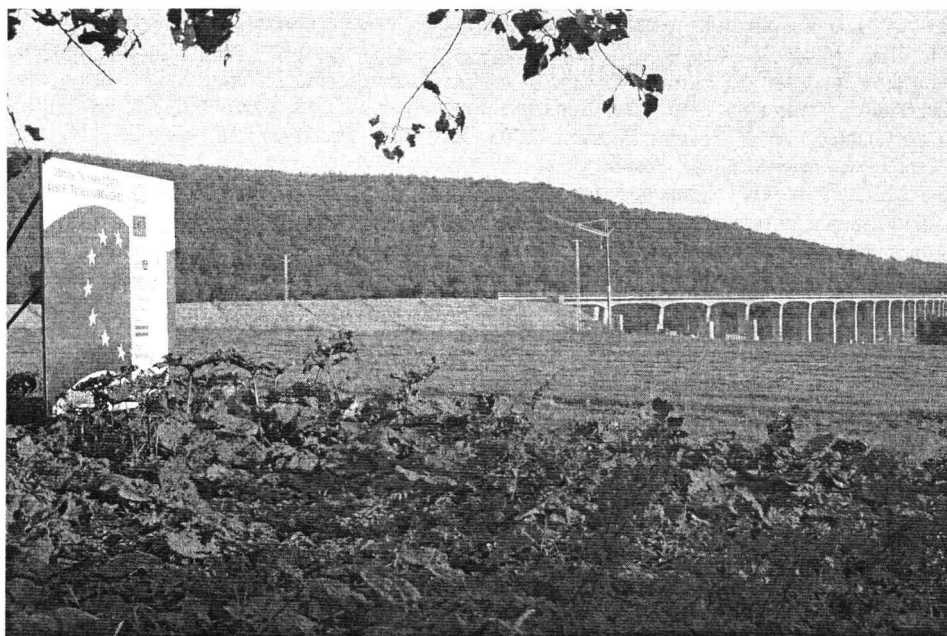


Figure 1 Dálnice D8 v Knínicích – výstavba mostu v úseku Ústí nad Labem – státní hranice

7. FINAL OBSERVATIONS

At the moment, the Czech-Saxon borderland is a zone in which positive objective factors (e.g. the geographical position) combine with negative subjective factors (the quality of population). The whole region, its socio-economic development and its participants/movers as well as its entire population are still going through the transitional period, which started after 1989 and partly after joining the EU in 2004. There is no doubt that it is desirable to accelerate the development through regional politics both at the national and European levels. Cross-border cooperation should be perceived as a means of creating common living and economic space so that the region could succeed in the competition within "Europe of regions".

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Česko-saské pohraničí – periferie či prostor zprostředkování?

Resume

Přihraniční poloha jako objektivní skutečnost působí pozitivně jak při překonání nevýhod z okrajové polohy v rámci Čech (Česka), tak využití výhody z blízkosti vyspělé ekonomiky na druhé straně hranice. Mimo jiné se projevila zvýšenou intenzitou zapojení obyvatel do mezinárodního/přeshraničního trhu práce.

Přeshraniční spolupráce jako složka socioekonomického vývoje v současnosti odpovídá historickému vývoji a rozdílné úrovni stávajících možností a do budoucna se bude rozvíjet, protože je oboustranně prospěšná. Činnost euroregionů, v našem případě Euroregionu Elbe/Labe je posuzována pozitivně: v obecné rovině česko-německých vztahů však více než v konkrétních dopadech.

Obyvatelé Euroregionu Elbe/Labe zaujímají jak k současnému dění, tak k perspektivám regionu i přeshraniční spolupráce zčásti diferencované postoje. Lze očekávat, že názory z české a německé/saské strany se budou postupně sblížovat tak, jak se budou vyrovnávat poměry po obou stranách hranice.