

Kommunal- und regionalwissenschaftliche Arbeiten online (KrAo), Nr. 4

**Cooperation between Germany and Czech Republik
in the Egrensis Region**

von

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Impressum:

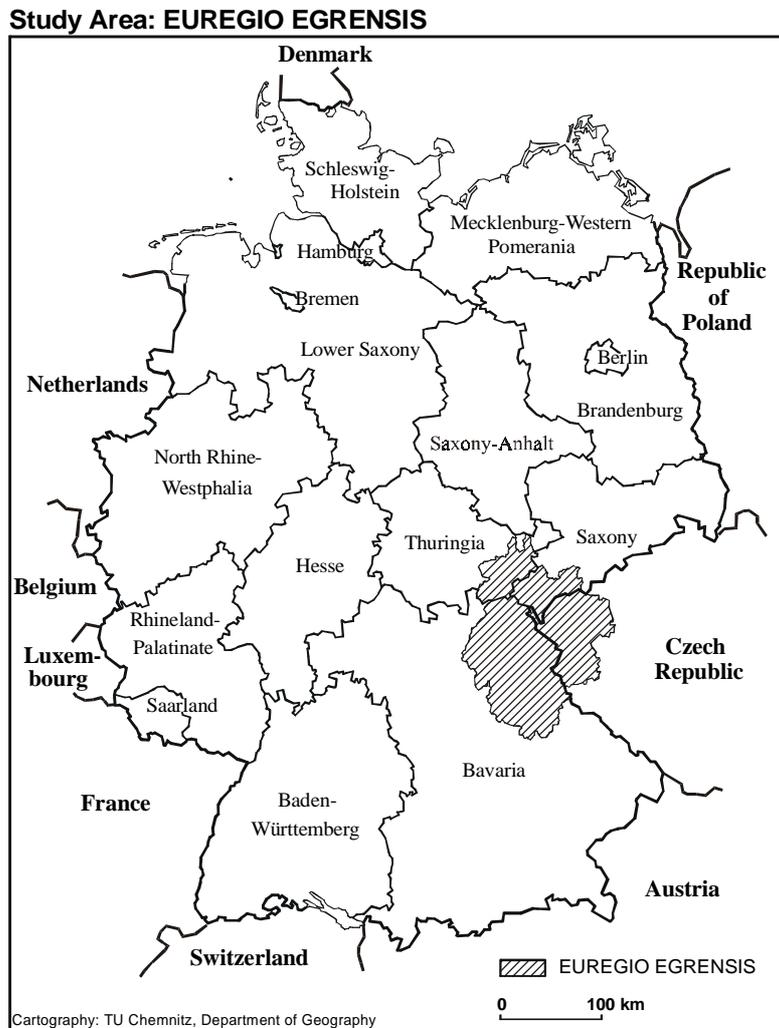
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Erscheinungsort: Chemnitz 2001
ISSN: 1619-8603

EUREGIO EGRENSIS

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A) Brief presentation of the area, the regional socio-economic and political-administrative situation, the main characteristics of the co-operation

Its central location is one of the most significant characteristics of the Euregio Egrensis when one looks at it in geographical terms. It consists of parts of German Länder – Bavaria in the west, Saxony and Thuringia in the north-east – and parts of the Czech Republic's territory in the east and south-east. Here, one important spatial characteristic of the Euroregion becomes visible for the outer border of the EU that crosses it means a border of wealth at the same time. But there are significant disparities even within the German part. Upper Franconia and Upper Palatinate, structurally weak areas of Bavaria, show more favourable characteristics than Saxony which was formally part of the GDR. Therefore, all participating Saxon regions are - like the whole eastern Germany – first priority areas of EU funding (Target 1)



Historically, the area was an ethnic and linguistic unity until the end of World War II. Its centre was the town of Eger (Cheb). All individual parts of today's Euroregion, on the other hand, have belonged to different administrative territorial entities since the Middle Ages.

Nevertheless, the region was characterised by intensive cultural and economic interactions between all its areas. This is the starting-point of a new and successful co-operation today.

The Second World War and its aftermath can be seen as a break since it resulted in expulsion, resettlement and flight of a large part of the German majority from the north-west of Czechoslovakia. The former strongly inter-linked economic and living space was parted by the “iron curtain” and thus became a peripheral area. Additionally, people from the eastern part of the CSSR were settled in the area. In the course of decades, the political border has now also manifested as a linguistic border. This not entirely reviewed chapter of German-Czech history still holds a certain potential of conflict, which, among other things, is expressed by antipathy towards the respective „other“. In this connection, the relationship between the Western German and the Eastern German population should be mentioned, which appear to be not always harmonious due to different experiences during forty years of separation and to economic difficulties in Eastern Germany caused by the transformation.

Concerning the natural space, the area is a low-mountain region. Its characteristics are large woods and a rough climate, larger settlements are located in the valleys. The Euroregion is an important area of transit between Western Europe, Middle Europe and Eastern Europe. While its natural characteristics hinder the development of traffic, the tourism industry can profit from this potential. There are, for example, some world-famous spas in the region.

The study area can mostly be classified as rural, the number of population is small. The population density, however, varies significantly and reaches maximum values in the industrialised areas along the main traffic routes. About 2,033,500 people live on an area of 1,753,978 hectare. The Bavarian part has the largest number of population (1,027,500), the smallest number live in Thuringia (226,600). In the Saxon and Czech part live 423,260 and 356,140 people respectively. The Czech part has the lowest population density with only 76 people per square kilometre, the Saxon part has the highest with 218 people per square kilometre. In Bavaria and Thuringia, this number is 115 people per km² or 114 people per km². Only the Czech part of the Euregio Egrensis has a low increase of population. There is a negative development in all other parts. Concerning migration, only the Bavarian part has some gains. The Saxon- Thuringian and Czech parts has to suffer from losses.

The tendencies of migration from the region are in close connection to its economic structure, which is based on agriculture, tourism and the production of consumer goods of the textile, porcelain and glass industries. This structure of industry has proved to be problematic because structural changes has had a negative impact on these old industries. The unemployment rate is 8.5% in the Czech part of the Euroregion, 17% in the Saxon-Thuringian part, and about 7% in the Bavarian part. If one keeps to the economic profile „industry“ in the future, there are some potentials in the development of the electrical goods industry and mechanical engineering. Some German companies already profit from low wages in the Czech Republic and started to establish branches. Czech workers, on the other hand, occupy jobs in Germany, especially in Bavaria. As a result, there are large numbers of commuters from the Czech Republic and Saxony to Bavaria.

The service sector is gaining importance in this still industrial and partly agricultural shaped region. This process is not just limited to the branch of tourism, which stagnated in the last years, but is due to the dynamism of commerce and the region’s function as an area of transit. The border crossing-points Schönberg/Vojtanov, Selb and Rozvadov are especially important for the long-distance travel of heavy goods vehicles in and from Eastern and South-eastern Europe.

The problem of crime in the border region is a negative consequence of the different degree of prosperity in the Federal Republic of Germany and the Czech Republic. Illegal migration and smuggling of goods are the most serious offences here.

Due to its rather unfavourable industrial structure, the different degree of prosperity in the Federal Republic of Germany and the Czech Republic, and some disadvantages of the natural space, the inhabitants of the Euregio Egrensis region are confronted with numerous problems and unsolved tasks. However, it has to be mentioned that the formerly typical strong regional

relations has been revived, extended and intensified after the opening of the borders in 1989. The location in the centre of Europe has to be realised as a chance, especially concerning an expected Czech joining of the EU, and also to avoid a reduction of the region to a mere area of transit.

B) Has the co-operation studied open the way to new ways of delivering public policies at regional (sub-regional or town) level? Who are the actors of the change?

The German-Czech co-operation – exemplary described with the example of the Euregio Egrensis – has partly induced new ways of delivering public policies. This general evaluation can be differentiated by several spatial levels.

Because the European Commission handles the Laender of the Federal Republic of Germany as regions, this aspect should be dealt with first. After an initiate hesitation – possibly to avoid extreme regional behaviour in the border region – the respective Laender, in this case Bavaria, Saxony and Thuringia, now support their Euroregions persistently. Their interests are dealt with by the Minister President's Offices and the Departments of Economy as a matter of priority. Partly, additional staff has been recruited to cope with all tasks connected with the German-Czech co-operation as well as with the realisation of funding programmes as Inter-reg. According to the political importance of the German-Czech co-operation (i.e. concerning preparing thoughts about the eastern expansion of the EU, discussions about demands of specific ethnic groups like the Sudeten Germans) the joint action in the border regions is realised in a more or less intensive way.

From the German point of view, the Euroregions are on a sub-regional level. Here, the principle is seen most clearly that the German-Czech co-operation found new ways of politics. This is particularly true for the joint project work without changing or neglecting established structures of communication in the respective parts (of Bavaria, Saxony, Thuringia, the Czech Republic). Although towns and municipalities actively take part in the co-operation as a rule, it is done case-wise and intensifies as the border line comes closer.

At the time of the first foundation of Euroregions, there was even more antipathy towards a border-crossing co-operation on the national level of the Czech side than in the south-eastern German counties. On the one hand, this was caused by Czech centralism, on the other hand, by an evaluation of the historical development of the Egerland and the danger of a separatist movement. In the meantime, such antipathies seem to be dispelled or at least minimised, not least as a result of the Czech Republic's wish to join the EU.

Another obstacle was the absence of an intermediate administrative level which forced mayors and regional councils to directly communicate with the national government and the departments in Prague. This deficit was recently taken into account when an intermediate council similar to the German administrative districts was established. Moreover, no additional posts in local councils were created (e.g. for dealing with the European issues). As a rule within the context of the Euregio Egrensis, some mayors commit themselves to cross-border co-operation together with their local parliaments and other key figures from several sectors. In other cases, lethargy and/or prejudices of decision-makers dominate, even though in a decreasing intensity.

Thus, in particular local politicians, who cooperate in the Euroregions and other key figures from several sectors are the competent players of change; followed by state officials who function as a communication link between the local level and the European Commission.

The most important working methods follow from this: Directly comprehensible activities within the Euroregions are in particular recognised in the border region. In contrast, decisions on the state level, mainly made outside the public, are primarily part of national reporting (e.g. via newspapers, national radio and television).

Even though no new departments are established on the regional and local level, some additional staff, at least as part-time employees are recruited. As a rule, qualified staff has been employed in the newly founded Euroregions. The number of employees being at disposal (as a rule one manager, one secretary and one project supervisor), however, do not correspond to the actual needs.

The project management attempts to initiate or partly implement border-crossing projects with much commitment and creativity. Despite considerable success, there are some hindering factors: the separately organised management (on the Bavarian, Saxon-Thuringian, and Czech side), inadequate infrastructure, limited decision-making powers etc.

The change of political priorities is expressed by the fact that respective guidelines are no longer oriented towards the improvement of the living conditions in the peripheral areas along the border but towards border-crossing development and co-operation, often though only after problems concerning the own situation were solved. The close co-operation especially between local action groups across the border and the orientation of joint aims of development according to economic indicators are expressions of the political and economical interests in the co-operation.

As a result, active networks of many institutions and people from all sectors of the political, economic and social life has developed in the Euroregions, although their own tasks still have priority. Additionally, many cross-border partnerships between public (e.g. municipalities, districts), semi-public (e.g. associations, churches) and private institutions (e.g. clubs) can be detected. On the one hand, the civil society gets involved by regular information, public events and motivation for participation in the project. On the other hand, there are many cross-border activities – mainly in an organised form (e.g. societies) – initiated by the population itself.

Concerning the emergence of new local and regional players, such key persons exist on all levels. In most cases, they had already worked in their respective institutions before the new challenges motivated them to get more than averagely involved. In order of importance, this concerns the following: the sub-regional level (Euroregion), the regional level (county) and the local level.

The necessity of cross-border co-operation initiated these changes after the political change. Acceleration and further qualification were stimulated by successes (and failures) of the actual co-operation. The process was financially accompanied and supported by respective EU funds. Not least because of the forthcoming expansion of the EU, expected structures can be simulated within a smaller area, and thus may bring forward clues for larger co-operation models.

C) What have been the qualitative effects of the strategic co-operation in the region? What are the concrete improvements?

There are definitely a number of aspects that make up the qualitative effects of the strategic co-operation within the Euregio Egrensis. After the political change, priority was to get acquainted on a professional and personal level. Furthermore, a continuous co-operation had to be established and consolidated despite fifty years of different political systems and cultures.

In the case of the Euregio Egrensis this proved to be specifically difficult for the core of the region, the former Egerland, was a historically disputed area. Additionally, the people that are involved in the Euroregion came from different political systems, namely from the socialist systems of the former GDR and Czechoslovakia, and the democratic system of the Federal Republic of Germany, member state of the EU. Leaving aside the challenge to successfully realise free-market thinking and actions within a short period of time, the substantial transformation processes of the last ten years have equally shaped political, social, cultural, ecological and other matters.

Therefore it was essential to establish and foster contacts between the partners. The first tasks were to gradually remove differences caused by different political systems, to reconcile missing experiences and to break down possible antipathy. The period of building up the cross-border co-operation was meant to establish mutual understanding and to support each other. Such processes take more time than expected. Successes of the co-operation first are visible amongst the decision-makers and key figures before they are recognised by the general public. Here, the frequent changes of contact persons as in the Saxon-Thuringian and Czech part during the first years of co-operation were an obstacle. In addition, events on a higher political level (e.g. negative comments of a politician on the national level) or serious internal problems of only one co-operation partner (e.g. concerning the development of national regions or municipalities) may slow down the process of integration.

After about ten years of co-operation in the Euregio Egrensis, the following important, concrete improvements are to be named:

- Successes in seeking, establishing, stabilising and fostering contacts
- Readiness and ability to co-operate across borders despite a long period of belonging to different political systems and cultures
- Interest in each other and understanding of wishes and interests of the respective co-operation partner
- Commitment above average to achieve the commonly established goals
- Joint presentation and advertisement on the national level and, above all, internationally
- Concrete implementation of measures concerning the well-being of the area's population
- Successful co-operation of persons on the working level (e.g. forestry, tourism, schools/universities, nature conservation, sports, culture)
- Co-operative euroregional marketing and management
- Strengthening the feeling of belonging together among the population of Upper Franconia, Upper Palatinate, the Vogtland or South-western Saxony and South-western Thuringia as well as North-western Bohemia

The following passage deals with several sectors that show most clearly the qualitative effects and concrete improvements. Concerning culture, single projects, thematic events, media-related reporting etc. contribute to the process of coming closer within the Euregio Egrensis, as a result of which the citizens profit from directly. The sector of education, involving activities of schools (e.g. language courses, exchange of pupils) and universities (e.g. GIS, symposiums) is of special importance. In spite of the real demand, there are enormous problems in realising these projects since Interreg has financed such people-to-people projects insufficiently or not at all. Due to the strong local identities in the areas of the Euregio Egrensis, it seems to be an utopian goal to develop a regional identity in the stricter sense across the national and regional borders. But the acceptance of the euroregional area seems to be expressed by the empirically proved high proportion of population that know the Euregio Egrensis and their tasks as well as projects funded by the EU.

Concerning the social issues, a gradual reduction of social disparities can be detected within the Euroregion although their socio-economic level is still lower than the level of the respective central regions. The labour market is – not least due to the high unemployment rates – relatively strongly screened off from each other. Additionally, it is a critical aspect in the light of the expected Czech Republic's joining of the EU because south-east-German players – partially also Czech representatives (e.g. because of the fear of losing qualified workers) – want to limit the flexibility of the labour market and therefore demand appropriate transitional periods.

The situation of the economy within the cross-border co-operation is ambivalent. Business networks or the setting up of Joint-Ventures are functioning. But they are normally based on internal decisions of companies and, thus, the public is rarely informed about them. The innovation potential and the companies' dynamism could be used even more effectively, if private enterprises were allowed to directly take part in funding programmes like Interreg and Phare CBC. Support is given indirectly, for instance through associations. Examples are the successful co-operation between the IHK of Upper Franconia and the professional association of the Egerland or the frequent use of the IHK-owned centre of contact concerning the Saxon-Czech economic co-operation.

In the sphere of politics, the partners on the local level continuously come closer together as a result of regular meetings of politicians. Party politics, however, plays only a minor role here. As a rule, democracy is translated into reality. This complex of themes was dealt with in numerous events especially shortly after the political change. Peace is considered as natural, so that no special actions are taken here. Exceptionally, the topic appears as a minor point at the schedule of meetings or in form of programmatic objectives. Concerning the political life, the Euregio Egrensis is relatively often visited by regional, national and European politicians in order to get acquainted with the specific euroregional problems.

How about the new issues put on the agenda? As a rule, they are by thought integrated into the catalogue of projects that meet the demands of being funded. But there are problems concerning the responsibility for a concrete material support. The fight against crime is a special problem considering the present function of the German-Czech border as an outer border of the EU. The interest in questions concerning the law (e.g. jurisdiction) or in emergency services (e.g. non-bureaucratic help across the border) represent additional topics.

Despite initial problems of communication and a constant change between upward and downward trends, the cross-border co-operation presumably has a firm basis after ten years of existence. Here, qualitative aspects are of a special importance although their efficiency may be increased enormously by granting financial support (e.g. Interreg, Phare CBC). In addition, the human potential plays another substantial role and, consequently, must be increasingly invested in.

D) What is the external impact of this co-operation?

First, it is to be mentioned that the cross-border co-operation developed from the necessity of working together after the political change that mobilised endogenous powers. In the following time, it was possible to win higher authorities (e.g. the German regional governments, the responsible national institutions, the European Commission) over to support. But, at the same time, they themselves were also aware that the border regions and their activists needed help (e.g. by funds of Interreg or Phare). In the meantime, the involved partners of communication has adapted to their respective tasks and developed a constructive mutual relationship on a partnership basis. Additionally, further partners from inside (e.g. regional press, foundations) and outside the region (e.g. associations, interest groups) were won over.

Concerning the improvement of the relations with other regions, the Euregio Egrensis has, on the one hand, integrated into the structures of the directly neighbouring marketing regions (Oberfranken Offensiv e. V., Initiative Südwestsachsen e. V.) and vice versa. On the other hand, it is an active member of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) that represent the interests of all European border regions. Additionally, both direct (e.g. with the Finnish Päijät-Hämeen Liitto) and indirect contacts (e.g. with the regions of Triest and Salzburg) has been established throughout Europe. These contacts prove to be important to gain information and stimulus.

As already mentioned, the relationship with the central authorities has improved since the foundation of the Euroregion. This is in particular true for the Bavarian, Saxon, Thuringian and Czech parts and their relationship with the respective regional government or the national government of the Czech Republic. At the same time, the function of the Euregio Egrensis as an instrument of co-operation in the south-east-German border region, and the region as a whole are acknowledged on the national level. An expansion of the euroregional autonomy, though, is unlikely. This is mainly due to the integration of most local players (e.g. mayors, heads of institutions, representatives of associations) into the grown structures of their respective authorities. Therefore, the Euroregions should increasingly have a say in matters directly concerning their interests (e.g. in the committee controlling the approval of Interreg projects).

Spill-over effects on the neighbouring areas exist in many different ways. For instance, this concerns areas that are direct neighbours of the border districts and that want to realise relevant border-crossing projects, preferably financed by Interreg. Although this is, on principle, a possible option (namely by up to 20% of the Interreg funds), there is unfortunately insufficient information about it. Thus, in spite of interesting projects, many applicants are prevented to apply for financial support. This problem particularly concerns Thuringian districts that actively participate in the Euroregion but that cannot profit from Interreg funds due to the exclusion of the Free State of Thuringia. Therefore, measures should be introduced that would allow these and similar districts to profit from Interreg funds.

The formal level should be also mentioned, where districts of the so-called second row (e.g. Kronach) became new members of the Euregio Egrensis. At the same time, though, there are regions that meet the demands of being funded but that are no member of the Euregio Egrensis. Such regions should apply for membership in order to further strengthen the Euroregion. In summary, one can say that these results are primarily explainable by institutional interconnections, the social capital and the political milieu.

For the following passage deals with external impacts, finally, some problems will be discussed that limit the success of the cross-border co-operation. This is done by taking special account of the instruments of funding that play an important role for granting Interreg and Phare funds. The greatest difficulties are the following:

Although the funding period of Interreg III formally began already at the beginning of 2000, the coordination of the funding documents between the European Commission and the regional authorities (state, counties) took so long that the measures identified on time still can not be realised. This delay of now nineteen months (by end of July 2001) is by no means a motivation for the players in the Euroregions and causes non-understanding, anger and resignation among them. In particular, the local decision-makers and their staff are negatively affected by this because they have to put potential project investors off, and they are limited in their own working efforts.

Less professional but innovative project investors may give up because the complicated application, the examination, approval or disapproval of the cross-border projects take a very long

time. Furthermore, there occur problems concerning the intelligibility of decisions whether to fund projects. This intelligibility needs further improvement. The already stated facts alone are proof that the information stand on the European, national, regional and local level has to become better.

An additionally negative fact is that Interreg and Phare are still incompatible. Their differing structures considerably hinder the co-operative project work and joint spatial development across the German-Czech border. The different funding modalities in the Bavarian and Saxon parts of the Euregio Egrensis are also unfavourable. This concerns less the differently large funding sums, especially since they are objectively justified, but rather the partly unlike implementation that limit the realisation of trilateral measures. In this connection, it should be remarked that it seems to be contra-productive to impose additional conditions on the regional level (e.g. by a restrictive interpretation of the EU funding guidelines or by using national funding guidelines as a basis).

The different projects are rather to be financed on the basis of their border-crossing relevance and by renunciation of bureaucratic conditions. Concerning the character of projects, both economic enterprises in the stricter sense and programmes that intensify soft location factors (culture, sports, education, science etc.) should be increasingly supported in the future. The latter should be realised by a simply practised support of small projects that had to function smoothly in reality.

To dispel the economy-oriented deficit, the „Association of business associations along the borders of Middle and East European states joining the EU“ was founded in September 1998. It demands, “for a time of transition, to consider the special situation of the regions along the border of these states and therefore to allow special support in order to cope with the economic and social changes”, to improve the location factors of the border regions and, thus, to secure their ability to compete on a long term basis. In July 2001, the European Commission proposed nearly 400 million DM to support the 23 border regions that are effected by the eastern expansion of the EU. This amount was considered by the local level as too small. The chambers of commerce also argue for a greater importance of economic and business management aspects of the cross-border co-operation (www.ts.camcom.it). This idea originated within the Euregio Egrensis and is now widely accepted.

Together with this goes the demand for temporary limitation of the flexibility of eastern and middle European employees and services providers after their states joined the EU. In this way, their expected sudden migration should be prevented in order to give the border regions and their inhabitants some time to prepare for the new situation.

The large amount of the stated tasks demand a very high degree of commitment from the euroregional players. In view of this, the regional offices seem to be under-equipped regarding staff and material. Another question is, how it is possible in the long term to integrate the activities even more and, consequently, make them more effective within the Euroregions despite the organisational division into three (in case of the Euregio Egrensis) or two parts (as in other Euroregions).

Nevertheless it can be stated that the cross-border co-operation in the exemplary studied Euregio Egrensis is pursued on a high level ten years after the political change. Therefore - by renouncing every unnecessary bureaucracy - all future euroregional efforts should be supported on the regional and national level in order to successfully reduce all disparities that will presumably remain for some time. At the same time, Euroregions have the task to come up to the high expectations, to lastingly bring in their endogenous potential and to coordinate their organisational structure properly.

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