

Summary:

Introduction:

Use of languages:

The choice of the language for the writing of that thesis was the first big question I had. I first choosed to use French, because it's my mother tongue and it would have been easier to express myself. But after a few researches about my topic, I noticed that using German could be a relevant choice because most of my literature was in that language. I finally choosed to use French, my mother tongue, because I was afraid that if I was writing it in German it could have influenced my work on a bad way.

But of course, I used all of my language skills. I mostly used German because most of the sources I could access were in that language. I also used a bit of English (for some articles) and French (for the general theory and also for some articles). Unfortunately I couldn't access the Czech sources because I don't speak Czech good enough. This is one limit to my work because I couldn't use the point of view of the Czech side which represents an important part of the euroregion.

Sources:

For this thesis I used three complementary types of sources. This large range of informations allowed me to have a general overview about the situation.

The first one is the bibliography. They are mostly in German and are the sources I used the most. I've asked for it to the head of the German office of the euroregion, but also to some libraries in the region. I completed it with some works I found on the internet. Unfortunately there are not many recent sources (that was confirmed by Ms Ebenhöf, the head of the German office). I've also noticed that most of the books have been written by the same authors what restricts the range of the points of view.

The second source is the webography. I mostly used the websites of the euroregions. On those websites I found some reports but also the journal of the euroregion (which is published about four times a year). Otherwise, I also used some websites about the regional or European cooperation.

Finally the oral sources. I had the chance to meet several times the people who are working for the offices of the euroregion. They gave me a lot of informations and of litterature, what was very useful. I could also take part into a meeting about the decision process for the small projects. I also interviewed the two heads of the offices of the euroregion.

Problem statement / layout:

I wish I could in that thesis bring an external viewpoint to the topic and to understand, how did the cooperation developed in the euroregion Erzgebirge. I'll try to understand why and how did the cooperation appeared and developed in the region, but also what it brought to the territories. I'll also try to find out how would the cooperation evolve in the next years and what challenges will face the euroregion.

In order to understand the situation I will first of all analyze the history of the region and of the cooperation in order to understand on which basis the euroregion was built. Then I'll explain how did the actual cooperation came out. I'll also focus on the way the euroregion is led. I also wanted to present what is the euroregion concretely doing and what does it brings to the local populations. I'll analyse what have been done in the past 25 years and what future challenges will face the euroregion. Finally I'll analyse the limits of the cooperation and give some recommendations.

This general overview on the topic will give a global overview on the topic and discuss about a lot of different aspects of the cooperation.

Theoretical part:

Since the beginning of the cooperation between the west European states, right after the Second World War, the situation of the border regions changed a lot. They were before more isolated and most of the time less developed (transports, industries ...). They are now more considered as a link between the countries and some of them are part of the European dynamic.

The issue of the border regions came right at the beginning of the european cooperation. In 1951 was created the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, which wanted to connect the western European regions and municipalities. Since that time a lot of different organizations were created, such as the Association of European Border Regions (in 1971), from which both euroregions Erzgebirge and Krušnohoří are members.

The European community tried to help as much as possible the regions having some socio-economical difficulties (a lot of border regions were part of them). Some funds with particular goals (agriculture, social ...) were set up. Some general funds were also set up, such as the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund), in order to develop the European regions.

Since the 1970's, the development of the regions became a competence of the European community and of the territorial communities (at least for the border regions).

The border cooperation has a descending mechanism (the decisions are taken on the communitarian level and set up by the local organs).

This system allows a general balance between the European regions. It helps avoid the regional disparities. But it also helps having a local implementation which is important because all territories are different. Even if the state doesn't have so much importance as before, it can still influence the cooperation because the local actors have to respect the national laws.

In the 1970's and in the 1980's the European community tried to influence the states in order to make them have a coordinated regional development policy. The apparition of the Interreg program in 1989 reinforced that coordination. This program has the development of the border regions as objective. Interreg supports four main branches: Research & innovation, SME competitiveness, low-carbon economy and the environment and resource efficiency. Those general goals are decided on the communitarian level and set up on the local level.

Even though the European Union is making lots of effort to reduce the disparities between the region, they are still existing. One reason is that all the regions are not equal and that this border cooperation needs to be implemented on a local scale. When the locals are not in to cooperate with they neighbours, it impede the cooperation, which is one of the limits of the border cooperation.

Theoretical part euroregions:

A euroregion is an association of actors of a border territory that are cooperating in order to find some common solutions to resolve the challenges faced by the territories and the population. They are cooperating in order to set up some common projects or policies. They status, their sizes, their populations ... are really different from one region to another, but the EU is trying to coordinate the status of the different euroregions.

Euroregion Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří:

The euroregion Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří is located at the German-Czech border. The name comes from the Ore mountains that are located in the euroregion. This is why this region is a medium-sized mountains region. Next to the mountains are situated two axes (one in each country) where the big towns are located.

Both territories are having some similarities. Those similarities are not only geographical, but also economical (industrial regions), or cultural (mining regions).

Since the end of the communist era, both regions are facing some difficulties (economical, social or environmental). They are facing some common challenges on the economical but also on the demographical levels.

I The history of the region and the begin of the cooperation:

The territory of the Erzgebirge is having a long history. If the relations between the actual two parts (the German one and the Czech one) have been complicated for the years, we have to know that it now became more peaceful and quiet. This part seemed important to me because in order to understand how is the cooperation working nowadays, it's important to know how it was in the history.

The history of the region:

Because of its mountains, the Erzgebirge has been a natural border for centuries. This natural border became a political one more than a thousand years ago.

After the German populations arrived in Saxony in the 12th century, they crossed the Erzgebirge about one century later. This population move is called “Deutsche ostsiedlung” (German oriental colonization) or “Drang nach Osten” (drive to the east). Soon the German population took an important place in those new territories and brought some new agricultural or commercial techniques.

For years and years the German populations stayed in those territories and even became more powerful. In 1526 the Bohemian kingdom became part of the Austrian empire. As the Austrian empire was also a German speaker, but also because the bourgeoisie was expanding, the influence of the German speaking population grew up and stayed for about four more centuries.

After the First World War, the Austrian-Hungarian empire was splited in some new countries, such as the Czechoslovakia. The German speaking populations only represented 25% of the population of the country and were a minority. The situation was complicated for the Germans (even if officially the government wanted to protect them) and it took time before it was accepted. But after some years, the Germans minorities were integrating the Czechoslovakian Parliament.

The situation was stable in the 1920's and the early 1930's. In Germany Hitler came to the power and tried to unite all the German populations in a big “reich”. He was targeting the Sudeten region, where he had more and more support. After the Munich

agreements in 1938, the Sudeten became part of Germany. This region represented about one third of the Czech part of Czechoslovakia and the region was now surrounded by its powerful neighbour. After the resignation of the Czechoslovakian president Edvard Beneš and after Slovakia became independent in 1939, the protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was created (and became a client state of Germany).

After the Second World War, Czechoslovakia became independent again. Then came one of the most terrible events of the German-Czech history: the Beneš decrees. As in the all central and eastern Europe, the German populations were kicked out and sent back to Germany. This event influenced the German-Czech relations for several decades. During the communist era this topic was not discussed, but after the end of it, this topic came back and some Sudeten Germans asked for a compensation. But finally the Germans and the Czechs decided to let that terrible part of their history behind them and to build up a new friendly relation.

The beginning of the cooperation:

Right after the communist period, the Czechoslovakian government, and then the Czech one after January 1993, decided to get closer from the European Union. It's in this particular context that the cooperation began in the Erzgebirge.

The decision for the euroregion Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří came on a local level. Because on both sides people and local politics were gaining some power back (because of the democratic change), the local administrators decided to act on their scale for the cooperation and got closer from their foreign neighbours.

The first contacts came right after the fall of the Berlin wall in November 1989. Some university, political and working union people from Karl-Marx-Stadt (nowadays Chemnitz) decided to contact their Czech "colleagues, comrades and friends from Czechoslovakia". It continued with some initiatives during the next years, with a focus on some practical topics (such as the transports). Different Czechs and Germans partners met several times and discussed those topics. Except a bilingual journal, they didn't make any concrete actions or projects.

In 1991 and 1992 the creation of a euroregion was decided. They were both created in 1992 (June for the German part and December for the Czech one). In 1993 they signed a cooperation contract in order to work together. Their goal was to coordinate the set up of some cross-border actions, while respecting the national sovereignty. There was a focus on some topics such as the regional development, the

economy, the transport ...

II The structure of the euroregion:

It was really important in my thesis to present how does the euroregion works. I'll present its structure, its partners, but also discuss about its financing.

The structure:

A binary structure:

As I already mentioned, the structure of the euroregion is split in to two parts, a Czech one and a German one. Outside the umbrella-organization and the working groups, there are some decisional groups (council or executive board) and two offices (who are concretely implementing the actions of the euroregion. Each part of the association is made of an association ruled by the local laws. In order to link them, they signed a cooperation contract. We can say that there are two levels: a decisional one, with a bi-national and two national groups, and an implementing one, with bi-national working groups and two offices.

The umbrella-organisation:

This organ is the superior one. This commission made of both Czech and German members meet about once a year. The results of the past year are presented and the main lines of the cooperation discussed and decided during that meeting.

The national organs:

Both sides are having many similarities. The main one is that they both have a decisional organ and an office.

The decisional organ (council) has on the Czech side 15 members, mostly coming from the public entities of the region. They are also some more members of the euroregion such as a company and someone from the cultural branch. They meet about once a month to adjust the policies that are decided during the meetings of the umbrella-organization.

There are only four people in the German executive board. The officials of the three members and the head of the office. They are meeting only twice a year and have the same task as the Czech decisional organ.

About the offices, there are no differences between both parts of the euroregion.

They have to set up on a concrete way the decisions that were taken during the assemblies of all decisional organs. Their goal is to help anyone who wants to build up a project to do it. The three people of each office has to advise the project leaders and partners to achieve their goals.

The working groups:

Those nine groups are focused on some particular topics (economy, culture, tourism, transports, schools ...), according to the needs of the region. They are coordinated and supervised by the offices of the euroregion, and meet between two and four times a year. Those groups are made of professionals coming from precise branches that are linked to their groups. They are also advising the offices and the decisional organs about the precise situation in their branches, what help them to take better decisions.

The bi-national work:

After 25 years of cooperation, the different partners are used to work with their foreign neighbours. But this trans-national dimension remains important. As the umbrella-organization and the working groups are only meeting between one and four times a year, they don't need to communicate every day (even if the contacts are regular). But the offices really needs it. They are daily communicating about the implementation of the projects and about all the topics linked with their tasks. That's why their communication need to be as easy as possible, despite the cultural and linguistic differences.

The partners:

All members of the euroregions are having some interest in the trans-border cooperation. But there are some big differences about the membership on both sides of the border.

There are only three members on the German side. The Kreis Mittelsachsen and the Erzgebirgskreis are both some territorial entities. The third one is the Sparkasse, which is a bank. Those members and their official have the right to vote during the meetings of the executive board. I have to precise that all the municipalities who are part of both Kreise (districts) are automatically members of the euroregion. The Sparkasse is there to help the euroregion Erzgebirge on the financial side.

On the Czech side, the situation is a bit more complicated. The main difference

between the Czech Republic and Germany is that the municipalities have to decide on their own if they want to be members of the euroregion or not. This is a political decision that was taken by 76 mayors (31/12/2017). The percentage of the municipalities that re members is not higher as 50%, even close to the border.

But the municipalities are not the only members of the euroregion Krušnohoří. Some companies having some interest in the border cooperation are also members. There are 39 of them (31/12/2017).

Financing:

The financing of both Erzgebirge and Krušnohoří euroregions are similar.

There are four sources of income: the members contributions, the public aids, the contribution as project manager and the donations.

If the members contributions are constant in Germany, it can change in the Czech Republic because every municipality can join or quit the euroregion.

The public aids are mostly coming from the European funding (via Interreg). But the regions (Ustecky kraj and Freistaat Sachsen) are also financing. In Germany the federal state is also financing the border cooperation, which is not the case in the Czech Republic (or not in the same way).

As the euroregions are project administrators, they also get some money from the projects that are set up in the region. This represents a big part of their tasks and budget. There are also some donations but they are not very important.

The SN-CZ programm:

The SN-CZ program (SachseN and CZech Republic) is the Interreg program that is coordinating the European funds in the region (Saxon-Czech border). The current program (2013-2020) has targeted four topics: the adaptation to the climate change, the protection of the environement, the investments in the education and the enhancement of the institutional capacities of the public authorities. Those axes has been chosen for the region and its specificities, in concordance with the Interreg axes.

This program is providing the money for all benficiaries which are responding to certain criterias such as being based on the territory, having a partner in the other country, not asking for more than 85% of the total budget ... In order to give that money, a financing bank has been designated: the SAB (Sächsische Aufbau Bank).

III The project implementation:

Most of the work of the euroregion is connected with the projects financed by the EU, and especially the small projects (less than 30 000 euros). I decided not to discuss the big projects because the euroregion doesn't have a so important role (she's just voting them).

The small projects:

The main goal of the small projects is to connect the Czechs and the Germans populations by implementing some projects from various range of categories (culture, sport, tourism, transport ...) on a local level. They are not investment oriented. Many different partners are leading the projects, but most of them are municipalities or associations. Fifty-eight projects were implemented in 2016 and 74 in 2017. The majority was led by a Czech partner. As the Czech part is less populated, it shows that they are more dynamic in to implementing some projects. Most of the projects are asking for the maximal amount of money they can get from the European financing what represents 85% of the total amount.

The role of the euroregions in those small projects is to centralize the demands for the projects, before sending them to the SAB (who checks if the projects are compatible with the rules and who gives them a note). The euroregion also advise the lead partners of those projects and help them getting their project accepted. Once the project is approved (see next part about the process of decision), the euroregion warns the lead and project partners. It is also a financial intermediate between the SAB and the project leaders and partners.

Comity of decision for the small projects:

This comity of decision for the small projects is the major step to get projects approved. A project has to be accepted by the comity in order to get some money. This process is part of a big project that is implemented to redistribute the funds for the small projects. The heads of the offices have been chosen to be the head of that comity, which is taking place in the offices of the euroregion (two times a year in Germany and two times a year in the Czech Republic). At every meeting are discussed between 10 and 20 projects.

During those meetings, 18 voting members are present (eight from each country). On the German side are the head of the office, the representatives of the Kreise (three of

each) and a representative of the cultural sphere present. On the Czech side are the head of the office, the representatives of the five okres (Most, Chomutov, Louny, Teplice and Litoměřice), a representative of the kraj Ústí nad Labem and a representative of the cultural sphere present.

There are also some people who cannot vote, but who are advisors. In case the comity cannot decide if he validates the project or not, the head of the comity (the head of the office who is hosting the meeting) has to do it. Because the voters and advisors are coming from different branches, and also because there is an equity between the Czech and the Germans, we can say that this process is fair for everyone.

IV Results and future of the cooperation:

In this last part I will present the results of the cooperation after more than 25 years of cooperation. I will also try to understand how could the situation of the cooperation evolve in the next years and in which way. As I didn't find so many recent literature, I based that chapter on the interview on both office heads of the euroregion Erzgebirge and Krušnohoří.

General informations about the interview:

I became the contact of Ms Ebenhöh (the head of the German office) through my colleagues during my internship. I contact her and met her (as one of her colleague) in April. Then during a comity of decision for the small projects, I met her Czech colleague Mr Bína. They promised to give me an interview.

I prepared my interview during my research period and during the beginning of the writing of my thesis. I decided to focus on two topics: the results of the cooperation and its future. I wanted them to have a critical judgment on their work (I knew it would be complicated because of their lack of neutrality). I also wanted them to discuss some challenges such as the euro scepticism.

The first reason why I choose those topics was that I didn't had many litterature about that topic. The second one is that I wanted this chapter to have some interpretation about the facts. As both heads of the offices are here since a long time, I knew they have a lot on informations and that they could have a global overview on the topic. About the future of the cooperation, I thought that it is important to have to point of view of the actors because they will influence the way it will evolve in the next years.

The interview was made in German, because it is our only common language. I sent the

questions to the interviewees a few days before the interview, so they could know what we were gonna discuss.

The interview lasted 40 minutes and except a few technical and comprehension problems, the interview was lead in good conditions.

After analyzing the interview I've noticed that I sometimes had some small difficulties to express myself in German (to use some particular vocabulary) and that I could sometimes have got deeper on some topics.

The beginning of the cooperation:

The first topic of that interview was about the set up of the cooperation. As nothing existed before, the workers and partners of the euroregion had to first build a bi-national network. This first task had been decided by the partners as the most important thing at the beginning. The aim was to build a strong basis on which it could be possible to further develop a strong cooperation. This phase of networking is still going on nowadays because there are always some new partners. But this is now a sideline task. According to the interviewees, this phase lasted for nearly 10 years.

But not only the partners or potential partners are aware of the euroregion. The populations also take the euroregion in consideration. Thanks to the small projects which are linking the people via a lot of different topics, the Czech and German populations feel always closer and see that it is possible to do things together in order to improve the quality of life. Step by step the feeling of belonging to the same region is increasing in both sides of the border. Mr Bína told me that he met some people from the German part of the region during holidays and that they told that they were all coming from the same region.

We see that this feeling of belonging to the same region has increased even if it is still impeded by the language difference. However, it is really difficult to measure this changing of minds without a big study who would directly ask the populations.

The results of the cooperation after 25 years:

During this interview, we talked about the influence of the European policies on the work of the euroregion. Two main informations appeared. First of all, the European policies are influencing the cooperation. This is not a big surprise, but it is important to see in which way it changes the work of the euroregion. Then, I've also been told that the euroregion are trying to influence the European decisions via lobbying, and especially via the AEBR. It shows that even if the decision process is vertical (one organ

is superior to the other ones), both sides can influence each other and defend their interests.

On a national/regional scale, we can see that the situation also evolved.

In Saxony, the regional government decided to integrate the euroregions and some partners of the border cooperation into their commissions about the topics that directly link them. It even got further by involving some Czech and Polish partners.

In the Czech Republic, the situation was a bit different. After the Velvet revolution and the dissociation of the Czech Republic and the Slovakia, the Prague government had lost some power and some influence. The border cooperation had a bad image to them because they thought they would lose even more power. But it only lasted for a few years and the ministry of regional development and the government understood the importance of the border cooperation and began to support it.

But on both sides the euroregions are helped by the parliamentarians on the national (Czech Republic) and regional (Germany) levels. It helps the euroregions to get some influence on the higher decisional levels.

Because the Czech Republic joined the EU in 2004, I wanted to ask them what it changed on their work. I thought that they would mostly tell me about the simplification of the administrative works, but they mostly talked about one other topic: the freedom of movement. It seems that the entry of the Czech Republic in the Schengen area helped a lot to improve the communications between the countries. It also facilitated the meetings of the different partners from both sides but also the circulations of goods. According to the interviewees it also made the connections between the populations easier, and they now consider the fact of moving to the other country as totally normal.

Both interviewees are really satisfied of the advancements of the border cooperation in the last 25 years. They spotlight the creation of new networks. Those networks are physical (roads, train lines, waste water discharge ...) or humans (between the populations or some organs as schools or associations). Mr Bina explains that the people get used to the physical networks, but that the human links are still living between the Czechs and the Germans. He points out that those human links are really important for the cooperation and especially for the youth. The youth exchanges are essential because they are the future people who will cooperate. There is also a snowball effect because the more people are cooperating, the more cooperation actions are set up, and the more people are involved in it.

Then I ask them to try to have a critical viewpoint about what they did in the last years for the cooperation and what could have been done on a better way. According to the

head of the Czech office, the parliamentarians could have been more involved in to the process of border cooperation (it is not the case in Germany where the regional parliamentarians are more involved). On the German side, the head of the office told me that it would have been great to get more money from the partners in order to have more people working for the euroregion and to be more efficient.

Overall, we can see that the cooperation is positive for the territory and that it brought a lot. The networking phase should keep going on because it is an important task that need to be continued. But the euroregions should also try to get more help from the external partners (parliamentarians) or the internal (members) in order to get more funds who could help the development of the cooperation via the euroregion.

The future of the euroregion:

According to Ms Ebenhöh, it is important to keep the euroregion at a middle and long-term. The first reason is that the cooperation is working very well, and is situated at the right level to set up the projects (and especially the small ones). The second one is that because of the actual political situation (euro scepticism), it is important to keep a connection between the German and Czech populations. The euroregion is important because it is independent from the politics and it will continue to work even if there are some political changes.

Concerning the actual membership, it should not change in the next year on the Czech side (municipalities will continue to decide if they want to be part of the euroregion or not).

The euroregion will continue to develop in the next years and try to reinforce the cooperation. At short term, there is no major change which is planned.

Problems and challenges of the euroregion:

Because of the current political situation in both Czech Republic and Saxony, I wanted to ask the interviewees about euro scepticism. It appeared that it is the major issue and risk for them. As euro scepticism is against their values (because they are developing the cooperation), the heads of the offices fighting against him.

Since 2015 and the migration crisis, the populations are more and more wary concerning the EU. The migration crisis is the major object of tensions for them. Even though, the partners of the euroregion understand that there is a difference between the actions of the euroregion and the migration crisis, so they continue to cooperate.

It is hard for the euroregion to fight this feeling because they are not the ones

taking the decisions. Nevertheless Ms Ebenhöh told me that it is important for the euroregions to talk about what they are doing and what brings the EU to the region. She considers that one of her roles is to directly communicate with the populations on that topic.

If no one knows how the situation will change in the next years, all of the actors knows that the euro scepticism will change it.

Conclusion:

After centuries of a complicated and sometimes tragic history, the Czech-German border region became an area where people are peacefully living as neighbours. During the last 25 years, the links were strengthened and lots of connections were made all along the border. On a local area the relations between Germans and Czechs, that were not really existing before, have become stronger and continue to grow. The goal of the rapprochement between both sides has been successfully reached, and the euroregion was a part of it. I also have to say that the euroregion was not the only actor of that rapprochement. The national and communitarian politics also helped reinforce those links. But the local level is probably the level where the populations can see on the easiest way what the cooperation is bringing.

All those projects are also bringing the people together and step by step they are creating their own new identity by sharing with they neighbours. If the German or the Czech identity will probably remain stronger, we can already see that the populations are feeling closer from each other and sharing more and more things.

Despite all those advancements, there is one major risk for the euroregion: the euro scepticism. If the cooperation is on a short term not threatened (the funds won't be lowered because of the Brexit), it could be more dangerous on a long term (for example if the Czech Republic decide to quit the EU). However, the euroregion is trying to fight again this feeling by showing what brings the EU to the citizens of both countries.

In order to face those challenges and to strengthen the cooperation, some things could be improved. First of all it would be important to develop the exchanges between the citizens and especially between the youth of both regions. Because those young people represents the future of the region and of the cooperation it is important to put them in contact in order to make them cooperate while they will be growing up. It would also make them more open minded, what is important in our actual global world.

But there is one major problem for those exchanges: the language. There are just

a few people in the region that can speak both German and Czech. In my opinion, this lack of language competences is braking the cooperation because people have difficulties to understand each other. If it is now impossible for all children to learn the other language (because of a lack of professors and of money), the euroregion, the ministries of education and some other partners should unite in order to improve the comprehension between the 2 people.

The third recommendation is about a different topic: the financial one. Ms Ebenhöh told during the interview that she would like to have more money in order to increase the activities of the euroregion. In order to get more money the euroregion could find new members. The most obvious would be to expand the euroregion to some neighbour territories (the municipalities which are not members in the Czech Republic and eventually the city of Chemnitz in Germany). But the major problem is that the politicians are not always willing to take part in it. Some companies could also be members (as in the Czech Republic) but they don't always want to spend money for it. Some intensive lobby from the euroregion could change the mind of some decision-makers, but the euroregion doesn't have enough workers to do it.

We have seen that the cooperation started from scratch and became really dynamic. But the euroregion will in the next years have to face some new challenges that could disturb it.