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Master's Thesis

**The Effects of COVID-19-Induced Border Closures on
Cross-Border Projects Implemented within the Coopera-
tion Program between Saxony and the Czech Republic**

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In the 2014-2020 programming period, a total of 147 projects were approved in the programming area of the Saxony-Czech Republic Cooperation Program (Interreg). Of these, about 20 projects were strongly affected by the Corona pandemic and the related border restrictions. The aim of this thesis is to analyze and evaluate the impact of the Corona pandemic on the cross-border cooperation in the Saxon-Czech border area.

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Qualitative research approach based on interviews.

- Theoretical background
- Data collection
- Data analysis
- Results
- Proposals and conclusions

Framework structure:

1. Introduction. Objectives.
 2. Review of literature.
 3. Methods.
 4. Results. potentially discussion.
 5. Conclusion.
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- Branda, P. (2014). Regionální politika EU a podpora přeshraniční spolupráce.
- Busch, B. (2018). Kohäsionspolitik in der Europäischen Union: Bestandsaufnahme und Neuorientierung. IW-Analysen, No. 121. Köln: Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft (IW).
- Grom, I. (1995). Regional grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit als Beitrag zur Förderung der europäischen Integration. Die Einheit Europas setzt das Überwinden voraus. Berlin: Verlag Dr. Köster.
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- Schramek, C. (2010). Systemtheorie und grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit: Einige Überlegungen aus Sicht der deutsch-tschechischen Europaregionen. In: GeoScape Supp., Vol. 5, S.3-13. Ústí nad Labem.

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Statement

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1. Introduction

With a total of 274 regions in 27 different member states, the European Union represents a heterogeneous and divergent living space. Since every member state has different natural resources, population densities, production and export structures, and either belongs to high-growth member states or to low-growth ones, disparities might occur. These socio-economic disparities also exist between individual regions within member states, which hampers cooperation and impedes integration. In order to become a thriving and prosperous Union, those imbalances need to be tackled. Since, in general, borders are deemed to be an instrument of separation which might possibly hinder a proper cooperation between the single regions and member states of the European Union, European Cohesion Policy was introduced to “mitigate the adverse effects of internal borders,” and “help regions to identify solutions to common problems including those linked to new global challenges” (European Commission, 2017, p.126). Thanks to Cohesion Policy, even the smallest village in the deepest ridge of the Ore Mountains can claim to contribute its part of the European integration process.

Agreements such as the Schengen Agreement turned borders invisible so that border regions could become spaces of contact and action. Through the introduction of cross-border programs, which are funded by the EU, cross-border cooperation became increasingly important. The Saxon-Czech border region became one of the most active sites of cross-border cooperation, with a constantly growing interest among its residents. A turning point came in January 2020, however, when the member states closed their borders one after another in fear of an unknown virus. Crossing the border was prohibited for more than three months so that cross-border cooperation faced enormous challenges. During my internship at the Joint Secretariat of the Cooperation Program between Saxony and the Czech Republic, which I started in March 2020, I was a witness of the challenges and impact that the border closure had on individual cross-border projects. This inspired me to base my thesis on the following research question: “To what extent has the COVID-19-induced border closure affected cross-border cooperation between Saxony and the Czech Republic?”

The main objective of this thesis is to evaluate the effects of the COVID-19-induced border closure on cross-border cooperation within the cooperation program between Saxony

and the Czech Republic. To this end, a qualitative content analysis is conducted based on five expert interviews with project managers whose projects were negatively affected by the pandemic. These are projects implemented within the framework of cross-border cooperation in different areas of different Euroregions of the program area. Among them are projects in the fields of education, culture and tourism, environmental protection, and improvement of institutional capacities. Furthermore, the experts consulted were Czech and German nationals, which allows for opinions and experiences from different perspectives. The interviews revolved around questions such as, what impact has the pandemic had on the implementation of the projects? Which individual aspects or measures have caused the most damage? How has the border closure affected the interpersonal relationship between the Saxons and the Czechs? The individual answers of the experts are grouped and evaluated. At the end, a conclusion is drawn from the answers given. In order to be able to assess the influence of the border closure adequately, the thesis starts by outlining the development of cross-border cooperation in the theoretical part to provide a basis of comparison with the findings of the practical part. Since the cooperation program in question is an EU-funded program that promotes cross-border projects, the idea and guiding principles of European Cohesion Policy are presented first. This is followed by an overview of the historical development of the border area and the cross-border cooperation between Saxony and the Czech Republic. After that, the idea of Euroregions is introduced as the program area is composed of four Euroregions. The theoretical part lastly takes a detailed look at the specific cooperation program between Saxony and the Czech Republic, its tasks, and its goals.

2. The EU's Cohesion Policy

The EU's Cohesion Policy is the policy behind hundreds of thousands of projects realized within the scope of hundreds of programs all over Europe that enable active cross-border activities. To properly understand the evolutionary realignment and the idea behind this construct, it therefore is crucial to take a closer look at its beginnings. The following chapter gives an abundant overview of the motives, historical development, instruments, and the current objectives of the EU Cohesion Policy.

2.1 Motives and Importance of the Cohesion Policy

To prevent significant fluctuations in disparities between the members states, a certain balance has to be achieved. The creation of such a balance between regions and the reduction of inequalities was already attempted at the national level in the 1930s. As a result of the great economic crisis, economic and social disparities in the individual countries and their regions intensified to such an extent that the state was forced to take action to mitigate this development. To that end, the Act of Special Areas (“Special Areas Act”) was enacted in 1934 as the first legislative Regional Policy document to define specific problems in the respective regions. Measures and instruments for a socio-economic improvement in the regions were determined and mainly aimed at improving the local infrastructure. With the progressive enlargement of the European Union through the accession of new member states, the EU had to cope with even greater disparities between the individual countries and their regions. A solution at the supranational level had to be found in order to rebalance these disparities. That was how Cohesion Policy came into being. The term “Cohesion Policy,” which is commonly used today, is synonymous to the term “Structural Policy,” which was used in the past, as the instruments of this policy are traditionally included in the EU’s structural policies (Priebe, 2012, as cited in Busch, 2018, p.8).

Cohesion Policy denominates the European Union’s strategy to promote and support the “overall harmonious development” of its member states and regions, as it is written in Article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.¹ It aims to strengthen economic and social cohesion by reducing disparities between regions. The policy focuses on key areas which are to help the EU step up to the challenges of the 21st century and remain globally competitive (European Commission, 2021a). In this spirit, economic cohesion is to be strengthened, social tensions to be mitigated, and disparities in regions to be reduced (European Commission, 2014). Initially, the focus was on unemployment, industrial conversion, and the modernization of the agricultural sector. Today, it is on innovation, education, environment, and poverty.

¹ The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) is one of the two treaties forming the constitutional basis of the European Union.

Becker considers Cohesion Policy a “comprehensive term for a policy that promotes regional infrastructure measures as well as activities in the field of environmental, labor market or education policy” (2014, p.62). In the context of the accession of the East European Countries, Ferry regards Cohesion Policy as a “vital source of funding as Central East European Countries seek to overcome persistent structural deficiencies and embark on new development paths, which brings with it opportunities to expand the scope and impact of economic development interventions” (2014, p.2). Bronisz sees it as an “expression of solidarity between EU countries and regions” (2015, p.16). Over time, Cohesion Policy became the EU’s main investment policy, which encourages member states, its cities, and regions to work together and learn from each other through joint programs, projects, and a plethora of networks with tangible impact.

2.2 Cohesion Policy over the Course of the European Integration Process

The EU’s Cohesion Policy as it operates today is the result of a long process, in which various factors have played a significant role. It has been subject of a series of modifications, changes, and developments over the years, which resulted from the constant adjustment that was undertaken with each new accession, every financial crisis, and further external influences.

The main objective of the Cohesion Policy—reducing regional disparities—dates back to the foundation of the European Community in 1957. The Treaty of Rome stated: “In particular, the Community sets itself the objective of reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions” (European Commission, 2014, p.192). However, Cohesion Policy did not yet exist at that time. Brunazzo points out that “the Rome Treaty did not create a proper European Cohesion policy, since it was considered at that time politically divisive, unnecessary, and too ambitious” (2016, p.17). The beginning of today’s Cohesion Policy is generally said to date back to the second half of the 1980s (Becker, 2014; Brunazzo, 2016; Busch, 2018), when the instruments supporting Cohesion Policy were progressively established. In the preceding years and periods, EU funds with a territorial impact were limited to the financing of predefined projects with a small European or sub-national impact only (European Commission, 2014).

A first step in the direction of Cohesion Policy was the establishment of the European Social Fund (ESF), which was set up under the Treaty of Rome in 1957 with the purpose of financing the development of individual regions in the respective countries and thus contributing to narrowing the regional development gap. Moreover, the foundation of the European Investment Bank in 1958 indicated a timid structural policy effort at the time. However, there was no sign of an active shaping of a European funding policy.

Becker contends that this reluctance of the Community in the initial phase—despite its active commitment to the common cohesion objectives in the Treaty of Rome—was due to the “divergent economic priorities and a different understanding of the economic role of the state” (2014, p.64). Furthermore, the political actors of the six founding states were convinced that “due to the very similar socio-economic structures” of the states, “the existing differences would largely be leveled out as a consequence of the opened markets in the European economic community” (ibid.). However, this was not the case; quite the contrary. In the 1960s and 1970s, disparities grew and, as a consequence, the need for regional policy intervention was increasing. This situation was a result of the progressive activities of the national regional policies in the member states. France and its regional policy, for instance, endeavored to balance the disparities resulting from different development stages of its regions, i.e., the agglomeration in the Île-de-France region and its rural areas. With its infrastructure support programs and its regional policy, France managed to balance its regional structure by deconcentrating the agglomeration from Paris into eleven other cities, such as Bordeaux, Strasbourg, or Marseille. Italy tried to close the huge economic disparities between the southern and the northern part of the country with its “Cassa per il Mezzogiorno” plan, also known as the *Southern Development Fund*. In Germany, regional policy first focused on denazification and demilitarization and later on the reorganization of the old industrial regions as well as on the development of the new “Bundesländer”.

Due to the different regional policy strategies, the danger of a distortion of competition in the common market grew. According to Becker (2014), this motivated the European Commission to promote the establishment of an independent European regional and structural policy. Following the accession of Ireland and the United Kingdom, for instance, whose structurally weak regions were lagging far behind the EEC average, the social and economic gap between European regions widened. Disparities thus increased

and the need for European assistance through a cohesion policy grew. According to Brunazzo (2016), the inclusion of Cohesion Policy in the European Community policy agenda was both triggered by this situation and by the oil crisis in the early 1970s. The oil crisis was the major aspect which persuaded the governments that regional problems needed to be addressed at EU level.

A further step towards European Cohesion Policy was the publication of the Report on the Regional Problems in the Enlargement Community, better known as the Thompson Report.² With its publication, it was evident that EEC regional policy was now much more than merely a balancing instrument for integration spillovers. The report stated that a reduction of disparities between regions and of the backwardness of less-favored regions was “a human and moral requirement of the first importance” since “no Community could maintain itself nor have a meaning for the people which belong to it so long as some have very different standards of living and have cause to doubt the common will of all to help each MS to better the condition of its people” (COM, 1973, p.4). Ultimately, in 1973, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) was created, which the UK succeeded to enforce for the benefit its structurally weak regions. The new fund sought to remedy regional imbalances, trigger new investment in the industry and service sectors to create new jobs, help build and expand infrastructure, and accompany structural change in agricultural areas (Becker, 2014).

In the early 1980s, two major reforms were carried out that led to significant intensifications of Cohesion Policy. The first reform was a 50% increase in the ERDF budget due to the growing regional disparities that Greece’s accession in 1981 would bring. The second was the 1984 reform that led to a progressive increase of the allocation of economic resources to the ERDF. In 1985, the European Commission proposed its single market project. Fearing to “become losers of the internal market project and the deepening of economic integration” (Becker, 2014, p.68), the poorer member states demanded a financial compensation through additional assistance from the European structural funds. These events created enormous pressure for a reform of the European expenditure policy.

² British Commissioner for Regional Policy George Thompson.

Thus, the completion of the European single market was linked to the expansion of structural policy measures (Becker, 2014).

Ever since 1988, which is deemed to be the “birth of Cohesion Policy” (Brunazzo, 2016, p.22), crucial reforms of the ECC regional policy have been initiated due to the above-mentioned factors, the “change of political course” (European Commission, 2014, p.179). Under its new president Jacques Delors, the Commission began to have one main objective—“to transform it from an essentially intergovernmental budgetary transfer to that of a genuine regional development tool with the potential to provide effective solutions to the problems faced by the Community’s regions” (Manzella & Mendez, 2009, p.13). Thus, the objective was to make the structural funds “an integral part of a common policy for economic and social cohesion” (European Commission, 2014, p.179). In 1988, as financial support for the poorer member states of the southern enlargement and in the context of the Single Market Program, the European Council adopted the Delors Package I for the years of 1988 to 1993, which doubled the resources for the three structural funds (ERDF, ESF, GRI) from 7.2 billion ECU in 1987 to 14.5 billion ECU by 1993 (Busch, 2018). The first reform, the increase of funds, was complemented by further reforms and new principles.

Due to the massive increase in funding since 1989/1990, the funding of individual projects was replaced by the introduction of multi-annual funding programs, especially to support cross-border cooperation as we know it today (Busch, 2018). During this period, its most important instrument, the Interreg Community Initiative, was created. From that moment on, local authorities have played an increasingly important role in the European integration process, as is confirmed by the constant increase in financial resources made available for regional policy programming periods. The European integration process targets a significant reduction of the “relevance of national borders for European economic players, in order to create a large market in which national borders no longer stand in the way of the free movement of workers, goods, services and capital” (Committee of the Regions 2007, p.16, as cited in De Sousa, 2012, p.4).

Furthermore, from that year on, the emphasis was placed on the poorest and most lagging regions of the Union (European Commission, 2014). Besides its economic connotation, the Cohesion Policy received a political dimension, which led to a greater involvement

of regional and local partners and subnational institutions in community policy making (Brunazzo, 2016).

1993 saw once more the introduction of decisive reforms of Cohesion Policy. This time they were linked to the enactment of the Maastricht Treaty. The focus of the treaty was the establishment of the common monetary union. In this context, a new instrument was introduced which was meant to support less developed countries such as Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and Spain—the Cohesion Fund. It was designed to help them participate in growth despite economic underdevelopment (European Commission, 2014). In the Cohesion Policy Regulations for 1994-1999 of the Maastricht Treaty, the funds allocated to Cohesion Policy were doubled and now covered one third of the EU budget. This instrument was intended to improve transport infrastructure in the respective countries in order to contribute to the reduction of economic disparities, since a poor infrastructure limits access to markets and services on the other side of the borders (European Commission, 2014). According to Becker (2014) this fund was not meant to pursue regional goals but rather to focus on the member state level. Besides the introduction of the monetary union, the Maastricht Treaty introduced the principle of subsidiarity, which would from then on result in ‘multilevel’ European governance, involving the local and regional levels, too (European Commission, 2015). With this, the EU has enhanced the role of the European regions as active contributors to the integration process.

1999 was marked by the EU’s commitment to support the accession of Central and Eastern European countries. The year of 2004 led to several changes in the Cohesion Policy—the eastward enlargement. With the accession of ten new member states,³ the population of Europe increased by 20 percent. GDP, however, increased by merely 5 percent (European Commission, 2014). Thus, the average GDP per inhabitant in the EU decreased by about 12 percent, and the socio-economic development gap between the EU 15 and the new member states once again widened extremely. The EU’s response to this situation was a realignment of its Cohesion Policy to new policy objectives and the transfer of funds from the EU 15 to the new member states of the Eastern enlargement. As a result, the share of funds for the old member states decreased significantly. It was therefore necessary to develop new criteria for the eligibility for funds in order to ensure a balanced

³ Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

distribution. In the new programming period of 2007-2014, all previous Community initiatives as well as Interreg were abolished and a new priority objective, the “European Territorial Cooperation”, was introduced. In addition, the financial resources of the Cohesion Fund were doubled in 2007-2012.

Brunazzo (2016) highlights that 2006 has seen the most radical reforms in Cohesion Policy since 1988. With the new reforms, Cohesion Policy as we know it today has approached slowly. A strategic approach based on the Lisbon strategy was introduced for targeting EU priorities. The Lisbon Strategy was launched in 2000 by the European Council and consisted of a program of reforms that strived to, by 2010, make the EU the “most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” (European Council, 2000). The programming period of 2007-2014 was aligned with the goals of the Lisbon strategy. This was considered a “paradigm shift in cohesion policy” (European Commission, 2014, p.179). Since then, the priorities of the Community funding policy have been to strengthen “growth, competitiveness and employment” (Becker, 2014, p.71). However, the goals of the Lisbon Strategy were evidently not achieved by 2010. Therefore, in March 2010, the European Commission drafted a new strategy that defined the goals until 2020—Europe 2020. Europe 2020 expanded the Lisbon Strategy by two new EU policy agendas—poverty reduction and sustainability (European Commission, 2014, p.196).

2.3 Objectives of the Cohesion Policy for the Programming Period of 2014–2020

The three main objectives for cohesion funds of the 2007-2013 funding period have been reduced to two objectives in the 2014-2020 funding period—Investment for Growth, and Job and European Territorial Cooperation.

With the new programming period of 2014-2020, eleven new thematic objectives were enshrined in the agenda (see fig. 1), which are now in close alignment with the Europe 2020 strategy and on which the budget of 352.9 billion euros is focused (European Commission, 2014). The Europe 2020 strategy thus represents the most important development target of Cohesion Policy in the 2014-2020 programming period.



Fig. 1: 11 thematic objectives 1

Their aim is to align the European Union’s economic policies and achieve smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth. In order to achieve the full impact of the investments, the member states, regions, and their programs pertaining to EU funds must focus on a certain number of these objectives. Furthermore, in this period, the planning of cohesion policy investments will take into account country-specific recommendations, in addition to the alignment with the Europe 2020 strategy. The European Semester, which was adopted by the European Council in 2010, is intended to identify the needs of the member states and, on a proposal of the Commission, to make “country-specific recommendations”, in which economic, structural, and fiscal policy measures are proposed to the member states. These recommendations must be taken into account by the member states and regions when drafting their programs (European Commission, 2014a, p.247). The member states and their funding programs have to develop a “partnership agreement” in cooperation with the European Commission (European Commission, 2014, p.236) in which they set out their investment priorities and corresponding measures. All of this aims at a better coordination of national policies in the areas of budget, growth, and employment.

2.4 European Territorial Cooperation

Since the programming period of 2007-2014, European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) has been one of the key objectives of Cohesion Policy. It is focusing on “joint actions and exchange of policy ideas and experience between national, regional and local authorities in different EU member states” (European Commission, 2017, p.96). In order to enable a better exchange between border regions, the ETC mission is to “mitigate the adverse effects of internal borders” and furthermore “help regions to identify solutions to common problems including those linked to new global challenges” (European Commission, 2017,

p.126). It has to be mentioned that the territorial cooperation between member states is unique in every case due to the individual historic, economic, political, and social context of the respective regions and territories and the relations between the local players. European Territorial Cooperation enables countries and regions to identify solutions to common problems in border regions and other functional areas of cooperation. The designation of “European Territorial Cooperation” was established in 2007 and as also known as Interreg.

2.4.1 Interreg

The Interreg Initiative was launched by the European Commission in 1990. According to Medeiros (2018), it was initially designed to help prepare border areas for the opening of the EU single market (see Ch. 2.2).

Interreg’s principal objective is to “create a Europe that guaranteed free movement, one where economic flows and the mobility of persons would not be hindered by barriers and borders” (European Commission, 2015, p.20). This objective is to be attained by administrative collaboration and by forging “links between neighboring local actors on both sides of a national frontier between member states” (European Commission, 2015, p.29). Thus, a stronger collaboration had to be established.

Since 1990, the Interreg community initiative has supported collaboration on the following scales:

- Cross-border cooperation (Interreg A): Strand A aims at local cooperation between neighboring regions separated by a frontier
- Transnational Cooperation (Interreg B): Strand B includes cooperation over large areas covering several countries
- Interregional Cooperation (Interreg C): Strand C aims to promote network cooperation on a pan-European scale
(European Commission, 2015a, p.13).

However, the two terms of Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) and Interregional Cooperation (IC) are often interchangeably used. Therefore, I would like to point out that for the scope of this thesis, Cross-Border Cooperation means the cooperation of neighboring regions. It is aimed at a common economic, social, and cultural area (European

Commission, 2000). Interregional cooperation, on the contrary, describes the cooperation of non-adjacent regions. It focuses on the cooperation and networking of units of action with the goal of developing synergetic solutions to problems. Niehaus (2013) notes that in contrast to CBC, IC is a cooperation of more developed regions that can afford a high technical, financial, and administrative effort.

Interreg provides financing for cross-border projects supported by the ERDF and implemented within the framework of various European cross-border funding programs of different regions of the member states. With the involvement of local and regional stakeholders, Interreg seeks to eliminate barriers to the free movement of goods, people, capital, and services by enabling those stakeholders to develop cross-border projects (European Commission, 2015, p.29b). The 2014-2021 funding period is the fifth generation (Interreg V) of the Interreg initiative. In total, 60 Cross-Border Cooperation programs exist alongside 38 internal EU borders as well as 15 Transnational Cooperation programs and four Interregional Co-operation programs: INTERREG Europe, Interact, Urbanact, and Espon (European Commission, 2021b). In the fifth period, a budget of 10.1 billion euros was allocated to the Interreg Initiative, which will be invested in the above-mentioned programs.

2.4.2 Geographical scope

Cohesion Policy funds are intended to reduce disparities between less developed and more developed regions. Since the development stages of the regions in Europe vary, the regions were divided into groups according to their eligibility for Structural Funds, ESF, and ERDF (see fig. 2). In the programming period of 2014-2020, eligibility was calculated on the basis of the regions' GDP per inhabitant and categorized in the following three groups:

- **less developed regions** (GDP per inhabitant <75% of the EU average)
- **transition regions** (GDP per inhabitant \geq 75% and <90% of the EU average)
- **more developed regions** (GDP per inhabitant \geq 90% of the EU average)

(Eurostat, 2021)

The less developed regions comprise 71 regions in Europe with a total of 128 million inhabitants. They are mainly located in the east and south of the EU. 182.2 billion euros were allocated for them in the fifth period. In the 2014-2020 funding period, 51 regions

with a total of 68 million people were categorized as transition regions. These regions are mainly located in Central Europe. 151 regions with 307 million inhabitants are considered more developed. Overall, the EU-15 countries account for 219 billion euros (48.2 percent of all cohesion funding) and the countries that joined later account for 226 billion euros (49.8 percent).

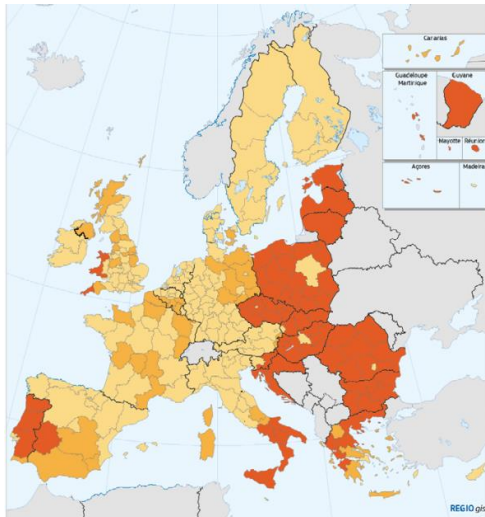


Fig. 2: Category of Regions

Source: Eurostat GD Region (European Commission, 2014, p.238).

The level of funding provided by the subsidies thus has to be allocated individually according to the development stages of the regions. The regions have to correspond to the NUTS-2 level, the nomenclature of territorial units for statistics (Nomenclature des Unités territoriales statistiques – NUTS⁴) in order to receive funding.

⁴ NUTS is a geographical system which divides the territory of the European Union into hierarchical levels. The three hierarchical levels are known as NUTS-1, NUTS-2 and NUTS-3. This classification enables cross-border statistical comparisons at various regional levels within the EU. NUTS-2 regions usually have between 800,000 and 3 million inhabitants. https://www.destatis.de/Europa/EN/Methods/Classifications/OverviewClassification_NUTS.html

3. Borders and Cross-Border Cooperation

3.1 Borders and Border Areas

3.1.1 The Characteristics of Borders

As the character of borders plays a major role in cross-border cooperation, in this subchapter, I will outline the evolution of the function of borders and take a closer look at their meaning. The most common connotation when thinking of the term “border” is probably its function as a territorial demarcation. From the 16th century on, the Grimms’ dictionary has described borders as an “imagined line, that serves to separate areas of the earth’s surface” (Kleinschmidt, 2014, p.5). However, other definitions of borders do not merely reflect the territorial and geographical aspects but also political, socio-economical, legal, military-strategic, and cultural ones (Branda, 2014). Demarcations, on the other hand, often have a cultural, religious, linguistic, ethnic, economic, or social character (Lozoviuk, 2009). Furthermore, Branda strongly refuses the interpretation of borders as strictly dividing lines between states and sees borders rather as “dividing lines between spatial units that are defined by social activity in a given space” (2014, p.9). Moreover, Grom (1995) contends that it is usually not the border that separates two nations but rather the historical background of why the border was created in the first place. For this reason, national borders are often perceived as “wounds of history,” “interfaces”⁵ of territorial development (Jeřábek, 2015, p.233), or “scars of history”⁶ (Grom, 1995, p.39). According to Branda (2014), one can therefore regard borders from two different angles: as a place which separates—i.e., as an “instrument of separation”⁷—or as is the case today at most borders within the EU, as a “place of contact” (p.11). Jeřábek (2015, p.233) supports the idea of borders as “thresholds”⁸ of European integration and borders as “building blocks” and “bridges”.

Grom associates five different functions with borders:

⁵ Ger. “Nahtstellen.”

⁶ The expression “Scars of History” is the motto of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR).

⁷ Czech orig. “nastroj separace.”

⁸ Ger. orig. “Hemmschwellen.”

- Regulatory function (separation function)
- Control function: to regulate the import and export of people, goods, capital, services
- Protective function: an important means of maintaining independence and integrity
- Identity-creating function: a geographic enclosure
- Peacekeeping function (1995, p.41).

3.1.2 Characteristics of the Saxon-Czech Border

The function of the border between Saxony and the Czech Republic and its character have undergone various dynamic changes throughout history. Saxony and the Czech Republic are separated by a 435km long border. This represents an enormously large contact zone between the two countries. This border is a historical border and the oldest in the Czech Republic, which has existed—nearly unchanged—for almost 1000 years. Over the course of the last century, this border has gone through many historical events, which often resulted in long-standing tensions on both sides of the border. Two events that have stood out are the pre-war period and the annexation of the Sudetenland,⁹ which was annexed to the German Reich by the Munich Agreement on September 29, 1938.

⁹ Sudetenland: A mountain range in north-eastern Bohemia and northern Moravia in Czechia and Poland, which was inhabited by the so-called “*Sudetendeutsche*,” the former German-speaking inhabitants of the Sudetenland, also referred to as “*Deutschböhmer*” or “*Deutschnährer*”.



Fig. 3: Sudeten Germans in 1938

photo: Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-58507-003 / CC-BY-SA 3.0.

In that year, many Czechs were expelled from the border area and sent to the interior of the country. After the war, however, the reverse occurred. More than three million Sudeten Germans were expelled from the Sudetenland, which then was annexed back to Czechoslovakia. A large number of Sudeten Germans became residents of neighboring Saxony, just across the Czechoslovak border. For a long time after the war, a final reconciliation between the Sudeten Germans and the Czechs after this historic act was not in sight. After the war, Saxony became part of the German communist regime, while on the other side of the border, the communist CSSR, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, was established. In 1964, the visa requirement between the two states was removed. Berthold (2009) points out that at the time, the border between the GDR and the CSSR was relatively permeable compared to the Federal Republic of Germany, where the Iron Curtain remained in place. The signing of the agreement on passport- and visa-free travel¹⁰ between the GDR and the CSSR made another significant contribution to a more permeable border. From that moment on, free border crossing, which only required an identity card, was possible (Kucera & Segert, 2002). Thus, mutual encounters between the Czechs and the Saxons already took place already in the 1960s, and resentments and stereotypes were reduced considerably in both populations (Berthold & Kucera, 2002). However, according to research by Berthold (2009) on the Saxon-Bohemian Elbe region, this was merely due to shopping tourism. Although there was contact between the two populations, this

¹⁰ Orig. “Abkommen zum pass – und visafreien Reiseverkehr”.

was perceived as more of an “enacted friendship,” according to Niehaus (2013, p.11). Furthermore, during the phase of rapprochement on the official level, the two countries were controlled by state organs and only of short duration (Niehaus, 2013).

While Berthold claims that the border between the GDR and the CSSR was “relatively permeable” (2009, p.135), Branda (2014) argues that the border could not be characterized as open. The fact that the border was more closed than open could be observed in the developments of the two states after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Decades of closure led to enormous developmental delays, which only really became apparent after the fall of the communist regime in 1989.

Czechoslovakia and the GDR were in a disastrous economic state after the collapse of the communist regimes. But the border regions of the two countries were in an even greater plight. The reason for this was the “sealing off” function of the border, which prevented the exchange of relations with the neighboring region. This shows how borders can have a socio-economic impact on states—the “socio-economic effects of a border” (Grom, 1995, p.44). Border regions are particularly affected by these effects. Due to their location, which is usually far away from the political centers—the core of the country—they have no exchange with neighboring regions when the border is impermeable. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, not much changed in terms of border permeability between Saxony and the Czech Republic. It was still possible to cross the border but now one needed a passport instead of an identity card. The next milestone in the history of the Saxon-Czech border was the Schengen Agreement¹¹ on December 21, 2007. Schengen implied the opening of the border and the abolition of customs controls, which simplified and, above all, accelerated traffic. However, according to Branda (2014), even joining Schengen does not bring perfect border permeability, as border crossings still regulate traffic through road signs and in the case of pedestrians through nature protection measures, for instance. Today, the border between the Czech Republic and Saxony is primarily of a political-geographical nature (Branda, 2014). It defines the state territory

¹¹ On June 14, 1985, at the height of the cities of Schengen (Luxembourg) and Perl (Germany) on an excursion boat on the Moselle River through the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, the Schengen Agreement was signed by said countries. The Schengen Agreement paved the way for the gradual abolition of border controls at the European internal borders of the signatory states.

and separates the Czech Republic from Germany. In an empirical border region study by Kleinman and Peselmann (2019), evaluations of interviewed participants revealed that the border in the German-Czech border region—at least materially—is described as “no longer existing” and perceived as an “open gate” (p.142).

3.1.3 Border areas

In the context of European integration, border regions play a significant role in ensuring “democratic stability” in Europe, both within the borders of the EU and on its periphery (European Commission, 2015b, p.14). Within the framework of the Interreg Initiative and the Interreg A strand (Cross-Border Cooperation), projects between regions considered as border regions are financially supported by the ERDF. De Sousa defines border regions as “special areas of fluxes and exchanges of a social, cultural, economic and political nature, a space where the development of multiple activities takes place and where the type and intensity of transactions have evolved in time” (2012, p.3). This definition, of course, only applies if the borders between the two border regions are open and allow for “fluxes and exchanges”.

Cross-border regions, as stated in Article 174 of the Treaty of Lisbon, are expected to play a leading role in the construction of an integrated social and economic space (European Commission, 2015b). In the course of ongoing integration, those regions may also begin to acquire their own (subjective) identity by constant exchange and cooperation (Branda, 2014). Border regions are typically peripheries, whose isolation from the economically strong center often complicates the living conditions of their inhabitants. A typical structural feature of border regions is the small number of large cities in it, as well as below-average population density. Even though they are not densely populated, border regions are home to 30% of the EU’s population (ECA, 2019). However, this typical peripheral character does not necessarily apply to all border regions. The character of a border region depends on the bilateral relations of the states, as does the resulting degree of openness of the border for the movement of people and goods (Klatt, 2021).

The European Commission sees the status of border regions as peripheral, outlying, and disadvantageous areas as a “former status” (2014, p.14). Border regions which were referred to as “scars of history” (Medeiros, 2018; Jeřábek, 2015) progressively changed

during the European integration process and have today become “components”¹² (Jeřábek, 2015, p.233) or “hinges”¹³ (Jurczek, 2007, p.5) of the European integration process, as well as “central players in the process of European reunification” (European Commission, 2015, p.14) or “engines of cross-border cooperation” (European Commission, 2000, p.6). In the framework of Cohesion Policy, border regions were also often described as “laboratories” for European cohesion (Ruidisch, 2013, p.95). This denomination derived from the fact that border areas became places of high interest since they were dividing western and eastern Europe, and disparities were extreme and easy to see. Consequently, according to De Sousa, border regions are a suitable indicator for testing EU integration theories (2012, p.5). The unique qualities of border regions explain why research on the Saxon-Czech border region has intensified since 1990 (Jurczek, 2009, p.51; Kroll & Řezník & Munke, 2014), and with it the cooperation between historians and institutions (Kroll & Řezník & Munke, 2014).

3.1.4 The German-Czech Border Area

Today, the Saxon-Czech border area and its cross-border cooperation is considered the most successful compared to the other parts of the Czech border area (Jeřábek & Lipský & Pohajdová, 2010; Jeřábek, 2015).

Over the course of the last century, however, the Saxon-Bohemian borderlands have undergone many political and socio-economic changes. The expulsion of the Sudeten Germans and the communist regime brought many disadvantages. There was a considerable deterioration on the interpersonal as well as on the economic level. Both border regions were very similar for centuries due to similar entrepreneurial structures and their mining history, which dates back to the 12th century. In the 19th century, Bohemia and Saxony were two of the richest industrial regions in Europe (Tillich, 2001). Due to their similar business structure and wide range of production, there was a very strong industrial interdependence between these two regions. After the collapse of the communist regime, however, the two countries were in a catastrophic state. During the communist era, heavy industry was moved to the peripheral regions—the border regions. Due to the

¹² Orig. “Bausteine”.

¹³ Orig. “Scharniere”.

development of heavy industries such as mining and brown coal before 1990, the environment was severely damaged. Forest dieback in the Saxon-Bohemian Ore Mountains was a major problem. The damaged landscape caused by the communist regime in the border area between Saxony, Czech Republic, and Poland became known as the “Black Triangle” (Banse & Roch, 2010, p.67; Slavík, 2010, p.14).

Furthermore, the transformation of the economy after 1990 entailed strong demographic changes. In Saxony, the massive decline in economic activity in industry, agriculture, and mining led to a loss of many jobs. This resulted in increased migration, especially of young people, to the old federal states, as they hoped and strived for better perspectives (Jeřábek et al., 2010). In addition, this was accompanied by a decrease in the birth rate resulting from the loss of social security (Slavík, 2010). On the Czech side, migration was not as large-scale as in Saxony. The reason for this were the complicated conditions for migration (Jeřábek et al., 2010). Over time, differences in the development of the Saxon and Czech border areas slowly became visible. The Saxon border area experienced a faster structural change than its Czech neighbor. This was due to the fact that Saxony, as a European member state, already had the possibility to benefit from the EU structural funds (Slavík, 2010). In addition, this was supplemented with funds from the federal government. The funds were mainly used to finance investments in business development and job creation as well as education and environment (Slavík, 2010). According to Zich (2012), a short tourist boom occurred after 1989. This marked the beginning of cooperation not only in the civil sphere but also in administrative cooperation, as well as in economic development and trade.

After the political, economic, and social changes of the 1990s, the Czech Republic began its process of integration (Jeřábek et al., 2010). In terms of the population on both sides of the border, one often speaks of a life “with their backs to each other” that should gradually change into a life “from face to face” (Jeřábek, 2015, p.234).

3.2 Cross-Border Cooperation

3.2.1 Cross-Border Cooperation in the EU context

In this subchapter, I will introduce the term of Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC), its definition, and general purpose within the framework of the European Union, before taking a closer look at the specific example of Saxony and the Czech Republic.

CBC is cooperation that transcends borders and has a significant impact on both sides of the frontier. In the context of the European Union, CBC is defined as a “partnership between local and regional stakeholders separated by a national frontier, whose actions have repercussions at the local and the regional level on both sides of that frontier” (European Commission, 2015, p.8). In operational terms, De Sousa describes CBC as “any type of concerted action between public and/or private institutions of the border regions of two (or more) states, driven by geographical, economic, cultural/identity, political/leadership factors” with the aim to reinforce “the (good) neighborhood relations, solving problems or managing jointly resources between communities through any co-operation mechanism available” (2012, p.5). Since neighboring border regions often face similar problems due to shared characteristics, they seek to learn from each other and cope with their problems through joint cooperation, which is often realized in the form of cross-border projects.

The first forms of cross-border cooperation between European border regions in the context of European integration has developed progressively since the late 1950s. One the first cross-border regions was the German-Dutch Euregio around Gronau, which was created in 1958. Later, CBC progressively started to augment. However, the most significant development of cross-border cooperation has been seen since 1989—after the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Iron Curtain. The main factors for CBC were political changes in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The CEE¹⁴ had opened the way for the gradual removal of the divisive influence of the borders and led to a new form of municipal and regional politics. With the ease of the eastern borders after 1989, cross-border cooperation was giving the role of fostering the “reunification of the European Continent” in a pan-European dimension (European Commission, 2015, p.14). The main stakeholders of CBC include, in particular, local and regional authorities—so called “sub-nation” authorities. Since then, cooperation between educational institutions, towns and municipalities, chambers of commerce, associations, and the non-profit sector has developed.

¹⁴ Central and Eastern Europe

Cross-border cooperation can operate at different levels. Grom (1995) differentiates in the local, regional, and central state level.¹⁵ According to Niehaus (2013), the regional and the local level are the most successful forms of cooperation to date, as they encompass socio-cultural as well as economic cooperation and form the most intensive network across borders. However, it is essential to mention that CBC also presents several challenges which may impede cooperation: “administrative barriers, [...] economic and financial barriers, cultural and intercultural discrepancies” have to be overcome (Brunn & Schmitt-Egner, 1998, p.19, as cited in Schramek, 2010, p.6). In numerous empirical studies, language barriers were considered one of the greatest obstacles (Schramek, 2010; Slavík, 2010; Medeiros, 2016; Jeřábek & Lipský & Pohajdová, 2010). Furthermore, it is not only borders that hinder cooperation. Grom (1995) considers the consequences that the borders have caused throughout history, regarding societal development, culture, and the legal and administrative systems, a significant aspect that may hinder cooperation.

3.2.2 Cross-Border Cooperation between Saxony and the Czech Republic

Cross-border cooperation between the Czech Republic and Saxony dates back to the fall of the communist regime. In the first phase of Cross-Border Cooperation until 1993, cross-border working communities—Euroregions—were established, mainly on the Czech border with German local and regional authorities. The newly established Euroregions of Neisse-Nisa-Nysa, Elbe/Labe, Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří, and Egrensis contributed significantly to the stimulation of cross-border cooperation. The European Commission supported this process by providing funding. Since the Czech Republic was not yet a member of the European Union, support was granted through the Phare CBC Program in the pre-accession period. But even beyond this program, Bohemia and Saxony have had close relations for centuries. They have many historic similarities and are still very similar today. According to Tillich (2001), their common historical background, shared values, and belonging to the same cultural circle are essential reasons for why the Free State of Saxony has been committed to intensive cross-border cooperation with both the Czech Republic and Slovakia from the very beginning. Furthermore, and in contrast to Bavaria, it was possible to build on the long-standing contact at the Saxon-Bohemian border (Jurczek, 2003). This positive stance towards cooperation is enshrined in Art. 12

¹⁵ Lokale, regionale und zentralstaatliche Ebene.

of the Constitution of the Free State of Saxony. It strives for cross-border regional cooperation and aims at the development of neighborly relations. The Free State of Saxony has concluded a number of agreements with its neighbor concerning cooperation. One of them is the Joint Declaration¹⁶ of the Free State of Saxony and the Czech Republic from December 5, 1992. Although a number of cooperation agreements have been concluded at the political level since, which slowly set the CBC between Saxony and the Czech Republic in motion, euphoria among inhabitants was not as high as it was just after the fall of the Iron Curtain. According to Jurczek (2003), the Saxon population became increasingly insecure and reserved around the turn of the century and showed a growing lack of interest in a common CBC. This was due to the unfavorable economic-political basic conditions and the EU's eastward enlargement with its unforeseeable effects. At that time, about one third of the population living in the region participated in CBC. According to an empirical study carried out by Jurczek (2003), Czech border residents (49%) were more active in CBC than Saxons (21%).

Two significant events influenced the activities in the Czech-German border area—the Czech Republic's accession to the EU on May 1, 2004, and its entry into the Schengen area on December 21, 2007. Entering the Schengen area meant the opening of the border and the total abolition of customs controls. However, even before the Czech Republic acceded to the EU, the Czech Republic and Saxony declared, in the Rothenburg Declaration of April 16, 2004, to link transport infrastructure, environmental protection, preventive flood protection, and tourism more closely on their territory and agreed on a closer cooperation in these fields (Jeřábek & Vejvoda, 2012).

The accession to the EU further expanded activities with the introduction of new cross-border funding programs and projects on both sides of the border. A decisive program for the Saxon-Czech border area has been the current cooperation program for the promotion of cross-border cooperation between the Free State of Saxony and the Czech Republic. Cross-border cooperation was now funded by the Interreg Initiative through the ERDF. With its accession in 2004, the Czech Republic entered the third funding period (Interreg III), which was already introduced in Ch. 2.4.1 After the accession, the Saxon-Czech border area received 9.9 million euros of funding between 2004 and 2006. These funds

¹⁶ Orig. "Gemeinsame Erklärung".

were aimed at promoting the progressive integration of the European area by means of joint development strategies (Jeřábek et al., 2010). The recipients of the funds were different in the Saxon and Czech territories: in the Czech Republic, it was mainly the local self-government, whereas in Saxony the funds went to various associations (Jeřábek et al., 2010). However, this newly constructed cross-border cooperation was facing some challenges and barriers as well. These include the different languages, habits, traditions, currencies, and lastly different experiences in the pre- and post-war period. Furthermore, Jeřábek and Vejvoda contend that the different administrative structures and levels at which spatial planning is carried out in Saxony and the Czech Republic resulted in considerable differences in legislation, which represented an obstacle to cross-border cooperation in the field of spatial development (2012, p.46). This is due to the “interconnect- edness” between the two systems, which requires the respective subjects to be willing to cooperate beyond the individual administrative level.

3.3 On the Concept of Euroregion

In the context of cross-border cooperation, the Euroregion's, often also called Euregio and Europaregion, play a crucial role. According to Niehaus (2013, p.9), they serve as an "engine for solutions to all cross-border problems". However, there is still no agreement on an exact uniform definition. According to Schramek (2010, p.5), the Euroregion is an "institutional structure within which cross-border interactions are coordinated." Its "institutional structure" distinguishes Euroregions from "mere cross-border cooperation" (Schramek, 2010, p.5). In this respect, Branda (2014, p.28) distinguishes two types of euroregions: geographical and institutional. The geographical euroregion is the area in which the cooperation takes place. This area can be "national" or "cross-border". The "national part of a cross-border Euroregion" means the part that is located in only one state, or the entire cross-border Euroregion (Euroregion as a whole) - i.e. all states that belong to the Euroregion (in the case of the Czech Republic two or three). The institutional Euroregion should be seen as an organization that significantly contributes to the development of this cross-border cooperation (Branda, 2014, p.28). Euroregions are voluntary associations of public and private actors (Schramek, 2010, p.12), mostly local authorities, economic and cultural institutions. According to Jurczek (2009, p.53), the goal of Euroregion's is "to steadily expand cooperation and development across national borders and to achieve joint activities." An important component of this goal is to remove

the border, which is a barrier to this cooperation. They aim to create cultural, social, economic exchange between the nations of the Euroregion's within it and to bring the inhabitants on both sides of the border closer, as well as to "rediscover and redevelop awareness of the common region" (Euroregion Elbe/Labe, 2020). To achieve these goals, they support and implement a variety of projects to improve infrastructure, reduce environmental pollution, promote tourism, etc., which are supported by EU funds and which contribute to the development of the region. Their members include municipalities, chambers, public authorities, and other institutions (Jurczek, 2009, p.53). Euroregion's are not financed from the EU budget, but from the contributions of their members (member cities, municipalities, institutions, or companies) (Jeřábek et al., 2010, p.25).

3.3.1 Czech- Saxon Euroregions

The first Euroregion in the Czechoslovakian – Saxon borderland was the Euroregion Neisse-Nisa-Nysa established in 1991 on the river Neisse border, linking three countries Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland. After 1991 Euroregion in the Saxon – Czechoslovakian border land mushroomed. Today there four Euroregion's established in the Czech-Saxon border land:

- Euroregion Neisse-Nisa-Nysa
- Euroregion Elbe / Labe
- Euroregion Erzgebirge / Krušnohoří
- Euroregion Egrensis

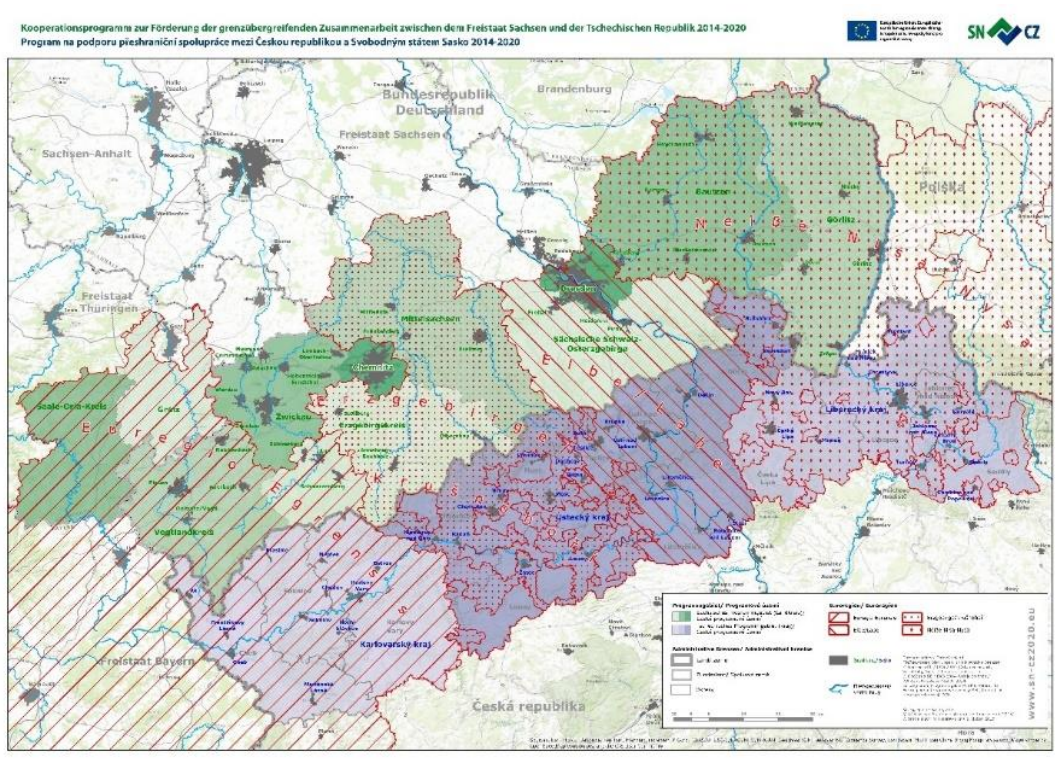


Fig. 4: Euroregion's Source: sn-cz.eu

Euroregion's in the Czech and Saxon border areas were established due to the the Integration of the Czech Republic in the EU and for the purpose of better cross-border communication (Jeřábek et al., 2010, p.25). The most important incentive for the establishment of the Euroregion's on the German-Czech border was the sudden opening of the border and also the enthusiasm and hope of the inhabitants that through cooperation many common problems can be solved (Jeřábek et al., 2010, p.25). However, the formation of these cross-border territorial communities has taken place even before the EU Phare CBC financial instrument for the promotion of cross-border cooperation started to finance the Czech Republic. For this reason, Critics often claim that it was the other way around and that the Euroregion's only came into being for a specific purpose with the vision of being able to draw (national or European) funding (Jeřábek et. al, 2010, p.24). As mentioned above, the Euroregion's were confronted with enormous challenges after the fall of communism (e.g. short-term improvement of technical infrastructure, long-term development of regional economic and socio-cultural development (Jurczek, 2009, p.54). For these reasons, relevant cross-border projects in this territory have since been supported with EU funds.

4. The Cooperation Program between the Czech Republic and the Free State of Saxony

4.1 Basic Information and Thematic Objectives

The cooperation program between the Czech Republic and the Free State of Saxony is one of five cross-border programs implemented in the Czech Republic, and one of thirteen cross-border programs in which Germany is participating. The name of the program in its full length in English is: “*cooperation program to promote cross-border cooperation between the State of Saxony and the Czech Republic 2014-2021*”.¹⁷ On the EU- level, it is referred to as “Interreg V-A - Germany/Saxony-Czech Republic” (Interreg.eu).



Europäische Union. Europäischer Fonds für regionale Entwicklung. Evropská unie. Evropský fond pro regionální rozvoj.

Fig. 5 : Logos 1

Source: sn-cz2020.eu

The current programming period is the third generation of the Interreg Initiative which provides funds to promote cross-border cooperation between the State of Saxony and the Czech Republic. The CBC program with its motto “Hallo Nachbar. Ahoj sousede.” (hello neighbor) builds on its predecessors—the Phare CBC, INTERREG, and Objective 3 (Ziel 3/Cíl 3). For the current programming period of 2014-2021, a total volume of 157,967,067 EUR has been allocated from the ERDF to the program (sn-cz2020.eu). Of this amount, 148,489,043 EUR were allocated for project funding and 9,478,024 for the technical implementation of the program. The program aims to promote the expansion and further development of joint cross-border cooperation activities in the form of projects. These projects are intended to contribute to the social, economic, cultural, and ecological development in the program area (SN-CZ.eu). The program promotes the goal of territorial cooperation “to sustainably increase the competitiveness of the region in the

¹⁷ Ger. “Kooperationsprogramm zur Förderung der grenzübergreifenden Zusammenarbeit zwischen dem Freistaat Sachsen und der Tschechischen Republik 2014-2020”.

Cz. “Program na podporu přeshraniční spolupráce mezi Českou republikou a Svobodným státem Sasko 2014–2020”.

European context by taking into account the territorial aspect, to ensure that positive effects are achieved for the overall growth potential by bringing regional development closer together” (SN-CZ, 2015, p.24).

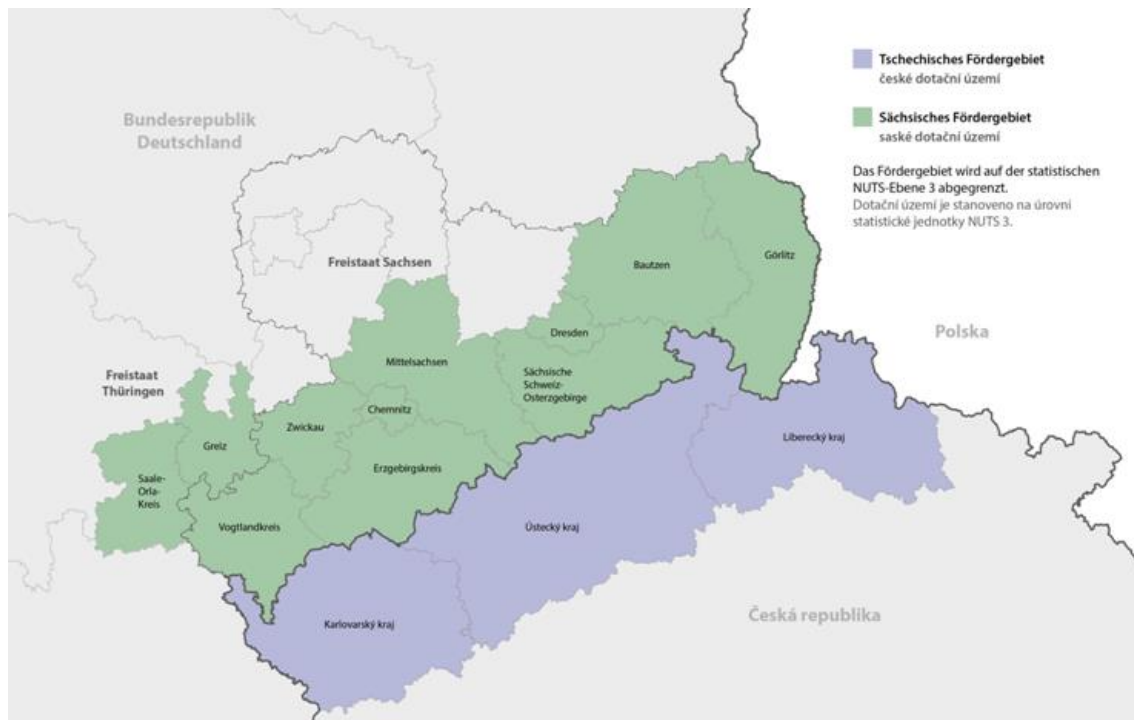


Fig. 6: Program area

Source: SN-CZ (<https://www.sn-cz2020.eu/>)

The common program area of Saxony and the Czech Republic covers a total area of 26,796 km² and encompasses the following districts (Ger. “*Landkreise*” and “*Bezirke*”) on the German and Czech side (fig. 6):

Saxony	Czech Republic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vogtlandkreis • Landkreis Zwickau • Erzgebirgskreis • Landkreis Mittelsachsen • Landkreis Sächsische Schweiz-Osterzgebirge • Landkreis Bautzen • Landkreis Görlitz • kreisfreie Stadt Dresden • kreisfreie Stadt Chemnitz 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Karlovy Vary Region • Liberec Region • Ústí nad Labem Regio

Table 1: Czech and Saxon districts of the program area.

As to the thematic objectives (TOs), TOs suitable for the strategy of the specific cooperation program have to be selected taking into account the principle of thematic concentration. These TOs are based on the 11 thematic objectives (see fig. 1) which have been established for the new funding period 2014-2020. With each program individually selecting up to a maximum of four TOs, to which 80% of the ERDF funds are allocated, a significant contribution is made to support the Europe 2020 strategy.

For the funding period of 2014-2021, the following thematic objectives have been set for the cooperation program:

- 5.** Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management
- 6.** Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency
- 10.** Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning
- 11.** Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration

The European TOs are denominated in the context of the Program priority axes

TO 5 was defined in view of the experience with floods of the Elbe and Neisse rivers in the past years (2002, 2010, 2013) and the future challenges of climate change.

TO 6: Since the Saxon-Czech border area has extensive and attractive cultural landscapes such as the Ore Mountains, Lusatian/Zittau Mountains, and Bohemian-Saxon Switzerland, which represent an important economic factor for the region, it was decided to include the thematic objective as a priority for the program. The potential for touristic development is based on its touristic infrastructure, the maintenance and rehabilitation of the historical cultural heritage, and the improvement of language skills. At the same time, the TO strives to contribute to the protection of biodiversity (SN-CZ, 2015, p.14).

TO 10: Within the program area, there are still sub-areas in which the participation of the young generation in tertiary education is relatively low. The sharp decline in education entrants as a result of the demographic and structural changes, especially in the Saxon

part, is problematic for the program area. Although there are many cooperation structures, for example university and school partnerships, cross-border mobility is still weak.

TO 11: Cooperation between regional, municipal, and state institutions and organizations in the program area is indispensable for the integration of the border region. In the last funding periods, cross-border cooperation evolved enormously in various areas. TO 11 is therefore expected to contribute to further expansion. The financial resources for technical assistance—priority axe 5—are primarily used for the implementation of the program.

4.2 The Program Area and its Characteristics

The program area corresponds to the statistical level of NUTS 3. Along the Saxon-Czech border, there are natural barriers such as the Ore Mountains ridge and Saxon-Bohemian Switzerland. Furthermore, it is characterized by a persisting language barrier and by a different legal and administrative system on both sides of the border. The joint program area covers a total area of 26,796 km² and has a population of 4,582 million. Of these, 3 million (66%) live on the Saxon side and 1.6 million (36%) on the Czech side (SN-CZ, 2020, p.18). With its population density and settlement structure, the program area can be characterized as a rural area (SN-CZ, 2015). A major problem is posed by the growing migration. Between 2007 and 2012, the number of inhabitants decreased by 3.48%, mainly on the German side. Due to the above-mentioned circumstances, a demographic change can be expected to happen in the near future. In this case, an above-average population decline will occur, as well as an increase in the average age. Furthermore, the program area is experiencing a high shortage of skilled workers, which will have a tremendous impact on economic development, which in turn will lead to a competitive disadvantage. The program area has to reckon with further deficits. In the Saxon as well as in the Czech part, the economic performance is still significantly below the national average. This includes the GDP level, which is close to 80% of the EU-27 average (SN-CZ, 2015, p.14). These characteristics, deficits, and specific needs of the program area must be considered for the practical orientation of the program, which is elaborated at the beginning of each funding period. They have also been the basis for the selection of the TOs for the strategy of the cooperation program.

4.3 Project Implementation

The cooperation program, as well as all other Interreg A programs, promotes the implementation of cross-border projects with ERDF funds. The EU provides up to 85% of the total expenses of a the implementation of a project. Project selection depends on a number of principles. The core principle is the involvement of at least two stakeholders situated in each country belonging to the area that is eligible for the program, and the plan and action of the project has to contribute to one of the TOs—priority axes—listed in previously in this chapter. The following are eligible for receiving EU funds:

German side	Czech side
Authorities and other institutions	Authorities and bodies of the public administrations
Local authorities, their institutions, and associations	Educational institutions
Legal persons governed by private and public law	Non-governmental organization (NGOs)
Social partner organizations	Trade and professional associations
Bodies responsible for road construction in the Free State of Saxony, regional and local authorities for transport infrastructure measures	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
Local public transportation operators (only priority axe 4)	Business (only priority axes 3)
Police authorities (only priority axe 4)	

Table 2: Eligible bodies for receiving funds from the ERDF.

Moreover, projects have to fulfill three of the four following criteria for cross-border cooperation: joint planning (mandatory), joint implementation (mandatory), joint staff, and joint financing. All project partners have to make a joint decision on one *Lead Partner*, who will be the sole contractual partner of the Development Bank of Saxony (Sächsische Aufbaubank – Förderbank – SAB) and who has the overall responsibility for the project in terms of organization, content, and financing. In the programming period of 2014-2020, 151 cross-border projects have been realized (as of 12.07.2021) along the following priority axes:

Table 3: Allocation of funds in the programming period of 2014-2020 along priority axes.

Priority axes	EFRE-Support (in EUR)	Share in (%)	Thematic objective	Implemented projects (As of 15.03.2021)
1	15.796.707	10	TO 5	12
2	68.715.674	43,5	TO 6	48
3	27.644.237	17,5	TO 10	45
4	36.332.425	23	TO 11	39
5	9.478.024	6	Technical assistance Targeted use of technical assistance resources should ensure that implementation is efficient and effective	100% exhausted

Whether projects are ultimately granted ERDF funding is decided by the Monitoring Committee. This committee also decides on any modifications to projects that have already been approved. Furthermore, it is responsible for monitoring the cooperation program as well as project selection. The meetings of the Monitoring Committee are usually held four times a year, and the Committee consists of the following members:

- Saxon Department for Regional Development as the Administrative Authority, head of mission
- Saxon State Ministry for Energy, Climate protection, Environment, and Agriculture as representative of the Saxon departments
- The Saxon State Ministry of Justice and Democracy, Europe, and Equality as the body for monitoring equality, equal opportunities, and non-discrimination
- Thuringian State Chancellery
- Euroregion Neisse-Nisa-Nysa, Saxon part

- Euroregion Elbe/Labe, Saxon part
 - Euroregion Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří, Saxon part
 - Euroregion Euregio Egrensis, Saxon part, as the legitimate representative of local authorities
-
- Chamber of Industry and Commerce of Chemnitz (IHK Chemnitz)
 - Saxony Tourist Association (Landestourismusverband Sachsen e. V.) (LTV)
 - German Trade Union Federation, District of Saxony (DGB)
 - German Red Cross (Landesverband Sachsen e. V.) (DRK)
 - NABU Landesverband Sachsen e. V. as an economic and social partner and for monitoring sustainability

4.4 Euroregions and Funds of Small Projects

As was already stated in chapter 3, Euroregions play a significant role in CBC and do so in the cooperation program as well. Euroregions and programs work together intensively. In each funding period, the cooperation program provides funds to the individual Euroregions, the so-called *Funds of small projects (Kleinprojektefonds)*. These funds are granted by the Euroregions for small-scale cross-border cooperation projects. These projects aim in particular at the realization of encounters, so-called people-to-people projects, and are intended to further intensify cross-border cooperation in all areas of social life. This mostly includes folk festivals or city events etc. The total expenditure of a small project must not exceed 30,000 euros and is supported with up to 15,000 euros of ERDF funding (SN-CZ).

4.5 Administrative Structure of the Program

The structure and responsibilities of the individual institutions and entities involved in the operational program are ultimately responsible for the efficient management, implementation, and achievement of the objectives. These responsibilities are allocated to the

different institutions and authorities of both countries.

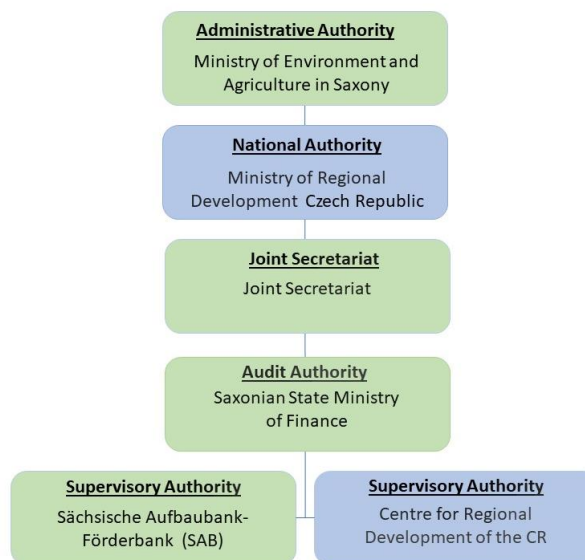


Fig. 7: Administrative Structure

Source: The authors own illustration based on the program document SN-CZ 2014-2020, p.102-107.

The overall responsibility for an efficient and effective implementation of the program lies with the Ministry of Environment and Agriculture in Saxony. The ministry is thus the exclusive point of contact for the European Commission. The core responsibilities of the Ministry include the establishment of appropriate project selection procedures and criteria, ensuring that projects to be financed are selected in accordance with the regulations applicable to the cooperation program and always comply with applicable legislation during implementation.

The National Authority in the Czech program area is the Ministry of Regional development, Department of European Territorial Cooperation. It is the direct point of contact for the Administrative Authority in all matters concerning the implementation of the program in the Czech program area. This includes the allocation and coordination of technical assistance funds in the Czech Republic, the monitoring of the tasks of the regional bodies, as well as supervising the delegated activities and ensuring the allocation of the support from the state budget of the Czech Republic.

The Joint Secretariat is responsible for the overall implementation of the cooperation program and mainly provides administrative support to the Monitoring Committee (Ger.

Begleitausschuss). It works on behalf of and in close coordination with the Administrative Authority and acts in cooperation with all other bodies involved in the procedure.

At the project level, the Joint Secretariat advises and informs potential project promoters and supports them in the search for suitable project partners. Together with its Czech partner, the Center for Regional Development, it is responsible for the acquisition and qualification of project applications and reviews and evaluates all project applications. Furthermore, during the implementation of the projects, it is responsible for the supervision of the projects.

The Saxon Audit Authority is responsible for auditing projects on the territory of Saxony and is assisted by a group of auditors from the Czech Ministry of Finance, which is responsible for the Czech territory. It regularly informs the Administrative Authority about the results of the projects.

The Supervisory Authority verifies whether co-financed products and services of Saxon or Czech beneficiaries have been delivered or provided, and whether the declared expenditure complies with the applicable legal provisions and the conditions for the support of projects. The relevant EU regulations and European procurement rules are taken into account. For the Saxon part, the SAB (*Sächsische Aufbaubank – Förderbank*) is the responsible body, and for the Czech Republic, the Center for Regional Development (CRR ČR).

5. The COVID-19 Pandemic

Officially starting from December 31, 2019, with an official report to the World Health Organization on a mysterious lung disease in the Chinese city of Wuhan, a new coronavirus¹⁸ has been spreading across borders and ultimately arrived in Europe a month later.¹⁹ In mid-March 2020, almost all countries in the Schengen area closed their borders

¹⁸ The disease is caused by a pathogen belonging to the coronavirus family SARS-CoV-2 (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus type 2). Clinically, the SARS-CoV-2 infection presents in many cases pulmonary in the sense of an interstitial pneumonia. The virus can be transmitted from humans as well as to animals (RKI) and an infection can lead to the severe diseases with fatal outcome.

¹⁹ To date, it is not known when exactly the lung disease broke out in China or what its cause is.

and reintroduced border controls. Freedom of movement was restricted as a reaction to curb the spreading of this highly infectious virus. For the first time in history, the borders of that many countries were closed simultaneously. Medeiros et al. have referred to this phenomenon as „covidfencing“. Reintroducing border controls and closing the border led to many complications in the everyday life of thousands of people living and working in border regions.

5.1 Corona Pandemic on the Czech and German Border

The Czech Republic was the first EU member country to close its borders on March 13, 2020. Initially, the border closure affected everyone, without any exceptions. Physical barriers in the form of fences were set up at crossing points on highways, foot and forest trails. Public transportation across the border was completely suspended. People who possessed the Czech citizenship and had their permanent residence in the Czech Republic were allowed to enter the country and instructed to self-isolate. Border controls on the Czech-German border were carried out by Czech police only. After realizing that this approach was not feasible, German authorities pressured the Czech government to make exceptions for cross-border commuters, as many sectors, such as the German health system, are dependent on workers coming from the Czech Republic (European Commission, 2021c, p.6). As a result, exceptions for cross-border commuter who worked in relevant jobs were made (European Commission, 2021c, p.6). However, cross-border activities that were not classified as relevant could not take place across the border. Later, business trips for relevant reasons were possible under the condition of having a negative PCR²⁰ test. This situation lasted until June 5, 2020, when the Czech government unexpectedly reopened its borders before the previously scheduled date, which was set for the June 15 (European Commission, 2021c, p.6). After both countries had eased the restrictions during the summer and cross-border encounters were possible again for the most part, corona-related travel and encounter restrictions unfortunately returned in the fall. On October 21, 2020, the Czech Minister of Health announced a new lockdown starting on October 22. On the same day, the Czech government closed its border for German citizens

²⁰ Polymerase chain reaction.

wanting to enter the country for shopping or tourist purposes. This also included student exchanges within the framework of cross-border projects, among others.

5.2 The SN-CZ Program and the COVID-19 Pandemic

The reintroduction of physical barriers in the Schengen area had a far-reaching impact on the CBC programs, since CBC and its people-to-people projects in border regions became almost impossible or at least very complicated. This also included the program between the Czech Republic and Saxony. “The year 2020 was undoubtedly a breaking point for the cross-border cooperation programs, the Saxon-Czech program included,” as is stated in a press release by the Czech Minister for Regional Development Dostálová. At the time of the border closure, 147 Projects were approved, and approximately one third of them were still in their realization phase. More or less all “soft” projects that are based on mutual encounters were in critical conditions. The projects concerned were mostly those of priority axes 3 and 4 (investing in education and improving the efficiency of public administration). For instance, due to a decree of the Saxon State Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, no educational trips of Saxon pupils abroad could take place until July 31, 2021. The cooperation program has identified opportunities during the corona pandemic to mitigate the negative impact on project implementation. These include alternatives such as utilizing alternative formats (e.g., videoconferencing, hybrid events, e-learning, etc.), a project extension until no longer than December 31, 2022, freezing projects for a few months, or other individual solutions.

6. Methodology

In this chapter, I will present my research methodology. I will start with a characterization of my research design, followed by a description of my instruments. Subsequently, I will discuss my sample construction in detail. Lastly, the interview procedure will be described.

6.1 Research Design and Instruments

In order to answer the research question “To what extent has the COVID-19-induced border closure affected cross-border cooperation between Saxony and the Czech Republic?”, a qualitative research was conducted in the form of expert interviews. This approach

was chosen with the aim of gathering greater insights on the interviewees' personal experiences, thoughts, and personal views. It is imperative to mention that the research I conduct is explorative. As the corona pandemic is a topical subject that has caused an unprecedented situation inducing unprecedented effects, this topic has hardly been analyzed and documented up until now. This makes it an innovative topic. The literature speaks of a "desideratum in research" (Ger. "Forschungsdesideraten") (Bortz & Döring, 2006, p.87) when referring to contents and topics which have been insufficiently researched and whose investigation is relevant for the future. Expert interviews were deemed the most suitable interview method for answering the research question. This is because this specific variation of an interview is focusing more on the target group—the experts who are interviewed—than on the methodological form of its conduct (Kruse, 2014). For the purpose of this thesis, experts are understood as people, mostly project managers, who live, work or spend most of their time in border regions and are versed in implementing bilateral projects within the scope of CBC. Moreover, all cross-border projects implemented by these experts were directly affected by the corona pandemic. Therefore, full validity is given as I receive reliable answers based on their own experiences. However, it must be stated that the experts are not the "object" of this investigation, but they are, so to speak, "witnesses" of a particular situation have experienced personally. Another advantage is the vast topic-related knowledge of the experts.

A typical feature of expert interviews is the reconstruction of social situations or processes in order to find a social scientific explanation (Gläser & Laudel, 2009, p.13). In this thesis, the aim is to measure an impact of a certain action—the impact of the border closure.

I decided to conduct a structured guided interview with a set of prepared open-ended questions following a strict guideline. A strict guideline was chosen as several different topics were to be covered in the course of the interview, determined by the aim of this research. According to Kruse (2014), precise questions regarding a specific topic are typical for conducting expert interviews.

My strictly guided questionnaire was divided into the following relevant topics (see also Annex):

- 1.) border areas
- 2.) cross-border cooperation

- 3.) borders
- 4.) corona restrictions
- 5.) border closure
- 6.) future of cross-border projects

These predefined topics correspond to the categories I will analyze later. Although the main focus of this research is devoted to the effects of the corona pandemic on CBC, it is imperative to ascertain how the experts assess and evaluate the development of CBC between the Free State of Saxony and the Czech Republic and how they see the future after the corona pandemic. That being the case, I started my questionnaire with general questions about the development of the border area, CBC, and the borders, in lieu of “warm-up questions” that seem to be easy-to-answer questions. This was to ensure relevance. My core questions regarding the corona pandemic were placed in the middle of the interview. My closing question were five topics regarding the future plans and needs in the realm of cross-border projects. Almost all of my questions, except for one narrative question, were open-ended questions. This form was chosen on purpose to give the interviewees the opportunity to answer freely and avoid yes-or-no answers. My questionnaire consisted of simple questions in which only one subject was covered with only one information needed. For the development of the questionnaire, no guide was used. The questions were chosen on the basis of their relevance for the present research.

In order to give the experts the chance to prepare properly for the specific questions, almost all questionnaires were sent to the interviewees in advance, except for the last one. The reason for this was that it was arranged spontaneously via phone. Nevertheless, I did not reveal all the questions that I planned to ask in the interviews. I kept some questions “hidden”, which were mostly questions that asked for personal stances. Thus, the interviewees had no possibility to prepare and were forced to respond spontaneously. Almost all questionnaires contained the same questions except for some slight adaptations regarding the different realm of projects of the interviewees’ personal involvement. The questionnaire contained between 11 and 18 questions and was drafted in Czech and German, since I knew in advance that my interview partners would be Czech and German speakers. The number of questions asked in the individual interviews was based on the content to be collected and chosen according to the time allotted for the interviews. This is because

I promised my interview partners in advance that the interview would not take longer than 40 minutes.

6.2 Presentation of the interviewees

Since I served my internship at the Joint Secretariat of the SAB, I asked my colleagues—the personal contact persons for the project partners—for a listing of projects that had been heavily affected by the corona pandemic. After receiving the list, I did my own research on the projects and their actions. It was important for me to conduct an interview with experts who implemented their projects in different priority axes and therefore had a different or even contrasting emphasis. In the end, I only chose projects from priority axes 2, 3, and 4—environmental protection, education, and partnership cooperation—since there was no suitable project in priority axe 1. In addition, it was important to choose experts who came from different regions of the border area. I managed to find suitable experts from the Ore Mountains, the Liberecký kraj, and the tri-border area.

Since I am proficient in both German and Czech, it seemed opportune for me to take advantage of it and to interview German as well as Czech experts. This approach allowed me to investigate and analyze the answers and views from different perspectives—from the German and from the Czech angle. In total, I conducted five interviews: three with German and two with Czech project partners, who primarily talked about their personal experience in their projects during the corona pandemic. It is important to say that one Czech project partner, PR, and one German partner, KP, were half Czech and half German. Initially, I planned to have at least six interviews, but since two people I contacted did not reply anymore after speaking to them via phone, I decided to proceed without them. Regarding the project “Handwerk im Dreiländereck”, however, I had the opportunity to conduct interviews with two experts. One of the experts was responsible for the administration in the project and the other one was the Czech teacher, who was in direct contact with the children. I particularly appreciated this offer since it enabled me to address questions regarding the children’s reaction to the changes induced by the corona pandemic.

All interviewees were contacted via phone, since my first interview requests via e-mail had not been fruitful. The phone numbers of all project managers were available on the website of the cooperation program.

My first interview partner was Mr. Christian Zimmer from the *Freier Schulträgerverein e. V. "SCHKOLA" in Zittau*, a Project Partner of the project "Handwerk im Dreiländereck." The interview was conducted via Zoom. Mr. Zimmer is the commercial director of SCHKOLA GmbH and is responsible for the administrative work in the project. SCHKOLA is a school which promotes encounters with children from neighboring countries such as the Czech Republic and Poland. SCHKOLA has been operating for more than 20 years. The subject of the project is the cooperation with German and Czech schools and the creation and piloting of educational programs focused on traditional crafts as well as on the development of Czech and German language skills of students and teachers. The aim is to further develop the social and cultural particularities, to overcome barriers, and to inspire students to assume technical professions. Since mainly children are involved in this project, I chose this particular project in order to investigate the development of the interpersonal relationships of the students during the corona pandemic and how they reacted on alternative teaching methods, in this case online formats.

My second interview partner via Zoom was Mr. Ingo Reinhold from the *Staatsbetrieb Sachsenforst, Forstbezirk Marienberg*, the Lead Partner of the project "Moorevital." Being the leader of multiple cross-border projects and actively working in the border region, Mr. Reinhold is regarded as a particularly suitable expert for cross-border projects. Together with four different project partners (two Czech and two German), the project's mission is the revitalization of marshes and peats which were formed at high altitudes after the last ice age and were very well and effectively drained for agricultural use in the past. Aside from the revitalization of marshes, Mr. Reinhold has tackled the revitalization of forests which were heavily affected by the acid rains coming from the heavy industry during the communist era. The third interviewee is Mr. Kampil Prisching, German teacher at SCHKOLA and also an active collaborator of the project. Since Mr. Prisching works actively with the students, he was asked specific questions regarding the children.

My fourth interview partner in a face-to-face interview was Mrs. Pavla Růžičková, a Czech project manager with German roots who is working for Geopark Ralsko and has several years of experience in multiple cross-border projects. During the corona pandemic, Mrs. Růžičková was involved in the GECON project—Grenzüberschreitendes geologisches Kooperationsnetzwerk (*Cross-border geological cooperation network*). The project's mission is to connect all institutions and people dedicated to research,

protection, or popularization of the geological heritage in the Saxon-Czech border area. Besides GECON, Mrs. Růžičková is implementing a second project, which is called *GeoAdventures* and aims to train outdoor guides.

My last interview partner in a face-to-face interview wanted to stay anonymous. It should be mentioned, though, that the interviewee is not only an expert in cross-border cooperation but also in border studies and the history of the border areas. He has examined the development of the border regions extensively for many years. Unfortunately, no further information can be revealed.

6.3 The Interviews

Regarding the interview conditions, I was striving to conduct face-to-face interviews, since I consider this type of interview the most suitable one. In my last face-to-face interview, for instance, an atmosphere of trust quickly developed, which noticeably helped the success of the interview. I knew from prior experience that face-to-face interviews usually allow for a certain closeness between the interviewee and the interviewer, which may lead to freer and more open responses. Unfortunately, due to the location of my full-time internship being Dresden, the long distance to some interview partners, and their availability being restricted to weekdays, it was not possible for me to conduct all interviews face-to-face. Therefore, three of the five interviews were conducted using the free Zoom version. I decided to use this tool for the interviews since I was already familiar with this platform and its simultaneous audio record function. Besides this, all of my interview partners were familiar with the tool as well. Nonetheless, this tool proved to be the wrong decision since the free version is restricted to 40-minute sessions. Although I was aware of this fact, the restricted timeframe put me under enormous pressure during the interviews and kept me from fully focusing on the interview. Moreover, I was forced to skip a question in several interviews in order not to cut off my interview partner, which for obvious reasons has had a negative impact on my research.

The interviews were recorded on two devices: on my laptop via the Zoom recording function and on my cell phone via the *Dictaphone* application, as a backup. The last two interviews were conducted face-to-face on my cell phone only. For both interviews I had to cross the border to the Czech Republic. This was possible thanks to the low corona

infection rates since the end of May of 2021, which meant there was no obligation to self-isolate.

The first of my face-to-face interview was conducted in Usti and Labem where I met my interview partner in a café. Even though it was conducted in a café in a mall, no distraction occurred during the interview. The sounds quality, however, was poorer than expected and previously tested. In combination with the background noise, which I did not perceive as particularly loud during the interview, the recording was of such poor quality that transcribing it turned out to be a challenge.

For my second face-to-face interview I had to travel to the Ore Mountains, where my interview partner worked on his new projects. Since this interview partner wished to stay anonymous, no further information to the specific town will be given.

All of the interviews were carried out in the mid-morning, according to my interview partners' requests. This was possible due to my flexible working hours. In contrast to the online interviews, the face-to-face interviews were very time-consuming. In the end, I did not notice a significant difference between the two interview types. All interviews ran smoothly, and all of my interview partners took enough time to deliver detailed and comprehensive answers. Beside this, each interviewee was very talkative and showed interest in my research as well as in my studies and my German-Czech background. However, it noticeable that during the face-to-face interviews, I engaged in much more small talk with my interview partners than during the Zoom interviews. All in all, however, face-to-face interviews turned out to be more preferable, since they were more personal.

Before conducting the interviews, I introduced myself and explained that I was doing an internship at the Joint Secretariat at the SAB besides my studies. However, I accentuated that the study at hand was conducted within the scope of my Master's studies. This information was imperative for transparency since one question in my questionnaire concerned the Joint Secretariat. The five interviews had an average length of 36:15 minutes. The longest one lasted 39:10 minutes and the shortest one 33:12 minutes.

6.4 Transcription and Processing of Data

For the transcription of the interviews, I used the MAXQD software. Since this was the software I was going to use for my computer-aided analysis as well, it was the most

practical solution. Choosing a computer-aided analysis was a faster option for conducting a well-coordinated analysis compared with a sequential analysis, which would have been unfeasibly time-consuming. I also chose this software for my qualitative data analysis due to the reputation of MAXGD as the most common software for computer-aided analysis on the German market and the free 30-day trial period, which enabled me to properly test the software.

First, I transcribed all interviews in their full length except for the last interview, since the interview asked me to only publish the text segments actually needed. A transcript-based analysis (Kuckartz, 2007, p.39) was conducted using the entire transcripts. Concerning transcription conventions, I used a linguistics-oriented system, the GAT 2. Since my analysis was rather content-oriented, I did not include all detailed prosodic information in the transcription. I mainly focused on speech pauses and their length, elongations, paraverbal expressions such as laughing and groaning, not fully articulated words, and incomprehensible expressions. Stress, volume, and dialect were excluded from the transcription. For my transcriptions, I used the initials of the interviewees—CZ, IR, KP, PR, and ANONYM for the interviewee who wanted to stay anonymous. The segments that I present in my analysis are in the original language, Czech or German, with an English translation under every line. I chose this approach since I considered it important to have the nuances of the original wording available.

I chose a computer-aided content-structured analysis according to Kuckartz. This method is a code-based evaluation method, which fragments the data in order to only refer to separate segments in the evaluation. Thanks to guidelines I had elaborated, all topics in form of questions were already in the correct order. The relevant data material, which consisted of the interviewees' responses, was extracted in form of text segments and allotted to the codes that were already represented by the questions. I merely had to slightly change the denominations. This step is referred to as *coding*. Beside the main codes, I created sub-categories during the coding process. The majority of the codes were singled out deductively from the data. The deductive codes were known in advance since they derived from my interview questions. However, during the interview I also coded inductive codes, which I will indicate later in my analysis. The MAXQD software enabled me to properly allocate my selected text segments to the single codes. Moreover, I could add comments to the single segments.

7. Results

In order to answer the research question “The impact of COVID-19 related border restrictions on cross-border cooperation between Saxony and Czech Republic“ five experts interviews were conducted following a strict interview guideline which was arranged in a sequence of topics. The answers of the experts to those topics were afterwards divided into categories and sub-categories and analyzed. The single chapters are grouped corresponding to the categories. The expert’s responses base on their personal experience in their respective project and on their subjective perception and opinion. The subsequent categories and subcategories were established -inductive and deductive.

1. Cross-border cooperation

General assessment of the development of the CBC in the Saxon-Czech border area

In the first question, the respondents were asked to give a specific statement on how they assess the development of CBC in the Saxon-Czech border region. This made it possible to ascertain certain development trends in the border region. All of the interviewees evaluate the development of CBC as of 2004 as very positive. Interview CZ and PR both perceive the development of CBC between Saxony and the Czech Republic as a “implicitness” that is reiterated several times by CZ.

CZ: [0:02:43.2] also eher eine grosse selbstverständlichkeit (.) ich habe das gefühl es ist eine ganz (-) so schöne selbstverständlichkeit dass:: eh menschen aus tschechien in zittau häuser kaufen und da wohnen (.) eh dass sie einfach teil unserer community sind (...) also das ist so eine (.) ehm finde ich eine ganz schöne neue selbstverständlichkeit und zwar nicht nur in solchen projekten wie die die skola die eben ja auch ein bildungsprojekt ist (...) ich erlebtes genauso auch in eh in eh in kleingartenvereinen (.) im geflügelzüchtervereinen und kaninchenvereinen (.) das ist völlig normal also solche solche ganz selbstverständlichen dinge (.) über die grenze hinweg (.) die funktionieren (.) recht gut finde ich inzwischen relativ selbstverständlich (-)

CZ: [0:02:43.2] so rather a great implicitness (.) i have the feeling it is a really (-) so wonderful implicitness that:: eh people from czech republic buy houses in zittau and live here (.) eh that they are simply part of our community (...) so that is such a (..) ehm i think it is a very wonderful new implicitness and not only in such projects like the schkola which is an educational project (...) i experienced the same in eh in eh in small garden clubs (.) in poultry breeders clubs and rabbit clubs (.) this is completely normal such things

across the border are taken for granted (.) .) they work in the meantime (.) quite well i think it is relatively natural (---)

Interviewee CZ does not only refer on CBC on the project level but also on cooperation across the borders between communities and further association. However, PR mentioned merely the “implicitness” of CBC on project-level.

PR: [0:00:16.3]: *velice pozitivně těch projektů se prostě rozjíždí spousta (.) a:: eh myslím ze jsme navázali dobrou spolupráci a musím říct že (-) já sama jsem třeba vrůzných projektů a musím říct že je to čím dál tím lepší a přijde mi úžasné že už to začíná být tak samozřejmé (.) jo že jako kdykoliv něco připravujeme tak už prostě pro nás ze jako rovnou říkáme to by mohly dělat němci s námi (.) že už nás to vůbec nenapadne případně poláci (-) takže mně to přijde že: konečně se to dostává zase jako do správných kolejí*

PR: [0:00:16.3]: *very positive, lot of projects are starting (.) and:: eh I think we have established a good cooperation and I have to say that (-) I am also active in different projects and I have to say that it's getting better and better and I find it amazing that it's becoming so obvious (.) yeah, like whenever we prepare something we just say for us that the Germans could do it with us (.) that we don't even think about the case of the Poles anymore (-) so it seems to me that: it's finally getting back on track*

Besides the positive development and the “implicitness” of CBC IR and Anonym refer as well to a constant intensification of CBC since the accession of the Czech Republic to the EU. IR refers that between the ČSSR (Czechoslovak Socialist Republic) and GDR (German Democratic Republic) was always “base” of CBC.

IR: [00:00:33.92] *ja (.) also ich denke es gibt durchaus eine (.) positive entwicklung im sinne ner intensivierung (-) also es ist durchaus so dass es auch vor dem eu-beitritt zum teil auch schon vor der vor der politische wende in deutschland und auch in der damaligen cssr ehm (.) natürlich zusammenarbeit gegeben hat und diese kontakte auch über diese politischen veränderungen hinweg vor allen dingen zwischen den beteiligten fachleuten aufrechterhalten wurden (...)*

IR: [0:02:11.0] *also so so ein grundlevel hat es immer gegeben (.) aber wir haben seit für den frostbezeugt marienberg glaub ich kann ich das seit (.) ja 2010 11, 12 etwa so sagen(-) haben wir durchaus auch eine projektbezogene zusammenarbeit in mehreren projekten (---)*

IR: [00:00:33.92] *yes (.) so i think there is definitely a (.) positive development in the sense of an intensification (-) so it is definitely the case that even before the eu accession even before the political changes in germany and in the cssr ehm (.) there were already certain cooperations and these contacts*

were also maintained throughout these political changes especially between the experts (...)

IR [0:02:11.0]: *so there has always been such a basic level (.) but we have since for the frost witness marienberg I think I can say that since (.) yes 2010 11, 12 something like that(-) we have definitely also a project-related cooperation in several projects (---)*

However, IR also mentioned that even before the collapse of the communist regime there was a certain cooperation which was maintained.

Anonym explained the evolution of CBC that started with a time of „euforia“especially after the accession of the Czech Republic into the EU and after the Schengen Agreement which later changed into “stable routine cooperation”.

Anonym: [00:00:21.9] *myslím si že od (.) toho vstupu do eu přes: (.) vstup do schengenu eh v tý době jako by panovala taková euforie a navazovalo se spousta vztahů (.) spousta spolků začnou spolu spolupracovat to byla taková doba (.) eh nadšení (..) ta se pak změnila podle mě v nějakou dobu: takový ti: větší stabilní rutinní spolupráce. tam bych řekl že hodně aktivit opadlo (.) a: eh (...) a začne lidi jezdit pracovat do německa čemuž vzniklo spousta jako známostí jako tý ekonomický provázanosti (.) takže tam myslím že ta ekonomická provázanost jako: vlastně až do covidu jako zásadně jako se zvyšovala a to pohraničí se na tom začalo stávat podle mě jako závisli (.) oboustranně češi na práci v sasku a sasové na pracovní síly s česka (.)*

Anonym: [00:00:21.9] *i think that from (.) the accession to the eu through: (.) the accession to schengen area eh at that time there was such an euphoria and a lot of partnerships were established (.) a lot of associations started to cooperate with each other it was such a time (.) eh of enthusiasm (..) which then changed in my opinion into a time: such as: more stable routine cooperation. there i would say that a lot of activities ceased (.) and: eh (...) and people start to commute to work in germany and there was a lot of like contacts like that economic interdependence (..) so there i think that the economic interdependence like: actually up to the covid like progressively increased and the border region started to become in my opinion like dependent on that (..) both czechs on work in saxony and saxons on labour from the czech republic (.)*

Furthermore, Anonym mentioned the economic interdependence and speaks about an “joint dependency” regarding commuters on the Saxon and Czech side. Interesting point is that Anonym explicitly mentioned two times that the economic interdependence merely lasted till the corona pandemic, and that Saxony was important till corona occurred.

Anonym: [0:02:01.8] ze to sasko je fakt důležití (.) a až do tý korony to byla velká výhoda musím (.) jo říct ale od doby korony to je naopak velká nevýhoda ((laugh)) (.) takže myslím si že to vlastně až do tý korony do toho korona viru to::: eh fungovalo a kdo chtěl tak mohl navázat spoustu kontaktů: eh a rozvíjet se velmi pohodlně a úspěšně

Anonym: [0:02:01.8] *Saxony is really important (.) and until the corona panemic it was a great advantage I have to (.) yeah say but since the corona panemic it's a big disadvantage ((laugh)) (.) so I think that actually until the corona panemic it::: eh worked and who wished could make a lot of contacts: eh and evolve very comfortably and successfully*

Reasons for Cross-Border Cooperation

Asking about their personal importance of CBC some interesting factors were detected. Two interviewees IR and CZ accentuated primary their geographical localization that leads them to operate CBC. In the case of CZ it is the tri-border area and in case of IR the Ore mountains that share a common border. Furthermore, both experts are mentioning the realm in which they work (in case of CZ it is education and IR it is forestry) as an imperative reason that require CBC.

CZ [0:12:01.5] wenn wir hier in der dreiländerregion aufwachsen (.) dann (.) wollen wir dass die: eh auch ne interkulturelle kompetenz in bezug auf das nachbarland lernen ehm (-) das heißt sprache und auch tatsächlich begegnung mit dem nachbarn (.) also schulklassen kommen zu uns unsere schulklassen gehen dahin (.) und ehm (-) das ist eigentlich das ziel und im grunde sind die projekte die: mittel denen wir uns bedienen um diese ziele umzusetzen(.)

CZ [0:12:01.5] *when we grow up here in the three-country region (.) then (.) we want them to: eh also learn intercultural competences in regard to the neighboring country ehm (-) that means the language and also actually meeting their neighbors (.) so school classes come to us and our school classes go over there (.) and ehm (-) that's actually the goal and basically the projects are the: means that we use to implement these goals (.)*

IR [0:09:3 5.2] in der vergangenheit denken sie an die geschichte der schadenemissionen an den saurer regen und das waldsterben und so weiter das war eine unmittelbare beeinflussung die unser handeln forstliches handeln heute noch bestimmt(.)

IR [0:10:55.2] *in the past think of the history of harmful emissions of acid rain and forest dieback and so on that was a direct influence that still determines our forestry actions today(.)*

IR alluded to the heavy industry in the past that was positioned to the border area especially into the ore mountains that caused heavy environmental damages and which now “forces” them to cooperate in order to tackle this problematic.

IR also insofern haben wir mit diesen folgen noch stark zu tun (-) ehm daneben um ein weiteres beispiel zu nennen haben wir wildtiere für die die grenze natürlich durchlässig ist und die nicht danach fragen sind sie jetzt auf tschechischen oder deutschem gebiet (.) sondern die leben halt da wo sie günstige bedingungen finden und wechseln das auch (-) (...) also insofern gibt es viele einflüsse die einfach dazu zwingen dass man miteinander eh kommunizieren sag ich mal dass man zusammenarbeit

IR *so in this respect we still have to deal with these consequences (-) ehm besides this to give another example we have wild animals for which the border is of course permeable and which do not ask whether they are on czech or german territory (.) but they just live where they find favorable conditions and also move across the border (-) (...) so in this respect there are many influences which simply force us to communicate with each other eh let's say to work together*

Language barrier

Since three of the interviewees accentuated the language barrier without asking about it, I decided to establish this topic as a subcategory. The subcategory was initially not foreseen. It came into being through inductive coding out of the interview's responses. IR refers to a „Sprachproblem, eine sehr harte Sprachbarriere“ which „führt natürlich dazu, dass eine gewisse Trennung schon da ist. IR even goes beyond and speaks of a „barrier effect” caused by the “language barrier” that he personally experienced in his projects.

IR: [00:30:38.83] also (--)
was ich mir (.) oder oder was (.) eine erfahrung aus einen der beiden projekten ist(.) ist eben die (.) dass sie die (-) die unterschiedlichen sprachen schon immer noch eine (.) eine grosse barriere wirkung haben (.)

However, PR refers as well to a present language barrier, but in contrast to IR she stresses that nobody of the project partners and participants in her project cared about it.

PR 0:45:59.4: *mě tohle těší že to nikdo neřeší (.) a i ta jazyková bariéra na začátku to bylo takový že všichni na sebe jako koukali (.) ale měli jsme úžasní tlumočnice (.) odborníci se kolikrát mezi sebou se baví anglicky teda to se*

přiznám protože (-) to prostě tak jako všichni umějí všichni znají ale takový ty berührungsängste už tam vůbec nejsou (-)

PR 0:45:59.4: *it makes me happy that nobody cares (.) and even the language barrier at the beginning was such that everybody was like stare at each other (.) but we had amazing interpreters (.) the experts talk to each other many times in English I admit because (-) everybody can speak it but the berührungsängste (fear of contact) is not there anymore (-)*

CZ and IR mentioned the unwillingness of the German people to learn the Czech which he regrets.

CZ [0:03:56.7] wobei ich immer mit nem weinenden auge sagen muss auch deswegen weil ich immer den eindruck habe dass es in tschechien nach wie vor eine hohe bereitschaft dafür gibt die deutsche sprache zu lernen (.) also ehm also wesentlich höher als in deutschland die bereitschaft die tschechische sprache zu lernen (-) wobei die auch gewachsen ist

CZ [0:03:56.7] *although i always have to say with a teary eye also because i always have the impression that in the czech republic there is still a high willingness to learn the german language (.) so ehm significantly higher than in germany the willingness to learn the czech language (-) although this has also increased*

IR [0:31:03.3] da muss man sagen da sind die die deutschen im erlernen von fremdsprachen wenn es nicht gerade englisch ist ohnehin (--) ich sag jetzt ma (.) I mehr bittet man möge mir das verzeihen ein bisschen faul manchmal (.) (laugh) also es fällt uns schwer (.)

IR [0:31:03.3] *one must say that the Germans are in the acquisition of foreign languages if it is not English (--) i will say (.) please forgive me what i will say now a bit lazy sometimes (.) (laugh) it is difficult for us (.)*

Common Identity

The present category about common Identity in the border area proved to be a very interesting aspect to with various different views of the interviewed experts accompanied by different justifications. Two of the interviews claimed that there is a common identity in the Saxon-Czech border area and two disagreed. ANONYM approved a common identity mainly speaking about the identity of the Czech and Saxon inhabitants of the ore mountains. He claims that dwellers of the Ore Mountains on both sides of the border have a

closer relationship to each other than for example the Ore Mountains- dwellers with Prager²¹. The following excerpt will introduce his point of view with its explanation

Anonym [0:02:49.2]: °ehm musím říct že i češi tady s krušných hor mnohem lépe vnímají saský krušnohorce (.) než třeba Pražák (.) jo že prostě mám pocit že ten ten status těch (censored) tech nepřátel prostě už dávno nemají Němci ale pražáci (.) (...) máme pocit že i Sasové říkají že v krušných horách se vyrobí hodnota v chemnitz se to prodá a drážďanech se to utratí (.) takže takže vlastně taky mají despektem vůči těm velkým městům takže se cítí jako okrádání ty obě strany těma centrama °a (...) °a myslím že o to víc potom ty samé saský a český krušnohorci k sobě jako Inou (.) Takže vlastně si myslím že ta společná identita tam je. Jsem jako hrdý na to že jsou s krušných hor že můžou spolupracovat a že tak trošku bojují proti těm bohatším jo (.) protože u nás ústecký Karlovarský kraj je nejchudší část republiky a co vím tak krušný hory jsou vlastně nejchudší část Německa a Johanngeorgenstadt je nejchudší město německa vůbec takže to jako epicentrum

Anonym [0:02:49.2]: °ehm I have to say that even the Czechs here from the Ore Mountains have a much better perception of the Saxon Ore Mountains (.) than for example a Prague resident (.) yeah I just have the feeling that the status of those (censored) of those enemies have not the Germans anymore but the Prague residents (.) (...) (...) we have the feeling that even the Saxons say that in the Ore Mountains the value is produced in Chemnitz and sold and spent in the Dresden (.)) so actually they also have a disrespect for those big cities so they feel like they are robbing both sides with those centres (...) °a (...) °and I think that even more Saxon and Czech Erzgebirge people felle attached to each oteher (.) So actually I think that the common identity is there. They are proud of the fact that they come from the Ore Mountains that they can cooperate and that they are fighting against the richer ones, yeah (.) because here the Ústí-Carlsbad region is the poorest part of the republic and as far as I know the Ore mountains are actually the poorest part of Germany and Johanngeorgenstadt is the poorest town in Germany at all because it's like the epicenter

Anonym refers that the dwellers of the Ore Mountain feel closer to each other than to Prager for instance. A similar assumption mentioned KP in his statement of the dwellers in the tri-border area by Zittau.

KP [0:30:54.0] hier die geschichte ist ähnlich also durchwachsen ne also karl iv die tschechische krone also slawen haben zittau gegründet sozusagen und so weiter dann ist es auch kein westdeutsch dann sozusagenen also haben wir uns auch nah (.) also sind wir uns auch näher als zum beispiel mit bayern oder so (.)

²¹ Inhabitants of Prague

(...) liberec boomt ne also zum beispiel das zeigt sich auch in den immobilienpreisen zittau dagegen ziemlich ehm (.) arm wenn ich das jetzt wirklich offen sagen kann und deswegen sind wir uns aber auch näher weil das ist dann ungefähr dasselbe level

KP [0:30:54.0] *here the history is similar so middling as charles iv the czech crown slavs have founded zittau so to speak and so on then it is also not west german so to speak so we are also close to each other (.) we are closer to each other than for example with bavaria or so (..) (..) liberec is booming so for example that is also reflected in real estate prices zittau on the other hand quite ehm (..) poor if i can say that really openly and that's why we are so close to each other.) (...) liberec is booming ne so for example that also shows in the real estate prices zittau on the other hand quite ehm (.) poor if i can say that now really open and that's why we are closer because we are about the same level*

KP mentioned that the residents of the tri-border area in Zittau are closer to the Czechs than for instance to Bavaria. He rusticated it with their common history and the same economic level. Anonym refers to the exact same idea. Based on their poor economic situation of the towns and regions, in Anonym example of the Ore Mountains, they feel more connected and closer to each other.

IR who is active in the Ore Mountains as well does not agree with the statement of a common identity, but claims being on the right track to it.

IR [0:03:10.1] auf der sächsischen seite wohnen bürger fühlen sich als (.) zuerst vielleicht als erzgebirger (-) dann als sachsen (.) und dann als deutsche (-) und die tschechen tun das in einer ähnlichen Weisem natürlich auch (-) ne (.) nicht zuletzt (.) eh besteht natürlich das sprachproblem eine sehr (.) harte sprachbarriere (...) ehm (.) und das führt natürlich dazu dass eine gewisse trennung schon da ist (.) aber (.) was ich (2 sek) meine zu beobachten ist schon eine (.) ein ein ein wachsendes bewusstsein (.) einwohner in einem(-) mehr oder weniger einheitlichen landschaftsraum beiderseits der grenze zu sein (-) also ich sags mal schlicht erzgebirge zu sein ehm (.) vor allen dingen (.) eh: spüre ich es deswegen weil es seit einiger zeit auf der tschechischen seite bemühungen gibt (-) an orte die noch den nach (.) nach 1948 infolge der benes dekrete eh: (.) beseitigt worden sind zu erinnern (...) eh also man versucht sich dort ein bisschen (.) doch auf dieses eh erbes (.) und auch auf die ja teilweise deutschen wurzeln (.) die dort liegen zu besinnen und versucht die positiv (.) sag ich mal für die zukunft zu interpretieren (.) und das ist für mich schon eine entscheidende veränderung gegenüber vielen jahren oder jahrzehnten nach dem krieg (...) auf der deutschen seite: (3.7 sek) ist das denke ich nicht ganz [00:05:30.00] so intensiv (.) also da wird natürlich das angrenzende tschechische gebiet immer noch zwar als landschaftlich sehr schön empfunden (.) und es sind gute gelegenheiten etwas günstiger zu tanken manchmal und zigaretten zu kaufen (.) ehm (---) ja: ich glaube da ist noch entwicklungspotenzial da ich will es mal so formulieren (...) (.) also ich denke (.) eh es entwickelt sich da durchaus etwas im sinne einer (--)

grenzüberschreitende gemeinsame identität (.) ich würde aber momentan noch nicht soweit gehen dass diese schon besteht (-) sondern es gibt ansätze und entwicklungen in diese richtung denke ich

IR [0:03:10.1] *on the saxon side living citizens feel as (.) first maybe as erzgebirger (-) then as saxons (.) and then as germans (-) and the czechs do that in a similar way of course (-) ne (.) last but not least (.) eh of course there is the language problem a very (.) hard language barrier (...) ehm (..) and that leads of course to the fact that a certain separation is already there (.) but (.) what i (2 sec) mean to observe is already a (.) a growing awareness (.) to be a resident in a (-) more or less uniform landscape area on both sides of the border (-) so i say it simply to be erzgebirger ehm (.) above all (.) eh: i feel it because for some time now there have been efforts on the czech side (-) to remember the places that were removed after (.) after 1948 as a result of the benes decrees (...) eh: (...) so they are trying a bit (.) to remember this eh heritage (...) and also to remember the partly german (...) heritage (...).) and also to the partly german roots (.) which are there and try to interpret them positively (.) I say for the future (.) and that is for me already a decisive change compared to many years or decades after the war (...) on the german side: (3.7 sec) i don't think it's quite [00:05:30.00] as intense (.) so of course the bordering czech area is still perceived as scenically very beautiful (.) and there are good opportunities to fill up a little cheaper sometimes and to buy cigarettes (.) ehm (---) yes: i think there is still potential for development i will formulate in this way (...) (..) so i think (.) eh there is definitely something developing in the sense of a (--) cross-border common identity (.) but i would not go so far at the moment that it already exists (-) but there are approaches and developments in this direction i think*

As well as Anonym, IR accentuate the fact that people strongly identify themselves by being from the Ore Mountains. Moreover, he mentioned the efforts of the Czech people to make the former history of the Sudetenland more visible by the progressive reconstruction of monuments from the Sudetenland era. This has been interpreted as a positive aspect. It shows that people move on with the negative thought what happened in the history. They take efforts to make the people aware what happened in the history that to simply ignore it. As already mentioned, IR stresses that the language barrier is posing in the development of a common identity a separation factor.

PR [0:03:38.5] *to se úplně nemyslím (.) akor zrovna tady v tom pohraničí protože tady (.) to je poznamenání strašně ze jo tím odsunem a tím co sem potom přišlo tady jsem prostě absolutně vykořenění (.) tady prostě lidí kteří by tady prostě měli kořeny je strašně málo (-) ale myslím si že už se to uz jako vrací a dostávají se i třeba hlavně v tech městech to je hrozne znát (bad quality) se prostě dostává do (.) nijakého normálního stavu a už tam jsou prostě lidi kteří (.) si jsou vědomí: (.) že: žijí v místech kde dříve bylo jiný obyvatelstvo a: už se s tím prostě naučili*

pracovat přijde mi že už prostě spousta lidí tady hledá i prostě historii kořeny a: jenom tak že prostě když (.) se budeme(-) nemůžeme se vyhýbat historii a zavírat oči a ve chvíli kdy to prostě člověk nějak normálně zpracuje tak s toho můžou být normální vztahy myslím si že úplně jako (.) kdybyste měli taky nějakou českou německou identitu to si nemyslím (-) ale nevím jak z druhé strany (.) ale zase věřím tomu že prostě ty vztahy sousedství jsou čím dál tím lepší.

PR [0:03:38.5] *I don't think so (.) especially here in the border area because here (.) it is marked terribly by the expulsion and what came afterwards, we are just absolutely rootless here (.) there are just very few people who have roots here (-) but I think it's slowly returning and it's getting even especially in the towns it's terribly noticeable (bad quality) it's just getting to (.) to a normal state and there are just people who (.) are aware: (.)) that: they live in places where there used to live a different population and: they've just learned to deal with it it seems to me that a lot of people here are looking for the history of the roots and: just so that when (.) we (-) can't avoid history and close our eyes and the moment when you just process it in a normal way then you can have normal relations I think it's just like (.) if you also had some Czech German identity I don't think so (-) but I don't know how from the other side (.) but again I believe that just the neighbourhood relations are getting better and better.*

Beside IR also PR mentioned the fact that people searching for history of the former inhabitants of the region and that they move on from the cruel history that happened. Moreover, she accentuates that from the moment, people have processed mentally their history, they can start to interact normally with each other again and good neighborly relations can develop. This is now the case on the Czech side. Unfortunately, we have no point of view how the German people think about it. If they also feel the same way.

Denying a common identity, PR is mentioning that people in the Border area, who came after the expulsion of the Sudetengermans did not put down their roots yet, and thus no common identity can be establish.

CZ concurs with Anonym and by saying that the fact that people living close to the border the actions that are taking place, the different cultures is a part of their identity. The question of whether they are dealing with an common identity was not answered.

CZ: [00:05:39.18] *glaube ich (.) ich glaube da gibt's verschiedene lager dazu(.) so könnte man vielleicht sagen eh ich bin mir sicher dass es viele menschen gibt für die ist es teil ihrer ihres ganz normalen (-) wie soll ich sagen ihres lebens ihres alltags es gehört zu ihrer sozusagen zu ihrer kultur dass drei meter weiter hinein in ein anderes land mit einer anderen sprache und mit einer anderen währung und das ist sozusagen auch teil dir dessen was heimat hm ist auch*

dieses fremde in anführungszeichen (.) ehm ein paar meter weiter ehm (-- das ist (.) ehm da bin ich mir ziemlich sicher also(.) (...) das ist eh schon teil deren identität

Meaning of the border

Due to the moving evolution of the Saxon-Czech border and especially regarding the closing of the border in March 2020, the experts were asked to comment on their subjective semantics of the borders. In general, can be said that the border was stated as something positive without mentioning the function of separation.

PR: no jako česko německá hranice dneska už v podstatě jako už to není co by nás oddělovalo (.)

PR: *well, like the Czech-German border is basically no longer a thing that separates us (.)*

Two of the experts accentuated the word “invisible” while describing its characteristics.

PR: ta hranice v podstatě už dneska je pro nás taková co se týče pracovní víceméně jako ne neviditelná nebo není překážkou. (...) už to neberu jako hranice mezi prostě lidmi zdaleka ne.

PR: *the border is basically already such for us today in terms of work more or less as not invisible or not an obstacle. (...) i don't think of it as a boundary between people anymore not at all*

IR [0:10:54.4] ja (.) da ist eine linie im gelände eine imaginäre die wird durch grenzsteine markiert (-) (...) da ist natürlich ne ne grenze eine veränderung da (.) aber es ist nichts bedrohliches sag ich jetzt mal es ist nichts was (.) eh angst (-) unwohlsein oder ähnliches hervorrufen würde (.) sondern man kann (.) eben sehr entspannt damit umgehen vor allem natürlich vor allem natürlich nach dem schengenbeitritt

IR [0:10:54.4] *yes (.) there is a line in the terrain an imaginary one that is marked by border stones (-) (...) of course there is a border a change there (.) but it is nothing threatening i say now it is nothing that (.) would cause fear (-) discomfort or something like that (.) but one can (.) just deal with it in a very relaxed way especially of course especially of course after joining the schengen area*

IR stated the border as something not that is not intimidating. ANONYM even described border as its home from which it is difficult to move away. He describes the border in the following way:

Anonym: pro mě hranice jako(.) ehm° když si představíte že na hranici ehh° připichnete do země tyč (.) pak n ani přiděláte gumový lano takový lano který je strečový a teď vyrazíte do toho Německa (.) a čím a já to mám teda tak (.) čím jsem dál ty hranice dál do Německa tím více cítím to napětí se vrátit zpátky jo že to už stačí dál už nepotřebuju (.) už se chci vrátit jo že vlastně ta hranice je taky jako takový jako: (.) takový:: jako volání zpátky že čím jsem dál tak (.) tak jim říkám že už to stačí už jen 10 kilometru od Hranice to paráda to je doma (.) ale pak to dál už mě to víc táhne zpátky jako na tom gumovým lane (.) ale jak už to nemusím nemusím to znát tolik už to co dál (.)

Anonym: *for me the border is like(.) ehm° when you imagine that at the border you ehh° stick a stick (.) then you add a rubber rope that is stretchable and now you go to Germany (.) and this is in my case like this (.) the farther I am from the border to Germany the more I feel the tension to go back yeah that's enough I don't need to go further anymore (.) I want to go back yeah that actually the border is also like: (.) like:: like a call back that the further I am so (.) so I tell them that it's enough just 10 kilometers from the border it's great it's home (.) but then the further I go the more it pulls me back like on that bungee cord (.) but as I don't need it anymore I don't need to know what is after that (.)*

Challenges during the restriction in the course of the corona pandemic and its aspects

Since the impact of the corona pandemic is the core subject of the present thesis, a variety of data material was collected through the interview question which resulted in a multitude of subcategories. The data material mainly based on personal experiences of the experts gained during the implementation of their individual projects in different districts along the Czech- Saxon border.

Negative impacts on individual projects

The individual projects of the interviewees were affected of varying degrees by the corona pandemic. The project of CZ which was an educational project involving children of primary school age was heavily affected. After the corona restrictions came into effect almost nothing happened.

CZ [0:15:33.3] das hat eine grosse unsicherheit reingebracht (.) sodass wir ab märz erstmal (-) ehm (3 sec) relativ wenig zusammen gemacht haben also keine wirkliche begegnung mehr stattgefunden hat (.) (...) aber die das projekt selber hat unter corona(.) ja : muss man so sagen sehr gelitten (.) sehr gelitten (.) bis dorthin bis märz ein bis märz 20 ist toll hat auch eh viel spass gemacht (...) es war ja das schwierige an corona du weisst ja nie was bringt die nächste woche?

wird es jetzt alles gut? wird alles noch schlimmer? ja, aber im endeffect hat sie ja darunter gelitten. das muss man ganz klar konstatieren

CZ [0:15:33.3] *that has brought a great uncertainty (.) so that we have done from march first (-) ehm (3 sec) relatively little together so no real meeting has taken place (.) (...) but the project itself has suffered from corona(.) yes : you have to say very much (.) very much (.) until there until march one until march 20 is was great has also been a lot of fun anyway (...) it was the difficult thing about corona you never know what the next week will bring? will it all be good now? will everything get worse? yes, but in the end it has suffered from it. that has to be stated quite clearly*

CZ accentuated that the uncertainty about what will happened in the following weeks was the most challenging. The cross-border encounters, which were the basis for the intercultural exchange between the students in this project, could no longer be practiced after Corona.

The project of Anonym could be evaluated as the most effected project presented in this thesis. Anonym refers to a “broke down of organizational mechanisms” which was mainly caused by communication problems.

ANONYM: (5.2) *no tak byl tam problém když se rozpad celý ten organizační mechanismus když se ty starostové jednou měsíčně scházely (.) a:: a to se úplně rozpadlo(--)* mám pocit že to poté už to nikdy pořádně nefungovalo a a:: ta e-mailová komunikace mi přijde že nefunguje (.0) *myslel jsem si že všichni mi říkali na začátku projektu že mám všechno řešit přes maily ústní dohody nejsou závazný nebo důležitý (.) a ukázal se v pravý opak že když to s někým proberou po telefonu tak to spíš zafungovalo než když jsem jim psal maily všem (.) (...) takže to prostě my jsme to museli jako víceméně vzít do svých rukou cely ten projekt a točit to svým mužstvem přesvědčení*

Anonym: (5.2) *well there was a problem when the whole organizational mechanism broke down when the mayors met once a month (.) and:: and it completely fell apart (--)* *I feel like it never worked properly after that and:: the email communication doesn't seem to work (.) I thought that everyone told me at the beginning of the project that I should handle everything through emails verbal agreements are not binding or important (.) and it turned out the opposite that if you discussed it with someone on the phone it worked rather than if I emailed them all (.) (..) so it was just us more or less taking the whole project into our own hands*

Another aspect that the interview mentioned was the cancelling of the events and celebration on which the project should be presented which resulted in a lower publicity for

the project, by reaching less people. In lieu of the official presentation an online video was created.

ANONYM: všechny obce měly za úkol udělat den (censored) že měla na území všech obcí proběhnout veselice (.) tak to se tedy zrušilo protože to nešlo (.) místo toho jsme udělali jedno video

Anonym: [00:25:44.6] Ovlivnila koronavirová pandemie váš projekt určitě ovlivnila protože to měla být větší sláva že jo (.) měla by před rokem měla být na (censored) měla mi velký slavnostní zahájení (.) (censored) měla mít velký akce (.) a ani jedna nebyla (.) takže si myslím že ten dosah toho projektu bude mnohem vyšší a není to video si myslím že se jako rozšířilo je možný ale dneska videi je tolik že to trosku jako zapadne ale (--) ale jako rozhodně kdyby nebyla pandemie tak si myslím že to má mnohem větší publicitu a i o tom dozví víc lidí (2.9 sec) pak prostě ty vztahy trošku narušila holt ta blbá komunikace (---) snad to vyprchá snad se to vrátí zpátky

Anonymo: [00:25:44.6] *Did the coronavirus pandemic affect your project for sure because it was supposed to be a bigger celebration right (.) it was supposed to be a year ago at (censored) it was supposed to have a big opening ceremony (.) (censored) it was supposed to have a big event (.) and neither one was (.) so I think that the reach of the project would have been much higher and it was not and the video I think it reach the people but nowadays there are so many videos that it got lost (--) but like definitely if there wasn't a pandemic I think it has much more publicity and more people will know about it (2.9 sec) then just those relationships got a bit disrupted due to the poor communication (---) hopefully it will get back to normal hopefully we will come back to the good relations*

PR participated in two projects during the corona pandemic. The first one was merely slightly affected due to the fact that it was at the end of its implementation. Only a few activities as encounters and the final conference could not take place due to the restrictions. The second project that started later was much more affected. The projects mission was the training of so-called geo guides for the terrain. Since this activity cannot be conducted in an online format, the project freeze.

PR: pak jsme zase připravili celý školení celý ti původce zase jsme měli jsme úžasný ohlas my jsme asi dvacet přihlášených průvodců no a: (.) museli jsme to tedy zrušit kvůli koruně

PR: natáčí i tam se natáčí nějaký společný image film a opět prostě nás to jako že je my máme třeba natočené jako český geopark a nemáme natočený Německo my jsme tam byli akorát těsně předtím nebo těsně potom než zavřeli Hranice

PR: *then again we prepared the whole training for the guides again we had an amazing feedback we had about twenty registered guides and: (.) we had to cancel it because of corona*

PR: *they were also filming some kind of common image film there and again it's just like we finished the filming in the Czech geological park and we didn't film in Germany we were there just before or just after they closed the Borders*

Furthermore, as ANONYM also PR project had difficulties with the recording of their image film since the filming should have taken place in the Czech Republic as well as in Saxony. When asking if the potential participants keep stayed motivated after various postponements, she referred that people showed constantly great interest.

Referring to challenges that have been faced during the corona pandemic IR stated the impaired cooperation during the corona pandemic and the canceling of the opening celebration of the project.

IR: [00:20:46.55] *was jetzt die corona pandemie angeht (.) eh die hat natürlich die (.) unmittelbare zusammenarbeit (.) während der fertigstellung oder endphase des projekts schon beeinträchtigt (.) (...) sollte im september vergangenen jahres mit einer grossen eröffnungsfeier abgeschlossen werden wir hatten ursprünglich ein richtiges moorfest geplant mit bürgerbeteiligungen von deutscher und sächsischer seite das ist natürlich corona zum opfer gefallen (.) wir haben es (.) haben uns dann eh überlegt dass wir zumindest eine von der mit den begrenzten teilnehmerkreis aber doch grenzübergreifend eine (.) einweihung oder eröffnungsveranstaltung durchführen (.) ja: und leider (.) hat die hat dann auch stattgefunden am 26. september voriges jahr (.) aber leider einen tag vorher ist sind die ehm (.) ist die eh pandemie situation in tschechien so eskaliert dass alle von uns eingeladenen tschechischen partner freunde und kollegen absagen mussten und nicht teilnehmen konnten (--)* das ist vielleicht das gravierendste (.) (...) man kann sagen bis jetzt in die jüngste vergangenheit ehm eh vor wenigen eh wochen noch (.) also auch der projektabschluss abschlussbericht eh letzte auszahlungsanträge und so weiter (-) da konnten wir nur eben mit einschränkungen oder erschwernisse auf zuarbeit unsere tschechischen kollegen zurückgreifen (.)

IR: [00:20:46.55] *as far as the corona pandemic is concerned (.) eh it has of course already affected the (.) immediate cooperation (.) during the completion or final phase of the project (.) (...) was supposed to be finished in september last year with a large opening ceremony we had originally planned a real marsh festival with citizen participation from german and saxonian side that of course did not take place due to corona (.) we (..) then thought about it (...).) then we thought about to plan at least a cross-border inauguration or opening event with a limited number of participants (.) yes: and unfortunately (.) then it also took place on 26 september last year (.)) but unfortunately one day before that the ehm (.) the eh pandemic situation in the czech republic escalated in such a way that all of our invited czech partner friends and colleagues had to cancel and could not participate (--)* this was maybe

the most tragic (..) (...) you can say until now in the recent past ehm eh few eh weeks ago (.) so also the project conclusion final report eh last payment applications and so on (-) this we could only manage during the restrictions or difficulties an in cooperation with our czech colleagues (.)

Furthermore, he mentioned the difficulties that their Czech colleagues who commuted from Czech to their German office during the corona pandemic. This was during the pandemic impossible.

Inconsistent lockdowns as a cause for complications

Since three interviewees point out several times the inconsistent lockdowns in the Czech Republic and Saxony and the accompanied chaos, a new subcategory was created.

According to PR the chaos and lack of information that were provided caused much more damage than the pandemic itself.

PR: [0:34:10.5] (.) ta:k si myslím že mnohem více by se mělo dbát na jeho informovanost protože ten chaos co tady byl jsi myslím že: (.) napáchal mnohem víc škody než pomalu ta pandemie jako taková nechci to nějak zlehčovat ale: (-) prostě myslím si že jsme se měli ne tady zavřít (.) ale spíš prostě informovat co se děje vedle a jak se to dá (.) zvládat

PR: [0:34:10.5] (.) so:o I think that much more attention should be paid to inform people because the chaos that was here I think: (.) did much more damage than the pandemic as such I don't want to make out the pandemic un-serious issue but: (-) I just think that we should have locked us up here (.) but rather just inform properly the people what's going on next door and how it can be (.) handled.

CZ even referred to an uncertainty which resulted from the different lockdowns on the Czech and Saxon side. This uncertainty led to the termination of joint encounters.

CZ [0:15:23.4] und dann gibt's die unterschiedlichen lockdowns zu unterschiedlichen zeiten in tschechien und in deutschland oder in sachsen (.) dann gibt's die grenze wieder offen ist sie nicht offen kann man einfach drüber kann man in gruppen rüber ehm muss quarantäne oder nicht das hat eine grosse unsicherheit reingebracht (.) sodass wir ab märz erstmal (-) ehm (3 sec) relativ wenig zusammen gemacht haben also keine wirkliche begegnung mehr stattgefunden hat (.)

Moreover, he mentioned that the different lockdowns separated the people. That they realized that they did not belong together:

CZ [0:21:32.4]: (.) ich finde: ehm der kollateralschaden ist ja auch der dass das das (.) ehm trennende wieder ins bewusstsein der menschen rückt da sind wir auf einmal wird deutsche und tschechen (.) und nicht bewohner einer dreiländerregion (.)

CZ [0:21:32.4]: (.) *i think: ehm the collateral damage is also that the (.) ehm separating again moves into the consciousness of the people suddenly we are german and czechs again (.) and not residents of a three-country region (.)*

Anonym mentioned the same aspect as CZ. According to him the different actions which were not brought in line in both countries also recollected the border as something that separates. Therefore, the German and the Czechs experts share the same point of view.

Anonym [0:32:53.5]: jenom jako člověk se začne uvědomovat tu hranici zase jo (.) že na jedné straně je režim který řeší pandemii jinak než na druhé straně (.) a v tu chvíli chcete nechte to ti lidi prostě oddělí no

Anonym [0:32:53.5]: *only as a human being you start to realize the border again (.) that on one side there is a regime that solves the pandemic differently than on the other side (.) and at that moment if you want or not it separates the people*

The inconsistent lockdowns to different times complicated the cooperation between the Czech and German project partners during the pandemic

Moreover, CZ suggested that both countries should have undergone a more coordinated approach regarding the corona measures.

CZ: [0:22:12.2] (-- also wenn ich jetzt klar wenn sie jetzt sagen ich darf jetzt wirklich richtig in die wundertüte greifen da hätte ich sag natürlich müssen sich eh eh dresden und prag dazu abstimmen mit den massnahmen synchron laufen dann muss man sowas auch nicht machen

CZ: [0:22:12.2] (-- *so if I i had the right to decide I would have said of course that Dresden and Prague must coordinate with each other with the measures run synchronously then you do not have to do something like that*

The inconsistent lockdowns also hindered to participate in joint events, as it was the case of Ingo Reinholds project.

Effects of the border closure

The border closure induced presumably the most detrimental consequences. This measure was in conflict with the main principle of the European integration. It caused not only complication in the project partners cooperation across the border, but it also left its mark

on the people's perception of the border as was already mentioned in the previous subchapter.

CZ [0:23:58.4] diese grenze war wie ein rollback(.) also diese schliessung (.) wie so rollback wieder wieder wie ein sichtbarmachen dessen dass es da doch unterschiede gibt und die deutschen und die tschechen und das finde ich sehr schade

CZ [0:23:58.4] *this border was like a rollback (.) this closure (.) like rollback again like a visualization that there are differences and the Germans and the Czechs and I find that very sad*

CZ accentuated that the border closure evoked the separating in people's mind. Furthermore, is mentioning the word "rollback" for explain that with this action Europe made a big step back. KP shared a similar perception with CZ:

KP 0:32:53.1 es schön das sich jemand anderes auch noch für so eine sache einsetzt dass so eine grenzschließung nicht geht also das ist (.) und wie gesagt auch mit unserer schule haben wir hier versucht jahrelang stück für stück diese diese grenze verschwinen zu lassen und dann kommt wie gesagt von einem moment so ein schlag und es diese minimalistische arbeit war dann (.) uff ein stück zurück gelaufen

KP 0:32:53.1 *it is nice that someone else also stands up for such a thing that such a border closure is not possible that it cannot be done (.) and as I said also with our school we have tried here for years piece by piece to let this border disappear and then comes as I said from one moment such a blow and it this minimalist work was then (.) uff a piece run back*

In Kamil's statement, it is once again clear that the mission of the project and cross-border cooperation is to eliminate the border in order to establish more intercultural contacts with their neighbors on the other side of the border. He also describes the border closure as "a step back".

Anonym stated a "collapse of the CB effect". He reasons that people have ceased to trust each other.

Anonym: ta přeshraniční efekt prostě fungovala až do korony (.) a v době korony se to vlastně úplně rozpadlo protože vlastně si ty dvě strany přestali věřit protože najednou češi zavřeli hranice a pak uzavřeli s Němci (-)

Anonym: *the cross-border effect simply worked until corona (.) and at the time of the corona it actually completely fell apart because actually the two sides stopped trusting each other because suddenly the Czechs closed the border and then closed with the Germans (-)*

Furthermore, it shows how vulnerable the CBC is and how much we need it as IR states in his response:

IR: [00:26:34.45] naja sie hat vor allen dingen gezeigt wie (--) cha ich will es mal so sagen wie verletzlich (.) eh letzten endes diese zusammenarbeit ist also wie schnell durch äussere umstände ich betrachte jetzt corona oder die corona pandmie als einen solchen äusseren umstand (.) wie schnell doch: ehm durch solche ereignisse (.) und entsprechende (.) massnahmen was das grenzregime angeht eben solche projekte auch (--) verzögerung oder in gefahr bringen können (.)

IR: [00:26:34.45] *well it has shown above all how (--) cha I want to put it this way how vulnerable (.) this cooperation is how fast it can be affected by external circumstances I now consider corona or the corona pandemic as such an external circumstance (.) how fast nevertheless: ehm by such events (.) and corresponding (.) measures concerning the border regime just such projects can also (--) be delayed or put at risk (.)*

Impact of the corona pandemic on interpersonal relationships (approximation or alienation)

In connection with the many damages cause by the corona pandemic as communication problems between project partners, closure of the border etc. I strive to know if those impacts caused an approximation or an alienation between the people on both side of the border. The opinions vary between the experts. Two interviewees tend to an alienation and two are tend to the opposite. Interesting rationales accompanied the experts' responses:

Anonym: [00:20:58.9] no (.) já si spis jako myslím ze to odcizilo (---) tak jako ochladily ti vztahy (-) a ted' se to jak pomalu dává dohromady ze (9.3 sec) ze třeba na úrovni tech spolku a tech obci tam ta důvěra jako zůstala (.) ze je to dlouhodobý (--) ale u (--) ale to ze člověk kouká (.) kdo je v obchode když sem jezdíme do rewe nebo do netta tak mam pocit ze se na nás dívají trochu jinak no (.) ale (2.6 sec) já nevím no <<pp> (---) jako (7.5 sec) jako jako dlouhodobé českou německý vztahy to jako nezhorší (.) jenom jako člověk se zacne uvědomovat tu hranici zase jo (.)

Anonym [00:20:58.9] *well (.) I think that the border cllosure alienated (---) the relationships cooled down (-) and now it is slowly getting back together (9.3 sec) but on the level of the associations and communities the trust is still there (.) that it is a long term (--) but with (--) but the fact that people giving you bad looks when you are in the supermarket when we go for shopping to rewe or netto than i have the feelig that they are looking in a strange way at us (.) (2.6 sec) I don't know, (---) like (7.5 sec) like it will not affect Czech-German relations on a long term (.) just like one starts to be aware of the border again (.)*

According to anonym it it led to a certain alienation between the people since the border closure. However, it will not impair the German-Czech relationship in the long term.

CZ: [00:24:23.01] (6.5 sec) also wenn dann eher entfremdet (-) ich glaube die die ein interesse aneinander haben die haben ehm (--) die haben jetzt sozusagen überwintert ehm (.) mit der grenzschliessung und diesen ratzfatz wissen die bescheid eh ob man rüber hinüber kann und nutzen diese möglichkeiten auch wieder (.) ehm (-) aber ich glaube diejenigen die es auf dem weg mitzunehmen gilt die auch hier leben eigentlich kein interesse haben oder eher eine gefahr (...) da haben die erfahrungen einfach mal über ein jahr lang abgeschnitten (.) die möglichkeit diese erfahrung zu machen (.) insofern würde ich immer sagen ja das hat jetzt eher getrennt als verbunden es gab aber auch die einzelaktion das fand ich total nett in bestimmten dörfern (laugh) haben die ja dann auf deutsch und tschechisch fahnen aufgestellt

CZ: [00:24:23.01] (6.5 sec) *so if then rather alienated (-) I think those who have an interest in each other they have ehm (--) they have now so to speak hibernated ehm (.) with the border closure and they are always up to date whether they can cross the border again and use also this opportunities again (..) ehm (-) but i think those who have to be taken along the way and who live here and actually have no interest in wht is a cross the border or see it rather as a danger (...) there the experiences have simply been cut off for over a year (..) the possibility to make this experience (..) in this respect i would always say yes that has now rather separated than connected there were also the individual actions that i found really nice in certain villages (laugh) they have then put up flags in german and czech (...)*

According to CZ it merely alienated the people who are generally not interested in CBC or in the contact with the people on the other side. People who active in CBC and are interested in this transfer they just made a “hibernation”. Furthermore, he mentioned joint actions as that took place on many borders to demonstrate there engagement to CBC.

IR states that the closure was not long enough to lead to an alienation between the people, and an approximation would be too exaggerated. Therefore, he is not sharing the thought of an alienation. It is the contrast, people, explicitly mentioning the employees of the Euroregion, are looking forward to finally continue the project work.

IR: [00:29:12.78] also ich (.) ich denke (.) für solche effekte war diese zeit nicht lang genug sage (...) also ich denke eher direkt corona hatte da auf diese prozesse nur einen geringen einfluss bis jetzt (.)(..) dass das einfach langfristige prozesse sind (.) (...) corona hat da vielleicht zeitlichen bisschen ein dämpfer gesetz sag ich jetzt mal aber hat es nicht grundsätzlich in frage gestellt denke ich (.) also was ich so mitbekomme auch letzten endes über die arbeit anderer mitarbeiter der euroregion man freut sich einfach drauf dass es jetzt wieder losgehen kann dass man wieder anfangen kann (...) insofern hat das eh ist dieser

ist diese dille wenn man es so will nicht nachhaltig gewesen aus meiner sich also (-) ja mehr zusammengeschweisst (-) das wäre mir jetzt hier zu weit ge-griffen ist

IR: [00:29:12.78] *so i (.) i think (.) for such effects the time was to short (...) so i rather think that corona had only a small influence on these processes until now (.) (...) that these are simply long term processes (.) (...) corona has maybe put a bit of a damper on it i say now but has not fundamentally put it in question i think (.) what i hear also from the work of other employees in the euroregion.) one is simply looking forward to the fact that it can now start again that one can start working again (...) insofar this has not been sustainable from my point of view so (-) and bring people together (-) that would be too far fetched*

PR is in contrast to the other interviewee speaking explicitly about an approximation in her project. Project partner and relentlessly asking about progresses and about the situation. Furthermore, she mentioned the fact, that it was the opposite: the threat of being separated, brought them closer together.

PR: [0:33:38.3] *z naší zkušenosti musím říct že: to lidi spíš sblížilo a že: musím říct že naopak mě hrozně jako potěší ten zájem (.) jak jsem ukázal že to asi děláme dobře že v podstatě všichni partneři nejenom v tomhle projektu ale (.) s kterým spolupracuje tak ten vzájemný kontakt byl strašně pozitivní všichni jsme se navzájem neustále ujišťovali jak to vypadá (.) jo a (.) snažili se různě si pomáhat (.) a musím říct že ve chvíli kdy jsme něco potřebovali všichni strašně vstřícní (.) a musím říct že ta hrozba toho že nás zase rozdělí (.) nás naopak spojila*

PR: [0:33:38.3] *from our experience I have to say that: it brought people closer together and that: on the contrary I have to say that I am very pleased with the interest (.) it has shown that we are probably doing it the right way that basically all the partners not only in this project but (.) with whom we cooperate so the mutual contact was very positive we were all constantly re-assuring each other how it looks (.) yeah and (.) trying to help each other in different ways (.) and I must say that in the moment when we needed something everyone was very helpful (.) and I must say that the threat of being separated again (.) brought us together*

Alternative Solutions for a successful completion of the projects

Due to the Corona pandemic, various activities which were planned in the projects could not be implemented because of the restrictions. I asked the interviewees which alternatives they had used and whether the utilization of these alternatives had had any negative or even positive effects on their project.

For two projects, the project duration had to be extended due to the Corona Pandemic – the project of CZ and PR. ANONYM project was presented with an online video and brought to the public instead of the live presentation at various festivals and events. Moreover, PR, IR used virtual formats for their final conferences and CZ with KP took advantage of it to maintain the contact with their partner schools in Czech and Poland. However, since the project” Handwerklich im Dreiländereck”.

CZ [00:16:24.76] und dann kam der nächste lockdown (-) ehm wir haben da noch ein paar virtuelle formate platziert (.) ja (---) ja: die sage ich ganz ehrlich (.) bei handwerk im dreiländereck natürlich an ihre grenzen stossen also (.) aber es war uns klar wir wollen auf jeden fall eine virtuelle (.) basis schaffen auch um den fahrt nicht zu lange abreissen zu lassen dass wir den faden wieder aufnehmen mit unserem partnereinrichtung ist vollkommen klar es ist allen vollkommen klar

CZ [00:16:24.76] *and then came the next lockdown (-) ehm we have placed a few more virtual formats (.) yes (---) yes: which I say quite honestly (.) for handicraft in the tri-border area of course reach their limits so (.) but it was clear to us we want to create in any case a virtual (.) basis to not stay too long without contact*

However, according to KP the children handled the online format well, since the conferences were practical-oriented.

IR evaluated the usage of the virtual formats rather a “challenge”.

IR: wir haben dann unsere abschluss konferenz als videokonferenz durchgeführt als (.) zum ersten mal grenzüberschreitende telefon und videokonferenz was funktioniert hat aber durchaus eine herausforderung war (.)

IR: *we held our final conference as a videoconference (.) for the first time cross-border telephone and videoconference which worked but was quite a challenge (.)*

In contrast to IR, PR refers to realization of an online conference as positive

PR[0:13:05.4]:jsme akorát měli naplánovanou konferenci závěrečnou a ta teda byla online a zase to bylo pro nás je to pozitivní svým způsobem protože jsme se naučili prostě další věci pracovat s tým zoomem to co jsme se předtím vůbec neuměli představit a ve finále vlastně ta konference byla velice úspěšná (.) myslím že tam bylo hodně hodně lidí a i tam jsme třeba byli lidi třeba i z větší dálky který by nepřišli to že vlastně tím že odpadlo to cestování mohli být jenom připojeni tak přeci byly další já nevím třeba z Bavorska a podobně prostě další spřáteleni třeba odborníci s geoparku který by pravděpodobně sem vůbec nedorazili takže nás paradoxně ta korona zasáhla ale ne až tak jako tragický.

PR [0:13:05.4]: *We just had a final conference scheduled and so it was online and again it was positive for us in a way because we just learned other things working with the zoom team that we didn't know how to do before and in the end actually the conference was very successful (.) I think that there were a*

lot of people there and even there were people from far away who would not have come that actually by dropping the travel they could only be connected so there were other people I don't know from Bavaria and so on just other friendly experts from the geopark who probably would not have come here at all so paradoxically the corona hit us but not as tragic.

PR justifies the positive outcome of the online conference with the fact that it had much more participants from weiter weg than it would actually have when it would have taen place face-to-face.

Assistance of the Joint Secretariat (SAB) during the Corona Pandemic

Since the Joint Secretariat is responsible for the monitoring of the project, I asked the interviewer about which alternatives were provided by the the Joint Secretariat's, which I introduced in chapter XX in order to adequately tackle the pandemic. Before receiving the answer to my actual question, I received from two experts compliments by handling administration and helping with the chaos.

Anonym: všechno jsme řešili a hlavně s (censored) (...) bez ni by to nějak těžko proběhlo takže myslím že jako sekretariát k tomu jako velmi pomohl zvlášt' jednat s tou německou stranou a myslím že i všechny jako průběžné zprávy žádosti o platbu kontrola ti to bylo úplně perfektní že to fungovalo úplně skvěle byl jsem s toho nadcení tenhle ohled pro mě uklidňující (.)

Anonym: *they solved everything and especially with (censored) (...) without her it would have been somehow difficult so I think that the joint sekretariat was very helpful especially now to deal with the German side and I think also all the reports payment request checking it was absolutely perfect it worked absolutely great I was really happy*

PR: [0:15:12.9] sab byli strašně jako nápomocni a musím říct že ve chvíli kdy vlastně (.) tady byl strašný chaos ze vlastně ty nařízení se měnily prostě den ze dne že jo nikdo nevěděl co vlastně můžeme a co nemůže na jednou 20 lidí a jednu deset lidí tak to bylo takový hrozne zoufalý (.) a do toho všeho vlastně přišel akorát mail od sab (.) ze teda jako chápeme že se to děje a jsme s vámi a nebude problém prostě projekt prodloužit což pro nás v tu chvíli bylo strašně jako zachraňující hurá (.)

PR: [0:15:12.9] *sab were very helpful and I have to say that at the moment when actually (.) there was a terrible chaos due to the changing regulations day by day yeah nobody knew what we can do and what we can't one day 20 people can meet and the other day only ten people so it was so depressing (.) and in the middle of all this we received an email from sab (.) that we understand that this is happening and we are with you and it will not be a problem to just extend the project which was a lifesaving hurrah for us at that moment (.)*

Positive aspects of the corona pandemic

Besides various negative effects and challenges that the projects in the course of CBC have faced, some positive aspects were stated by the experts.

KP mentioned that the break during the corona pandemic enabled the participants of the project and the employees of the school to think and develop new forms for new projects.

KP 0:18:35.8 jetzt für uns erwachsene die teams ehm ist es eine ganz spannenende zeit weil wir haben ehm so unser begegnungsmodell ist schon sehr alt und (.) es war fast nicht möglich dadurch das es eben so traditionell ist das ist jetzt mehr als 20 jahren (.) (...) und plötzlich öffnet sich für uns eine möglichkeit etwas gründlich zu ändern also also wir können jetzt wirklich über einen neustart nachdenken und mutig sein und vielleicht andere eh wege der begegnung gehen (.) (...) in der alltagsroutine sozusagen wären wir dazu nicht gekommen (.)

KP 0:18:35.8 *now for us adults the teams ehm it is a very exciting time because we have ehm so our encounter model is already very old and (.) it was almost not possible by the fact that it is just so traditional it is now more than 20 years old (.) (...) and suddenly an opportunity opens up for us to make a change, so now we can really think about a new start and be courageous and maybe go other ways of our encounters (.) (...) in the everyday routine, so to speak, we would not have come to this (.)*

Referring to positive aspect of the pandemic, ANONYM mentioned the effect on the Ore Mountains regarding tourism. Since people could not travel abroad, they started to spend they holidays in the mountains. The rising number in tourists were in the summer 2021 in the Ore Mountains extremely recognizable. Due to that fact, the tourist infrastructure needs to be expanded.

Anonym: [00:33:40.3] takže si myslím ze díky díky eh tomu roky jak ti lidi byli zavření tak ti krušný hory získali strašné jako (.) na renomé a hrozne sem přišlo jako investoru a lidi (.) takže to dlouhodobě jako ovlivní tu tvar (.) tech krušných hor (.) možná ze na německý straně to tak nebylo ale tady jo

Anonym: [00:33:40.3] *so I think that thanks to eh the years when those people were closed up so the Ore Mountains gain (.) on reputation and a lot of investors and people came here (.) so in the long run it like affect the shape (.) of those Ore Mountains (.) maybe on the German side it wasn't like that but here it was*

As already mentioned before, PR stress the positive effect of the online formats of the conference. According to PR due to the online conference the project reached much more people than it would have been conducted face-to-face.

PR: [0:13:13.7] pro nás je to pozitivní (.) svým způsobem protože jsme se naučili prostě další věci pracovat s tím zoomem to co jsme se předtím vůbec neuměli představit a ve finále vlastně ta: konference byla velice úspěšná (.) myslím že tam bylo hodně hodně lidí a i tam jsme třeba byli lidi třeba i z větší dálky který by nepřijeli (.)

PR: [0:13:13.7] *for us it's positive (.) in a way because we learned just other things how to work with zoom we couldn't imagine this before and in the end actually the: conference was very successful (.) I think there were a lot of people there and even there we had people maybe from further away who wouldn't have come (.)*

Personal attitude regarding CBC in the future

In order to outline the development path of cross-border cooperation after the Corona pandemic, the last question was addressed to the future development of the CBC. Interrogating if the challenges faced during the corona pandemic will hinder the experts in starting new projects everyone negated without hesitation.

CZ [00:26:27.84] auf gar keinen fall (.) also ob das kommt oder nicht kommt wissen wir alle nicht (.) ja es wird uns gar keinen fall daran hindern (.) eh die zusammenarbeit jetzt wieder endlich wieder aufzu hab ich ja vorhin schon beschrieben wieder aufzupumpen und (...) ich bin mir aber auch sicher (.) dass wir neue (.) ehm projekte neue formate entwickeln werden und dann auch wieder im sinne eh (.) der projekt im sinne der sab oder also auch da wieder auf der matte stehen werden irgendwann und sagen wir haben da eine idee (-) vielleicht unterstützt er uns damit

CZ [00:26:27.84] *no way (.) if corona will come or not come we all don't know (.) yes it will in no way prevent us (.) eh to finally pump up the cooperation again and (...) but i am also sure (...) that we will develop new (.) ehm projects new formats and then also in the sense of eh (...) the project in the sense of the sab and im sure sometime we will be in front of their doors again and say we have a new idea (-) maybe you will supports us with it*

IR justifies his answer with the fact that the challenges the project was facing during the pandemic were demanding but nothing that could not be coped with. As well as all the other experts who this question was posed, also PR would not be deterred by the pandemic to start new projects:

PR: [0:36:18.1] v některých ano (.) v některých eh eh takhle (--) ne v přípravě dalších projektů myslím si že naopak všem prostě i tím že jsme se naučili pracovat online tak jsme zjistili že se dá dělat s spoustu věcí (.) a: že zrovna třeba na jiným projektu (.) kdy děláme landartovej festival (.) tak tam jsme se jako

opravdu připravovali prostě dvě verze prostě a musím říct ze prostě naopak nás to prostě naučilo eh další projekty různě připravujeme (-)(...) zase nám jako ne-zabránilo že bychom nechtěli už spolupracovat ne ne ne naopak zase čekáme co zase jako sab vymysli co nám nabídnou

PR: [0:36:18.1] *in some yes (.) in some eh eh like this (--)* not in the preparation of other projects I think it is the opposite just by the fact that we learned to work online we found out that you can work with a lot of things (.) and: that for example in another project (.) when we are doing a land art festival (.)) we were like really preparing two versions and I have to say that it is the opposite it just taught us (...) again, it didn't stop us from wanting to cooperate anymore, no no no no, on the contrary, we're waiting to see what they'll come up with

PR mentioned a positive aspect of the corona pandemic, the fact that they learned to work with online formats as zoom and discovered all the possibilities that can be conducted with this tool allowed them to discover many possibilities that can be realized with online formats. Their stance indicates how relentless there are in realizing cross-border projects, and that it is something important for them and that the corona pandemic will not hinder them in realizing new project. It is their job to implement cross-border projects, and constantly think of new formats and ideas that could be implemented and financed by the SAB.

Anonym: [00:34:36.6] *myslím ze nějaký projekty v oblasti ochrany přírody vyhlásování no prostě nějaký infrastruktury turisticky infrastruktury tým jak teď sem jezdí čím dál víc lidí ale nejsou širší silnice nejsou parkoviště nejsou tady žádný infocentra nejsou prostě to zázemí pro ti lidi ze tohle rozhodne do toho musíme investovat (.) mělo by se investovat do nejky kultury nějakých tradic který tady v tom regionu byli a zmizely tak to rozhodne ten region by mel zpátky získat svoje nějaký renomé*

Anonym: [00:34:36.6] *I think that some projects in the field of nature conservation some infrastructure tourist infrastructure since more and more people are coming here but there are no wider roads there are no parking lots there are no information centers there are just no facilities for those people, so we have to invest in it (.) it should be invested in some culture of some traditions that were here in the region and disappeared so definitely the region should regain its reputation (...)*

IR sees, as already mentioned, the language as a huge obstacle. Therefore, he wishes to invest more into projects that addresses language acquisition besides environmental protection. As we can see, environmental protection and culture is an important aspect in CBC. This is due to the fact, as we have also presented in the chap. 3.1.1 that the regions

depend on its nature, since parts of the border region are well-known ranges, also for international tourists.

8. Discussion

In this chapter, I will introduce my findings grouped under individual sub-headings. First, I will explain and justify the topics of my questionnaire. Afterwards, I will outline and discuss significant findings.

In order to evaluate the impact of the COVID-19-induced border restrictions on the cooperation program between Saxony and the Czech Republic, a qualitative analysis was conducted. To this end, five experts who had carried out cross-border projects during this period and whose projects were in a critical condition were interviewed. Choosing expert interviews proved to be a suitable method since plenty of relevant material could be gathered. Besides getting useful subjective opinions on the development of the border area and the CBC from the Czech and German point of view, I received relevant information about the experts' personal experiences and challenges that they were faced with during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study was conducted from April until August 2021. This was right after the end of the second wave of the pandemic, accompanied by strict lockdowns, which started in September and remained in full force until mid-April. It is important, therefore, to keep in mind that access to the literature on this topic was restricted or not given at all. This made a discussion of the results quite challenging if a qualitative discussion is to consist of a comparison of the results of self-conducted research with other research papers and relevant literature. I therefore decided to keep this comparison, which was restricted to the literature available at the time, short. Instead, since my evaluation is based on real experiences and on assessments of experts with many years of experience in the field, my discussion will focus on the evaluation of these statements. Moreover, I will use the results to present suggestions for improving and mitigating negative effects of further crises or waves of the corona pandemic.

Regarding the questionnaire, even though the emphasis of my research is on the effect of the corona-induced border closures on CBC, I first asked questions about the development of the border area, about what CBC meant to the interviewees personally, and about a possible cross-border identity. Those questions were asked to accurately evaluate the situation in the border areas. This intensive questioning was imperative to later evaluate the effects or the damage that the border closure has caused. In the last part of the questionnaire, the questions were focused on the future of cross-border cooperation and its projects. Here it should come to light whether the Corona pandemic has had any implications for program planning in the future.

Cross-Border Cooperation

Concerning the development of CBC since 2004 until today, all respondents concur that the development has been as positive and clearly intensified throughout the years. Two even called the development as an “implicitness.” The answers were given by both the Czech and German experts, thus both nationalities agree upon this fact. One of the respondents even talks about a “stable routine cooperation” that followed the euphoria after the Schengen Agreement, which was a milestone for CBC. This perception of “implicitness” and a “stable routine” indicates that CBC is already anchored in the everyday life of the citizens of the border area on both sides of the border. By giving multiple examples of different fields in which the cross-border activity is taking place besides the project level financed by the EU, it is revealed that CBC is vividly conducted in all regions of the border areas. People are buying houses on the other side of the border, cooperating in small associations, tackling environmental problems, and commuting every day to their neighboring country. These numerous activities indicate a strong bond between the people on both sides of the border. Moreover, they show that for many people, life takes place across the border. These are indicators of a positive regional development in this border region. According to Havlíček et al., an important condition for a positive development of a border region is—next to an existing contact zone—the conviction among the regional population that the border area has a potential for development (2004, p.18). This fact can be seen clearly through the high activity that is taking place across the border. Thus, Jeřábek’s et al. (2010) assertion that the Saxon-Czech border region constitutes a relatively successful region regarding CBC can be confirmed.

As regards the “euphoria” after the Schengen Agreement, this is demonstrated by the rising activity after abolishing the barrier effect of the border. This corresponds to the idea and the effect of Territorial Cooperation. Those facts demonstrate the intensive activity and mobility and therefore the importance of border access in this area. It should prove that a border closure can cause tremendous damage not only to the economy but to people’s life.

Reasons for Cross-Border Cooperation

This code arose by inductive coding from the interviewees’ responses. The experts were invited to comment on the personal importance of CBC in their regions to them. Initially, the aim of this question was to evaluate the commitment of the experts to the CBC mission.

Two of the experts stated that their location and the external factors and conditions in that location “forces” them to operate and take action across the border. CZ, for instance, perceived the CBC in the tri-border area as pivotal since living in close proximity to a different country with a different culture required intercultural and language competences vis-à-vis the other nation in order to guarantee good relationships. The second example regards environmental protection. The state-owned enterprises in the forestry sector in the Czech Republic and Saxony cooperate closely across the border to jointly tackle the forest dieback which had become noticeable on both side of the border due to the heavy industry in the Ore Mountains in the 1970s and 1980s. The state border is virtually ignored in this case. The same applies to the monitoring of wildlife in the Saxon-Czech forests. This indicates that the border area is perceived as a joint area between Saxony and the Czech Republic and stresses that it is imperative to tackle problems across the border jointly. Besides this, these efforts contribute to the economy, which represents an important aspect for areas that have a peripheral status. According to a case study evaluating the COVID-19 effects, the freezing of economic activities such as touristic activities, on which some parts of the Czech-Saxon regions are dependent, have led to a heavy impact on the local economies on both sides of the border (European Commission, 2021c, p.7).

Language barrier

This code derived inductively from the experts' responses. Language barriers seem to be still present and might represent a significant challenge in the development of a joint identity and a proper cooperation. One reason for this might be the significant differences between the German and the Czech language and the high level of difficulty in learning them. One of the respondents perceived it as a "barrier effect." It is obvious that the language barrier is still present in the Czech-Saxon border area. Nevertheless, the people of the border area are aware of this fact and try to tackle the problem through various educational projects, such as youth exchanges or voluntary service years. However, two German respondents have observed that the German are not willing to learn the Czech language. It is more common that Czech people acquire the German language. The Czech experts did not comment on this subject. The language barrier as a separating factor and obstacle to CBC was already mentioned by Schramek, 2010; Slavík, 2010; Medeiros, 2016; and Jeřábek et. al, 2010. One of the respondents mentioned that experts from different countries are mainly speaking English with each other. However, this could be rather difficult cooperation between districts and small municipalities is concerned.

Common Identity

According to Schramek (2010), regular cooperation among borderland residents ultimately promotes the formation of a regional identity that extends across both sides of the border. This can specifically develop through "euroregional activities" (Schramek, 2010, p.11). Since CBC in the Saxon-Czech border is very intense, the aim of this question was to explore if the experts perceived said common identity. The reason for this question was the identification of a sense of belonging or attachment between the border region residents on both sides of the border. Moreover, I strived to discover whether the border area is perceived as a common living space. This result was imperative to adequately assess the extent of the impact of the border closure. In a border region where residents do not share a common identity, or rather, where people do not feel a sense of belonging and interest in each other, closing the border might not cause as much damage. Furthermore, I strived to observe whether the Czech and German experts' perceptions are in line with each other or if dissent would occur. The results demonstrate that the experts' opinions are not in line, regardless of their nationality. Taking into account the answers of the respondents, one could say that the regional identity or their affiliation with each other is slightly higher in the Ore mountains than in the other districts in the border region. This

conclusion can be drawn from the answers of IP and ANONYM, and from the enormous activities in CBC within the cooperation program in the Ore Mountains. Even though IR stated that the border area was not yet sharing a joint identity, he added that they were on the right track to create one. The tackling of joint issues and the efforts that are made to bring the Sudeten German history back to the mind of the Czech population can be considered an indication for a common identity. Furthermore, since the inclusion of the Ore Mountains in the UNESCO World Heritage List, joint activities have increased. Moreover, two of the experts accentuated that the dwellers in the Ore Mountains are feeling closer to each other than to countrymen from other cities. IP stated that they felt more as “Erzgebirger” than Saxons, for instance. A similar response was given by KP, who mentioned a higher attachment to the Czech country than to Bavaria, for example. ANONYM and KP indicated that the reason for this were the similar economic circumstances and the historical background. The Czech and Saxon region of the Ore Mountains have the status of the poorest regions in the Czech Republic and Germany. This economic situation might have brought both nationalities together and had them develop a mutual aversion against the economically strong cities in Saxony and Czech. PR, however, who is active in the Euroregion of Neisse-Nisa and does not share the feeling of a joint identity, justifies her point of view by stating that people in the border region have not yet put down enough roots in the area they live in. In this context, she mentions the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans. In her opinion, people still notice that another population inhabited the region before them. This indicates that the present inhabitants still regard the region as their home. According to Zich, the personal relationship to the region is at the core of any development of a regional identity (2012, p.13). However, the vivid activities that are taking place across the border and the perception of the border region as a common place when it comes to tackling problems can arguably be considered a strong enough indication for a common identity—maybe not in all parts of the border area, but definitely in the Ore Mountains. The issue of identity is also the subject of a plethora of research on the Saxon-Czech border region.

Meaning of the border

The Saxon-Czech border has undergone a moving evolution throughout the last century as described in Chapter 3. Today, almost 15 years after the Schengen Agreement, the border is, or has been, perceived as “invisible”. This is also demonstrated by the numerous

activities that have been carried out regardless of the border. One of the respondents even describes the border as his home, due to the vivid activities that are taking place in the border area. One could say that throughout the years, the border has changed from something negative that separated people to an arguably positive institution. Thus, the objective of the European integration process, on which the EU has been building on for several decades, can finally be considered successful. Saxony and the Czech Republic have achieved the goal of becoming virtually borderless. Closing the border would, in this case, exert a tremendous effect on people's lives and be a huge step backwards.

Challenges during the restrictions related to the corona pandemic: negative impacts on individual projects

Almost all of the so-called "soft projects" that are based on encounters and whose duration extended into the pandemic were in a critical condition, and their implementation was therefore at great risk. From all experts' answers it can be concluded that no project was spared from difficulties and challenges. However, the challenges faced by the projects differed and had different impacts with varying degrees. Educational projects which are based on joint encounters and whose mission is to get children acquainted with the culture and language of their neighbors were forced to cease due to the border closure. This also applies to projects which could not be continued via online meetings, such as the training of outdoor guides. Moreover, one of the respondents reported that it came to a complete breakdown of their "organizational mechanism." The main reason for this breakdown was the poor communication when no encounters were possible, resulting in a deterioration of the relationship between the project partners on both sides of the border. This example demonstrates how important it is to properly communicate and stay in contact. Since the projects were in their final stages, final conferences and events at which the projects were supposed to be presented could not take place in person. Although many final conferences took place online, the official ceremonies and events were mostly canceled. The annulation of these events resulted in a smaller reach of the projects, which might have led to a smaller success.

Inconsistent lockdowns and lack of information as a cause for complications

Taking into account the experts' answers, it can be concluded that the inconsistent lockdowns in Germany and the Czech Republic as well as the insufficient information given

to the people led to significant negative impacts. First of all, the constantly changing information about the many corona-related measures caused a significant uncertainty among the project managers regarding further action in the implementation of their projects, and ultimately resulted in a freeze of the projects. Secondly, it led to enormous chaos.

A second challenge was represented by the inconsistent lockdowns in Saxony and the Czech Republic. Since the lockdowns were not synchronous, no common denominator could be found during the project implementation. Therefore, activities on the Saxon and Czech side had to take place at different times. This includes, for instance, jointly planned excursions, filming, and bilateral conferences. Consequently, there were several complications and great discrepancies in their final results. Furthermore, the different lockdowns led to people becoming more aware of the border again. According to one of the experts, people suddenly became aware that there was a government on the other side of the border that approached the situation differently. This could potentially have resulted in a rupture in the perception of the border area as a joint area. Border areas that have the border as a part of their everyday life, which have a high cross-border mobility, and which work together to address common challenges should not act differently during such a crisis. Considering the experts' answers, it can be concluded that both nations are dependent on each other. Therefore, more of a multi-level governance and a bottom-up approach are needed for regions to gain more influence on political decisions. In this context, local authorities can assess the situation better and find more adequate solutions. Moreover, communication and the flow of information have to be improved. Although the main role of the Euroregions was to give up-to-date information on the situation during the crisis, people were obviously not aware of this. Therefore, people should be informed better about where they can access information. Moreover, chaos could be prevented in the future if measures are not changed constantly in short intervals.

Effects of the border closure

The border closure can be regarded as the main cause for the negative impacts. It did not only negatively affect CBC and their projects but also had a tremendous effect on many people's lives. The experts' responses made it clear that the border closure caused a huge step backwards and was a tremendous shock. This proves how fragile a permeable border

can be. Decades of effort were needed in order to remove the barrier character of the border—and the pandemic destroyed it within a day.

Furthermore, differences between both nations became visible again despite CBC having functioned properly until the beginning of the pandemic. Besides this, people's relations were heavily affected. One of the respondents stated that people lost their trust in the other nationality due to the border closure, which was put into effect depending on the case numbers on the opposite site of the border. Besides all the negative aspects, however, it made the residents of the borderland aware of the advantages that a permeable border has. They realized that the border area in fact constitutes a joint living space. However, the most common and significant words mentioned in this context were “rollback,” “step backwards,” “collapse of the CBC effect,” and “vulnerability.” The border closure brought a separating character into the people's minds. Suddenly, the other side of the border constituted a threat. Looking back at the history and the exact reasons for the emergence of European integration, the main motivation for a common European policy was the common management of crises. A perfect example of this is the oil crisis at the beginning of the 1970s. According to Brunazzo (2016), this crisis convinced the former governments that regional problems needed to be addressed at the “EU” level.

One of the core questions posed to the experts was if the border closure had resulted in alienation that would give rise to nationalist thinking or if it had brought the people in the border regions closer together and strengthen the guiding principle of European integration. The experts' opinions on this were divided, regardless of their nationality. Two of the experts contended the closure had resulted in alienation, one claimed a strengthening, and another one remained undecided. However, even though one of respondents stated that the border closure resulted in alienation, it has to be said that his answer does not apply to the part of the population which has a general interest in cross-border activities. It only affects people who have no interest in cross-border activities. One of the experts has observed an approximation. In their project, the project partners kept up regular contact and asked each other about their current situation and progress. This example is a model for successful crisis management, which should be taken into consideration for the future. Another respondent argued that the duration of the border closure was not long enough to lead to an alienation. Nevertheless, he did not go as far as to talk about a strengthening of the ties between the two neighbors.

All in all, one can say that the border closure has shown how vulnerable cross-border cooperation can be and that the idea of a borderless Europe is not resilient to crisis. Furthermore, it has shown how strong the national level is and how much it ignores European values in situations of crisis. The European countries demonstrated that when it comes to an unprecedented global crisis, they resort to being single players. From the previous categories one can deduce that the inhabitants of the border regions feel closer to the inhabitants of the same region on the other side of the border than to their own countrymen from other parts of the country. This indicates a strong connection, not just economically but also emotionally. Therefore, it should be noted that a border closure might have serious effects on people's personal lives. It has to be mentioned that during the corona pandemic, a number of demonstrations took place in reaction to the border closure. A spontaneous grass-root movement along the Czech and Saxon border organized meetings that resulted in gathering of people who were in favor of cross-border cooperation. These meetings called "Saturdays for Neighborhood" (Ger. "Samstag für Nachbarschaft") were organized every two weeks (European Commission 2021c, p.7).

Alternative solutions for a successful completion of the projects

In order to tackle the negative effects of the border closure and to complete the affected projects, a number of alternative solutions had to be introduced by the Joint Secretariat in order to guarantee successful termination. The most commonly used alternative was online formats for conferences and workshops, a prolongation of the projects, and, as an individual solution, an online video instead of face-to-face presentations. Nevertheless, the online formats were associated with many challenges such as those in the "Handwerk im Dreiländereck" project, where children were supposed to engage in handcraft, or in the "Geo Adventures" project, whose mission is to train outdoor guides. In those cases, the program duration was extended. All projects could be prolonged until December 31, 2022. On the whole, it can be said that the alternatives have enabled a relatively successful project completion—with a few cutbacks, of course. However, the response of the children to the online formats was surprisingly positive—"they just took it in their stride," as one of the respondents answered.

Assistance of the Joint Secretariat (SAB) during the Corona Pandemic

The experts evaluated the assistance of the Joint Secretariat, which is responsible for the monitoring of the projects, as very good and helpful. The Joint Secretariat helped to manage the amendments for the alternative formats, since they did not correspond to the initial funding agreement. This aspect is extremely important. Bad management or a lack of assistance from the Joint Secretariat—i.e., the cooperation program—could have threatened the implementation of new projects in the future. People would have gained bad experiences and might not have applied for new funding. It might have led to demotivation.

Positive aspects of the corona pandemic

Besides all the negative aspects due to the restrictions, some positive aspects should not be forgotten. According to one of the project team members, the corona pandemic gave the project team a break to reflect on their work and think about new innovative concepts for new projects. Using online formats for conferences enabled people from further away to participate and thus led to a higher number of participants. Regarding online formats, I would contend that the corona pandemic, in general, has accelerated digitalization. Furthermore, an increase of tourism in the Ore mountains was registered, which according to one of the respondents led to a rise of the reputation of the region. People started to build cabins and regularly spend their holidays there. It is contested, though, whether this can be considered a positive aspect with regard to the environment.

Personal attitudes regarding CBC in the future

Having faced multiple challenges with the implementation of cross-border projects during the corona pandemic, the next question was whether all these bad experiences would keep the experts, in their role as project managers, from starting new projects in the next programming period. The experts' answer was unanimous—no. The experts stated that after having coped with several challenges and having learned to use online formats, they were now well-prepared for future projects. Apart from this, it needs to be mentioned that even if the project period has already ended, this does not mean that the projects will stop, too. Most of the projects are sustainable and will be maintained well beyond the project duration, with the only difference that they are no longer funded by the ERDF.

Project ideas for successful development after the corona pandemic in the Saxon-Czech border region

This question about the experts' view on future projects in the German-Czech border area was supposed to point out the potential in this region as well as to detect the requirements of the project fields. Furthermore, I wanted to find out whether the corona pandemic had had an effect on the area in which new projects are suggested. The experts suggested projects in the areas of environmental protection and cultural heritage. One of the experts referred to the effects of the corona pandemic in the Ore Mountains in his response. Due to the increased tourism, it is now necessary to increase investments into tourist infrastructure, such as roads, parking, information centers, etc. Furthermore, it is important to increase investments into language exchanges, which are covered by priority axis 3, with the aim of diminishing the language barrier.

Discussion of the chosen method

Choosing a qualitative analysis in the form of expert interviews has proven an adequate method. All of the interviewees had a very good overview of CBC in the Saxon-Czech border area and of the area itself. The experts' answers were based on their own experience, which contributes to reliability. The different nationalities of the interviewees made it possible to get insights from Czech and German points of view. One limitation of this thesis is the lack of existing research on the subject. The reason for this is the topicality of the issue. For this reason, this thesis has no chapter on the state of research. Furthermore, in my opinion, five expert interviews are not sufficient for assessing the extent of the negative impact on cross-border cooperation. A more appropriate method would have been to either interview more experts whose projects have been affected by the corona pandemic or to complement the qualitative study with a quantitative one, in form of surveys. Questions about a possible alienation or reunification of the two nations after the border closure could not be properly evaluated due to the differing and undecided answers of the experts.

I am convinced that more publications on this topic are forthcoming—not only research on the German-Czech border area but also on other border areas in Europe. It is therefore imperative to collect and analyze the results and information from other European border areas, to evaluate, and to compare them in scientific studies. As we are currently at the end of the 2014-2021 programming period, it would be possible to measure the impact of the border closure by comparing the number of funding applications in the funding period that is coming up.

Summary and suggestions

After a detailed presentation of the results, I would now like to summarize the most decisive findings and make suggestions for a more effective cross-border crisis management. The first part of the interviews covered the development of the border region and CBC. The analysis of the results confirmed that CBC in the Saxon-Czech border region is very successful and active. Although the experts claimed that there was no common identity in the Saxon-Czech border region, the reaction of the experts to the border closure, the current activities and cooperation, and the common everyday life can be interpreted to prove the contrary. Furthermore, the results show that the border region is perceived as a common space that is oriented towards joint cross-border cooperation to tackle common problems. The border is virtually ignored because of its permeability and its resulting “invisible” character. A negative aspect that may hinder such active cooperation, however, is the language barrier, which is still strongly present.

So what has been the impact of the border closure? To put it concisely, the impact of the corona pandemic on CBC has been considerably more negative than positive. This is mainly related to the different lockdowns in the Czech Republic and in Saxony. There is no reference of cross-border crisis management or a joint tackling of the crisis. Rather, the lockdowns and the measures were taken on a national level without considering individual regions. As a result, most of the CBC froze. The projects’ duration was extended and online formats were used, which can be considered to have cushioned the negative effects. Furthermore, the results have demonstrated that a border closure has fatal consequences not only for cross-border projects but also for interpersonal relations. The active support of the cooperation program in the implementation of the critical projects was a crucial aspect in maintaining the positive spirit of CBC in the EU context. If this had not been the case, the project partners would probably have felt abandoned, which could have resulted in a negative attitude towards the EU. A positive aspect, however, is that none of the experts sees the corona pandemic as an obstacle for future projects. Furthermore, it can be claimed that the corona pandemic has advanced digitization in the context of cross-border cooperation significantly. The sudden need for online formats forced people to address this issue.

Based on the results obtained in this research and the events at the very beginning of the pandemic, I conclude that crisis management is not sufficient in border regions. For this

purpose, I will now propose a number of deduced suggestions for a more effective cross-border crisis management in the future.

First, it is essential that at least the border regions on both sides of the border agree on uniform lockdowns at uniform times. Different lockdowns cause distrust among people and affect mutual cooperation. Therefore, top-down decisions are no feasible solution in this case. The results have shown that after 15 years of the Czech Republic's accession to the EU, CBC is very actively executed in this border area. Therefore, a multi-level governance is needed, namely a bottom-up approach that gives regional authorities greater power in political decision-making.

In addition, a central source of information should be established, from which people living in the border area can regularly obtain reliable information on the current situation. This task can be performed by the Euroregions, for example, or by the cooperation program.

Secondly, the high activity in the border area has shown that border closures can have fatal consequences. In binational border areas, which are strongly connected to each other and work closely together, a border closure should be avoided if possible. The border closure has clearly shown that it has a separating aspect, which has a negative impact on the relationship of the inhabitants in the border area, not to mention the economic effects.

Third, positive aspects should be maintained at all times. They include constant and good communication between the project partners, as has been the case in one of the projects. A lack of communication can lead to disagreements between the partners, which can result in a deterioration of relations. The same applies to crisis communication at the national level.

The extension of the project duration and the use of online formats have proven to be a viable solution for crisis management within the projects. They can also be used in the future.

9. Conclusion

This thesis has analyzed and evaluated “*the effects of the COVID-19-induced border closures on cross-border projects implemented within the cooperation program between*

Saxony and the Czech Republic.” The presented findings are the results of a qualitative content analysis conducted on the basis of five expert interviews. After giving an abundant overview of the theoretical background of the idea and the development of European Cohesion Policy, the construct behind Territorial Cooperation, and the idea of a borderless Europe, I illustrated the subject of Czech and Saxon border regions and CBC. The purpose of the theoretical part was to introduce the border regions and to present and evaluate the cooperation along the Saxon-Czech border in order to gain background knowledge that allowed for an adequate analysis of the extent of the impact of the border closure on the cross-border cooperation.

In sum, this study has shown that, on the basis of the expert interviews that were conducted, cross-border cooperation and the idea of a borderless Europe cannot withstand a crisis. Nearly all projects implemented during the pandemic froze. These projects, which fall under priority axes 3 and 4, are based on cross-border encounters, which were not possible during the pandemic. Most of the projects had to extend their project duration due to this reason. The pandemic did not only have a significant negative effect on the cross-border project work but also on the “neighborly” relations between the Saxons and the Czechs. The different approaches and measures on both sides of the border brought distrust among the inhabitants of the border region and has a separating effect. Unfortunately, it could not be ascertained whether the pandemic alienated or united the people.

It is not surprising that the governments took such drastic measures to curb an unknown virus. Nevertheless, a common solution at the European level should have been found, and regional authorities should have been involved in the decisions-making process. The decision of the Czech government to close the border without any consultation with other states in March 2020 is not in line with European standards—especially not in a border region where cooperation and exchange is so actively pursued. The fact that such an approach is not acceptable was corroborated by the renewed opening of the borders, only a few days after its closing, for people with relevant jobs.

This research has shown that the Saxon-Czech border region meets all the criteria for considering a system of multi-level governance in which it would receive greater power in the political decision-making on the regional level. As has been highlighted in the interviews, economic activity in the borderland is high. Saxony and the Czech Republic are economically interdependent. Workers regularly commute across the border. Everyday

life in the border area is determined by the border. There is even a debate around a common identity. However, this aspect could not be confirmed in this study. Although cross-border cooperation in this area is thriving, one must not forget its peripheral status. The regions on both side of the borders are among the poorest regions in the Czech Republic and in Germany. Furthermore, chapter 3 has illustrated the challenges that the border area faces. Therefore, any economic restrictions, such as those caused by border closures, will have tremendous effects on the area.

To summarize, it can be said that there probably will be no drastic long-term consequences for the Saxon-Czech relations. The closure of the border was too short to allow this conclusion. As to the individual projects, it can be stated that most of them coped well with the pandemic overall. Activities were resumed after the lockdowns. Certainly, the visibility of the projects was negatively impacted in one way or another as they could not be presented to the public in the usual way. In the context of the project work of the cooperation program, however, the projects were lucky that the pandemic hit towards the end of the funding period. Most of the projects were already successfully completed at that time. If the pandemic had occurred earlier, many more projects might had been affected and the extent of the damage might have been much greater. The Saxon and the Czechs are great partners. The answers of the German and Czech experts indicated that both “nations” are really similar. They share the same point of views and have the same opinion as I deduced from the interviews. Various aspects show, regardless to this study that Saxon and Czech are connected, and I believe that this connection and cooperation will rise. Why else would the new high-speed rail be built between Dresden and Prague?

10. SUMMARY

This master thesis deals with the research question "To what extent has the COVID-19-induced border closure affected cross-border cooperation between Saxony and the Czech Republic?". The aim of this thesis is to conduct a qualitative research in order to gain insights, personal experience and different perspectives. For this purpose, five expert interviews were conducted with German and Czech experts whose projects were implemented within the framework of the EU cooperation program Saxony - Czech Republic 2014-2021 and strongly affected by the Corona pandemic. The theoretical part addresses firstly the cohesion policy in the EU context, which is behind the EU funded cross-border cooperation. Secondly, the development of the Saxon-Czech cross-border cooperation, the border region and the border will be discussed. Finally, the cooperation program between Saxony and the Czech Republic and its work and processes are presented in more detail. The answers of the experts were coded and evaluated with the help of a computer-aided content structured content analysis. After the analysis and discussion of the results of the interviews, they were related to the theoretical background and evaluated. The results show that the Czech-Saxon border region carries out active cross-border cooperation. However, the Corona pandemic has affected this not only economically, but also interpersonally in a certain way. The results have shown that closing the border in such an active border region simply does not work. This calls for a cry for more multi-leveled governance.

Keywords: Cross-border cooperation, cooperation program Saxon-Czech Republic, Covid-19 pandemic, border closure, border area, negative impacts;

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List of abbreviations

- CBC - Cross-border Cooperation
- CEEC - Central Eastern European Countries
- CSSR - Czechoslovak Soviet Republic
- EC - European Commission
- EEC - European Economic Community
- ERDF - European Regional Development Fund
- ESF - European Social Fund
- ETC – European Territorial Cooperation
- EU 15 - EU -15-Staaten
- IC Interrectional Cooperation
- JT – Joint Sekretariat
- TO thematic objective

14. ANNEX

Declaration of consent Ingo Reinhold

Einverständniserklärung

zwischen

Jennifer Laura Enders

(Studentin Regionales und Europäisches Projektmanagement)

und

Ingo Reinhold

(Staatsbetrieb Sachsenforst, Forstbezirk Marienberg (Lead Partner))

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und

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(Freier Schulträgerverein e.V. "Schkola", Zittau)

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Declaration of consent Pavla Ruzickova

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mezi
zwischen

Jennifer Laura Enders
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a
und

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(Projektmanager GECON - Grenzübergreifendes geologisches Kooperationsnetzwerk Projektmanagerin)

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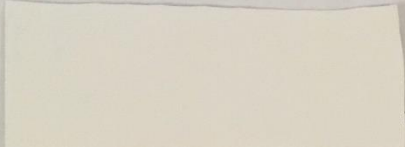
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Prohlášení o souhlasu
Einverständniserklärung

mezi
zwischen

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(*geologisches Kooperationsnetzwerk Projektmanagerin*)

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ausschließlich zum Zweck der Bewertung der Arbeit genutzt werden dürfen

mohou být použity pro výzkumné a výukové účely.
für Forschungs- und Lehrzwecke benutzt werden dürfen

všechny údaje by měly být uloženy a uchovávány anonymně.
alle Daten sollen anonym gespeichert und aufbewahrt werden

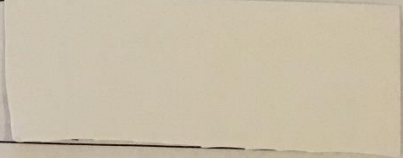
může být uvedeno mé celé jméno.
mein voller Name darf genannt werden

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výslovně souhlasím
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Nesouhlasím
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Tento souhlas lze kdykoli odvolat.
Dieses Einverständnis kann jederzeit zurückgezogen werden

Datum: 15.7.2021 Unterschrift: 

Questionnaires



Die Auswirkungen der COVID-19-bedingten Grenzbeschrnkungen auf die grenzberschreitende Zusammenarbeit am Beispiel des Kooperationsprogramms Sachsen Tschechien

Informationen:

Interviewer: Jennifer Laura Enders
Befragter: Ingo Reinhold

1.	Wie beurteilen Sie die Entwicklung der schsisch - tschechischen Zusammenarbeit allgemein?
2.	Kann man von einer gemeinsamen grenzberschreitenden Identitt im schsisch tschechischen Grenzgebiet sprechen?
3.	Was bedeutet fr Sie diese grenzbergreifende Zusammenarbeit?
4.	Was bringen Sie mit dem Wort „Grenze“ in Verbindung?
5.	Die Umsetzung ihres Projekts „Moorevital 2018“ fand im Zeitraum whrend der Corona-Pandemie statt. Knnen Sie uns ein bisschen ber Ihr Projekt erzhlen?
6.	Welche Herausforderungen hatten Sie / Ihr Projekt whrend der Einschrnkungen im Rahmen der Corona Pandemie?
7.	Wie sind Sie mit der Situation umgegangen und welche Mglichkeiten/Alternativen hatten Sie vom Gemeinsame Sekretariat angeboten bekommen? Welche haben Sie in Anspruch genommen?
8.	Welche Manahmen htten Sie sich von der Regierung gewnscht? Wie htten Sie in dem Moment gehandelt? Was hat die Grenzschlieung ihrer Meinung nach gezeigt in Bezug auf die Grenzberschreitende Zusammenarbeit?
9.	Denken Sie die Corona-Pandemie/ Grenzschlieung hat die Menschen beiderseits der Grenze entfremdet? Oder eher nher zusammengeschweit?
10.	Hindern die Corona bedingten Einschrnkungen Sie daran neue Projekte anzufangen?
11.	In welchen Bereichen soll Ihrer Meinung nach in Zukunft noch intensivere gearbeitet werden?

Die Auswirkungen der COVID-19-bedingten Grenzbeschränkungen auf die grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit am Beispiel des Kooperationsprogramms Sachsen Tschechien

Informationen

Interviewer: Jennifer Laura Enders

Interviewpartner: Christian Zimmer – Handwerk im Dreiländereck

1.	Wie beurteilen Sie die Entwicklung der sächsisch - tschechischen Zusammenarbeit allgemein?
2.	Kann man von einer gemeinsamen grenzüberschreitenden Identität im sächsisch tschechischen Grenzgebiet sprechen?
3.	Was bedeutet für Sie diese grenzübergreifende Zusammenarbeit?
4.	Was bringen Sie mit dem Wort „Grenze“ in Verbindung?
5.	Die Umsetzung ihres Projekts „Handwerk im Dreiländereck“ fand im Zeitraum während der Corona-Pandemie statt. Können Sie uns ein bisschen über Ihr Projekt erzählen?
6.	Welche Herausforderungen hatten Sie / Ihr Projekt während der Einschränkungen im Rahmen der Corona Pandemie?
7.	Wie sind Sie mit der Situation umgegangen und welche Möglichkeiten/Alternativen hatten Sie vom Gemeinsame Sekretariat angeboten bekommen? Welche haben Sie in Anspruch genommen?
8.	In Ihrem Projekt kam es zu gegenseitigen Besuchen der tschechischen und deutschen Schulklassen. Wie hat sich das Stilllegen der gegenseitigen Besuche auf die Kinder ausgewirkt?
9.	Freuen sich die Kinder wieder auf die gegenseitigen Besuche und auf die Zusammenarbeit. Oder ist die Begeisterung mittlerweile abgeklungen?
10.	Welche Maßnahmen hätten Sie sich von der Regierung gewünscht? Wie hätten Sie in dem Moment gehandelt?
11.	Was hat die Grenzschließung ihrer Meinung nach gezeigt in Bezug auf die Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit?
12.	Denken Sie die Corona-Pandemie/ Grenzschließung hat die Menschen beiderseits der Grenze entfremdet? Oder eher näher zusammengeschweißt??
13.	Hindern die Corona bedingten Einschränkungen Sie daran neue Projekte anzufangen?
14.	In welchen Bereichen soll Ihrer Meinung nach in Zukunft noch intensivere gearbeitet werden?

Dopad hraničních omezení v rámci koronavirové pandemie na přeshraniční spolupráci na příkladu sasko-českého programu spolupráce

Informace:

tazatel: Jennifer Laura Enders

dotazovaný: Pavla Růžičkova

1.	Jak hodnotíte vývoj sasko-českého pohraničí obecně?
2.	Jak se díváte na vztahy mezi Němci a Čechy?
3.	Co pro vás znamená přeshraniční spolupráce?
4.	Realizace vašeho projektu "GECON" probíhala v období koronavirové pandemie. Můžete nám říct něco o svém projektu?
5.	Jakým výzvám čelil váš projekt během restrikcí koronavirové pandemie?
6.	Váš projekt se zakládal mimo jiné na workshopech a studijních cestách. Tito byli během pandemie nemožné. Jak jste situaci řešili a jaké možnosti vám nabídl společný sekretariát? Které z nich jste využili?
7.	Cíl vašeho projektu bylo mimo jiné vytvořit prostor pro setkání profesionálu, studentu, nadšenců atd. Zůstala tato skupina během pandemie motivovaná?
8.	V jaké míře změnila koronavirová pandemie váš projekt?
9.	Jak byste se v té chvíli (uzavření hranic) rozhodovala vy? Jaké alternativní opatření byste podnikla vy osobně?
10.	Co podle vás uzavření hranic ukázalo v oblasti přeshraniční spolupráce?
11.	Mělo to také něco pozitivního / negativního?
12.	Myslíte si, že koronavirová pandemie /uzavření hranic odcizilo lidi na obou stranách hranice? Nebo je spíše sblížila?
13.	Cítila byste to stejně, kdyby uzavření hranic trvalo déle?
14.	Brání vám Korona v zahájení nových projektů? (Budete opatrnější?)
15.	Ve kterých oblastech by se podle vás mělo v budoucnu intenzivněji pracovat?

Die Auswirkungen der COVID-19-bedingten Grenzbeschränkungen auf die grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit am Beispiel des Kooperationsprogramms Sachsen Tschechien

Informationen:

Interviewer: Jennifer Laura Enders

Befragter: Kamil Prisching

1.	Wie beurteilen Sie die Entwicklung der sächsisch - tschechischen Zusammenarbeit allgemein?
2.	Kann man von einer gemeinsamen grenzüberschreitenden Identität im sächsisch tschechischen Grenzgebiet sprechen?
3.	Was bedeutet für Sie diese grenzübergreifende Zusammenarbeit?
4.	Was bringen Sie mit dem Wort „Grenze“ in Verbindung?
5.	Die Umsetzung ihres Projekts „Handwerk im Dreiländer“ fand im Zeitraum während der Corona-Pandemie statt. Können Sie uns ein bisschen über Ihr Projekt erzählen?
6.	Welche Herausforderungen hatten Sie / Ihr Projekt während der Einschränkungen im Rahmen der Corona Pandemie?
7.	Wie sind Sie mit der Situation umgegangen und welche Möglichkeiten/Alternativen hatten Sie vom Gemeinsame Sekretariat angeboten bekommen? Welche haben Sie in Anspruch genommen?
	Falls Sie virtuelle Formate für die Kinder eingesetzt haben, wie haben die Kinder darauf anfangs reagiert? Waren Sie immer noch motiviert?
8.	In Ihrem Projekt kam es zu gegenseitigen Besuchen der tschechischen und deutschen Schulklassen. Wie hat sich das Stilllegen der gegenseitigen Besuche auf die Kinder ausgewirkt?
9.	Freuen sich die Kinder wieder auf die gegenseitigen Besuche und auf die Zusammenarbeit. Oder ist die Begeisterung mittlerweile abgeklungen? Kam es zur einer Entfremdung?
8.	Welche Maßnahmen hätten Sie sich von der Regierung gewünscht? Wie hätten Sie in dem Moment gehandelt? Was hat die Grenzschließung ihrer Meinung nach gezeigt in Bezug auf die Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit?
9.	Denken Sie die Corona-Pandemie/ Grenzschließung hat die Menschen beiderseits der Grenze entfremdet? Oder eher näher zusammengeschweißt?
10.	Hindern die Corona bedingten Einschränkungen Sie daran neue Projekte anzufangen?
11.	In welchen Bereichen soll Ihrer Meinung nach in Zukunft noch intensivere gearbeitet werden?