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Master thesis

Summary

THE INFLUENCE OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION ON THE COMPETITIVENESS OF EUROREGIONS

The EUREGIO Bayerischer Wald-Böhmerwald-Unterer Inn and Europaregion Donau-Moldau
as drivers for the Bavarian border area. A casestudy.

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Statement

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List of Abbreviations

CBC	Cross-Border-Cooperation
EUREGIO	EUREGIO Bayerischer Wald-Böhmerwald- Unterer Inn
EDM	Europaregion Donau-Moldau
AEBR	Associaton of European border regions
EGTC	European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund

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1 The Bavarian-Bohemian border region

Bavaria and the Czech Republic were closely connected for many centuries (Münch-Heubner, 2015, p. 26). The border separating the both countries did not represent a hard barrier to trade. One of the most important trading routes was the Goldener Steig (“Golden Track”), where salt and other imported products were transported from Passau to Bohemia (Michler & Prazáková, 2019, p. 9). Whilst the region flourished during the Medieval because of great sources of natural resources, it developed into an emigration zone over time. It could no longer compete with the economic centres Nuremberg and Augsburg. As the Iron Curtain was constructed, the boundary developed into an impermeable border. At the same time the region developed from the centre of Europe into a zonal border area. And not only was the physical border disrupted but also the mental boundary due to persecution and expulsion of both Czech and Germans. These incidents entered into the collective memory of the two nations and disunited them (Haus der bayerischen Geschichte, 2007). As for the economic situation, it changed for the worse because of the region’s new location on the zonal border. It was only after the fall of the Iron Curtain that the Czech-Bavarian relations could be re-established. In order to support the cooperation between the two nations in different fields and to stimulate the development of the region, the EUREGIO Bayerischer Wald-Böhmerwald-Unterer Inn was founded in 1993 (Altrichter, 2013).

1.1 Objectives

In the following paper, the influence of cross-border cooperation (CBC) on the competitiveness of Euroregions is examined. Therefore it is researched by means of a case study if the EUREGIO

and Europaregion Donau-Moldau (EDM)¹ are driving forces of the development of the border area in Lower Bavaria.

For this purpose, firstly the state of the art is presented. In chapter 2 the method of the empiric research will be introduced as well as subsequently the CBC in Europe and the programmes INTERREG and Ziel ETZ. In chapter 4 different approaches to measuring the regional competitiveness will be discussed and in a next part the EUREGIO and EDM, their organisational structures and fields of responsibility will be brought forward. The results of the qualitative interviews will be analysed in chapter 6, then discussed and finally a conclusion will be drawn.

1.2 State of the arts

The Bavarian-Czech border area was already researched from different perspectives. Dokoupil et al. (2014) examine the effect of the admission of the Czech Republic to the Schengen area on the Czech-German-Austrian borderland by means of an empirical study. Koch (2018) analyses the structure of the east-Bavarian border areas. Which types of cooperation are suiting the best for the German-Czech collaboration is examined by Chilla et al. (2018). They attribute special importance to the axis Munich-Prague. Haack (2007), Bertram et al. (2019) and Cilla & Heugel (2018) study the influence of CBC on spatial respectively on the European integration. In the *Entwicklungsgutachten* (development appraisal) for the Bavarian-Czech border area (Bayerisches Staatsministerium f. Landesentwicklung, 2015) the region's potential is analysed and recommended actions in the fields of economy, tourism and culture, infrastructure and telecommunications, education as well as science and universities are mapped out.

¹ In the following, EUREGIO will be used to denote the EUREGIO Bayerischer Wald-Böhmerwald-Unterer Inn, Europaregion or EDM for the Europaregion Donau-Moldau and Euroregion for talking about Euroregions in general.

Dědková and Blažková (2014) examine the competitiveness of firms in the Czech part of Euroregion Neisse-Nisa-Nysa. Greta and Lewandowski (2010) focus on the economic area as they research the competitive advantages of CBC in Euroregions.

The competitiveness of the EUREGIO-area has not yet been analysed.

2 Method

The research encompasses the districts of the EUREGIO area, on NUTS 3 level. Those are Deggendorf, Freyung, Passau, Regen, Straubing-Bogen and Rottal-Inn in Lower Bavaria and Cham in Oberpfalz (Upper Palitinate). Sometimes the whole administrative region Lower Bavaria (NUTS 2 level) is used for the analysis because data is not always available on NUTS 3 level and the EDM includes the whole region of Lower Bavaria.

To research the competitiveness of the area, four guideline oriented expert interviews were carried out with corporative actors of both EUREGIO and EDM. The interviewees are qualified as experts in the field because they are in possession of special expertise due to their professional activity (Scheu, Blöbaum & Nölleke, 2015, pp. 6). Their fields of activity englobe economy and technology transfer, university cooperation as well as cross-border traffic.

The collected data was then analysed using the structuring content analysis. Therefore the data was coded and categorized. These categories were created both inductively and deductively from the European Regional Competitiveness Index (Annoni & Kozovska, 2010) and the pyramid model of regional competitiveness from Lengyel und Lukovics (2006) that will be introduced in chapter 4. The results were then compared to other research and finally discussed.

3 Cross-border cooperation

In this paragraph the meaning of borders and border regions is discussed, explicitly by means of the installation of the Schengen area and the European integration.

3.1 Borders and border regions

Mozer states that borders are “the scars of history” that should neither be forgotten nor cultivated (Mozer from Europäische Kommission, 2015, p. 15). The man-made boundaries between countries can be of natural, psychological, cultural, economic, geographic and politic nature. One can distinguish between hard and soft borders and shades in between. While hard borders are clearly visible with walls, fences and border guards and have strict controls, as it was the case for the Iron Curtain, soft borders are characterized by a high degree of permeability. They also often cannot clearly be identified as such (Paasi, 2011, p. 6). The Schengen area is an example for a soft border. Borders represent both the dividing line and the zone of contact between two states (Stverkova et al., 2018, p. 324) which is why border regions do have an important role.

According to the EU, border areas are the regions at NUTS 3 level lying directly on a national border and the regions adjacent to them (Monfort, 2009). This classifies 40 % of EU’s surface as borderland with 30 % of the population living there (Europäische Kommission, 2017). The European border regions are integrated borderlands where people and goods can cross the borders without restriction (Martinez from Hardi & Uszkai, 2007, p. 16).

3.2 Cross-border cooperation and Euroregions

CBC is the more or less institutionalized cooperation of partners on both sides of the border (Perkmann, 2003, p. 156). It can increase a region’s geopolitical weight (Casteigts, Enjeux et limites de la coopération transfrontalière, 2003, p. 2).

Euroregions are a special, more institutionalized, form of CBC. The first one was founded in 1958 on the German-Dutch border (Perkmann, 2003, p. 154). The increasing number of Euroregions received a representation of their interests with the creation of the association of European border regions (AEBR) in 1971 (AGEG, History of AEBR).

In order to simplify the legal framework of CBC, different conventions have been concluded, such as the Madrid Convention in 1980 (Europäische Kommission, 1980). Since 2006 it is possible to create a European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) that can act as legal entity (Europäisches Parlament, 2020).

3.3 INTERREG and ZIEL-ETZ Bavaria - Czech Republic 2014-2020

The INTERREG programme was launched in 1990 in the frame of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to financially support CBC. Today there exists INTERREG A for cross-border projects, INTERREG B for transnational projects and INTERREG C for interregional projects. The fifth funding period focusing on investments in *smart growth, sustainable growth* and *inclusive growth* will end in 2020.

The funding programme for CBC between the Czech Republic and Bavaria is embedded in the INTERREG programme. It places the main focus on the four following points from the INTERREG priorities:

- 1) Fostering research, technological development and innovation
- 2) Preserving and protecting the environment and improving resource efficiency
- 3) Investing in education and apprenticeship for competences and lifelong learning
- 4) Improving the institutional capacities of public administration and stakeholders.

4 The concept of competitiveness

There are many different approaches to defining and measuring competitiveness. The term is mostly used regarding firms as in Martin et al.'s definition "a firm's capacity to compete, grow, and be profitable" (from Annoni & Dijkstra, 2017, p. 50). Nevertheless this definition cannot be used identically on countries or regions (ibid.).

4.1 Regional competitiveness

Therefore some attempts have been made to set a definition for regional competitiveness. According to the OECD, “skilled labour and investment gravitate away from ‘uncompetitive’ regions towards more competitive ones” (OECD). This approach combines the perspectives of the firms as well as of the citizens. Dijkstra et al. (from Annoni & Dijkstra, 2019, p. 3) add the criterion *sustainability*: “Regional competitiveness is the ability of a region to offer an attractive and sustainable environment for firms and residents to live and work.”

In order to measure the competitiveness of regions, the European Regional Competitiveness Index (RCI) has been created by Annoni and Dijkstra (2019). The index is composed of eleven dimensions which are subdivided into three main groups: *Basic* (institutions, macroeconomic stability, infrastructure, health, primary education), *Efficiency* (secondary education, lifelong learning, labour market efficiency) and *Innovation* (technological readiness, economic readiness, innovation). A factor missing in this scheme and being introduced by Bachinger & Bockstedt (2011, p. 64) as well as Lengyel and Lukovics (2006, pp. 4) is the quality of life. In their pyramid model of regional competitiveness, quality of life is the result of a high regional competitiveness. The scheme (see in annexes) is based on *success determinants* that have indirect but long-term effects on the region, such as the economic and social structure, the environment, infrastructure, skills of workforce and regional culture. They are followed by the competitiveness factors with direct influence on the regional competitiveness: human capital, social capital, productive capital, research, and cluster. Furthermore they define three components for the revealed competitiveness: labour productivity, employment rate and regional performance. The head of the model is represented by the quality of life (Lengyel & Lukovics, 2006).

4.2 Chosen indicators for regional competitiveness

The analysis of the regional competitiveness in the EUREGIO area is based on selected pillars of the RCI and the pyramid model of Lengyel and Lukovics. They will be explained in this chapter.

The human element

The natural population development in the EU has decreased in the past decades because of shrinking birth rates. Differences can be perceived between the countryside that is affected by emigration and cities that benefit from population growth (Dijkstra & Europäische Kommission Direktion Regionalpolitik, 2017, pp. 54-60). The demographic development of a region provides information about its competitiveness (OECD).

Economy

A stable economy and a good market size are important for the regional economy as they promote long-term investments in the region. Other important variables are the unemployment rate and innovations. The latter are vehicles for economic growth, employment and sustainability (Dijkstra & Europäische Kommission Direktion Regionalpolitik, 2017).

Education

Both primary and secondary education are key factors for regional competitiveness. Rural areas are often affected by brain-drain. For this reason it is essential to create opportunities for young people to study in the region and subsequently find an adequate work there to anticipate this brain-drain (ibid.).

Infrastructure

A good infrastructure supports the transport of people and goods. It is thus indispensable for a good economic development. Additionally it contributes to a better connection of the region to other regions and countries (IHK Niederbayern, 2017, pp. 34-35).

Tourism

Tourism makes an important contribution to the development of many European regions, especially the less developed ones. Furthermore tourism and quality of life are mutually dependent because a high potential in historic, cultural or natural resources not only improves the region's attractiveness to tourists but also as residence and business location (Bayerisches Staatsministerium f. Landesentwicklung, 2015, pp. 38-39). The factor tourism is not considered in Lengyels (2006) model and is situated outside of the competitiveness pyramid because a region first of all has to offer a high liveability to its citizens in order to guarantee touristic success (Pechlaner, 2020).

5 EUREGIO and Europaregion Donau-Moldau

In order to relaunch the Bavarian-Czech cooperation after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the EUREGIO and later on the Europaregion were created that will be introduced in this chapter.

5.1 EUREGIO Bayerischer Wald-Böhmerwald-Unterer Inn

The EUREGIO was founded shortly after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1993. It consists of three sections, a Bavarian, Czech and Austrian one with one office each to create more proximity to the people. The German administration is located in Freyung. It is a communal association composed in the Bavarian part of the rural districts (so called *Landkreise*) Cham, Deggendorf, Freyung, Passau, Regen, Straubing-Bogen and Rottal-Inn. Map 1 (annexes) shows the complete programme area. The euroregional cooperation is financed by the ERDF (EUREGIO, Wir über uns).

While at the beginning its main task was to help overcome prejudices by building partnerships the tasks diversified over time and can today be divided into three main groups: cross-border spatial development, administration of major- and micro-project funds and the representation of the border area in the AEBR (Biskup & Sammer, 2020; EUREGIO, Wir über uns). The

EUREGIO also conducts its own projects such as *Gastschuljahr*, *Sprachkompetenzzentrum* or *Zukunftsregion Bayerischer Wald-Šumava 2020+* (EUREGIO, Eigene Projekte).

5.2 Europaregion Donau-Moldau

The EDM was founded in 2012 aiming at strengthening the cooperation in the border triangle and creating a platform for treating mutual subjects (EUREGIO, Geschäftsbericht 2009/2010, 2010, p. 8). Its main purpose is to form a counterpart to the metropolitan areas around: Munich, Nuremberg, Prague and Vienna.

The Europaregion area includes 7 NUTS 2 regions in Bavaria (Lower Bavaria, Upper Palatine), Czech Republic (Pilsen, South Bohemia, Vysočina) and Austria (Upper Austria, Lower Austria) (see map in the annexes) (Europaregion Donau-Moldau, Über die Europaregion, 2020).

Its organisational structure differs from the one of EUREGIO because it has one central office but every region hosts one regional coordination office. Seven thematic axes are treated: Research and development, university cooperation, business cooperation and cluster, qualified workforce and labour market, tourism, renewable energy and energy efficiency and finally mobility and traffic (Europaregion Donau-Moldau, Die Europaregion Donau-Moldau, 2017).

The Lower Bavarian representation of the EDM is located as well in Freyung. The tasks there are focused on university cooperation and cross-border traffic. Also the *Beratungsbüros Bayern-Böhmen* are integrated in the administration with a network manager and funding-advisory for INTERREG B Danube and Central Europe as well as INTERREG Europe (Beratungsbüros BY-CZ Grenzraum, 2019).

6 Analyse

In the following chapter, the quantitative interviews are analysed and correlated to the results of statistic data and previous studies.

6.1 The human element

As for the human factor in the region, just like many other regions, the study area suffers from a negative natural balance with fewer nativities than fatality and as result an ageing society. Nevertheless a slight population grow can be observed due to a positive migration balance (Industrie- und Handelskammer für Niederbayern, 2014). But this development is less pronounced in the border districts than in districts closer to the economic agglomerations.

In general the population is deep-rooted in the region, mostly because of their family, living or job (Dokoupil, et al., 2014). So in general the population in the region is very motivated on staying in the area and prefers remaining there even if this means that they have to commute to the bigger cities for work during the week and are only at home on the weekends (Biskup & Sammer, 2020).

6.2 Economy

The economic sector developed a lot since the fall of the Iron Curtain. The Bavarian part did not instantly benefit from the border opening as desired because companies settled down in the Czech Republic because of cheaper workforce (Haack, 2007, p. 207; Biskup & Sammer, 2020). Nevertheless the region could catch up in the last decades. A very high seasonal unemployment rate in the winter months can be observed until the mid-2010s, especially in the districts lying directly on the border. Today they are in accordance with the Bavarian average (Bayerisches Landesamt für Statistik, GENESIS-Online Datenbank, 2020). On the contrary, today Czech commuters are important for companies in the Bavarian border region, first of all in Cham, because there is more workforce needed than there is available in the region. One key factor to foster innovation in the region are the seven technology campuses situated in small cities in the border area. In these institutes, universities and companies do research together on different fields. There also exist many research projects involving partners from the Czech Republic

(Biskup & Sammer, 2020; Martin, 2020). The Network-management Bavaria-Bohemia also establishes contacts between economy and science across the border.

6.3 Education

As for the educational sector, the cross-border cooperation is based on the two axis schools and universities. In the school sector the projects Gastschuljahr and Sprachkompetenzzentrum enable pupils to learn the neighbour country's mother tongue and to get insight into their culture. By reducing prejudices and improving the intercultural understanding, the mental barrier should be dismantled in the children's early ages (EUREGIO, Eigene Projekte). The projects are thus not sufficient to enable a big number of pupils in learning Czech. Such a language learning campaign can only have a big impact when the government supports the target (Biskup & Sammer, 2020).

To foster the CBC on university level a working group was created which is involved e.g. in supporting bi-or trinational study programmes or in the creation of a university guide in the border triangle. The Bavarian border region is rich in universities and university-offshoots in the rural area. Connecting them across borders and promoting the common university-region can contribute to strengthen the educational potential of the border region and provide incentives for the young population to stay in the region for their studies.

6.4 Infrastructure

The EUREGIO area is in general characterized by its location in the Bavarian Forest. The mountainous relief complicates the construction of streets and railway lines and thus the border crossing towards the Czech Republic. There exist five border crossing points for cars and trucks (Tschechien Tourismus Portal, 2020) where 90% of all passenger and freight transport takes place (Bertram, 2019). As far as railway lines are concerned there only subsist two (Allianz

pro Schiene, 2017). Additionally, one line existed connecting the cities Passau and České Budějovice but during the Iron Curtain an important part was removed on the German side. Today negotiations take place in order to decide whether to rebuild the line or not. Bad connections in public transport across the Bavarian border are especially found in the southern part of the EUREGIO because the relief makes it difficult to improve the traffic conditions. The correlation between linear distance, time and number of rides per train connection are schematized in space-time-lines. It is significant that the connection Passau - České Budějovice is very short in linear distance but the connection is very time-consuming with a little number of trains per day (Bayerisches Staatsministerium f. Landesentwicklung, 2015, p. 12).

A position was created at the EDM which is responsible for the cross-border public transport. Its task is to connect the different actors on the German and Czech side of the border in order to improve the number of lines and their connection across the border, e.g. on the level of transfer time. Another important responsibility is to do marketing and to make the cross-border connections more visible. There already exist over 70 cross-border connections and connections close to the border but still they are not so well known neither by locals nor by tourists (Gregor, 2020; Biskup & Sammer, 2020). Especially regarding the expected aging of the population and augmented need in climate-friendly solutions, a transport system needs to be installed that is competitive with the use of private transport. With this background, citizen participations including the opinion of people on both sides of the border may help to improve the public transport system.

6.5 Tourism

The tourism in the region constitutes an important economic factor due to the area's natural environment (Biskup & Sammer, 2020). The region is popular for hiking, biking and skiing. Additionally there is the *thermal bath triangle* and the territory wants to establish a cross-

border golf region (Bayerisches Staatsministerium f. Landesentwicklung, 2015, p. 39). Especially due to the great importance of tourism in the region there exist a high number of cooperation projects in this field (Biskup & Sammer, 2020). On the side of EDM a knowledge platform *Tourism* was created and different publications of EUREGIO and Europaregion promote the touristic potential of the region. The common projects often have the common history and culture as main subject. An example is the aspired goal of creating a *BierWeltRegion* (beer-world-region) promoting the countries' common beer culture (EUREGIO, Messenger 2019/1, 2019, p. 22).

A high offer in the touristic and cultural sector not only contributes to an improved attractiveness for tourists but also lifts the population's quality of life.

6.6 Further findings

As a mental barrier can still be perceived between the German and the Czech population, the main aim of the EUREGIO is to remove it because this is the foundation of successful CBC (Biskup & Sammer, 2020). The border needs to be perceived as something bringing not only disadvantages but first of all advantages for the population and for the region (Martin, 2020).

The last decades of CBC in the frame of EUREGIO and EDM show that the interest in such activities rises, especially on the side of project developers and public administration.

Nevertheless, the reporting on both organisations and the border area could still be improved.

A survey within the EUREGIO project *Zukunftsregion 2020+* (future region 2020+) shows that the broad population does not seem very interested in being involved in the border area issues because there was very little participation (Biskup & Sammer, 2020).

The EUREGIO and Europaregion can be seen as role model for the population because they not only award funds for cross-border projects but put the values of CBC in practice. In their organisations, Germans and Czechs work together in the office in Freyung and mayors and

county commissioners of member communes and districts carry out exchanges with their Czech colleagues in order to exchange on common subjects and plan joint projects.

7 Discussion

In the different working areas of EUREGIO and EDM many improvements have been achieved for the region. The CBC with the Czech Republic definitely contributed to improving the regions competitiveness or in other terms quality of life in the fields: human sphere, economy, education, infrastructure and tourism. These areas are interconnected and influence each other.

7.1 Quality of life in the Lower Bavarian border area

Thus it is quite difficult to distinguish between the changes initiated by CBC on EUREGIO and EDM level and by the fall of the Iron Curtain in general. Dokoupil et al. (2014, S. 99) suppose that the fall of the Iron Curtain is seen as the most important event for the restart of the German-Czech cross-border activities. Nevertheless both Euroregions perform important roles as contact wheel between two countries. Their work consists first of all in removing mental barriers that could hinder CBC. The operating range often is not large enough, e.g. for fostering language learning in schools or for big infrastructure projects because those types of activities are the responsibility of the government. But EUREGIO and Europaregion can act as lobby for the Bavarian-Czech border area.

7.2 Restrictions and further research

Due to a restricted time and content framework the regional competitiveness was analysed on the basis of four indicators of the pyramid of regional competitiveness of Lengyel and Lukovics (2006). The model was complemented by the factor *tourism*. The chosen method of expert interviews made it possible to gain insight in the work of both organisations. In an additional

step, it would be interesting to also do research on the point of view of politicians and inhabitants of the region to create a broader perspective. For this purpose, pursuing studies could also take into consideration the remaining factors of the pyramid model.

The CBC in the area was also influenced by the closure of the borders between Germany and the Czech Republic. Its influence on the CBC in the region could be subject to further research.

8 Conclusion

In this research the influence of CBC on the competitiveness of Euroregions was analysed within a case study of the EUREGIO und EDM. The results show that both organisations already contributed a lot to the development of the region in the examined fields during the past decades (or years) and thus have influence on its liveability, which is the outcome of regional competitiveness. The mental barriers that have been built between the two nations within the last century can be reduced by means of the projects from EUREGIO and EDM. If this target is achieved, the region can grow together even stronger. The CBC in the border region will be completely successful when the linguistic usage does no longer talk about Bavaria and the Czech Republic but about the Bavarian-Czech border region. For this purpose, the population has to grow together, because “it’s the people in the border areas that hold Europe together” (Biskup & Sammer, 2020, translation of the author).

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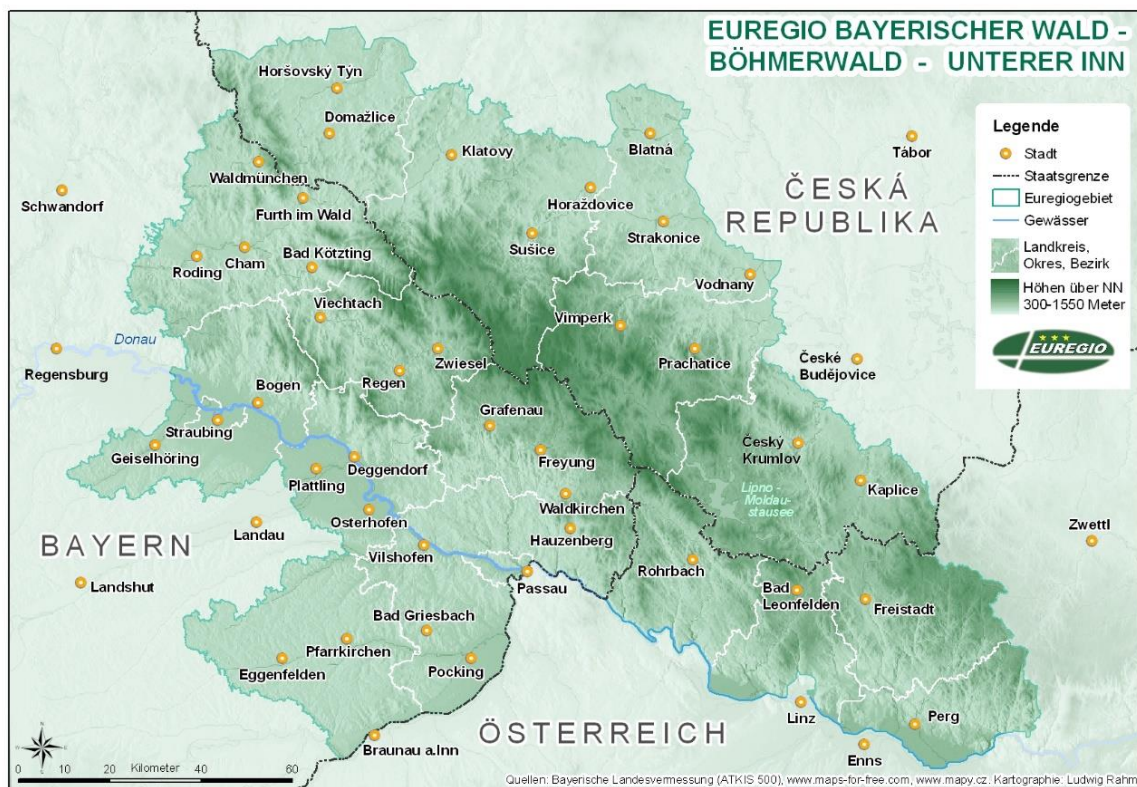
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Annex 1: Map of the EUREGIO



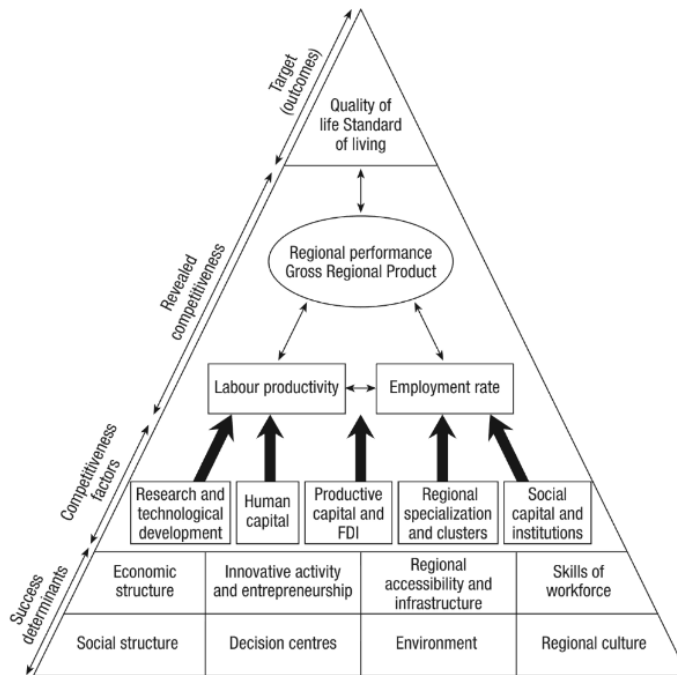
Source: EUREGIO, Karten

Annex 2: Map of the Europaregion



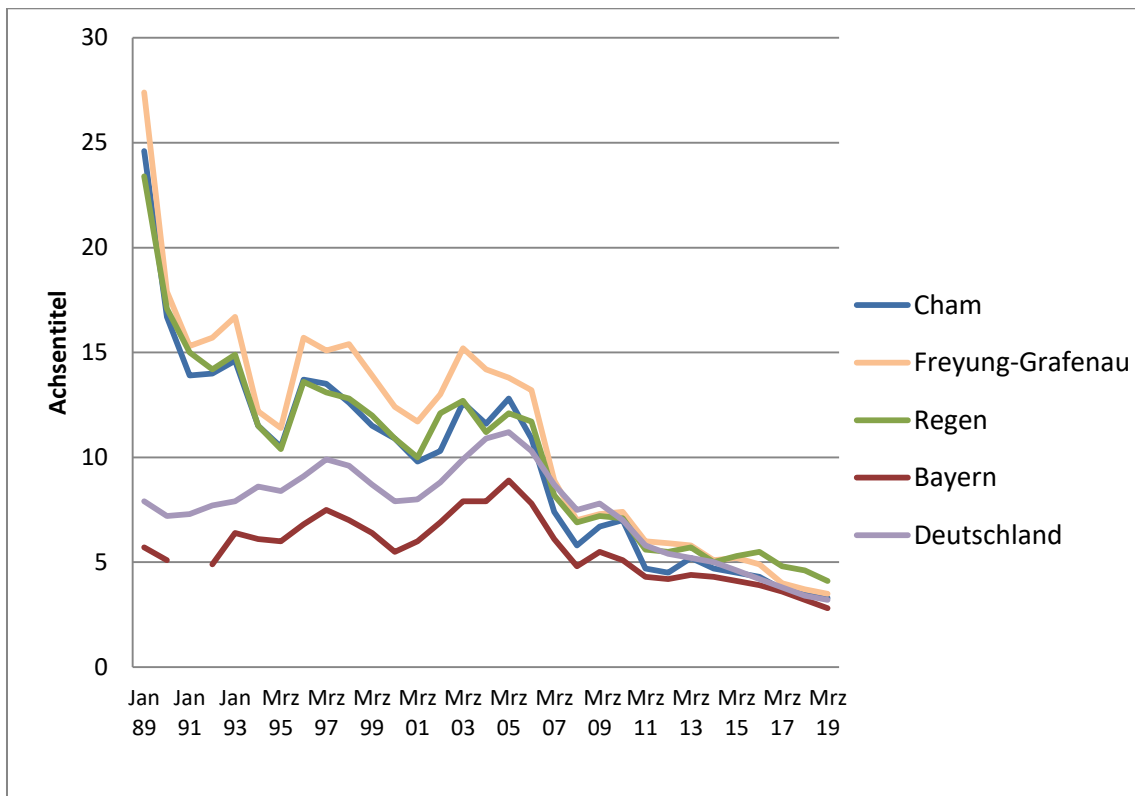
Source: Europaregion, Über die Europaregion

Annex 3: The pyramid of regional competitiveness



Source: Lengyel from Herntrei, 2013

Annex 4: Unemployment rate from 1989 to 2019



Source: after Bundesagentur für Arbeit, Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland, Statistisches Bundesamt Bayern