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**New instruments for new challenges in transborder planning
co-operation between Poland and Czech Republic.**

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Abstract

The harmonious development of the EU territory requires co-operation in spatial planning. At the moment there is no policy or instrument from the Commission's level that would directly regulate planning activities in Member States and their planning law and structures remain autonomous. Therefore successful transborder co-operation in spatial planning is based on the good will and commitment between engaged countries.

It is nearly 20 years since the establishment of institutional and statutory basis for spatial planning co-operation between Poland and Czech Republic. Within these years the model of planning co-operation beyond borders has transformed in terms of the role and power of different administration levels (governmental, regional and local) as well as the thematic scope. Accession to the European Union, on the 1 May 2004, has set new opportunities and new challenges to spatial development of border regions of the "new countries", which have become the EU's internal regions. This shift from the role of peripheral areas to a much more engaged ones have brought about a change in goals and strategies for the development of border regions.

The paper discusses some aspects of transborder co-operation between Poland and Czech Republic after the economical and political transformation in both countries. It gives a short overview of its historical, institutional and operational background however it is mainly focused on the recently completed document of Spatial Development Study of Polish Czech Borderland with a special focus on the method applied for its elaboration.

1. The area of Polish – Czech borderland

The border between Poland and Czech Republic goes along the chain of Sudety Mountains. Therefore, in geographical terms, the majority of the area has mountain or pre-mountain character with relatively poor accessibility comparing to other parts of neighboring regions.

For many years the economical development of the area had been additionally hindered by peripheral, frontier position. In spite of declared friendship and cooperation between nations - the frontiers between countries in ex-soviet bloc were almost as "iron" as between the eastern and western part of Europe. Only the political and economic breakthrough and membership of UE have opened new opportunities for this region.

The borderland co-operation area¹ comprises nearly 37 000 km² - of which 24 000 km² belong to Poland (which stands for 8% of the whole Polish territory) and 13 000 km² which belong to Czech Republic (and stands respectively for 16% of the of the whole country's surface). The length of state frontiers is 750 km. In terms of administrative division - the area consists of 51 units of NUTS 4 out of which 37 belong to 4 Polish regions and 14 belong to 5 Czech regions. The total number of inhabitants on both sides of the border reaches nearly 5,8 million, with majority living in towns. The Polish-Czech border area is seeing its population dwindle. The scale of this negative phenomenon is bigger than the average for either of the countries, although on the Czech side its intensity is relatively smaller. A highly disadvantageous phenomenon in the Polish-Czech border area is a high unemployment rate which mainly concerns the Polish side.

¹ Defined as the area eligible for EU support under Interrreg III A Program Czech Republic – Poland (2004-06).

2. Basic Documents for Polish – Czech transborder co-operation

The first major efforts related to spatial planning and the technical and organizational aspects of plan implementation took place in the early 1980s. of the past century. Those efforts concerned mainly the issues of environment and water protection and principles for the management of cross-border traffic and tourist movement. At that time in many locations the quality of natural environment was threatened by the movement of pollutants to and from neighboring countries, requiring closer cooperation to address these issues. Also there were problems related to small-scale property claims and land-use on the Polish-Czech border. These problems and a growing tourist activity called for an innovative approach to cross-border contacts.

As a result of the social and political transformation and a change of the economies of these two nations after 1990, cooperation in spatial planning efforts intensified significantly. During this period interest increased in direct cooperation amongst regional administrations and local governments. Associations of border towns and districts were established, representatives of many cultural and economic institutions began to meet, and the first joint Euro-regions were set up².

In November 1991, out of the initiative of the respective ministries in Czech Republic and Poland, work had started on the preparation of a long-term review of socio-economic and spatial relations in the Polish-Czech border region. This resulted in a bilingual statement, entitled “A Coordination Study of the Development of the Polish-Czech Border Region”, published in 1993. This document spelled out, amongst other things, the conditions for mutual cooperation, the analysis of major border region’s problems and the directions and goals for development in the region. The study also defined the principles of cooperation amongst relevant authorities and institutions for the years to come. The “Coordination Study” was updated and new version published in 1997. During the preparation of the updated Study, the first operational phase of a joint pre-accession programme: *Phare CBC Czech Republic – Poland* was initiated. The majority of the project within the Program (launched officially in 1999 but in reality in the year 2000), focused on the improvement of transportation between neighbouring countries, and on the environmental protection’s facilities (including biodiversity protection system and an integrated infrastructure for environmental protection). An important part of Phare CBC was the Small Joint project fund, managed by euroregions aiming at strengthening the cross-border relationships between communities, institutions and organizations. It is worth noticing that The Phare CBC Programme Document, completed in 2000, focused on defining cross-border development priorities and was based on the other policy document, jointly elaborated earlier in the same year 2000, called “Polish-Czech Border Region Development Strategy”.

However the region still doesn't have any joint document dedicated specifically to spatial problems and transformation, of this transborder area. Therefore in the year of 2002 the two governments decided on elaborating the joint “Polish-Czech Border Region Development Study” which was completed in 2006.

3. Levels of co-operation in spatial planning

It is nearly 20 years since institutional and statutory basis for spatial planning co-operation on Polish – Czech borderland have evolved. At the moment 3 main levels of such cooperation can be indicated.

² Euroregions: Nisa-Nysa (1991, Czech-Polish-German euroregion), Glacensis (1996, the biggest of the Czech-Polish euroregions), Praded-Pradziad (1997), Silesian-Silesia (1998), Tešínské Slezsko - Śląsk Cieszyński (1998), Beskydy-Beskidy (2000, Czech-Polish-Slovak euroregion).

a) Governmental level.

The main body responsible for coordinating the co-operation at the national level is the Polish-Czech Inter Governmental Committee for Cross-Border Co-operation. It has been established in 1995 and for over a decade remains very active in promoting and triggering co-operation between the two countries. Presently the Committee consists of 10 Working Groups out of which one: The Working Group for Territorial Development and Support Programmes, is specifically delegated to maintain the territorial and spatial planning cooperation. Four others are also strongly related to this issue: The Working Group on Transportation and Border Crossing, The Working Group on Environmental Protection, The Working Group on Natural Hazards and Catastrophes Protection, The Working Group on Euroregions.

The Working Group for Territorial Development and Support Programmes has over the years been supporting and coordinating the elaboration of the main strategic and spatial development documents and studies. It actively co-operates with regions and Euroregions. It is also engaged in information and promotion initiatives, like the very interesting and unique bilingual publication the “Czech-Polish Border Region Bulletin”. In view of constant political and structural changes one of the biggest successes of the Working Group has been its relative stability in terms of personal engagement: more or less the same group of experts have been working together for many years, safeguarding continuity of concepts and goals.

b) Regional level.

Regional level of spatial planning cooperation mainly concerns the exchange of information related to regional development plans with a special focus on the development of transportation network, flood prevention, environmental protection, tourism and more recently co-operation in initiating the transborder Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). The basis for such a cooperation are bilateral or trilateral agreements between partner regions. The region of Lower Silesia has established co-operation with 4 neighbouring Czech regions: Kraj Pardubicki, Kraj Liberecki, Kraj Kralovohradecki and Kraj Olomuniecki. Two other Polish regions co-operate formally with one Czech region each: Silesia region with Kraj Moravskoslaki and Opolskie region with Kraj Olomuniecki. The co-operation between Polish and Czech regions has also been performed in wider multinational groups within the framework of interregional or international components of Interreg Initiative, (and present European Territorial Cooperation).

c) Subregional and local level

At this level, co-operation related to spatial planning has been based mainly on the EU joint Programmes for Transborder cooperation and the activity of Euroregions. European Regional Development Fund and especially its transborder programmes (Phare CBC, Interreg III A, and so-called Interreg IV A) have been playing an extremely important role in enhancing and strengthening the cross border cooperation between Poland and Czech Republic, also in terms of spatial planning. Interreg III A Poland – Czech Republic was one of 7 Polish transponder co-operation programmes in years 20004-2006. However it has lasted 2 years, more than 120 projects were performed, with total cost estimated to 46 million euros (34,5 – ERDF). The main objectives of this programme referred to the development and modernisation of infrastructure and the development of society in these cross border areas. The study on the actual territorial impact of projects performed on the Polish side revealed clear spatial impact in majority of actions. The partners and beneficiares of such projects were mainly the local administrations.

4. Spatial Development Study of Polish – Czech Borderland.

As has been mentioned before, in the year 2002 the governments of Poland and Czech Republic decided on elaborating the joint document concerning spatial development of the border areas. At the early stage the analytical parts of the study were prepared by the two sides separately, based on a jointly organized program. It was not an easy process, taking into account the differences in data collection systems, planning tradition, methods used and the fact, that financial and timing coordination between Polish and Czech Ministries had to be ensured. Finally, in 2005, joint document with its full title: "Polish-Czech Border Spatial Planning Study – a Synthesis of National Documents" was commissioned by the respective Ministries of Czech Republic and Poland.

One of the most serious problems faced at the beginning of the elaboration was reaching an agreement on common, homogeneous methodology and the structure that would be consistent with both, different spatial planning systems. It is worth recalling that at the early stage, when works were performed in two countries separately it was not possible to agree even on the common name of the document! On the Polish side its name was: "A Study of spatial development" and it covered first of all the spatial vision for the area, without precise measures and concrete investment tasks. On the Czech side however, it was named "The Development Study" and it focused on the coordination of concrete investment actions and the need of having a strong anchor in economic and social issues.

Yet, from the content of both documents it was possible to pick up common concepts and common goals. They formed basis for elaborating methodology and in consequence for structuring the whole joint document. The relatively new approach was adopted for its construction. The traditional planning division into social, economic and environmental spheres was abandoned, since in the authors opinion they are strongly overlapping and influencing each other. Instead three different basic groups of factors conditioning spatial development of the borderland were proposed: the area's external cohesion, the area's internal cohesion and preservation and restoration of natural and cultural resources. These three groups of the development's needs formed the methodological backbone of the Study, in particular the structure of the two most important chapters: one of the diagnostic and one of strategic character.

The issues relating to the area's external cohesion refer to the area's participation in the global and continental development processes, including the links with wider European space and creation of regional growth centers. The study describes the border area on the background of the wider European territory and, of surrounding countries and regions. Treating this area as a whole, as a characteristic, united part of Europe was the philosophy of such an approach. For such a common territory the opportunities and potentials were identified. The Study analyses its advantageous geographical location in the centre of CEE, European infrastructure links, influence of neighboring metropolitan areas' centers, accessibility of external markets and innovation centers. These analyses allowed to formulate appropriate interregional policy aimed at strengthening the area's external links.

The area's internal cohesion part discusses the group of factors influencing the development of cross border area as a coherent region, that means creating better links between both sides of the borderland. Achievement of internal coherence of the area is the condition sine qua non for overcoming its civilization backwardness. Internal coherence is related to a wide group of problems, but the Study concentrates on issues with a clear spatial dimension. The most obvious are the links of infrastructure systems: both in the field of road and rail communication (with the

chain on border check points) as well as the networks of energy, gas, water and purification systems. The Study also analyses the co-operation potential of the administrative centers, the scientific and research institutions and the emerging clusters of different economic sectors. For the Polish-Czech borderland, tourism and spas networks are certainly one of the most meaningful spheres that call for co-operation. The study explains problems and points out spheres in which it is possible or even necessary to strengthen mutual, transborder spatial relations. Also the spatial conflicts of transborder dimensions are presented here, as for example the location of industry directly neighboring with valuable landscape and natural, protected areas or the issues of flood control.

Both discussed groups of factors related to the area's external and internal cohesion are strongly linked to the investment processes. However balanced and harmonious spatial development cannot be achieved without certain protective actions. Therefore the Study identifies the third group of problems which refer to those factors tied with the protection of natural and culture heritage. The majority of problems discussed here are related to the natural protected areas, including protection of surface and underground water reservoirs, but also a degrading impact of industry on the environment, urban decline areas and landscape protection issues. The Polish-Czech co-operation in this regard should aim at maintaining and strengthening of the existing nature corridors, completing the process of declaring certain natural areas as protected as well as renewing of areas destroyed by the human activity.

The Study indicates the most important fields of co-operation and possible actions which need to be taken in order to strengthen external and internal coherence and to improve the protection of resources on the Polish-Czech borderland. Upon the completion of this part - the Study presents examples of good practices and model projects that have been realized on the borderland so far. The graphical part of the document includes three thematic maps of the Polish-Czech border areas: Environmental protection factors (scale: 1:250,000), Economic development factors (scale: 1:250,000) and External links of the Polish-Czech border areas (scale: 1:2,250,000). It has been the first time, when content related common maps for this transborder area have been elaborated and published.

The document of the "Study..." aimed at identifying common ideas and priorities for cooperation in the area of spatial planning on the two sides of the Polish-Czech border, but not at establishing any definite developmental principles or directions for the border regions. This approach is justified by the fact that this Study deals with spatial planning concepts; specific policies and projects are subject, on both sides of the border, to statutory regulations and processes.

The document has been completed, translated and disseminated in 2006. The Study was prepared to assist the regional and interregional administrations in their decision-making processes. It can help initiating the preparation of planning documents for individual territorial entities (voivodships and krajs) in the Polish-Czech border area and the formulation of their development programmes. At the same time this Study can form the basis for the preparation of plans and programmes for the use of funds to support the aims of EU policies.

5. Conclusions

There is no question about the fact, that the harmonious development of the territory of EU and its neighbors requires co-operation in spatial planning. At the moment there is no policy or instrument from the Commission level that would regulate planning activities in Member States

and their planning systems and laws remain autonomous. Therefore successful transborder co-operation in spatial planning is based on the will and commitment of engaged countries.

The transborder co-operation between Poland and Czech Republic has already nearly a 20 years old tradition and it is probably the best example among all 7 Polish transborder partnerships. The relatively long experience allows to define several factors of success. Firstly, for successful co-operation in planning over the borders it is necessary to engage all levels of administration in both countries. It means not only horizontal dialogue among respective levels on both sides of the border, but also vertical consultation and expression of interests between local, regional and national levels in each country. Under present political, administration and legal systems, only the governmental level can guarantee the successful implementation of the programs initiated locally. Secondly, transborder planning - as any planning - is a long-lasting process, therefore it is advisable to keep relative stability of structures and continuity on expert level. Thirdly, transborder planning should be based on innovative methodological approach that would safeguard consistency of documents with national systems. And fourthly, transborder spatial development plans should be elaborated in real international co-operation, not only take a form of a collage of national plans.

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