

BORDERS AS A BARRIER TO INTERACTION: A CASE THE BREST-BIALA PODLASKE SIEDLCE REGION

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I. The world wide trends towards the cross-border cooperation and integration

Cross-border cooperation can mean new chances for regional (endogenous) development. Cooperation in a border region is assumed to generate profits, peace, understanding and prosperity¹ It is founded on various benefits which may accrue from it, sometimes but not always to the mutual advantage of the countries concerned.

The process of regional cooperation and integration can be considered from several points of view. Gibb and Michalak² edited the book entitled „Continental Trading Blocs; the growth of regionalism in the world economy". The authors considered regions to be large transnational blocs like the European Union, NAFTA (in northern America) and ASEAN (in Southeast Asia). In their view, it is better to speak about a process of growing regionalism instead of global integration or globalization. In the other words, integration and disintegration take place at the same time.

Cappellin and Batey³ wrote a book on regional Networks, Border regions and European Integration", This title stresses the role of border regions in European integration. Rumley and Minghi⁴ have edited a bundle of contributions with the title „The Geography of Border Landscapes", in which in particular the problems that arise from the existence of national borders are given attention. The series „World Boundaries"⁵ stresses the political aspects of boundaries. As it is easily to notice, the two central issues concerning cooperation and integration seem to be region and border.

Border-crossing involves people, goods, money and ideas moving from one region to another and vice versa. The current growing interest in borders and border-crossing mainly concerns the borders of countries. Particularly in Europe, where the idea of a borderless continent is in the process of being firmly anchored in society, interregional and cross-border cooperation is regarded to be of great importance for the process of European integration⁶. In this respect a case of the Brest-Biała Podlaska-Siedlce region is important from at least two points of view: i/ the interactions take place between people and organizations; ii/ the ultimate result of cooperation and integration of the both side of the border⁷.

2. Transportation linkages within the the Brest-Biała Podlaska-Siedlce region

The European Union puts much effort into diminishing the barrier effects of borders between the member states. It is worth to be said that the regions and borders are inseparably linked. Particularly the regions along the inner borders of the European Union are emerging to be the new centers of economic activity. Nowadays their previous peripheral locations have turn into ones that can be characterized as much more central. In our opinion it could be considered also a case of the Brest-Biała Podlaska-Siedlce region. The important railways and motorways that connect East and West run through the Brest-Siedlce area⁸. The modernization of the Berlin railway line has already reached

Warsaw, it arrives Siedlce soon, then Terespol and Brest. A high speed railway (of the French TGV type) railway link between Moscow and Berlin is to be added to this infrastructural asset. However, it remains to be seen whether the region, in question, is going to capitalize on these supposed opportunities for the once peripheral particularly on the Polish side of the border. It could be called after its old historical name The Brest Track. We wish declare that the region in question will embrace the process towards a future borderless Europe. To guide this process we should to answer the question concerning the nature of borders, because they can divide or unite.

We are aware that almost fifty years of the existing of the closed national borders, because of the political and military reasons, made a real disruption and wiped out the transborder contacts. Such contacts could exist on the local level only under highly restricted control and a strictly define scope. Under those conditions the region in question has inherited a poor technical infrastructure linkages, poor facilities, a low urbanity of the operating settlement nodes as Siedlce and Biala Podlaska⁹. As a rule there have been the weak ties with metropolitan centers. In the case of Brest and the Republic of Belarus there has been a slow speed in transition towards the market oriented economy, and the opening up markets. Nevertheless, the institutional development of private entrepreneurship in the formal life is going on. The Brest inhabitants have started thinking and acting in the terms of private economy, and they have been involved in the so-called the trade tourism. The knowledge of the advantages of market economy has begun to develop in the Brest community. In that sense one can say that the transition takes place on the mentality level.

A geopolitical location of the Republic of Belarus makes it a frontier country which is often labeled as a gate to the West. The Brest city and its area is perceived in the same way. Brest becomes very attractive also for Russian and the other Russian speaking peoples; the former citizens of the Soviet Union, who have started to run their businesses. Many of them have already settle down in Brest, they have purchased the real estates or they have already started to construct buildings. The investigation has shown that the new joint ventures are coming into being. A capital flows in the region in question due to its good geographical, e.i. its strategic location in Europe, as well as to the cheap labor which is relatively high skilled.

3. Forming of business climate becomes a challenge for marketing in the cross-border region

Under those conditions there is the urgent need to improve the business climate both, on the level of the newly founded companies and the entrepreneurial oriented individuals too. We have found that the forming of business climate becomes a challenge for marketing in the cross-border region in question. The business climate is base on cooperation, integration and interaction, which are largely determined by people or organizations, which have found the interest in crossing the border.

In the 90 quite a number of scientific books of articles were published concerning cooperation, integration and borders. Apparently, people crossing borders are still worth studying¹⁰. Particularly the developments in Europe are watched closely and have far

reaching consequences, witnessing the following quote: „The success of regional integration in western Europe is one of the most important reasons for the present resurgence of regionalism in the other parts of the world“¹¹ The border regions are defined as areas whose economic, social, cultural and political life are significantly affected by proximity to international border¹². They can include lack of interaction and lack of exploitation of economies of scale and scope due to hinterlands being cut off by the border. This can be seen in several functional and political fields of contact. E.g. the reason for lack of integration in border region is that the economic system competes on an international basis, while the political and legal systems are to a large extent nationally based. The interactions in border regions can be differentiated according to functional contexts, e.g. law, economy, politics and culture, as systems within modern societies¹³, c.f. Fig. 1.

Legal constructions were made use of to allow, e.g. the development of communal associations on both sides of the border. They can be members of these associations and interest groups belonged only to the region concerned. Associations created in this way represent, on the one hand, nationally binding interests, and on the other hand, function across the border in that they work together with communal associations on the other side of the border¹⁴. The most important consequence of choosing a legal form for functional alliance is the ability to exercise independent financial management and have self-sufficient support systems for projects. Under these conditions, independent personnel can be employed, contracts can be finalized, and finally, projects can be carried out in the region. The problem should be solved by an institutionalization of cross-border cooperation in the form of corporation in the area of public law is in part associated with the administration of the distribution of funds¹⁵ Economic interactions are detectable in trade relations or in competition situations. The political level is a much more short-term form of interaction, and it is measurable per legislative period. The cultural context for interaction consists of: the spoken language, the history of the region, and forms of education. The enumerated components can be different or the same, and they play an important role for cross-border regions.

The functional relationships are only activated in circumstances where mutual interests are involved. If one side of the border is clearly better off than the other, then it can be expected that both sides of the border will have the same level of interest in organized cross-border cooperation. The vision of cross-border cooperation should be marked by very different notions on both sides of the border. The program of cross-border cooperation can combine the field of culture, youth, sport, economics, transportation, infrastructure etc. The routine work should be completely done on a voluntary basis by the members. Only a number of secretaries can be provided through the reallocation of part-time positions from the administrations. Following the experiences of the cross-border regions, which are well described in the literature, the cooperation is more a result than a goal of the border regions working together. Some of them tried to establish an institutional level of cross-border cooperation, the others did not such attempt.

4. Borders as a barrier to interaction

In general, borders can be defined as barriers to interaction¹⁶. The function of borders as a barrier to interaction results from differences in the regulation that exist between various bordering societies and social structures¹⁷. The interactions involved can be of different types. Among the others the interactions form the business climate in the border region, e.g. they depend on the forms of payment (money exchange) or forms of direct relationships between individuals. When crossing a border, regardless of whether this takes the form of a physical crossing by car, the transfer of money into another country via a bank, or telephoning a company or friend in a neighboring country, the border is experienced as a tangible barrier. There are also some barriers which we can define as an obstacle designed to or capable of delaying or preventing the free flow of either goods, money, labor or know-how, and thus interfering with the normal functioning of markets.

The regional scientists have stated opinion that whatever form the Europe of regions will take, the resulting picture will lead: „not to new rigid boundaries but a patchwork pattern of overlapping jurisdiction or to a variable geometry of multiple transnational cooperation networks¹⁸. All over the world, neighboring regions combine their efforts in all sorts of regional cooperation. Thus, they create borderlands or border regions in which interaction is intensified instead of being blocked by the border¹⁹.

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