

HYNEK BÖHM

Comparison of the role of EU funds for Czech-Polish cross-border cooperation of schools

Streszczenie: W artykule porównano sposoby prowadzenia współpracy transgranicznej w szkołach w trzech euroregionach na granicy czesko-polskiej. Tekst oparty jest na analizie mikroprojektów, które realizowano we wszystkich tych euroregionach. Badania w zaskakujący sposób zaprzeczyły hipotezie wstępnej o spodziewanym najczęstszym wykorzystaniu funduszy UE we współpracy transgranicznej szkół w Euroregionie Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia, ze względu na historyczne powiązania obu części euroregionu i bardzo nieznaczną barierę językową. Hipoteza ta zakładała również najniższą intensywność i jakość współpracy w Euroregionie Nisa-Nysa-Neisse. Analiza wykazała, że pomimo pewnego korzystnego „początkowego nastawienia” do współpracy transgranicznej w Euroregionie Těšín /Cieszyn Silesia, nie poskutkowało ono największą liczbą aktywności w zakresie współpracy w edukacji. Należy to przypisać faktowi, że współpraca szkół nie jest rozumiana jako priorytet przez władze euroregionu. Zatem element ważniejszy niż „korzystne początkowe nastawienie” musi zostać dostrzeżony w aktywnym podejściu uczestników współpracy transgranicznej – głównie w sekretariatach euroregionów – do współpracy szkół.

Słowa kluczowe: współpraca transgraniczna w zakresie edukacji, program INTERREG, euroregiony

Introduction

Although it is an area of an advanced integration process, the EU territory does not represent a fully functional unit yet. The existence of differing administrative systems creates barriers to the sustainable development of different European regions. Cross-border cooperation has an important role to play in eliminating these barriers. The question is whether cross-border cooperation (CBC) is understood as something natural and desirable also by others than by the stakeholders and implementers of cross-border cooperation projects. Many cross-border cooperation stakeholders think and under-

line that it is important to allow the population living in the borderlands to experience cross-border cooperation as soon as it is possible. The earlier the children are exposed to the contact with their peers from the neighbouring country the bigger is probability that they will understand cross-border contacts and cooperation as something natural, nice and desirable.

Goals, methods and the hypothesis

What will be focused on in this paper is the role of EU funds, mainly INTERREG programmes, in cross-border cooperation of schools in selected parts of the Czech-Polish borders. This will concern with pre-primary, primary and secondary schools – generally the learners aged between 3 and 19. The role of universities will not be primarily taken into account. The main goal of the paper is a critical comparison of the use of INTERREG funds, mainly under the microprojects scheme, in cross-border cooperation of schools in three selected euroregions on the Czech-Polish border: Euroregion Těšínské Slezsko – Śląsk Cieszyński (later on the English translation Euroregion Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia will be used), Euroregion Silesia and Euroregion Nisa-Nysa-Neisse. This comparison will become an attempt to analyse the contribution of other participants – mainly secretariats of the euroregions concerned – in the cooperation of schools. The reasons why these three euroregions were selected out of six on the Czech-Polish borders are the following:

- *Euroregion Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia* is situated in the very east of this border, on the territory with a changing history of Czech-Polish relations: both countries – former Czechoslovakia and Poland led a short armed conflict to obtain the whole territory of Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia after World War I; the conflict ended in division of the whole territory along the river Olza and the Bohumín-Žilina railway between both countries. Approximately one fourth of the entire population living on the Czech side declares themselves Poles and use Polish as their mother tongue. There is almost no language barrier in the whole euroregion, local dialect based on Polish is spoken on both sides of the borders (or is at least well understood on the Czech side by people of Czech nationality). The cross-border contacts have been maintained since the division – for example separated families have been meeting. No major population exchange have occurred since the borders appeared in 1920.
- *Euroregion Silesia* is also historically colourful: it is situated in the eastern part of the Czech-Polish border; the Czech part of the Euroregion, with

its centre in Opava, involves part of the historically Prussian “Hlučínsko – Hultschin” region, but it was under the Czechoslovakian administration after the country was constructed in 1918. The Polish side of the euroregion, having Raciborz as its seat, lies on a territory which used to belong to Germany until 1945. Major population change occurred mainly on the Polish, but – to a smaller extent – also on the Czech side of the Euroregion. There is some language barrier between Poles and Czechs in the Euroregion Silesia – significantly bigger than in Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia, but the general understanding is very high there. There are few Poles living on the Czech side of the euroregion, no Czechs on the Polish side.

- *Euroregion Nisa-Nysa-Neisse* is a trilateral Czech-Polish-German construction, which was, partly as an important political symbol, constructed already in 1991. There was a major population exchange on the Polish and Czech side of the territory of the current Euroregion; the Germans created majority population on the Czech side before World War II, the Polish part of the Euroregion belonged to Germany until 1945; when the new Polish western border on the Nysa/Neisse and the Odra/Oder was set, major population exchange took place. Thus, it can be said that population is largely new in the both Polish and Czech side of the Euroregion. The language barrier is rather significant and creates – unlike in the other two Euroregions – a real obstacle in cooperation.

What will be verified is the following *hypothesis*: the most frequent use of INTERREG funds in cross-border cooperation of schools could be found in the Euroregion Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia, due to the historical links between both parts of the Euroregion and an almost non-existing language barrier. The lowest intensity and quality of cross-border contact shall be found in the Euroregion Nisa-Nysa-Neisse. The euroregions will act as cross-border cooperation drivers, mainly thanks to the EU funds/INTERREG microprojects schemes which they administer. To verify the hypothesis mainly *quantitative research methods* with some *qualitative elements* will be applied. The role of EU funds as a motivation to establish cross-border cooperation will be analysed in the paper, more concretely – the relationship between micro-projects’ scheme under the Czech-Polish INTERREG programmes and their use by schools. The multitude and nature will be compared of the supported cross-border cooperation projects. Based upon the findings from that stage, some interviews will be conducted with cross-border cooperation participants and some project promoters. The scope of this qualitative research will on one hand be rather modest, but on the other hand – quite representative.

Theoretical background

The cross-border cooperation and forms of its governance have drawn the attention of many researchers since the early 1960s at least, when the first cross-border cooperation structures were set on the Dutch-German border. The first of them, Euregio, offered a “terminus technicus” to be used when setting up cross-border cooperation structures¹. Euroregions have been understood as almost a synonym of cross-border cooperation or cross-border regions. A cross-border region is not only a territory, but is also its engine². This foresees the existence of a specialized body responsible for cross-border cooperation management. Contribution of these specialized bodies to cross-border cooperation of schools will therefore be assessed.

The regions are one of the key recipients of EU funds. When cross-border cooperation was connected with EU funds via the INTERREG programme in the end of 1980s, the number of cross-border initiatives dramatically increased³. Some authors (e.g. Scott)⁴ consider working with INTERREG as a primary purpose of Euroregions. Therefore, an attempt will be made to analyse the role of EU funds as the motivation for cross-border cooperation of schools. The concept of “*Institutional thickness*”⁵ belongs to the group of institutional regional development theories. This partial theory says that institutions are not formal organisations only, but they mainly create informal conventions, habits, networks of relations, which stabilize and stimulate

¹ J. Dokoupil: *Evropské příhraniční prostory – euroregiony*. In: M. Jeřábek (ed.): *Geografická analýza pohraničí ČR*. Prague 1999, Czech Academy of Sciences, p. 180.

² P. Schmitt-Eggner: *Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit in Europa als Gegenstand wissenschaftlicher Forschung und Strategie transnationaler Praxis. Anmerkungen zur Theorie, Empirie und Praxis des transnationalen Regionalismus*. In: G. Brunn (ed.): *Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit in Europa: Theorie – Empirie – Praxis*. Baden-Baden 1998, Publisher Nomos, p. 342.

³ H. Böhm: *A Comparison of Governance Forms For Cross-border Cooperation Within the EU*. “Journal of Cross-border Studies”, Centre for Cross-border Studies, Belfast 2015, p. 160.

⁴ J. W. Scott: *Euroregions, Governance, and Transborder Cooperation Within the EU*. In: M. van der Velde and H. van Houtum (eds): *Borders, Regions, and People*. London 2000, Publisher Pion Limited, p. 320.

⁵ A. Amin, N. Thrift: *Globalization, Institutions and Regional Development in Europe*. Oxford 1994, University Press, p. 268.

the performance of regional economies. The long-term success of regions is then dependant on the ability of local participants to create such institutions which can create good framework conditions for economic and social regional development⁶. What will be assessed in this paper is how three selected Euroregions create conditions for efficient cross-border cooperation of schools.

Whereas cross-border cooperation has become a frequent field of interest for researchers representing many scientific disciplines, the cross-border cooperation in education has attracted considerably less attention so far. When discussing cross-border cooperation of schools and the reflection of geographical proximities of the neighbouring country in school curricula in the Czech-Polish conditions, I was only able to find a dissertation by Ondřej Lochman, who called for “more in depth research into the attitudes towards and knowledge about neighbours of the learners in the Euroregion Nisa. Hand in hand with this, research should be done to the forms of implementation of the European dimension in schools of the Euroregion Nisa that would be focused on the school curricula and teachers”⁷.

Ryc. 1. Map of the Czech-Polish border



Source: *INTERREG Czech Republic – Poland 2014 – 2020*⁸.

⁶ P. Rumpel: *Teritoriální marketing jako koncept územního rozvoje*. Ostrava 2002, University of Ostrava, p. 179.

⁷ O. Lochman: *Implementation of the European dimension into the curriculum of lower secondary schools*. <https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/download/140019987> (access: 29.11.2016).

⁸ Ministry of Regional Development of the Czech Republic: *INTERREG Czech*

Geographical and political limitations of selected target territories (Euroregions)

With its 792 kilometres, the Czech-Polish borderline is one of the longest in Europe (it is the longest Polish and the second longest Czech state border). As many other borders in Central and Eastern Europe, this also experienced many changes during the 20th century. The birth of Poland and former Czechoslovakia was one of World War I results. As mentioned, a short military conflict between both countries ended up by international arbitration in 1920, when the questioned territory of Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia was divided between both countries along the river and the railway and not in compliance with the nationality; most of the inhabitants of the Czech part declared Polish nationality. Due to that division, the relationships between both countries – Czechoslovakia and Poland – remained rather cold in the period between both world wars. The tensions resulted in a short Polish occupation of the Czech side of Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia, which followed the Treaty of Munich in the end of September 1938 and which ended a year later when Nazis conquered Poland. After the end of World War II, the original borderline from 1920 was restored. As German-Polish and Polish-Soviet borders moved westwards the border changed accordingly. Despite the fact that both countries belonged to the East Block, the permeability of borders was rather low and the cross-border cooperation hardly existing. The Polish-Czechoslovakian relations within the divided region were intensified only after 1989, when the totalitarian regimes in Poland and Czechoslovakia/Czech Republic fell down. Both countries declared their intention to join the western cooperation structures and decided upon intensification of mutual regional cooperation by establishing the regional Visegrad group in 1991. The period of 1990s brought along the creation of cross-border cooperation mechanisms at the lower levels of public administration in all countries of ex-Soviet Block. Initially Euroregions were created between municipalities representing the western or eastern part of Europe (such as trilateral Czech-Polish-German Euroregion Nisa-Nysa-Neisse founded in 1991), later on they were also founded between the countries of the former East Block, including the Czech-Polish borderline (both Euroregions Silesia and Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia, founded in 1998).

Definition of the Euroregion

The Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) sets the following criteria for the identification of Euroregions⁹:

- an association of local and regional authorities on either side of the national border;
- a cross-border association with a permanent secretariat and a technical and administrative team with its own resources;
- in the private sector, based on non-profit associations or foundations on either side of the border in accordance with the respective national law in force;
- in the public sector, based on inter-state agreements, dealing – among other things – with the participation of territorial authorities.

Euroregion Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia

After 1989, i.e. after the fall of the totalitarian regimes in Poland and Czechoslovakia, the Polish-Czech relations in the divided Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia region intensified. The first steps within the framework of cooperation were made by the local authorities of (until 1920 one town) Polish Cieszyn and Czech Těšín, and this was an impulse for further activities. Formal cooperation between both cities commenced after the signing of the agreement on regional cooperation on the 24th March 1993 in Český Těšín. Three years later another agreement was signed, pursuant to which a coordinating group responsible for the further development of Polish-Czech cooperation was established. The group's tasks comprised the exchange of information in the field of culture, sports and passenger traffic. The thriving cooperation in the field of information exchange naturally turned into the idea of the formation of a euroregion.

The agreement on its establishment was signed on the 22nd April 1998. It is a voluntary community of Polish and Czech municipal associations in the broadly understood region of Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia. The Euroregion is situated in the borderland area in southern Poland and the north-eastern Czech Republic, close to Slovakia. It covers the area of 1400 km², which is inhabited by 630 000 people (of which 360 000 live in the Czech part, and

⁹ Ibidem, pp. 120–132.

270 000 in the Polish part). The Olza River is a natural axis in the territory; towns Cieszyn and Český Těšín, the heart of the region, are situated on its banks. On the Polish side it comprises 16 municipalities of the Silesian Voivodeship and 1 county – Cieszyn county, and on the Czech side about 40 municipalities¹⁰.

The objectives of the Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia Euroregion comprise the support of the borderland development in such fields as:

- the exchange of experience and information concerning the region's development,
- the exchange of experience and information concerning the labour market,
- cooperation in spatial planning,
- solving problems with transportation, traffic and communication as well as citizens' security,
- solving problems concerning ecology and the natural environment,
- cooperation in the prevention and elimination of the consequences of natural disasters,
- cooperation in economy and trade,
- the development of tourism and passenger traffic, including further improvement of cross-border traffic,
- campaigns supporting the development of culture, education and sports, in particular the exchange of information concerning these activities,
- cultural exchange and protection of the shared cultural heritage,
- cooperation of rescue services and mountain rescue services in the Euroregion,
- cooperation between schools and youth in the Euroregion.

The Euroregion supports the interests of municipalities, associations, organizations and natural persons which correspond to its developmental objectives, and enter into international agreements on cross-border cooperation. Cross-border cooperation within the Euroregion concentrates on the management of European funds supporting the region's development in the economic, social and cultural sphere, as well as on the effective execution

¹⁰ M. Olszewski, B. Kasperek, A. Olszewska, H. Böhm and D. Madziova: *Toolkit for Cross-border Project Management in the Polish-Czech Borderland in the Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia*. <http://pat-tein.eu/toolkit-czech-republic-poland/> (access: 26.08.2016).

of its own projects implemented jointly by the partners of the Euroregion agreement.

Euroregion Silesia

Euroregion Silesia refers to the common history of Polish and Czech Silesia, which until 1742 was entirely under the rule of the Habsburgs. After losing the war with the Prussian King Frederick II, the greater part of Silesia was taken over by Prussia, and the newly established border slowed down and, over the time, completely stopped the development of mutual contacts. The divided area was never merged back, and after World War II – Upper Silesia became a part of Poland and Czech Silesia – a part of Czechoslovakia. Although, only a “green border” was dividing both countries, the border itself was closely guarded and the border crossing was possible only in a few designated areas. Contacts between people from both sides of the border and the development of cross-border cooperation have been made possible after the democratic changes that took place in both countries in 1989. The real culmination of cross-border cooperation on the Czech and Polish border occurred in the 1990s.

Euroregion Silesia was founded on the 20th August 1998. In the beginning, it covered only a few cities, towns and municipalities on the Polish and Czech side with a minimum of human resources and technical facilities. Today, Euroregion Silesia has almost eighty members (municipalities), its Polish seat is in Racibórz and the Czech in Opava.

The Czech part of the Euroregion is located in the Moravian – Silesian Region and covers an area of four of its six districts. The area constituting the Polish part of Silesia Euroregion is located within the voivodships of Silesia and Opole. The main task of Euroregion is to initiate and coordinate projects in the field of economy, expansion of cross-border infrastructure, environmental protection, tourism, social and cultural heritage, as well as cultural and educational activities. The representatives of the Euroregion underline their focus on cross-border cooperation in the area of developing human contacts, social initiatives and educational events¹¹.

¹¹ Euroregion Silesia. www.euroregion-silesia.cz (access: 26.11.2016).

Euroregion Nisa-Nysa-Neisse

The founding conference of Euroregion Nisa was held on May 23rd – 25th 1991 in Zittau, under the auspices of three presidents: Vaclav Havel, Richard von Weizacker and Lech Wałęsa. Over 300 representatives of borderland communities from the three countries took part in the event. The decision to establish the “Triangle of Three Lands”¹⁹⁰ was a milestone for the future of the region. The Conference adopted a memorandum that defined the intentions, forms and scope of future cooperation. The Euroregion was officially established in December 1991 during the 1st meeting of the Euroregion’s council. At that time it was the first cross-border structure for Central – East Europe and was given a lot of positive political attention¹².

In the legal sense, it is a voluntary community of municipalities from the region. It is not a legal entity as constructed under the legislation of participant countries as all its authorities work in accordance with the legal standards of their countries. The three associations of Polish, German and Czech municipalities and other public participants create Euroregion Nisa. In 2004, Euroregion Nisa had 1 674 480 inhabitants, including 583 441 in Poland, 649 380 in Germany, 441 659 in the Czech Republic. The area of the Euroregion, after the recent change to its administrative reform in Poland, includes 10.6 thousand km², out of which Poland takes 4 thousand km² (37.7%), German 3.1 thousand km², and the Czech Republic 3.5 thousand (km²)¹³.

The main goals of the region defined in the Agreement on a framework of cooperation for the Euroregion are the following:

- elimination of the negative impact of the state border,
- improvement of the living standards of the Euroregion’s residents,
- improvement of the natural and cultural life conditions,
- development of the economic potential in the area of the Euroregion, supporting all actions at the national level which bring the participant countries to EU integration (Euroregion Nisa-Nysa-Neisse).

¹² O Lochman: *Implementation of the European dimension into the curriculum of lower secondary schools*. <https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/download/140019987> (access: 29.11.2016).

¹³ Ibidem, pp. 122–123.

Tab. 2 Basic information about Euroregions

Euroregion	Founding date	Number of inhabitants in thousands				Surface in thousands in square km				Number of members			
		Total	CZ	PL	DE	Total	CZ	PL	DE	Total	CZ	PL	DE
Nisa-Nysa-Neisse	21.12.1991	1578	426	590	571	12 591	2499	5595	4497	295	131	51	113
Silesia	20.9.1998	771	488	283		2732	1224	1508		76	56	20	
Těšín/Cieszyn	22.4.1998	672	360	312		1730	763	967		29	12	17	

Source:¹⁴

Scope of activities of Euroregions

When comparing the statutes of all three euroregions, it can be stated that the scope of their cooperation activities is very similar. Only Euroregion Nisa-Nysa-Neisse declares lower number of cooperation activities, but this must be attributed partly to the higher number of cooperation partners and the early year of construction (1991). However, the cooperation scope in fact does not differ much from other euroregions.

Cooperation field	Nisa	Těšínské Slezsko	Silesia
Information exchange	X	X	X
Economic development		X	X
Environmental protection		X	
Crisis and natural disaster management		X	X
Cultural exchange		X	X
Education, youth and sports		X	X
Tourism	X	X	
Technical infrastructure			X
Regional development	X	X	
Transport and communications		X	
Human resources development and quality of life			X
Labour market		X	X
Spatial planning			X

Source:¹⁵

¹⁴ S. Sitek: *Přeshraniční spolupráce v rámci euroregionů v česko-polském pohraničí*. In: B. Kasperek (ed.): *Euroregiony česko-polského pohraničí*. Cieszyn 2014, Olza, p. 152.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p 48.

European funds

One of the major tasks of all three euroregions is management of the parts of INTERREG bilateral cross-border cooperation programmes. This is represented by the so-called “small project fund”, used to finance the smallest projects, especially non-investment and people-to-people ones. These projects represent the cooperation of local communities at both sides of the border. They are aimed at the development in the field of human relations, mutual educational, cultural, sports and leisure time activities, public service, etc. All three euroregions obtained a possibility to co-manage these grant schemes relatively shortly after their creation: already at the end of the 1990s, the Phare pre-accession programme had its cross-border cooperation branch. Although the Czech Republic – Poland programme was directed mainly to support big investment projects, the «Joint Small Project Fund» (JSPF) supporting smaller non-investment «people-to-people» projects was an integral part of the programme as well. The JSPF was constituted in the form of a grant scheme financing small projects up to 50 000 EUR per project. The total amount earmarked for small projects represented 10% of the entire financial means of the programme each year.

As the JSPF was a very successful tool for supporting non-investment “people-to-people” projects, in 2004, when the Initiative INTERREG IIIA the Czech Republic – Poland started, the JSPF was replaced with a similar tool – the so called Micro-project Fund/Microprojects Scheme. The allocation of 5.1 million EUR, which was a subsidy of the European Regional Development Fund, was intended for the whole duration of the programme and this represented 15% of the entire financial measures. The maximum financial support was 20 000 EUR per project.

The largest sum of financial means for the small projects of local communities was earmarked in the Operational Programme of Cross-border Cooperation the Czech Republic – the Republic of Poland 2007–2013 (OP CBC CZ-PL). The Micro-project Fund represented a flexible instrument for implementation of the smallest projects of the Programme, both non-investment and small investment ones – up to 30 000 EUR, with total cost of the joint complementary project up to 60 000 EUR. In total, 20% of the total programme allocation was allocated to the Micro-project Fund (i.e., in total 43 891 869 EUR from the European Regional Development Fund).

The eligible area of the Micro-project Fund was identical with the eligible area of the OP CBC CZ-PL. Six euroregions have been made responsible for managing microprojects schemes: Nisa – Nysa, Glacensis, Praděd – Pradziad, Silesia, Těšínské Slezsko – Śląsk Cieszyński, Beskydy – Beskidy. What is important, the same principles, structures and comparable amounts will apply also for the work with the new INTERREG CZ-PL programme in the 2014 – 2020 period.

Euroregion Silesia

In 2007–2013, the Czech part of the Euroregion approved 199 microprojects for future funding, the amount approved reached 3.2 million EUR. Out of these projects, 58 were directly implemented by primary or secondary schools or NGO founded by teachers, moreover – 10 projects were implemented by universities. More than one third of all project (34%) focused on the cooperation in the field of education.

This number highly exceeds the numbers recorded in the other two analysed euroregions. This can be attributed to the special attention which both euroregional secretariats pay to the cooperation of schools. This accent was repeatedly stressed by all interviewed experts, who underlined that Euroregion Silesia is known among Czech-Polish CBC practitioners as “schools euroregion”. The most active project beneficiary in the field of education was the Primary and Secondary School in Vítkov.

Euroregion Nisa-Nysa-Neisse

In 2007–2013, the Czech part of the Euroregion Nisa approved 234 microprojects for future funding, the amount approved reached 2.9 million EUR. Out of these projects, 36 were directly implemented by primary or secondary schools or NGO founded by teachers, moreover – 4 projects were implemented by the local university. This means that 17% of all supported projects were directly focused on the cooperation in the field of education. The most active project beneficiary was the Municipal Leisure-time Education Centre in Turnov.

Euroregion Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia

There are difficulties in obtaining data from the Czech side of Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia Euroregion, therefore the selection was made from all (Polish and Czech) supported projects. There was the lowest share of school cooperation

projects in the Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia Euroregion, only 39 out of 284 supported projects. This number also includes 5 cooperation projects submitted by universities. The total number of supported projects in the field of education slightly exceeds 13%. The most active project beneficiary was the Primary School for Polish minority with the seat in (Czech) Bystrice, which implemented 6 projects.

Use of Czech-Polish cross-border cooperation programme outside the microprojects scheme

Except for the possibilities offered by microprojects schemes, schools could also have used the funds from the “big” Czech-Polish Cross-border Cooperation Programme (called INTERREG in earlier and later programming period), which was the most generously funded cross-border cooperation programme in the whole EU in 2007 – 2013. Taking into account the length of the border and the fact that border regions still belong to the poorest in the EU, this will also continue in 2014–2020 programming period. The 2007–2013 Czech-Polish Cross-Border Cooperation Programme worked with a financial envelope of 219,46 million EUR. It supported the project in three thematic priorities: 1) transport, environment and risk management, 2) cooperation in the field of entrepreneurship and tourism – which also involved cooperation of education providers, and 3) cooperation of public institutions.

Subpriority/measure 2.3 was supporting cooperation in the field of education. There were 11 million EUR allocated for this, part of which must have been sent to other subpriorities of the programme due to relative lack of interest in implementing projects in this field compared with another cooperation areas, such as tourism.

According to the available sources, there were 20 projects supported within subpriority 2.3 operation in the field of education. None of these projects was led by primary or secondary school, sometimes they only were parts of the partnerships. Out of these twenty projects the vast majority was implemented in the eastern part of the border: five projects were implemented and led by the Technical University of Ostrava, mostly in partnership with the Opole University of Technology. Another most active project promoter was Palacky University in Olomouc with four projects. Other three important public universities with seats in the western part of the border (the Technical University of Liberec, the University of Pardubice and the University of

Hradec Králové) did not implement any project. This can be partly attributed to the fact that these schools do not have their natural counterpart on the Polish side of the border in the programme territory, but it also gives a picture of the lesser intensity of mutual contacts in the field of education in the western part of the Czech-Polish border. Except for the universities, other important promoters of educational projects on the Czech side of the border come from Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia Euroregion and at least partly involve people who represent the Polish minority living in the Czech Republic. The best possible example is the Pedagogical Centre for Polish Minority Education in Český Těšín, which implemented four innovative projects in the 2007–2013 period and which primarily focuses on creating cross-border networks of co-operating schools.

Based on the outcomes resulting from the analysis of the use of the funds from Czech-Polish Cross-Border Cooperation Operation Programme – both in the “big” programme as well as under the microprojects scheme – it can be concluded that the role of strong institutions in initiating and supporting CBC of schools is important. This can be documented by good results of Euroregion Nisa-Nysa-Neisse in promoting cross-border cooperation of schools under the own microprojects’ scheme, compared with low involvement of schools from this Euroregion in the use of the “big” programme, where the Euroregion has no decisive competences.

Conclusions

This article was aimed to verify whether the most frequent use of INTERREG funds in cross-border cooperation of schools could be found in the Euroregion Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia, due to the historical links between both parts of the Euroregion and hardly any language barrier. What was also expected was its lowest intensity in the Euroregion Nisa-Nysa-Neisse.

This hypothesis was not confirmed. The analysis showed that a certain “default setting advantageous for cross-border cooperation” in Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia Euroregion has not automatically caused the highest number of co-operation activities in the field of education – this happened only partially in the use of the “big” programme, jointly implemented with Euroregion Silesia, but it was absolutely different in the use of microprojects’ scheme managed by the Euroregion. This must be attributed to the fact that cooperation of schools has not been understood as a “top priority” mostly by the Czech part of the secretariat, which supported projects submitted mostly only by

municipalities. This applies mainly to the Czech side of Euroregion – the Polish schools can apply for funding only via municipalities as they do not have legal personality.

The analysis of the use of INTERREG funds under the “big” programme – which is not distributed by the euroregional secretariats but by the ministry – revealed a different picture. Educators and schools from Euroregion Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia belong, jointly with those from Euroregion Silesia (mainly the Technical University of Ostrava), to the frontrunners in the use of these funds for cooperation. Therefore, it can be concluded that the statement in the previous paragraph was correct – the cooperation of schools has not been understood as a “top-priority” by the Czech part of the euroregion secretariat.

This contrasts with the approach showed by the representatives of Euroregion Silesia, who considered cooperation between schools as a high priority and made a lot of effort to fulfil this, which has been obviously achieved. The representatives of Euroregion Nisa-Nysa-Neisse, where the lowest cooperation intensity was expected, managed to support a higher number of cooperation projects between schools than those from Euroregion Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia. The interviewed experts expressed also certain reservations of the Czech part of the secretariat concerning the support for cross-border cooperation projects between Polish minority schools from the Czech side with schools from the Polish side (“We do not wish to support Polish-Polish cooperation!”). To conclude this part, the most important precondition for cross-border cooperation is not any “advantageous default setting”, characterized by minimal language barrier and a joint history, but the will to cooperate and the existence of institutions creating conditions favourable for CBC.

This leads to the confirmation of the secondary hypothesis, stating that euroregional structures have been acting as cooperation drivers, mainly thanks to the EU funds which they have administered. The most illustrative in this respect are the excellent results achieved by Euroregion Silesia and Euroregion Nisa-Nysa-Neisse in animating and promoting the cross-border cooperation of schools.

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Comparison of the role of EU funds for Czech-Polish cross-border cooperation of schools

Abstract: The author compares the ways in which the cross-border cooperation between schools is conducted in three euroregions on the Czech-Polish border. The text is based on the analysis of the microprojects which were implemented

in all the three euroregions. Surprisingly, the research disconfirmed the initial hypothesis expecting the most frequent use of the EU funds in cross-border cooperation of schools in the Euroregion Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia, due to the historical links between both parts of the euroregion and hardly any language barrier. What was also expected was the lowest intensity and quality of the use of EU funds in the Euroregion Nisa-Nysa-Neisse.

The analysis showed that despite a certain advantageous “default setting” for cross-border cooperation in Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia Euroregion, it has not resulted in the highest number of cooperation activities in the field of education. This must be attributed to the fact that cooperation of schools has not been understood as a priority by the euroregional authorities. Therefore, some more important elements than “advantageous default settings” must be seen in the active approach of CBC participants – mainly in the euroregional secretariats – toward the cross-border cooperation of schools.

Key words: cross-border cooperation in education, INTERREG programme, Euroregions

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