

Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives
European Institute of Cross-Border Studies



CROSSING THE BORDERS

Studies on cross-border cooperation within the Danube Region

Foreword. Acknowledgments. Introduction.



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Foreword

Dear Reader,

This volume owes its birth to a hard two-year-long work of many of us. Let me present to You in a nutshell the background of the project through which this book came about.

The beginning of the project dates back to the approval of the Road Map of Priority Area (PA) 10 (*Institutional Capacity and Cooperation*) of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). The third working group of PA10 (lead by the coordinator, Mr Kurt Puchinger) approved the Road Map in February 2012, defining not only the objectives to be achieved but also milestones to pass on the road.

One of the objectives of the Road Map was „[t]o facilitate the administrative cooperation of communities living in border regions”, with a vision of strengthening the internal cohesion of the Danube region. The working group has defined the elaboration of a feasibility study on CB governance based on existing experiences as the first milestone on the road to fulfil the above mentioned objective. CESCO has been invited to be the coordinator of this first project which was drafted and given the title „Crossing the borders” at the beginning of 2013.

With a view to lay the basis for a feasibility study, the current project aimed at unfolding the present conditions of cross-border cooperation within the Danube basin, i.e. the socio-economic features of border regions; framework conditions for cross-border cooperation; and best practice examples thereof, presented in 14 case studies.

Our association as lead partner of the research project has been awarded a grant of EUR 200 000 by the Hungarian Ministry of Public Administration and Justice, directed at that time by Mr Tibor Navracsics, present EU Commissioner for Education.

The scientific frames of the project (hypotheses, methodology and templates of the research) have been set by the former director and deputy director of the CESCO European Institute, Mr Zsolt Bottlik (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest) and Mr László Jeney (Corvinus University of Budapest).

The authors of the case studies were selected through a call launched on March 31st, 2014. We invited three contributors each from seven countries. Finally, we received tenders from six countries (from Austria no tenderer applied). Accordingly, the internal borderlands of the Danube region were divided for analysis among the winning tenderers, which were: Institut EuroSchola (Czech Republic), Institute for Spatial Planning (Slovakia), Regional Science Association (Serbia), Superna d.o.o. (Croatia), Institute of Geography of the Romanian Academy (Romania), and Sofia University (Bulgaria). Our colleagues at the European Institute (Esztergom, Hungary) completed research on the remaining border areas.



Figure 1: The Danube region borderlands and the division of tasks among partners

The partners were requested to gather territorial data for the investigations targeting the socio-economic situation of the given border areas, and to elaborate two case studies each on best practice examples according to a previously determined work structure. The first versions of all studies and databases were delivered by December 31st, 2014. Following submission, our colleagues started to structure the data bases and to edit the texts. This huge work took almost a year, the result of which you now hold in your hands in this comprehensive volume.

In addition to the studies, our colleagues have been developing an EUSDR border database by utilising the data gathered by the partners. This is undergoing structuration now and will be available in the near future on our website.

According to our plans, we will continue working on the creation of a platform of CBC within the EUSDR and the sharing of information on best practices.

Together with the co-authors and co-editor Péter Balogh we hope and believe that the experiences collected and analysed here will be of interest to all studying or actively engaging in cross-border cooperation in the Danube region and beyond.

Gyula Ocskay

Acknowledgments

We owe first and foremost our co-authors from abroad for their demanding and particular work; our former colleagues for developing the common research methodology and the templates; Mr Puchinger, coordinator of PA10 of the EUSDR, for his encouraging attitude and professional support; and Mr Tibor Navracsics, EU Commissioner for Education, former Minister of Public Administration and Justice of Hungary for his financial support that made the implementation of the project viable.

1. Introduction, content, research design and methodology

(Written by: Márton Pete and Péter Balogh)

1.1 Introduction and content

This volume is targeted at policy experts and the scientific community alike. A comparison of fourteen vast case studies of border regions is a relatively rare opportunity for scholarly experts, and as such forms an added value in itself. Additionally, as mentioned in the Foreword the studies were prepared not just by the team of one single organisation, but by competent experts from each of the countries involved. Apart of the latter's in-depth knowledge, this contributes to mitigate any potential bias from the side of the coordinating organisation.

The volume is structured in two parts. The first one begins with this introductory chapter explaining the methodological foundations of the research. It is followed by a general presentation of the Danube region. The two subsequent chapters deal more specifically with the border regions in the area and their cross-border cooperation. Chapter 2 provides a statistical analysis of the borderland areas of the Danube Region, thereby identifying their socio-economic position within the larger area's general pattern. Here, we seek to answer the question to what extent border regions can be considered as a distinct territorial category with regard to their characteristic features. Chapter 3 aims at a general evaluation of institutionalized cross-border cooperation initiatives throughout the macro-region. CBC bodies are scrutinized regarding their institutional form, work intensity, ethno-linguistic and historical characteristics, major fields of activity, duration and number of countries involved. The second part contains the fourteen case studies, each of which forming a chapter of its own. The final chapter is a comparative analysis of the case studies, recognising patterns behind the apparently varying intensity of the cross-border regions.

1.2 Research design and methodology

We opted for the implementation of a series of case study analyses on some selected cross-border cooperation bodies. A total of fourteen case studies were implemented by CESCO and its partners from Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia. All participants were requested to conduct two analyses each, on two cross-border initiatives of their own choice, either at the external or at the internal border of the Danube Region, while selected bodies must have had partners from at least two EUSDR Member States. Another important criterion was the request to choose cooperation bodies resulting from systematic thinking rather than occasional project-level working organs established for single projects. Both CESCO and all the partners were able to choose from a wide range of cooperation initiatives with various institutional forms such as EGTCs, Euroregions, twin cities etc., that

- are institutionalised;
- were established by cooperation between territorial administrative entities (e.g. settlements, municipalities, districts or counties); and
- were established with development aspirations.

For the selection of the best possible cases the following aspects were suggested to be taken into consideration:

- Has the collaboration resulted in an intensification of meaningful cross-border relations?
- Has some kind of local identity appeared in the area of the cross-border cooperation?
- Have they managed to exploit development funds for the cross-border cooperation?
- Are their objectives adequate in relation to the socio-economic situation in the border region?
- Has the cross-border cooperation affected the development of the region?

Partners were asked to prepare interviews along with the case studies with officials and the most active actors of the respective cooperation initiatives.

The case studies were supposed to contain approximately 150 000 characters (space included), yet their extent turned out to show some diversity.

The case studies were required to refer to the border section indicated to the research partner (see Table 1) and partners were enabled to prepare both case studies for the same border section. Evidently, once a cooperation body was chosen, the research area should cover both or all sides of the respective cross-border cooperation rather than only the side belonging to the partner's country of origin. Therefore participants were prevented from choosing the same entity, as all border sections were addressed to different partners.

Some of the border sections could not be automatically addressed to the partners as none of the neighbouring countries were represented among the participant institutions. Therefore the

Austria–Germany, Austria–Slovenia, and Bosnia–Montenegro border sections were subject to application and were taken over by three of the partners.

Table 1: Research partners for the case study analyses by country and study areas

| Partner institute | Border section | Number of case studies |
|--|---|------------------------|
| CZ Institut EuroSchola | Czech–German Czech–Austrian Czech–Slovak Austrian–German | 2 |
| SK Institute of Spatial Planning, Bratislava | Slovak–Austrian Slovak–Ukrainian Slovak–Hungarian | 2 |
| HU European Institute of Cross- Border Studies, Esztergom | Hungarian–Ukrainian Hungarian–Serbian Hungarian–Croatian Hungarian–Slovenian | 2 |
| HR Superna Ltd. | Croatian–Slovenian Croatian–Bosnian Croatian–Montenegrin Slovenian–Austrian | 2 |
| RS Republic Science Association Subotica, Serbia | Serbian–Croatian Serbian–Montenegrin Serbian–Bosnian Bosnian–Montenegrin | 2 |
| BG Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Geology and Geography Faculty | Bulgarian–Serbian Bulgarian–Romanian | 2 |
| RO Institute Of Geography, Romanian Academy | Romanian–Hungarian Romanian–Serbian Romanian–Moldavian Romanian–Ukrainian | 2 |

For the elaboration of the case studies, the structure below was proposed to the partners, including the respective questions as aspects for further clarification in their chapters. Though the use of this very same structure was not mandatory for the partners, all of the questions were required to be answered within the studies, if applicable.

Proposed structure for the case studies

- I. Introduction
 - In brief, for what reasons was this cross-border cooperation chosen to be the best example?
- II. The development of the cross-border cooperation
 - What were the antecedents?
 - When was it established?
 - How was it established?
 - Was it a bottom-up initiative or a top-down decision?
 - Who were the most active participants of the establishment?
 - What kind of pros and cons were identified during the establishment?
- III. Determination of geographical confines
 - Which are the associated settlements?
 - Did this area previously exist as an administrative unit?
 - Is it a contiguous area?
 - To what proportion does it extend to the area of the participating countries?
 - Has the delimited area of cooperation changed?
 - Is territorial expansion included in the plans?
 - Would any other actor (municipality etc) like to join?
- IV. Organisational and institutional structure, operation
 - What kind of organisational units is the cooperation built up of?
 - What is the role of each organisational unit?
 - Has the organisational structure changed over time?
 - Where is its seat located?
 - Who is the leader, where does (s)he live?
 - What is/are the working language(s)?
 - What kind of institutional form does the cooperation function under? (Is it an organisation, legal person, enterprise, etc?)
- V. Composition of the working group
 - How many employees does it have?
 - What qualifications do employees have?
 - What is the composition of the employees based on nationality and citizenship?
 - Are there any commuters?
- VI. Main activity areas/profile
 - Is the cooperation involved in academic research activities?
 - Is it involved in publishing activities?
 - Does it offer legal assistance?
 - Does it apply for development funds for the involved partners?
 - Does it communicate tender calls to local actors?
 - Is it involved in educational and training activities?
 - What kind of programs and events does it organise?

- VII. Management, budget (incomes/expenses)
 - Does the cooperation have a separate budget plan?
 - Is the budget negative or positive?
 - What are the sources of income?
 - What are the expenses?
- VIII. SWOT-analysis
 - Tables with analyses based on interviews
- IX. Future plans and goals of the cooperation
 - Tables with analyses based on interviews
- X. Unique, regionally specific features of the cooperation
 - What kind of local features are there in the area that other CBCs lack?
- XI. Summary
- XII. Bibliography
- XIII. Annex

Despite these largely fixed criteria, the case studies showed a high variety upon their finalisation by the partners. Therefore, after submission, all of them were worked through and adjusted by the colleagues at CESCO to making them more comparable. In the remaining of the book the reader can gain an insight in the outcomes of this complex, thought enriching work process and its results.

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