

# Spatial Integration and Identity: Cases of Border Regions

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## Abstract

Because of the complexity and importance of the concept of spatial (cross-border) integration and identity, the paper first of all defines the applied meaning of these phenomena. It aims to explore relations between these two phenomena. It is assumed that there are differences related to the spatial identity depending on the strength of integration. Probably, in strongly integrated border regions, where physical and mental borders have less or no importance, the population can identify with this spatial level better than people living in separated, alienated border regions. The study investigates several European borderlands from the aspects of integration and spatial identity and searches for the answer as to how the level of integration and the existence of physical and mental borders can determine the main characteristics of the regional, cross-border identity. This research helps to understand what kind of differences, similarities and specialties can be found in this field in several parts of Europe. Analysed cases in the paper are the following: the Öresund region at the Danish-Swedish border, the Polish-German borderland and the Basque border region between France and Spain. These cross-border regions are especially interesting from the aspect of identity, because the level of integration is likely distinct, thus the identity patterns as well.

## Theoretical background and methodology

First of all, it is necessary to define the meaning of *spatial integration* used in this paper. The idea of integration (social, economic, political) underpins the formation of the European Union. Integration tends to be regarded as a positive response to the disintegration of traditional structures caused by the globalisation. Within the EU, several distinct concepts of integration can currently be identified. One of often applied definitions comes from the first official project of ESPD:

*Spatial integration expresses the opportunities for and level of (economic, cultural) interaction within and between areas and may reflect the willingness to co-operate. It also indicates, for example, levels of connectivity between transport systems of different geographical scales. Spatial integration is positively influenced by the presence of efficient administrative bodies, physical and functional complementarity between areas and the absence of cultural and political controversies (Boe, D. – C. Grasland – Healy, A. et al., 1999:7).*

Marcuse (1997; 2005) affirms that integration represents the elimination of barriers to free mobility and the establishment of positive and non-hierarchical relationships. The dimensions (Table 1) are specifiable aspects of a concept to help grasp the complex meaning of **socio-spatial integration**. The *physical dimension* means the proximity between social groups, and can involve variables like space design, spatial distance according to social distance, agglomeration, clustering and so on. The *functional dimension* is related to access to opportunities and can involve variables like spatial distance to opportunities, quality of opportunities, economic access to services, level of state involvement and presence of public and private institutions. The *relational dimension* implies the interaction between different social groups, and can involve variables like hierarchical and non-hierarchical relations, social control, leadership, community institutions, cultural exchange and assimilation between groups, social capital, social networks, political participation, etc. Finally, the *symbolic dimension* is related to identification with a common ground and can involve variables such as real and imaginary boundaries,

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partial and common identity and differentiation, separation between established members and outsiders, etc. (Ruiz-Tagle, 2013).

**Table 1:** The dimensions of socio-spatial integration

Macro dimensions	Socio-spatial dimensions	Characterization
Systemic	Physical	Physical proximity between social groups (defined by power and status)
	Functional	Effective access to opportunities and services in the territory
Social	Relational	Non-hierarchical interaction between different social groups
	Symbolic	Identification with a common group

Source: Ruiz-Tagle, 2013

One of the sub-types of the spatial integration can be considered the *cross-border integration*. The concept of this phenomenon encompasses numerous understandings. In the field of border studies, it is clearly understood as a regionally-based phenomenon, which takes place along national borders across different domains, ranging from economics to politics and culture. This paper focuses on this perspective (Sohn, 2014).

The other important phenomenon used in this paper is the *identity*, especially related to areas. Identity has been a popular word for more than two decades already. The needs of individuals and groups are seen as a reaction to the dominant interest for social structures and systems in the 1960s and 1970s. The identity of groups will be related to families, relationship and personal connections as well as to linguistic, religious and other cultural community, but also to local, regional and national bonds. “Identity” is to be understood as a feeling or a certainty of belonging to a group or area or to be one with this group or area. If this feeling or certainty is related to an area or region it is referred to *spatial or regional identity* (Heller, 2011).

Regional identity has been described in the literature as closely connected to common space and culture, creating in individuals a sense of belonging. Regional identity is the identification of a group of people with the social system of a region, its culture, history, traditions and landscape (Paasi, 2003; Raagmaa, 2002). In some cases, regional identity may act as a stabilising, changing and constructive factor in a region, whilst in others it may have destructive effects, particularly when national and regional identities come into conflict (Smallbone, et al., 2007). Territorial identity is one of the ‘keystones’ of region and plays a key role in the process of the institutionalization of regions as well as the de-institutionalization of regions. Research on the relationship between people and the territory they inhabit has become increasingly important in recent years, along with research concerning the degree to which one ‘belongs’ to a territory and its territorial society or community (Semian – Chromy, 2014).

According to Paasi (1986, 2009), regional identity consists of two components: regional identity of the inhabitants and the identity of a region. The first one (regional identity inhabitants) is the expressed sense of belonging to a community and the perceived differences between a specific region and other regions by its inhabitants (an ‘us’ and ‘them’ relationship). It can be based on collective identification with community in a particular territory and/or collective identification with the particular regional environment of inhabited territory. The second one (identity of a region) is based on the constitution of a regional image either from within or from outside or, in other words, how the region is presented and perceived by its own inhabitants and institutions as well as by others outside the region. The image of a region can be influenced through promotion, branding, and marketing. The inhabitants can also be identified with the represented image of the region (Paasi 1986, 2009; Semian – Chromy, 2014).

Why is the identity so specific in the cases of the border regions? How can link the cross-border integration to the spatial identity? To answer these questions, the paper overviews the main characteristics of the borders and highlight why the identity of the border population can be so specific.

First of all, we have to take into account that European borders are *unnatural, political constructions*. Looking at European history, border drawing has been a consequence of the struggles about formation and re-formation of nation states, and the majority of contemporary European borders have been drawn as a consequence of the two world wars in the twentieth century (Yndigegn, 2011). Furthermore, borders are *multidimensional* (Risse, 2004). They are physical entities and determine people's perceptions. They are *spatial representations of power relations*, and become reflected in the minds of the people who live with and along the borders (Anderson - O'Dowd, 1999; Delanty, 2006). Besides being physical realities in geographical space, borders are *social constructions*. They divide people between known and unknown, between native and foreign, between us and them, moreover they *produce meaning and significance* beyond their existence. Borders *signify the relationships between actors and institutions* in the borderland (Yndigegn, 2011). Paasi (1998) pointed out that borders or boundaries have *identity producing functions*. Moreover, let us think the words of Newman and Paasi (1998:194), who said "*identity and boundaries seem to be different sides of the same coin*" on the fact that state borders are symbols of social institutions and power relations. In border areas, the space-related identity is an important topic especially, because political borders do not necessarily mean cultural, social and economic borders, even in cases when they are permeable. In these areas, the population can have a specific identity, which can be characterised by two or more identities. These border areas can be considered as areas of interference, where heterogeneous societies with overlapping identities are established. Moreover, the history and the conception of the history (cultural memory) which a population has can be important factors for the building of identity (Heller, 2011). Within the disciplines sociology, history, psychology and political science the memory functions are considered as being fundamental for the process of identity formation (Zimmermann-Steinhart, 2005). Van Houtum, Kramsch and Zierhofer (2005) argue that the hybrid culture that develops in cooperative cross-border urban areas will support the emergence of a new regional identity.

As for methodology, based on the hypothesis of this paper, in strongly integrated border regions, where physical and mental borders have less or no importance, the population can identify with this spatial level better than people living in separated, alienated border regions. In order to be able to decide on this hypothesis, the paper investigates three European borderlands from the aspects of cross-border integration and regional identity. The selected border regions are: the Öresund region at the Danish-Swedish border, Frankfurt-Oder – Slubice at the German-Polish border and Basque region at the French-Spanish border. They are very different from the aspects of the geographical position and extension, processes of economic and social development, historical background, dates of the accession to the European Union and thus the level of integration as well. The different endowments, possibilities and cooperation culture justify the selection of these areas. Figure 1 represents the selected border regions on a map, while Table 2 summarizes their main features.

**Figure 1: Examined border regions**

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**Table 2: Main features of the examined border regions**

Cross-border region	Member states	Accession to the EU	Population (inhab.)
Öresund	Denmark	1973	3,8 million (67% Danish side, 33% Swedish side) (2011)
	Sweden	1995	
Basque region	France	1952	3 million (80% Spanish side, 20% French side) (2015)
	Spain	1986	
Frankfurt-Oder – Słubice	Germany	1952	80 000 (75% German side, 25% Polish side) (2009)
	Poland	2004	

Source: OECD, 2013. Everyculture.com, 2015, Mission Operationelle Transfrontalière, 2009

### Cross-border identity as reality? – Cases of several border regions

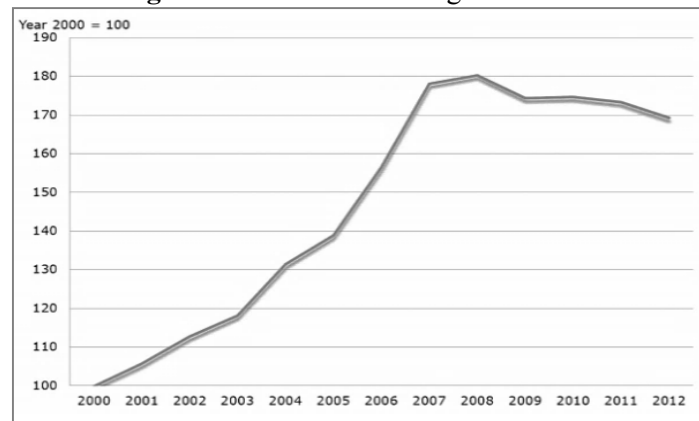
#### *Danish-Swedish-border - Öresund Region*

The Öresund Region is formed by the eastern part of Denmark and the south-western part of Sweden. The region is named after the narrow water, the Öresund. In the region can be found the Danish capital Copenhagen, and the third largest Swedish city, Malmö (Yndigegn, 2011). It represents the first European experiment of integration between two states based on marketing, economy and infrastructures (Santanicchia, 2003). Copenhagen and Malmö were connected by the 18- km fixed Öresund link in 2000. It was built with the explicit purpose of a new regional regime driven by cross-border functional integration. The object was to increase regional productivity, economic growth and competitive vitality, and thus give the Öresund Area new dynamics (Matthiessen, 2004).

The bridge building project initiated an integration process that developed in different ways. The population started to act on the new possibilities that opened, and the public authorities launched national separate plans for city development. The bridge became a catalyst for cross-border cooperation between the two countries (Yndigegn, 2011). In 1999, before the Öresund bridge opened, around 2 600 people commuted daily across the Swedish-Danish border. One decade later, around 20 000 commuted daily to work or study, though this had fallen to around 15 000 by 2013, in the wake of the financial crisis (McEwen-Petersohn, 2014). Commuting goes almost only in one direction; 95% of the commuters live in Sweden and, work in Denmark. Many Danes have settled in Sweden because of lower property prices. It reflects economic conditions that almost all traffic goes from Sweden to Denmark. There is no economic incentive to move the other way (Yndigegn, 2011).

It is possible to observe how new more or less formal networks evolve within the different sectors linking individual organizations in a strategic network of new resources and action structures. The “Öresund University” links the many different universities and business schools in the region. “Medicon Valley” has been a vehicle for corporation between research institutions and firms within the medical industry. The project “The Birth of a Region” is concerned with marketing and development of the Öresund Region initiated by public organizations in the area, and “Science Region” is perhaps a label that possible could integrate the networks above into a cohesive whole. This short list of initiatives is just mentioned to illustrate that many things are happening and a lot of organizations take part in the project of integrating the area (Tangkjær, 1999). According to the EU, the region of Öresund is considered a model for further cultural and economic integration within the EU, and an example of the new Europe without borders (Hofstam – Waldemarsson, 2006). This integration across Öresund is important for both countries. The Öresundskomiteen has developed an integration index to measure the changes of the integration between the Danish and Swedish part of the Öresund region compared with year 2000, which is the year of the opening of the Öresund Bridge. Values above 100 displays that the Öresund region is more integrated than in year 2000. The value of the index in 2012 is 169. So far the highest value of the index was reached in 2008 – at 180. The Integration Index is a combination of five sub-indices measuring the integration within the labour market, housing, business, culture and transport. Each of the five sub-indices weights 20% (Öresundskomiteen, 2013).

**Figure 2:** The Öresund Integration Index



**Source:** Öresundskomiteen, 2013

Seeing this growing tendency the question may arise: Do the inhabitants share in a common Öresund identity as a result of the integration processes? To answer this question, we can take into account two surveys related to regional identity.

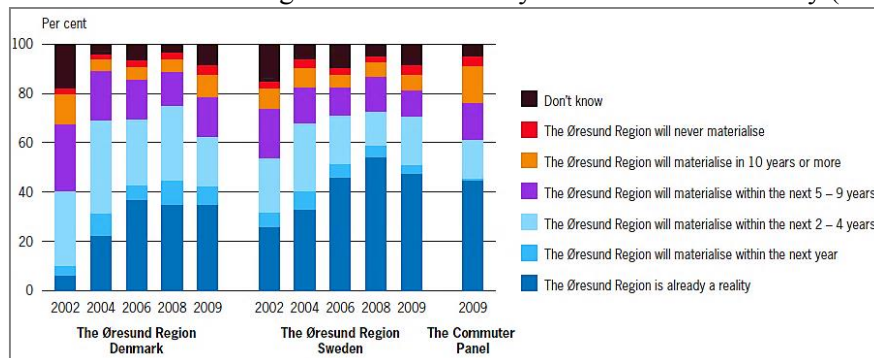
Firstly, as part of a larger project being carried out during 2001-2004 on identity in the Öresund region, 1949 residents of Denmark and Sweden were polled in 2001 regarding attitudes and behaviours towards their municipalities, regions, nation, and Europe as a whole. The data analysis reveals that there are significant differences between Danish and Swedish inhabitants of the Öresund region when it comes to matters of interest in the region, knowledge about the region, a willingness to identify and be seen as a member of the region, and moreover, the willingness to engage in substantial cross-Öresund activities (Bucken-Knapp, 2012).

Secondly, based another survey (2002-2009), published by Öresundsbron in 2010, slightly over half the polled Scanians (Swedish) (52%) declared that they regard themselves as Öresund citizens compared to 29% Danish part of the region. Among commuters using the Öresund Bridge, the figure is significantly higher (79%). Being an Öresund citizen, however, is only one of several identities of the region’s inhabitants. When dealing with the “other” country’s inhabitants, language and regulations, people on both sides are inevitably reminded of their own national identity. Common identity or not, the concept of one common region enjoys strong support among the Öresund Region’s residents, with 47% of Scanians (Swedish) and 35% of Zealanders (Danish) believe that the Öresund Region is now a



reality. At the same time, 40% of Scanians and 53% of Zealanders expect the Öresund Region to become a reality. Just 4% on each side believe that it will never materialise (Öresundbron, 2010) (Figure 3).

**Figure 3:** Will the Öresund Region become a reality? – Results of the survey (2002-2009)



Source: Öresundsbron, 2010

Santanicchia (2003) emphasizes, what the Scanians and Copenhageners need to understand is that they will not lose their identity because of becoming Öresunders; as well as they are Öresunders, they are Swedish, Danish, Muslims, Christians, and so on.

### The Basque region between France and Spain

The Basque region is situated in the western Pyrenees and includes territories in northeastern Spain and southwestern France with a total population of 2,900,000 inhabitants and an area of 20,531 km<sup>2</sup> (Menendez-Baceta et.al. 2015). At present, this territory is divided among three political-administrative structures: In the French State, le Pays Basque, and within the Spanish State, the Basque Autonomous Community and the Autonomous Community of Navarra (Lokarri, 2015). These three administrative regions include seven historical territories (Araba, Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, Lapurdi, the Southern and Northern Navarre and Zuberoa) (Douglass, 1996; Center for Basque Studies, 2011)

From the aspect of socio-spatial integration, as a result of the removal of border controls within the EU due to the Schengen agreement, many communities located in border zones have had to reassess their relationship with their neighbours across state frontiers. The French-Spanish border in the Basque Country is one of the cases, where numerous cross-frontier initiatives have been launched over the last decade. An increasing number of inhabitants now cross the frontier on a regular basis. In parallel, numerous economic changes have taken place, of which the steady urbanisation of the border is a consequence. All this means that traditional identities are altered with new emerging symbolic references (Bray, 2002). The stabilization of the Spanish democratic regime and Spain's accession to the European Community in 1986 favoured cross-border cooperation in Basque areas, which took two very different forms. On the one hand, inter-state cooperation over border controls was strengthened by European anti-terrorist and immigration policy. At the same time, European integration helped establish a framework of cooperation favourable to interventions by regional and local authorities. The progressive institutionalization of cross-border relations was strongly supported by the EU. From 1983, the French Aquitaine region and the Spanish Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) were among the nine border regions which founded the Pyrenean Labour Community. One example of cross-border institutional cooperation is the Bidasoa-Txingudi cross-border consortium (1998), which brought together the French town of Hendaye and the Spanish towns of Hondarribi and Irun (Itçaina, 2014). Nevertheless, Bray (2002) pointed out, the Bidasoa-Txingudi continues to be a highly segmented society, divided by a state frontier and differing traditions and attitudes, by language, social origins and loyalties and its members are as aware of their differences.

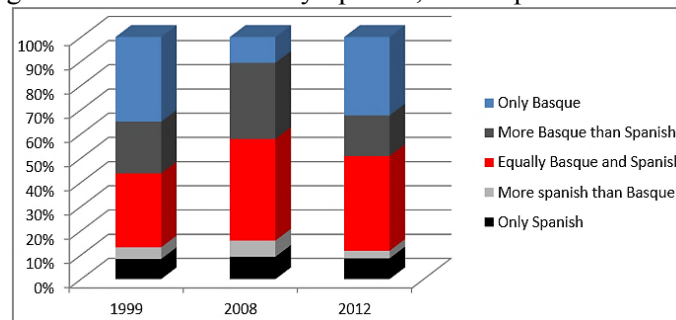
The Treaty of Bayonne, signed by France and Spain in 1995, strengthened the legal framework for cooperation. Small-scale cooperation between border municipalities flourished. Finally, the Aquitaine-Euskadi Euroregion (2011) represented a new phase in setting up a framework for cross-border cooperation. The process has had to overcome institutional and political asymmetries. There is a significant budgetary gap between the Aquitaine region, the BAC, and Navarre. Similarly there are large

differences between the extensive fiscal powers of the Basque Provincial Deputations and the more limited options of a French *département* (administrative area). At a political level, the perception of cross-border cooperation by political elites is different. French leaders had a functional and not identity-based perception of cooperation, while the BAC, when controlled by the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) saw cross-border cooperation as an opportunity to strengthen cultural ties between Basques (Itçaina, 2014).

It is not an easy task to define who Basque is and who not. One of the definitions is that Basques are people who speak Euskera. Another definition says that Basques are those who have Basque ancestors, even if they cannot speak Euskera. There are two other definitions as well. A Basque is a person who lives or works in the Basque Country, or a Basque is a person who thinks that he or she is a Basque (Jokinen, 2005). The issue of ‘Basque identity’ is a sensitive subject, reflecting past and present political and social tensions and competing notions of territory, region and country (Bray, 2002), moreover, based on the scientific literature, the situation is very different in the Spanish Basque Country (Hegoalde) and French side (Iparralde). Thus, this paper points out on the main differences.

In order to analyse Basque identity in the *Spanish side of the border*, Bartolomé (2013) has summarized the main results of European Values Study (1999, 2008) and Project Political Elites (2012) (Figure 4; 5).

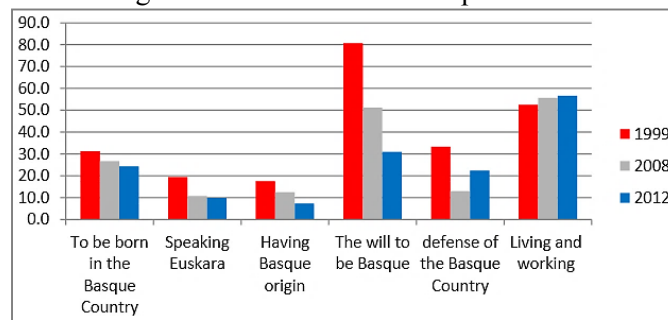
**Figure 4:** Basque-Spanish identity in 1999, 2008 and 2012.  
Percentages of those who feel only Spanish, more Spanish than Basque, etc.



**Source:** Edited by Bartolomé, 2013 based on European Values Study (1999, 2008) and Project Political Elites (2012).

As can be seen from Figure 6, the levels of Spanish nationalism have practically remained unchanged throughout the period 1999-2012 with a minority position. The option “equally Basque and Spanish” occupies a very relevant position, with a higher frequency in 2008. The percentage of people who declare to be either more Basque than Spanish or only Basque represents between 50-60% of the population. What seems to change throughout this time is the option in which people locate themselves (Bartolomé, 2013). Figure 5 shows the percentage of individuals who declare as relevant a number of given conditions for being considered Basque.

**Figure 5:** Conditions for being considered Basque 1999, 2008 and 2012.  
Percentages of those who choose a specific condition



**Source:** Edited by Bartolomé, 2013 based on European Values Study (1999, 2008) and Project Political Elites (2012).

The condition that seems to be the least relevant for respondents is to have Basque origins, in terms of having Basque parents or grandparents, which has also decreased over time. However, language often has an important role in ethnic identity and it means often much more than only a means of communication and it can be a very powerful symbol when discussing ethnic identity (Jokinen, 2005), speaking Euskera (Basque language) is the second least relevant condition for respondents, also showing a decrease over time (Bartolomé, 2013). One reason can be the fact that the Basque language and culture during the regime of Francisco Franco (1939–75) in the Spanish provinces were ruthlessly suppressed (everyculture.com, 2015).

To be born in the Basque Country is also one of the conditions that have been decreasing in relevance over time, probably due to the effect of immigration and assimilation of many of the inhabitants in the Basque Country (Bartolomé, 2013). One explanation can be that 28.7% of the population in the Basque Country were born outside of region according to data prepared by Eustat relative to the 2011 Population and Housing Censuses. The percentage of individuals born outside of the Basque Country has remained stable over the last ten years, although changes have been produced in their origins (Eustat, 2013).

Defending the Basque Country was somewhat relevant in 1999, with a significant decrease in 2008, and a revival in 2012, although it has returned to the levels of 1999. The two conditions to be considered Basque found most important by the respondents are: firstly, the will to be Basque—although this has experienced the strongest decrease throughout time, and secondly, living and working in the Basque Country. This condition scored the second highest in 1999, and the highest in 2008 and 2012, with a constant increase over time (Bartolomé, 2013).

### **What differences can be observed in the French Basque Country compared to the previously characterized Spanish side of the border?**

In order to answer this question, we have to pay attention on the research of Bray (2006), whose paper analyzes the “ethnonational identity<sup>2</sup>” of young French Basques in Iparralde in the context of European integration. Based on this research, one of the main differences between the two parts of the Basque Country is that young people in Iparralde tend to be more familiar with the political and cultural character of Hegoalde than is the case for their counterparts in Hegoalde in relation to Iparralde. Many young people from Iparralde spend their free time south of the border, attracted by its wider choice of cultural and social activities. The political and institutional arrangements are also very different on the two sides of the border. In Spain, the Basque people are recognized by the constitution as a nationality within the Spanish nation. Hegoalde is a clearly delineated territory with its own government, parliament, budget and taxation system. The Basque language is officially recognized and taught in

<sup>2</sup> National identity is primarily marked by identification with a specific nation. The concept of “ethnonational identity” goes further in that it refers to an identity marked not only by identification with a nation, but also by a code dictating who can and cannot belong (Bray, 2006).



schools, and use of it is given importance in both the public and private worlds. By contrast, Iparralde is part of a larger administrative entity, the Département des Pyrénées Atlantiques, which in turn is part of the much larger region of Aquitaine. However, the language is one of the most important identity markers for Basque youths in Iparralde, but it enjoys only a minimal position in the French public space. Only approximately 27 percent of the population of Iparralde can speak Basque and these are largely people above 50 years of age. The French state continues to refuse any official status for regional languages, contrary to the European Charter for Minority Languages drafted by the Council of Europe and ratified by most EU member states. So while on the Spanish side numerous people live out their identification with Basqueness quite comfortably, on the French side, Basque youths worry about how their language and sense of collective identity are going to survive (Bray, 2006).

### **Frankfurt (Oder) – Słubice (German-Polish border)**

Before the Second World War, Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice formed a single German town, divided by the river Oder. In 1945, the Eastern part of the river became an autonomous Polish town, Słubice, and the Oder, as major commercial waterway, a state frontier. Located 80 km east of Berlin, this cross-border conurbation has a population of 80,000 (75% on the German side and 25% on the Polish side) (Mission Operationelle Transfrontalière, 2009). In the Polish side the town belongs to the Lubuskie province and in the German side it is part of the Brandenburg region (Dudek et al, 2014).

Towns located on the international borders of the EU are regularly described as the “laboratories” of European integration because cross-border contact and interaction is very intensive in these regions. These cities are also locations where the EU has most vigorously pursued policies aimed at de-emphasizing national boundaries (Asher, 2005). Cross-border cooperation between Frankfurt (Oder) – Słubice began in the early 1990s, after German reunification and the easing of border controls. The first initiative was the elaboration of the common document “European city of Frankfurt– Słubice – state of play, tasks and perspectives” on the future actions for cooperation in the cross-border conurbation. At the same time, Frankfurt and Słubice, along with other municipalities on both sides of the border, decided to create the Pro Europa Viadrina Euroregion in 1993. In 1994, the two cities produced a common planning document covering the whole cross-border urban area. During this period, the two municipalities started to organise meetings between the mayors and municipal councils. Ten years later, the towns produced a programme for cooperation and the joint development of a European City. They then participated in the “City Twins Cooperation Network” within the framework of Interreg IIIC. From 2008 to 2010, the cross-border conurbation was a partner in the URBACT “EGTC” project, which has helped to clarify the role of actors in cooperation and develop a strategy for joint governance. (Mission Operationelle Transfrontalière, 2015).

The level of social integration in Frankfurt (Oder) – Słubice is considered rather low. Language and cultural barriers as well as the short tradition of borderland operation cause the lack of non-commercial contacts. Because of this, the relationship between Germany and Poland has remained mainly commercial, with the exception of academic circles (Dudek, et al, 2014). The mental borders between Polish and German borderlanders are determined by historical distrust and economic disparities. Several scholars who have written on recent Polish-German cooperation remarked that for true cooperation to develop between Poland and Germany, historical distrust and economic disparities must be overcome (Brym, 2011).

In order to present main features of the identity in this border region, the paper refers to a work of a research group (Budach et al, 2014), who conducted 10 interviews in Frankfurt (Oder) and 10 in Słubice about the cultural identity and the relations with people from the other side of the border. They also asked how people express their identity and what it means to be Polish in Słubice or German in Frankfurt (Oder). They interviewed 14 women and 6 men, 25 questions have been prepared in Polish and German language. The field work was done at the 13th of May 2014. This research offers a lot of interesting information about the people’s cultural background and about trans-border cooperation. This kind of close neighbouring across the border leads often to involuntary integration. One of the main conclusions is that the most important barrier for better integration is the language barrier between Polish and German. Only a few people can talk both languages and translation is needed during

cooperation projects. For example, in Frankfurt only 8% of people study Polish. That creates a lot of challenges in terms of cooperation between Słubice and Frankfurt (Oder). This research also revealed that people of Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice think that cooperation between both towns is an important part of living in the borderland. Both, Poles and Germans consider the Polish-German relations as positive. Cooperation between the towns produces cultural benefits and improves the communication across the borderline. This study also shows that Germans might see Polish people and the land itself less developed than Germany and that might cause some conflicts in cooperation. People on both sides of the river mentioned that the cultural identity is important but they only talked about their own cultural and national identity. There is no real common borderland identity in Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice. People of both cities think that the open border is important because it is easier if people are living and working in the other town. People also think that the border area is an advantage and possibility for both sides. All in all, nevertheless that the border is open and there are a lot of cooperations across the border, people see themselves either Polish or German. Maybe in the future if the border crossing cooperation continues there is a possibility that some kind of common border identity might be born (Budach et al., 2014).

### Conclusion

The paper was looking for the answers, why the identity is so specific in the cases of border regions, how the cross-border integration can link to the spatial identity and how the level of integration can influence the identity of the inhabitants of the borderland.

First of all, the space-related identity is an important topic in border areas, because of more reasons. Firstly, the borders have identity producing functions and secondly, they are symbols of social institutions and power relations (Paasi, 1998). Thus, elements of the identity can be different compared to non-borderland areas. Because the border regions are even not so homogeneous, they are very distinct from the aspects of the level of integration; the paper investigated firstly the selected border areas from this point of view, after that from the aspect of the identity. Summarizing, we can say that spatial integration among the examined border areas is growing in all of cases, especially thanks for several EU supported projects and economic differences (e.g. property prices, wages, etc.) but its current level and intensity is rather different. Based on the scientific literature, the spatial integration is stronger in the Öresund and Basque region, where there are not really cultural gaps, because the Danes and Swedish belongs to Scandinavian culture, furthermore the Basque community is also more or less homogeneous (apart from smaller national specificities). So, they are traditionally closer to each other, which can be a crucial factor in the integration process.

This higher stage of integration can support the emergence of a common regional identity. This is proven by the fact that the concept of one common region enjoys strong support among the Öresund Region's residents. In Basque region, an increasing number of inhabitants now cross the frontier regularly and numerous economic changes have taken place. The possibilities of the preserving of Basque identity are rather different in the two sides of the border; the Spanish Basque community with larger political autonomy has more favorable position in this regard than the French Basques. Frankfurt (Oder) – Słubice can be considered to be the most lagging compared to the other two border regions, because of language and cultural barriers as well as the short tradition of borderland operation. In this region, the mental borders are determined by historical distrust and economic disparities. Moreover, Germans might see Polish people and land less developed than Germany and that might cause some conflicts in cooperation. To sum up, because of weaker integration, there are not a common borderland identity in Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice.

All in all, we can accept the hypothesis of the paper, which assumed that the population can identify better with that borderland, where physical and mental borders have less or no importance, than people living in separated border regions. In addition, the paper did not examine how the economic situation of the border regions can influence the level of integration and therefore the emergence of a common borderland identity. The above investigated border areas are rather distinct from this point of view as well. It can be a topic of a further research, whether the economically most developed border areas have

more chance to share a common borderland identity, or the less developed, rural, peripheral areas are able to build up it.

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