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Czech–Polish Cross-Border (Non) Cooperation in the Field of the Labor Market: Why Does It Seem to Be Un-De-Bordered?

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Abstract: The Czech–Polish border is almost 800 kilometres long. Since 1991, 6 Euroregions and two European Groupings of Territorial Co-operation (EGTC) were created and have been conducting cross-border cooperation (CBC) along the entire length of the border. This was probably also the institutionalisation of cross-border co-operation, what has helped to reach and maintain a high level of mutual Czech–Polish relations. What can therefore be considered striking or surprising is a rather low level of cross-border labor mobility between the labor forces of both countries. Authors therefore attempted to identify projects and initiatives in the field of the cross-border labor market along the entire border. Research showed that the CBC stakeholders don't prioritise co-operation in the field of the labor market, as they don't see any real cross-border demand. There are some exceptions, driven mainly by the automotive and mining industries in Czechia attracting a Polish workforce. The main reason for the relatively low level of Czech–Polish cross-border co-operation in the field of the labor market is an absence of a major economic engine on either side of the border, rather than any kind of hostile or re-bordering sentiments in mutual relations between subjects from both countries.

Keywords: Czech–Polish cross-border co-operation; labor market; euroregions

1. Introduction

The existence of different administrative systems creates barriers to the balanced development of different European regions in the whole EU [1–4]. This is also true for the borders between Czechia (CZ) and Poland (PL). Cross-border cooperation (CBC) has an important role to play in eliminating these barriers [5]. The question is whether CBC is being understood as something sustainable, natural and desirable by other groups than its stakeholders and the realisers of cross-border co-operation projects [6].

The above-mentioned question is even more valid in developing the cross-border labor market [7]. Cross-border labor commuting in the current European Union is still more of an exception than a rule in both “old” [8–11], as well as “new” [12,13] Europe. The recent study conducted at the Polish–Czech border area indicates that development of cross-border cooperation in the economic sphere is lagging far behind other co-operation activities such as culture, nature protection, education and tourism [14].

We are approaching this topic knowing that both Czechs and Poles cross the border to work mainly in Germany, as the pay gap between Germany on one side and Poland and Czechia on either side of the border is still significant and creates an important pull factor. Hence, we would like to focus on bilateral Czech–Polish cross-border co-operation in the field of the labor market. We will identify the directions of cross-border commuter flows (if any), investigate who the principle actors boosting the cross-border labor market are, and will also attempt to assess the role of external EU funding in the Czech–Polish cross-border labor market.

2. Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) in the European Union

Many border scholars have repeatedly stated that CBC plays a major and relevant role within the integration process of European territories [15–17].

Cross-border co-operation has been subject to the attention of many researchers since the beginning of 1960s at least, after the first cross-border co-operation 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 co-operation structures [18,19]. Euroregions have been understood as almost a synonym of cross-border co-operation or cross-border regions [20]. Some authors even talk about “euroregionalisation” [17]. A cross-border region is not just a territory [21]. The existence of a specialized body responsible for cross-border co-operation management is extremely important in making co-operation happen. The contribution of these bodies towards cross-border co-operation with a focus on the labor market will therefore be assessed.

Euroregions and other co-operation entities composed from subnational public actors—mainly municipalities and regions—are the decisive actors of CBC governance in current Europe [4,22,23]. But there are also other actors entering into CBC. A special role is often played by non-public actors and their associations, mostly in the form of economic chambers.

When CBC was connected with EU funds via the INTERREG programme at the end of the 1980s, the number of cross-border initiatives dramatically increased [1]. Some authors, e.g., James Scott [24], consider working with INTERREG a primary purpose of Euroregions.

Functional cross-border co-operation needs to be based upon a network of co-operating institutions, which have created an atmosphere of mutual understanding and trust. This requires a relatively high standard of quality from the institutions involved. The “Institutional thickness” concept [25] belongs to a group of institutional regional development theories. This partial theory says that institutions are not only formal organisations, but that they mainly create informal conventions, habits, and networks of relations, which stabilize and stimulate the performance of regional economies. The success of regions in the long-term horizon is then dependant on the ability of local actors to create such institutions, which can create a good framework of conditions for economic and social regional development [26]. We will assess in this paper how Czech–Polish Euroregions and other CBC stakeholders create conditions for efficient cross-border co-operation in the labor market field.

2.1. Cross-Border Commuting in Europe

The free movement of workers is one of the fundamental principles of the European Union (EU) and is a key element of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), alongside the free movement of goods, services and capital. Article 45 of the TFEU stipulates free movement for workers within the EU, without any discrimination with regards to employment, remuneration and other conditions of work and employment. The freedom of movement is further elaborated in Regulation (EU) No. 492/20112 on the freedom of movement for workers within the Union and Directive 2014/54/EU measures facilitating the exercise of rights conferred for workers in the context of freedom of movement for workers [27]. The freedom of movement between EU member states has been further supported through the conclusion of the Schengen Agreement.

Despite the legal framework supporting freedom of movement, labor mobility between EU member states—both in terms of transnational migration as well as cross-border commuting—has historically remained rather low. According to the data of European Central Bank, 0.4 per cent of the EU population were known to commute across borders to work in 2000 [28]. It has only been very recently that cross-border commuting has increased significantly, as evidenced by Eurostat [27,29]. According to its data, 1.9 million citizens in the 28 EU member states worked in a foreign country in 2014, which represents a 94 per cent increase compared to 2002. However, the majority of cross-border commuting (1.2 million) is accounted for by the “old” EU15 Member States [27]. Luxembourg is the European capital of cross-border commuting [27,30,31], given its economic strength and its role as the economic engine of the whole Greater Region [1,5,32].

2.2. Drivers and Barriers of Cross-Border Commuting

The focus of our study is the phenomenon of cross-border commuting as one of the possible forms of transnational labor mobility. We understand cross-border commuting as daily repeated travel between place of residence situated in one country and place of work situated in the second country. Similar to other migration patterns, we can use the method of analyzing the push and pull factors that determine migration flows.

‘Pull factors’ (responsible for the attractiveness of destination market) are generally regarded as more important than ‘push factors’ (unfavourable economic indicators that cause an outflow of the workforce) in terms of influencing labor mobility trends. As such, higher incomes and better jobs in the destination region generally outweigh any unfavourable economic conditions (e.g., unemployment, lower incomes) in the region of origin [27]. Luxembourg and Basel can be mentioned in this context as the most representative examples of ‘pull factors success stories’, as well as the process of reunification of Germany in the 1990s [28]. However, economic conditions and indicators alone cannot explain labor mobility flows and trends. Other important elements fostering cross-border labor mobility are: well-functioning transport infrastructure [33,34], differences in housing and/or living costs [27,35], family connections and regional, cultural or language proximity [28,36], and the level of education and skills [37].

The generally low level of cross-border employment in the EU gives us evidence that the barriers of cross-border labor mobility have outweighed the pull and push factors of cross-border commuting. We believe the following barriers to cross-border commuting should be mentioned:

- the existence of legal and administrative barriers;
- the language and cultural differences among European countries;
- inefficient housing markets;
- the limited portability of pension rights;
- problems with international recognition of professional qualifications and non-formal learning;
- the lack of transparency of job openings [38];
- the level of urbanization of the borderland (the CBC is weaker in rural areas) [1].

Bearing in mind the above-mentioned barriers of cross-border labor mobility, we must state that people do not follow the homo economicus way of thinking only. According to many border scholars, people have tended to refuse the options offered by open borders, because they are still afraid of the “unknown” and feel uncomfortable on the other side of borders [39]. This is also true for the most “traditional” cross-border regions, such as those around Nijmegen on Dutch–German borders. Van Houtum and van de Velde claim that the bordering of our orientation and identity is preventing the existence of a large-scale cross-border or transnational labor market in the European Union. The social border produces a difference in the imagination of belonging and as such it produces an attitude of indifference towards the market on what is perceived as the ‘other side’. The avoidance of uncertainty and wish to border oneself and identify with an existing socio-spatial category then become important motivators for non-action [40]. Another explanation is that, in making decisions to migrate or cross-border commute, people are not fully rational [39]. We assume that this explanation, based on mentality, rather than on rationality, will fit the model of Polish–Czech CBC. For majority of the Poles living in the border area, Czechia could be the ‘space of indifference’, as well as Poland for Czechs. These expectations come inter alia from the research conducted by both authors among students of secondary schools of Euroregion Praděd/Pradziad [41]. We researched the mental preparedness of secondary school students to study and work on the other side of the border. We could have observed rather high willingness of students to study and mainly work abroad, however this willingness was not focused towards neighboring country. We also found out that students are scarcely led towards using the chances of the cross-border labor market, although there were some exceptions. Heinz Fassmann and Rainer Münz conducted a survey about migrants’ intentions and brought similar outcomes. For

only 2.5% of Czechs, the countries of Central-Eastern Europe were prime destinations; for Poles this score is much lower, 0.5% [42].

2.3. European Funds as Co-Operation Incentives

European funds, mainly INTERREG programmes, have helped to set up many cross-border groupings and initiatives. It is estimated that launch of INTERREG programmes in the 1988–1994 programming period contributed to the substantial increase of cross-border entities. Euroregions were most of those newly created entities, but not exclusively. Some of these new entities were oriented at easing the situation of cross-border commuters, as was the case for INFOBEST structures active in the Upper Rhine Valley [43]. Projects establishing those structures were primarily intended to serve existing cross-border commuters. Any further cross-border labor market promotion came only as a secondary motivation. Similar projects also appeared in other regions with active cross-border labor markets, such as the Saar-Lor-Lux (currently Greater Region) around Luxembourg.

Poland and Czechia, as EU future member countries, obtained a chance to participate in the second generation of INTERREG programmes in the 1994–2000 programming period, with financial assistance coming from PHARE CBC programmes. This contributed to the quick establishment of Euroregions as professional CBC structures. It also helped to finance the first projects, which had to comply with the design and priority intervention areas of those programmes. INTERREG programmes have been based upon similar structures in the whole EU, which have developed since the first INTERREG generation of 1988–1994.

3. Goals and Methodology

We would like to identify the potential role of European funds in promoting the cross-border labor market along the whole Czech–Polish border. This will attempt to identify who the main actors involved in the cross-border labor markets are and analyze the contribution of different CBC actors to co-operation in the field of the labor market. The article is a follow-up of previous research activities focused on the field of education and compared the CBC of schools alongside Czech–Polish borders [22,44,45]. We will try to verify the working hypothesis envisaging that the impact of European funds in the development of cross-border labor markets is weak in the short run. There are other, stronger factors, responsible for the cross-border labor mobility. The most intensive CBC in this field is in the Euroregion Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia, due to the relatively stable population, historical links between both parts of the Euroregion and almost non-existent language barrier. The lowest intensity and quality of cross-border labor market is found in the Euroregion Nisa-Nysa-Neisse, where the Polish part of the Euroregion that belonged to Germany until 1945 and where major population exchanges occurred after 1945 in both Czech and Polish part of the Euroregion. We can thus say that the population is largely new in both the Polish and Czech sides of the Euroregion. However, in the long run, the Euroregions will act as cross-border cooperation drivers, mainly thanks to EU funds/INTERREG microprojects schemes they administer.

To answer these questions, we will explain the context of the Czech–Polish borderland with a focus on primary CBC actors. The role of EU funds as a motivation to establish cross-border co-operation will be analyzed in the paper, more concretely the use of Czech–Polish INTERREG programmes in the labor market domain. We will compare the multitude and nature of the CBC projects focused on the labor-market field, using desk research. First, we will conduct an analysis of the projects which were supported under the Czech–Polish INTERREG programme in 2014–2020. We will work with the data available as of 30 June 2018. We will also analyse the bilateral cross-border cooperation programmes operated by the Euroregions, called the “microprojects fund”. They are used to support the smallest projects, especially non-investment and people-to-people ones. These projects focus on the cooperation of local communities on both sides of the border. Finally, we will conduct an analysis of regional and professional online media, searching for information about job positions for Poles in Czechia and for Czechs in Poland.

The study will be complemented by the expert interviews with representatives of selected Euroregions or stakeholders active in CBC on the Czech–Polish border in the labor market field. We shall use a questionnaire, which will be distributed among Czech and Polish experts (nonprobability, accidental sampling, $n = 20$), equally from both sides of the border. We believe that the modesty of this number will be sufficiently compensated for by the high expertise of the respondents, who have CBC as their “core business” [46,47]. We will address them with the following questions:

- What is the main reason for lower levels of cross-border labor market co-operation in the Czech–Polish border?
- Entrepreneurs cannot use the INTERREG programme. Could this be a reason for their non-involvement in CBC?
- Do you know about any particular initiatives focused on CBC in the field of the labor market on the Czech–Polish border?
- What would you recommend to increase the level of the CZ–PL cross-border labor market?
- What are the main barriers to the Czech–Polish cross-border labor market?
- What do you think about the EURES-T initiative on the Czech–Polish border?
- Who do you think should be the main promoter of the Czech–Polish cross-border labor market?

These methods and their triangulation should be sufficient to achieve the goals of the paper, given previous engagement of authors in the field.

4. Czech–Polish Cross-Border Cooperation

The Czech–Polish borderline experienced, as many other borders in Central and Eastern Europe, substantial changes during the 20th century. The creation of Poland and former Czechoslovakia was one of the results of World War I. Short military conflicts between both countries ended by international arbitration in 1920, when the questioned territory of Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia at the very east of the border was divided between both countries along the river and railway, not according to nationality; most of the inhabitants of the Czech part declared Polish nationality. Also, thanks to that division the relationships between both countries—Czechoslovakia and Poland—remained rather cold in the period between both World Wars. Tensions resulted into a short Polish occupation of the Czech side of the Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia, which followed the Treaty of Munich in the end of September 1938 and which ended a year later when the Nazis conquered Poland [48]. After 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 eastern Soviet block, the permeability of borders was rather low and cross-border co-operation was virtually non-existent.

Polish–Czechoslovak relations of the divided region were intensified only after 1989, when the communist and totalitarian regimes in Poland and Czechoslovakia/Czech Republic fell. Both countries declared their intention to join the western co-operation structures and decided upon intensification of mutual regional co-operation when establishing the regional Visegrad group in 1991. The 1990s also brought the creation of cross-border co-operation mechanisms at the lower levels of public administration in all countries of the ex-Soviet block; Euroregions.

4.1. Actors of CBC on Czech–Polish border

4.1.1. Euroregions

Initially, Euroregions were created between municipalities representing the Western or Eastern part of Europe (such as the trilateral Czech–Polish–German Euroregion Nisa-Nysa-Neisse founded in 1991); later on they were also founded between countries of the former Eastern block themselves, including the Czech–Polish borderline (Euroregion Glacensis in 1996, Praděd 1997, Silesia and Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia in 1998 and Beskydy in 2000). Currently, there are six Euroregions along the entire length of the

Czech–Polish border (see Figure 1). Some Euroregions also involve partners other than municipalities and regions—most commonly universities or economic chambers—however this is not the case in all Euroregions, and these partners are often quite weak. This influences the agenda and co-operation scopes of individual euroregions, which follow the interests of municipalities as their direct founders.



Figure 1. Euroregions on the Czech–Polish border. Source: INTERREG Czech Republic–Poland 2014–2020.

All of these Euroregions have a very similar structure of activities. Except for the trilateral Nisa-Nysa-Neisse, which was established as a major political symbol in 1991, the other five were created in the second half of 1990s. We can say that the Euroregion Tesin/Cieszyn Silesia faces the lowest language barrier, due to the presence of a Polish minority on the Czech side and a commonly understood dialect used on both sides of the border. Relatively lower language barriers can be observed in the other three “Eastern” Euroregions. The other two, Glacensis and Nisa-Nysa-Neisse, comprise regions where almost complete population change occurred; hence one can expect a bigger language barrier there (Table 1).

Table 1. Basic statistical data on Czech–Polish Euroregions [49].

| Euroregion | Founded | Nr. of Inhabitants in Thousands | | | | Surface in sq.km | | | | Nr. of Members | | | |
|-----------------------|---------|---------------------------------|-----|-----|------|------------------|------|------|------|----------------|-----|----|------|
| | | Total | CZ | PL | D/SK | Total | CZ | PL | D/SK | Total | CZ | PL | D/SK |
| Nisa-Nysa-Neisse | 1991 | 1578 | 426 | 590 | 571 | 12,591 | 2499 | 5595 | 4497 | 295 | 131 | 51 | 113 |
| Glacensis | 1996 | 770 | 255 | 515 | | 5249 | 1721 | 1328 | | 150 | 115 | 38 | |
| Praděd/Pradziad | 1997 | 761 | 133 | 628 | | 7656 | 1900 | 5756 | | 112 | 73 | 39 | |
| Silesia | 1998 | 771 | 488 | 283 | | 2732 | 1224 | 1508 | | 76 | 56 | 20 | |
| Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia | 1998 | 672 | 360 | 312 | | 1730 | 763 | 967 | | 29 | 12 | 17 | |
| Beskydy | 2000 | 1300 | 161 | 844 | 296 | 6343 | 972 | 3288 | 2083 | 181 | 63 | 38 | |

CZ—Czechia; PL—Poland; D/SK—Germany/Slovakia.

4.1.2. EURES-T Partnerships

EURES-T is an initiative gathering public employment services and other partners working together across borders to support the mobility of workers and employers. This initiative has been actively supported and co-financed by the European Commission. At the moment (February 2019) there are 11 active partnerships in the whole EU. One of these partnerships is the Czech–Polish–German Triregio covering the western part of the Czech–Polish border and southern part of the Free State of

Saxony. There was also other trilateral Czech–Polish–Slovak EURES-T Beskydy partnership covering the eastern part of the border, founded in 2007, but this partnership has been active only formally since 2016, when it did not get EU funding for its functioning.

The scope of the activities of all EURES-T partnerships is rather similar. They have been working mainly through their EURES advisor network throughout the regions, who should be responsible for establishing more contacts both in the public employment services and in the social partners' organisations in the border area. These advisers should be able to provide and develop up-to-date, targeted information and advice for employers, employees, self-employed persons, trainees and students. Special tools used for that are fairs promoting cross-border mobility in border regions, the triregional EURES-T initiative also aims at raising demand for skilled workers.

It was important for us to look for the reasons underlying the fact that the trilateral EURES-T on the Czech–Polish–German border is operating and the one on the Czech–Polish–Slovak border is not operating anymore. We came to conclusion that the main reason for this is the presence of pull factors in Triregio, being a German labor market that is attractive for Czech and Polish employees. Also, the scope of Triregio's activities advises that cross-border flows have been targeted there. However, the real impact of the EURES-T triregion network on promoting cross-border labor flows between Czechia and Poland has remained very limited until now. The impact of EURES-T Beskydy on the Czech–Polish–Slovak border has been absolutely negligible [50].

4.2. Labor Mobility as a CBC Objective

4.2.1. Minor Role of Euroregions

As already mentioned, the Czech–Polish Euroregions have been involved in working with the EU INTERREG programmes or their predecessors since their creation in the late 1990s. They are among the most skilled projects' beneficiaries and their projects often have major impacts. But when comparing the statutes of all six Euroregions, we can state that the scope of their co-operation activities is very similar. As far as co-operation in the field of the labor market is concerned, this was declared to be a priority for two Euroregions—Silesia and Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia—only (see Table 2).

Table 2. Scope of Activities of Czech–Polish Euroregions [49].

| Co-Operation Field | Nisa-Nysa-Neisse | Glacensis | Praděd/Pradziad | Silesia | Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia | Beskydy |
|---|------------------|-----------|-----------------|---------|-----------------------|---------|
| Information exchange | X | | X | X | X | X |
| Economic development | | X | X | X | X | X |
| Environmental protection | | X | X | | X | X |
| Crisis and natural disaster management | | X | X | X | X | |
| Cultural exchange | | X | X | X | X | |
| Education, youth and sports | | X | | X | X | |
| Tourism | X | | X | | X | |
| Technical infrastructure | | X | | X | | |
| Regional development | X | X | | | X | |
| Transport and communications | | | X | | X | |
| Human resources development and quality of life | | | | X | | X |
| Labor market | | | | X | X | |
| Spatial planning | | | | X | | |

4.2.2. INTERREG Programme in Cross-Border Labor Market Promotion

Given the lower interest of Euroregions in promoting the cross-border labor market, we should focus on analysing who the other actors are (if any) using the INTERREG programme in promoting the cross-border labor market.

The Czech–Polish programme 2014–2020 is the INTERREG programme with the highest financial allocation in the whole EU, due to the length of this populated cross-border area and relatively low GDP of its territory. It is about to distribute 211.8 MEUR among beneficiaries (we deducted this sum for technical assistance) in the following priority axis in 2014–2020 (see Table 3).

Table 3. Structure of the INTERREG programme [51].

| Priority | Name | EU (ERDF) Allocation |
|----------|---|----------------------|
| 1 | Joint risk/disaster management | 12.2 MEUR |
| 2 | Developing the potential of natural and cultural resources for a higher employment rate | 135 MEUR |
| 3 | Education and qualification | 10.1 MEUR |
| 4 | Co-operation of institutions and communities | 54.5 MEUR |

The most relevant priority for our research is the third one, supporting cross-border co-operation in the field of education and qualification. Despite this priority having the lowest allocation of the whole programme, there is very low interest for project proposers to submit project applications under this priority axis. In the beginning of 2019, before the end of the programming period, there was still 48% of the allocation left. This contrasts sharply with the state-of-play of other priorities, which are mostly spent despite their much higher allocations. A similar situation happened also during the previous 2007–2013 programming period, when a similar priority also remained unexploited to a large extent and the programme managing authority decided to transfer these funds to other priorities, mainly the one connected to tourism promotion.

Most of the 10 projects focused on CBC in the field of education and qualification in the 2014–2020 period were submitted by tertiary education institutions, who wanted to offer cross-border labor market opportunities for their own students. Joint workshops, training courses and cross-border internships are the main activities of those projects, sometimes supplemented by courses in the neighboring language. The problem is in the limited scope/reach of these projects; they address in total no more than 1000 people. Moreover, the projects mostly do not encourage their participants to work/study on the other side of the border, their focus is rather on presenting the Czech–Polish border region as an attractive place to work and live in as such.

To find out the reason why project promoters don't apply for projects promoting CBC in the fields of the education and labor market, we must have a look at who the CBC actors using the INTERREG programmes are. According to the INTERREG rules, these actors must be public or not-for-profit. This, to a large extent, eliminates private actors from using the INTERREG programme (and to a large extent also CBC as such), except for their associations, such as economic chambers. The main CBC actors involved in the INTERREG programme are thus municipalities, regions and the organisations controlled by them. Euroregions have an important role here, their representatives are also involved in complex programme management, including selection of its priorities and the selection of financed projects. Actors who have controlled and influenced INTERREG programmes are not primarily responsible for labor market interventions. This means that this domain remains the least important of all priorities of the INTERREG programme.

Analysing the Microproject Fund for 2007–2013 and also part of 2014–2020 programming period, we found only five microprojects focused on organizing cross-border labor market brokerage events and microprojects which helped support co-operation and partnership meetings of entrepreneurs from both sides of the border. All of these projects were realised in the Euroregion Těšín/Cieszyn

Silesia, where the language barrier does not constitute a major co-operation obstacle. We also analysed the microprojects of schools, but the vast majority of them were focused on the exchange of pupils attending elementary schools, without more profound ambitions. From more than 500 analysed projects, we documented the non-attractivity of CBC in the labor field as a cooperation topic. This brings a clear picture of existing border-relevant patterns.

4.3. Cross-Border Labor Market Outside of the INTERREG

The analysis of regional and professional media and interviews with experts brought us several new findings. In the Silesia Euroregion, as well as the Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia Euroregion, cross border workflow was observed in the last two years. This is a one-way flow: Polish workers from the borderland (for example Wodzisław and Gorzyce) commute daily to automotive factories in Czech Ostrava and nearby areas [52,53]. It seems that this trend was also confirmed by public surveys. From 2016, in studies done by the Polish Public Opinion Research Center, labor migration to Czechia is registered; 3 percent to 5 percent of Polish labor emigrants declare that they work or had worked in Czechia [54]. Interestingly, the actors responsible for this growth in cross-border commuting are not public actors, but commercial employment agencies.

However, the level of influx of real cross-border commuters—commuting from one part of the borderland to the other—is hard to estimate. According to data from the Czech Statistical Office there were approximately 41,500 Poles working in the Czech Republic in 2017 [55]. However, statistics don't differentiate the region of origin of these employees. Moreover, Polish employees don't work only in the border regions, but often work elsewhere, mainly in Prague. It is worth noting that many Polish workers employed in Czechia are agency-based employees coming from eastern Poland.

5. Discussion and Summary

This article had an ambition to verify whether there is a joint cross-border labor market in the Czech–Polish borderland. Our findings lead us to the conclusion that we can hardly speak about a single cross-border labor market across the entire border length. The main reason behind the relatively low levels of a cross-border labor market can be found in the relatively similar levels of economic development of both sides of the border, multiplied by the relative accessibility of other labor markets (mainly the German one), which offer significantly better opportunities and pay. Therefore, we consider it as being rather influenced by the barrier effect of the border. Referring to the title of the article, we call this 'un-de-bordered'. Generally, there is a lack of relevant drivers of CBC in the field of the cross-border labor market, with some exceptions mentioned below.

Nevertheless, there are certain isolated areas where a cross-border labor market can be observed, but this is mostly a one-way process: the Poles follow the “pull factors” of the Czech border regions, mainly those of the mining, steel and automotive industries. These areas of cross-border commuting are then driven by local businesses looking for workforces from the other side of the border. These private enterprises rely on their own forms of recruitment and do not liaise with public actors much. One of the cases indicated by the experts where CBC in the labor market can be observed is the Škoda factory based in Kvasiny, in the Czech part of the Euroregion Glacensis, some 30 km from the Polish border. Experts underlined that the high number of Poles (1500) employed there came as a result of a recruitment campaign of this car-maker which took place on the Polish side of the border. The attractivity of this employer is underlined by salaries which highly exceed the Czech national average—even the least qualified professions start on 35,000 CZK. Most of these employees commute on weekly, not daily basis, but a significant part come from the border region. The same story based on employment in the automotive industry can be seen in the Ostrava region.

More active recruitment strategies of Czech companies on the Polish side of the border are recommended. Economic chambers and other relevant actors can play an important role in this and some of them have already engaged in cross-border initiatives promoting the employment of Poles in Czechia. Most of the interviewed experts from both sides of the border see cross-border commuting as

unidirectional process—they are very sceptical of the possible flow of Czechs to Poland and mention this as an exception for the mostly Polish minority members in the Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia Euroregion who live in Czechia, but work on the Polish side of the border.

Different languages also create a cooperation barrier. Despite both languages belonging to the group of West Slavic languages, mutual comprehension of Czech and Polish speakers remains limited. The only exception is in the Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia Euroregion, given the Polish minority on the Czech side and use of a similar dialect on the both sides of the border [56]. This underlines that in the Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia region we can observe a moderate level of cross-border workflow: Polish miners in the Karviná district and workers in the Třinec steelworks. Moreover, the opportunities to study Czech in Polish schools and conversely are very limited, except for Polish minority schools in Czechia. School principals sometimes declared they were interested in introducing the language of their neighbor into the curriculum, but encountered zero or very low interest from students and their parents. Few identified exceptions were implemented under the framework of different projects, however they were not continued in most cases.

Due to the smaller role of the language barrier and high intensity of cross-border interactions in Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia we also expected a higher level of cross-border labor market interactions there. This was partly confirmed, as there is a significant number of Poles working in Karviná and Třinec. However, the reason for this is not only a lower language barrier, but the need for workers: the vast majority of Polish miners working on the Czech side are not allowed to work in the mining industry in Poland, because earlier they received state-subsidized compensation for having lost jobs in mining in Poland.

We also envisaged the lowest level of the cross-border labor market in west of the border, in the Euroregion Nisa-Nysa-Neisse. This hypothesis was rejected, as the actors in the labor market in the Euroregion actively co-operate with the EURES-T Triregion network, which helps cope with the intensive labor flows to the Saxon part of the trilateral region. The bilateral Czech–Polish flows of the workforce are not as substantial, but the whole territory should be understood in the context of its trilaterality.

The role of public actors in promoting the Czech–Polish cross-border labor market is significantly lower. This is due to many reasons: firstly, the dominant public CBC actors are Euroregions, who are composed of municipalities and to a lesser extent regions. Neither municipalities nor regions are directly responsible for employment promotion and therefore have not engaged in promoting the cross-border labor market substantially.

Public employment services—controlled from higher than local/regional levels of public administration—have tried to trigger CBC in the labor market field and joined EURES-T initiatives, such as the Triregion in the Czech–Polish–German borderland covering the west of Czech–Polish border and Czech–Polish–Slovak EURES-T Beskydy co-operation grouping on the eastern side of the same border. The earlier-mentioned partnerships have proven to be more active and helpful, as it addresses the region with substantial cross-border labor market pull factors, presented here by the attractive labor market in Saxony.

Also, other public actors don't ignore this co-operation field entirely. Despite analysis of INTERREG funds use in labor market promotion revealing that local actors prefer other co-operation domains, some minor projects were implemented. Given their modest target groups, the real impact of these projects has remained rather low. However, the importance of such projects cannot be underestimated: most of those projects were implemented by schools or economic chambers, sometimes also in their mutual co-operation. The role of schools can be seen as preparing their students to cross the mental barrier linked with employment abroad. Another possible task can also be in promoting studying the language of the neighbor, which is also a partial barrier.

The fact that the INTERREG programme cannot be used by the business sector is not very relevant and does not constitute a major barrier. Business representatives can obtain access to INTERREG-funded co-operations indirectly, via their participation in economic chambers or bodies specialized in CBC.

However, strict programme rules and relatively complex lengthy administration distract entrepreneurs from its use anyway.

In comparison to the “old EU”, mutual CBC as such has a significantly shorter history and local actors are simply not “mature enough” to enter the CBC field. This is evident mainly when comparing the Czech–Polish with, for example, the German–French labor market in the Upper Rhine valley. There is no problem with disputes or the historical conflict between both countries. This story is over and does not influence one’s behaviour in the labor market. One of the experts proposed establishing a specialized body directly focused on joint cross-border labor market promotion. Given the success of these specialized bodies in some other European borderlands, mainly in the Franco–German–Swiss Upper Rhine Valley, this could be part of the solution. However, this solution would only bring its effect in a very long-term timeframe. Such institution-based approaches would be materialized in establishing a specialized body, which would have to closely liaise with schools and contribute towards removing mental and more tangible—such as language—barriers. However, it is not clear whether the quality of co-operation between potential partners establishing such a body is at the necessary level. The intersectoral co-operation among labor market actors and education providers is desirable here, which should be underpinned by the interplay of the national, regional and local actors coming from both the public and private sector. However, there is probably no universal panacea which could be automatically applied.

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