

implementing EU cohesion policy through soft spaces

*an analysis of cross-border cooperation in two
central european euroregions*

stefan telle

regpol² national workshop

prague, 21 march 2017

research question

How can soft spaces help to improve the “added value” of EU cohesion policy?

intro (I)

- EU integration → socio-economic disparities → EU cohesion policy
- problems of balanced regional development spill over political and administrative boundaries
- Soft spaces = flexible, place-based governance tools to tackle such problems
- Based on the assumption that substantive issues, rather than boundaries, should define the nature of policy response (inclusive and efficient)

intro (II)

- euroregions are examples of soft spaces for cross-border cooperation
- especially in peripheral border regions, they can boost the "added value" of EU cohesion policy at the local level
- BUT: limited capacity, unstable objectives, unclear accountability, low levels of trust, ambiguous relation to hard spaces

added value

Mairate (2006) The 'added value' of European Union Cohesion Policy.

- Achieving cohesion objectives
- Fostering economic integration
- Policy and programming: Helping regions to think strategically
- Quality of delivery systems: Raising effectiveness

soft spaces

Haughton et al. (2010, p. 52) The New Spatial Planning.

- Soft spaces represent a deliberate attempt to insert **new opportunities** for creative thinking [...]
- The **'hard' and 'soft' spaces** of governance are mutually constitutive, such that one cannot work without the other [...]
- Soft spaces often seem to be defined in ways that are **deliberately fluid and fuzzy** in the sense that they can be amended and shaped easily to reflect different interests and challenges.

soft spaces boost added value when they:

	cohesion objectives	economic integration	think strategically	raising effectiveness
new opportunities for creative thinking	download and disseminate EU cohesion objectives and knowledge to local level Implement quality projects	provide improved access to EU funds for local actors	Help to define and upload of common local-level objectives (lobbying)	introduce new collaborative / competitive approaches to decision-making at local level
'hard' and 'soft' spaces are mutually constitutive	share responsibility in OP programming and implementation ('partnership')	help to implement EU objectives at local level	download and disseminate knowledge and connect actors	introduce new collaborative / competitive approaches to decision-making at local level
deliberately fluid and fuzzy to reflect interests and challenges	adapt to changing EU objectives	adapt to EU objectives to ensure access to EU funds	agreements are non-binding but consensus is important	include those actors who are most interested in cooperation

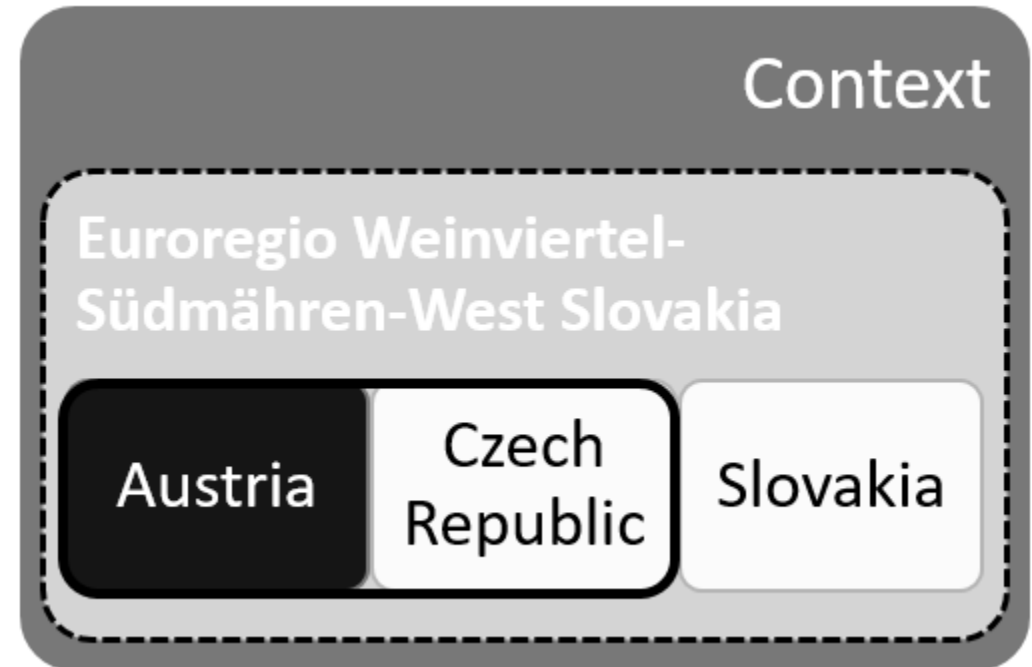
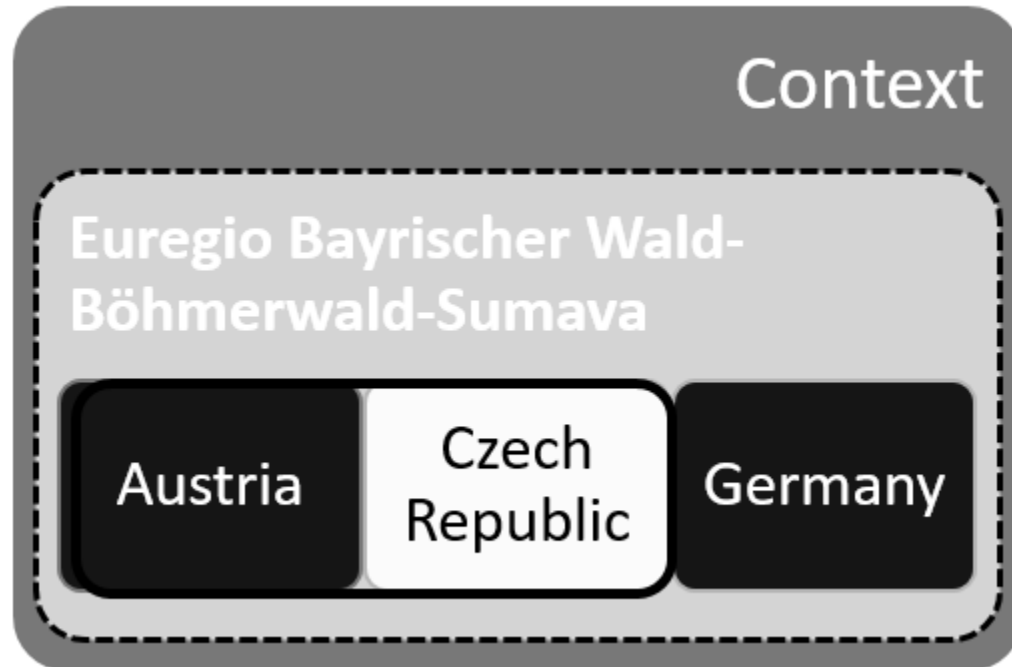
euroregions potentially can ...

- connect actors and improve participation
- adapt to changing EU objectives
- download and disseminate knowledge
- implement own quality projects
- facilitate the definition of common local objectives
- represent interest of the region at national and European level and in OP programming and project selection
- provide access to external funds
- introduce collaborative / competitive approach to decision-making

what they achieve depends on ...

- organizational capacity
- extent to which EU and local objectives are linked in a meaningful and stable way
- clear distribution of accountability
- sufficient levels of trust
- relation to hard spaces

comparing two euroregions (I)



comparing two euroregions (II)

	Bavarian Forest – Šumava – Mühlviertel (1993-2017)		Pomoraví – Zahorie – Weinviertel (1999-200?)	
settlement characteristics	predominantly rural surrounded by larger agglomerations		predominantly rural (exception Brno) surrounded by larger agglomerations	
language	German - Czech		Slovak / Czech - German	
history	(Habsburg Empire) divided by Iron Curtain		Habsburg Empire divided by Iron Curtain	
socio-spatial development	BA 36.600 CZ 14.800 AT 35.700	Straubing 20.700 JCZ 12.500 Mühlviertel 21.300	SK 12.800 CZ 14.800 AT 35.700	Trnavska 14.300 JMO 13.900 Weinviertel 19.500
geo-physical characteristics	limited accessibility because of physical barriers and national parks		good accessibility, despite Morava river	
politico-administrative system	federal – central – federal		centralized – central – federal	
	1.200 Mrd. – 90 Mrd. – 210 Mrd.		90 Mrd. – 32 Mrd. – 210 Mrd.	

	Euroregion Šumava	EUREGIO Bayrischer Wald – Böhmerwald	euregio bayrischer wald-böhmerwald-mühlviertel
Districts (Okres, Landkreis, Bezirk)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Domažlice Klatovy Prachatice Český Krumlov Strakonice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cham Straubing-Bogen Regen Deggendorf Freyung-Grafenau Passau Rottal-Inn (2004) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freistadt Perg Rohrbach Urfahr-Umgebung
Members	ca. 125 // 94 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Municipalities (92) Organizations (2) 	ca. 150 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> districts (7) municipalities (119) urban communes (2) interest groups (26) 	ca. 110 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> municipalities
Managing Committee		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> three elected district administrators (Landrat) 	
Chairman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> one chairman 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> one chairman two deputy chairman 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> one chairman four deputy chairman
Steering Committee	19 members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 representatives of regional forest association 2 representatives of the regions 4 representatives of the district centers 10 representatives from the districts (2 each) 	27 members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7 district administrators 3 lord mayors 8 representative mayors from the districts 9 interest group representatives and coopted members) 	26 members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 chairman 4 deputy chairman 4 representative mayors from the districts 4 appointed district administrators 6 representatives of political parties and interest groups 1 representative tourism 6 representatives Leader regions
Administration	Office (Besiny / Klatovy) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 (not only CBC) “which ensures the normal activity of the Euroregion” Regional Development Agency Šumava (Stachy) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7 (not only CBC) Administration Disposition Fund 	Dedicated Euregio office (Freyung) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 Euregio 2 Europe Direct 3 Euroregion Danube-Vltava 1 network management Bavaria-Bohemia 2 rural development 	Regionalmanagement Oberösterreich – Geschäftsstelle Mühlviertel (Freistadt) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9 office staff 1 dedicated to CBC

field research

Interviews with euroregion staff, local politicians, experts, program administrators

- case 1: 26 interviews / 29 informants
 - case 2: 27 interviews / 35 informants
- additional physical and digital resources
(potential online survey of mayors)



preliminary findings

- shared problems and EU structural funding not sufficient for survival
 - Austrian partners at the program level appear to be somewhat pessimistic about the **administrative capabilities** of, especially, the Slovak partners (severe problems of continuity, knowledge transfer, rationale is funding rather than topics)
- hard spaces matter
 - capacity and outlook of, as well as formal and informal links to, hard spaces crucial for building organizational capacity and broadening service portfolio (BA)
 - Softness allows to adapt to changing circumstances, but **collaborative relationship** with hard spaces is key
- Once depleted, rebuilding **trust** can take a very long time and, in fact, absolutely discredit the idea of voluntary cooperation in a euroregion

limitations

- time (and resource) constraints
- comparability of the cases
 - difficulties in comparing an active with an inactive euroregion
 - addressed by integrating temporal dimension
 - selection of and access to relevant actors
- internal validity
 - missing confounding variables
 - multiple causal factors and causal complexity
 - addressed by in-depth literature review and in-depth field research
 - deterministic causality (vs. constitutive causality)
- external validity
 - CBC is highly complex and context dependent
 - most-similar systems > low external validity
 - addressed by analytic generalization (compares findings of case study with theory)

thank you for your attention

references

- Map Euroregions: http://mapy.crr.cz/tms/crr_a/euro/index.php#c=3522969%252C5417488&z=2&l=ajax_euro,ajax_euro_plochy&p=&hs=1&, accessed 30.09.2016.