



# CROSS-BORDER REVIEW

# YEARBOOK 2021



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# Cross-Border Review

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## Introduction to the 2021 issue of Cross-Border Review

James W. Scott

Unavoidably, this 2021 Cross-Border Review Yearbook is marked by the profoundly complex experience of living with a global and borderless pandemic. Not only was/is Covid-19 an international phenomenon, it has also intensified the politically instrumental use of borders and exacerbated existing socio-cultural and socio-economic borders within national societies. As several advocacy groups for cross-border and territorial cooperation such as CESCO and the Association of European Border Regions have pointed out, the border closing impulses of member-states have deeply affected cooperation and eroded trust and social capital that has accumulated over the decades as a result of CBC. In addition, the closing of borders seems to underscore in many cases a lack of national interest in the workings of CBC, although we did see states backtrack in order to address concerns of commuters across borders.

Eduardo Medeiros and his colleagues (2021) coined the terms ‘covidfencing’ as a way of expressing the generalisation of border-closing measures as a visible display of government action but with limited epidemiological impacts. Perhaps most worryingly, the border politics of member states could question the viability of the Schengen Area as it was originally intended. In response to this, the European Committee of the Regions organised in July 2021 a Conference on the Future of Cross-Border Cooperation in which a *European Cross-Border Citizens’ Alliance* was unveiled. The purpose of the alliance is to send a political message to the European Commission and Parliament and to member states in defense of the rights of border region communities. The Alliance was undersigned by the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) and Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives (CESCI). Many of the contributions to this Yearbook elaborate on this problematic theme, offering different perspectives on ‘Covid borders’.

In the first contribution to the article section, **Eduardo Medeiros** discusses the urgency of establishing and maintaining institutional trust in response to the challenges presented by the Covid pandemic. He uses the term ‘covidfencing’, introduced above, to express the nationally focused and particularistic responses that have characterised what can only be termed as crisis management in the face of the pandemic. Covidfencing, however, could have longer lasting impacts by eroding faith in political and social institutions. As Medeiros argues, institutional trust is an essential counterpart of territorial cooperation, but also adds an extra layer of complexity to cooperation processes, thus requiring an insightful examination of its concrete re-

levance and impacts in boosting or hindering territorial cooperation in all its forms. This is the challenge he proposes to discuss by developing the hypothesis that European Territorial Cooperation programmes, and INTERREG specifically, can play a vital role in rebuilding institutional trust in European cross-border regions, which was greatly affected by the current COVID-19 pandemic.

**Jean Peyrony** follows up on Medeiros' observations by addressing the lessons learned from the crisis and actions that could be taken in favour of border regions both at the local level and within the framework of a bottom-up and multi-level governance involving member states and the EU. According to the author, cross-border regions will be a test case for recovery and beyond. The current crisis represents a danger, but also an opportunity for Europe to develop new policies for people and their living spaces. Furthermore, the recognition of interdependencies is a way to enhance the political dimension to cross-border and European integration. Peyrony reminds us that cross-border regions are at the heart of the European project. He also suggests that dealing with administrative borders requires functional approaches based on patterns of everyday interaction. Classical institutional approaches that focus primarily on sovereignty and control of mobility do not resonate with the reality of life in Europe's border regions. Closed borders have been a counterfactual to cross-border cohesion. Thus, the interdependencies revealed by the crisis call for new cooperation policies: a functional approach taking into account people in their cross-border living areas; multi-level bottom-up governance involving cross-border regions, states and the EU. Moreover, Peyrony provides some concrete suggestions regarding that could enable a more inclusive, sustainable and resilient development that, in benefitting border region, would promote cohesion more generally within Europe.

**Martín Guillermo Martínez** continues discussion of the pandemic and its consequences for border regions and communities living there. He relates how a number of advocacy groups for cross-border cooperation, including the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), combined efforts in order to collect cross-border stories of the pandemic. In addition to these stories, this team also analysed the many reports and social media posts from different borders areas regarding initiatives being promoted to ease the conditions faced by many citizens in border regions. From this wealth of information, a clear picture emerges of discrimination and hardships in addition to the burdens caused by Covid. Equally clear is the crucial role that various Euroregions, European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) or Eurodistricts played, helping people and businesses to understand their rights within the complexities of the cross-border contexts. The Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière also coordinated the report *The effects of COVID-19 induced border closures on cross-border regions* with the support of the European Commission and the collaboration of CESCO and AEBR, including an annex with 20 case studies. Details of the report are briefly provided by Martínez in his article.

**Alberto Gicometti, Mari Wøien Meijer and John Moodie** also engage with the issue of institutional trust and discuss how such trust holds Nordic countries, institutions, and people together, driving processes of cooperation and collaboration. As they point out, however, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fragility of this co-operation and even has threatened attempts to integrate the Nordic region even more. Their contribution to the Yearbook focuses on the impact of the pandemic on cross-border communities and assesses how the role and responsibilities of Nordic institutions and cross-border organisations can be strengthened to ensure that the rights of citizens in border areas are protected. The authors propose that “adaptive institutionalization” could help establish a clear distribution of responsibilities across different levels of governance and thus help adapt cooperation to situations of future potential crisis. As the authors state, strengthening institutional capacities will be vital in mending Nordic trust, deepening integration, facilitating socio-economic recovery, and building Nordic regional resilience.

**Volkan Altıntaş and Cemre Toklatli** then offer local perspectives on cross-border tourism at borders between Turkey, Bulgaria and Greece. Since the March 11 2020 declaration of a pandemic by the World Health Organization, tourism has been one of the industries in which the negative effects of the epidemic were seen the most, as restrictions in travel and tourism activities and social isolation were among the initial measures taken to get Covid-19 under control. However, as soon as domestic tourism activities were again permitted, international travel began again as well. In this context, people in Turkey have been observed to prefer bordering countries. Many of Turkey’s cities are near international borders and cross-border tourism has proved highly popular despite the threat of Covid infection. It appears that perceptions of risk associated with travelling during times of Covid varied highly among the local population. This motivated the present research in which psychological factors encouraging mobility were the central focus. In the article, the authors present the results of their quantitative survey research that examined the perceptions and perspectives of Kırıkkale residents who visited Bulgaria and Greece. Within this context, the research was conducted through a ‘questionnaire-with-local people’ method.

In a final article which is edited by **James Scott**, students share their border-crossing experiences with Covid borders and general impressions of Covid restrictions. Most of these students participated in Erasmus exchange programmes and all attended the Border Politics and Security course offered by the University of Eastern Finland. Students were motivated to read and discuss key works that have characterised the state of art of border studies and to contribute their insights into the politically charged debates related to borders and security. As part of the course, students, both Finnish and foreign, were asked to complete an assignment in order to relate their general understandings and personal experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic to discussions of border politics and security. Their individual essays reveal highly nuanced understandings of the significance of border politics as well as far-reaching



societal consequences of the Covid pandemic. These essays have been compiled and abridged in order to highlight the central points elaborated by the students.

The Yearbook also features **three research notes** that do not directly address the Covid phenomenon and its consequences. What they convey are results from ongoing explorations into issues linked to border politics, place-based development and regional identity. In the first of these **Alicia Fajfer** takes us to the border of Poland and Belarus which has very recently been the scene of dramatic border-crossing attempts by Iraqi and Syrian refugees. What is clear is that the refugees have been ‘weaponised’ by Belarus in retaliation for EU sanctions but also to an extent by the Polish government. Fajfer analyses selected public communication and policy documents that reveal Poland’s response to the 2021 border crisis. Because of the preliminary nature of this report, the material is limited to two ‘opposing’ actors: represented by the authorities on one hand, and activists participating in aid operations on the other. Fajfer’s case study offers a perspective on how a state with a shifting migration profile (from a country of emigration to a country of immigration) uses migration flows.

In his research note **James Scott** provides a ‘thought piece’ that ponders the question as to how principles of place-based development and spatial justice can be applied to cross-border cooperation. Inspiration for such a proposition emerges from a philosophy of place as something central to human flourishing, nevertheless the practical possibilities are many, especially when well-elaborated and inclusive strategies receive commensurate support from EU and national sources. This paper is followed by insights from **Goran Bandov and Martina Plantak** regarding current debate about the definition of the Central European region by asking, ‘What is Central Europe, and is there a Central European identity?’ While the first part of the article examines Central Europe’s concepts and development, as well as its demarcation from the Balkans, which imposes itself as the ‘Other’ in the European context, the second part of the article is based on two concrete examples of Central European identity construction. This paper will use the examples of Slovenia and Croatia to try to understand and compare the construction of Central European identity in these two nations.

Finally, the Yearbook provides two **reviews** of recent publications where processes of bordering and re-bordering loom large. **Teodor Gyelnik** reviews Cathal McCall’s book on Border Ireland, which relates the historical evolution of borders on the Island of Ireland in terms of continuous bordering, de-bordering and re-bordering. McCall also dedicates much attention to the impact of the European Union on these different bordering processes. In sum, McCall’s book provides insightful perspectives on the the origins of the border, its hard - militarised and its soft - cooperative versions and outlines the often confusing events since the 2016 Brexit referendum. **Martina Lendel** reviews a highly topical publication dealing with EU-Ukraine re-



lations and specifically, the situation of cross-border cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine. The book, entitled *The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and Its Impacts on Cross-Border Cooperation* deals with the need to improve conditions for cross-border cooperation on the Eastern border of the European Union, in particular under the influence of institutional, regulatory framework of relations with the EU. In particular Ukrainian authors (V. Ustyomenko, A. Sanchenko, A. Tokunova) try to identify the main political and legal determinants that influence the cross-border practice of national, regional and local actors in the context of commitments to sustainable development. While the book is highly relevant to ongoing debate, Lendel observes some limitations, primarily too much focus on institutional analysis which limits understanding of cooperation motivations. She suggests, however, that this collection represents a good basis from which to carry out a more comprehensive analysis of various determinants of CBC performance. Among these determinants might figure the institutional and regulatory dominance of the EU, the roles of national legislation, practices of local self-government bodies of Ukraine and neighboring countries, cultural and ethnic characteristics, economic potential, migration flows and the influence of social networks.

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# Challenges for (Re)building Institutional Trust in Post-Covid European Territorial Cooperation Programmes

Eduardo Medeiros

## Introduction

In my almost 30 years of academic experience in following the former EU Interreg Community Initiative, latter on (2007) transformed into one of the main EU Cohesion Policy goals (European Territorial Cooperation). I have heard and read, countless times, in international events and publications, many stating the importance of ‘institutional trust’ to consolidate territorial and, in particular, cross-border cooperation institutional processes. Conversely, a few have remembered how fragile, erroneous and ephemeral is ‘institutional trust’, since it is often dependent on the individual leading this process. Here, it is common to see frequent changes in Interreg programmes’ leadership and key staff members, as well as local and regional institutional leadership with often different perspectives on how to establish cross-border and transnational cooperation processes. In this context, it goes without saying that ‘institutional trust’, if regarded as an essential counterpart of territorial cooperation, adds an extra layer of complexity to this process, thus requiring an insightful examination of its concrete relevance and impacts in boosting or hindering territorial cooperation in all its forms. This is the challenge we propose to discuss in this chapter, which launches the hypothesis that European Territorial Cooperation programmes (Interreg) can play a vital role in rebuilding institutional trust in European cross-border regions, which was greatly affected by the current COVID-19 pandemic.

## How far is institutional trust relevant for cross-border cooperation?

In a general sense, for Devon et al. (2015: 87), institutional trust “refers to people’s expectations of how institutions should treat people and what institutions should deliver based on the definition of the objectives and the principles according to which institutions are expected to function”. The same authors recognise the challenges involved in measuring this process, which, in a business context, is understood as a “perception of the probability that other agents will behave in a way that is expected” (Welter et al. 2008: 1). According to these authors “in a cross-border

## Challenges for (Re)building Institutional Trust

Eduardo Medeiros

context, trust might be expected to play a particular important role because of the risks inherent in cross border transactions”, whilst assisting individuals in controlling “risks and reducing the costs connected with each border crossing” (ibid. 1).

Much contemporary research on institutional trust echoes its legal, political, cultural, economic and historical ramifications, supporting the institutional environment (Meyer 2021; Welter et al. 2008). It also acknowledges the importance of systemic institutional trust to “influencing the nature of cross border activities and their development potential” (Welter et al. 2008: 8). For Koch (2018: 591), four different forms of trust can be identified in cross-border cooperation relations: (i) rational-personal decisions; (ii) social-cultural understanding; (iii) general personal interactions and (iv) the historical–institutional environment. This adds to the complexity involved in analysing ‘institutional trust’ in cross-border regions. By referring to the work of Scott (2013), Koch highlights the crucial role of ‘institutional trust’ to ensure the continuation of cooperation activities in border regions, even within challenging geopolitical environments, just like in the current covidfencing environment (Medeiros et al. 2021). This author adds two other complementary advantages associated with the presence of high levels of cross-border institutional trust: (i) it contributes to eliminate the need for complicated institutional measures and procedures which ensure cross-border interaction, and (ii) it helps to forge a high level of cultural awareness from individuals and entities from both sides of the border.

The systematic closing of national borders across Europe, as a result of the spread of the COVID-19 in early 2020, significantly reduced the levels of ‘cross-border institutional trust’, at least between local and regional authorities and border citizens (Golunov & Smirnova 2021; Ikotun et al. 2021; Järv et al. 2021; Radil et al. 2021). For Casaglia (2021), the covidfencing process raised fundamental concerns on issues of spatial and social injustice, as well as unnecessary institutional tensions. As in many cases, covidfencing was “supported by local and regional administrators (van der Velde et al. 2021). Conversely, cross-border entities and commuters brought widespread concerns on the covidfencing effects on border regions’ economy and engaged in concrete initiatives to reopen the borders and to reinstall previous levels of cross-border institutional trust (Medeiros et al. 2021).

## Post-covid-19 institutional trust and EU Territorial Cooperation Projects

In the previous section it was possible to conclude that ‘institutional trust’ can be regarded as a barrier to cross-border cooperation if its level is reduced in a certain cross-border area (see Medeiros 2011), alongside many other obstacles, such as accessibility, sociocultural, economic and environmental related barriers (Medeiros 2018). So, how can post 2020 EU Interreg-A programmes contribute to reduce these ‘institutional trust’ barriers in a political mild covid-fencing context? One logical policy option would be to channel financial support to already existing cross-border entities (Lange – Pires 2018), which include Euroregions (Medeiros 2011), European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) (Evrard – Engl 2018), border cities (Jurado-Almonte et al. 2020; Medeiros 2021). But ultimately, the European Commission should, in our view, allocate a specific amount of Interreg-A funding to supporting cross-border planning (Durand – Decoville 2018; Medeiros 2014) as a longer-term institutional arrangement to foster cross-border institutional trust.

In the current (2021-27) EU Cohesion Policy framework, there is indeed a concrete objective to facilitate ‘cooperation governance’ (ISO 1: Better Cooperation Governance) which can be directly linked to the policy goal of reinforcing ‘institutional trust’, following from the activities proposed in Article 14, draft ETC regulation (Interact 2020: 6) for the Interreg-A:

- Enhance the institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders;
- Enhance efficient public administration by promoting legal and administrative cooperation, and cooperation between citizens, civil society actors and institutions, in particular, with a view to resolving legal and other obstacles in border regions;
- Build up mutual trust, in particular by encouraging people-to-people actions.

As stated in an Interact report (2020: 12) “people-to-people projects usually refer to small projects that bring citizens together – typically, such actions address children, culture, language, sports. The main objectives are getting to know each other and enhancing trust-building”. Both these small scale (financially speaking) people-to-people Interreg-A projects, and flagship ones, directly or indirectly supporting cross-border entities, can contribute to the reduction of obstacles’ Interreg-A (2021-27) policy goal, of removing 1/5 of border barriers in EU border regions. Likewise, the Interreg-A ‘partnership principle’, which invokes a balanced representation from both sides of the border, together with the ‘actions for the citizens’ goal, which supports trust-building as a basis for cooperation in a Europe closer to citizens, can contribute to rebuild institutional trust at several territorial levels via the implementation of EU Interreg-A programmes.

### Conclusion

By being, in a multitude of cases, the main financial source supporting cross-border projects in Europe, the Interreg-A programmes have the potential to be a crucial and foundational policy vehicle to impel the rebuilding of cross-border ‘institutional trust’ which has been strongly affected by the covidfencing process. In concrete terms, these programmes can provide further impetus to European cross-border entities which have proved formidable in mitigating initial covidfencing effects that provoked unnecessary chaos in European borders, in particular to cross-border workers. Secondly, these EU programmes could push steadily into supporting the implementation of cross-border planning processes in all EU internal and external borders, as a concrete means to limit future drastic reductions of ‘institutional trust levels’, since these plans would provide a more stable and long-term institutional partnership between all involved border actors and areas. Thirdly, the idea put forward by the European Commission to allocate Interreg-A funding to people-to-people projects has also the potential to reinstall individual and institutional trust in a small, yet crucial scale, of personal border contacts in all ages, via cultural, sports and social activities, that could leave a long-lasting imprint in forging cross-border trust. But, as in all aspects of human life and policy implementation, knowledge and education will eventually influence the degree of ‘intuitional trust’ that will be forged by the current Interreg-A programme, which is to be tested in the next event that will be used to justify the closing of European borders. Only by then, it would be possible to verify the real impact of the EU Interreg-A programmes to foster ‘institutional trust’ in European cross-border areas.

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## Challenges for (Re)building Institutional Trust

Eduardo Medeiros

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# The Effects of Covid-19-induced Border Closures on Cross-Border Regions

Jean Peyrony

## Introduction

In March 2020, Europe was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. The closure of very open borders by most states overnight had serious consequences for cross-border territories, which this article, based on a study<sup>1</sup> carried out by the MOT for the European Commission seeks to explore. The contribution is based on desk research, video interviews, and exchanges with MOT partners, including the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) and the Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI).

The health crisis has challenged all institutions, especially those in charge of border governance, and has revealed their shortcomings. It has also highlighted numerous socio-economic and human interdependencies, not only at the global or European level, but also at the local cross-border level. Based on the lessons of the crisis, the article proposes recommendations for crisis management, and more generally for the management of borders and cross-border regions. Most of these proposals were already on the table before. Far from invalidating them, the crisis has made them even more necessary.

Cross-border regions are at the heart of the European project. Our recommendations focus on them, but some are relevant to all regions. National borders are specific, but emblematic of all administrative borders, which require functional approaches, beyond the classical institutional approaches. Their implementation would enable a more inclusive, sustainable and resilient development for the whole of Europe. The article successively addresses the lessons learned from the crisis and the actions to be taken in favour of border regions: at local level and within the framework of a bottom-up and multi-level governance, involving the States and the EU.

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1 <http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/en/news/news/news/show/etude-europeenne-meen-par-la-mot-pour-le-compte-de-la-dg-regio-quels-impacts-des-restrictions-aux/>

## Lessons and Actions at the Local Level in Border Regions

### Lesson 1: Start with the persons in their cross-border living areas and their needs

The health crisis affected persons in all regions, but even more so in border regions. The concrete situations were diverse, but some common features emerge, highlighting pre-existing interdependencies and cross-border integration. Persons<sup>2</sup> have been affected:

As **economic agents**: cross-border workers, shoppers, inhabitants of second homes. All these activities are respectable, even if they take place across borders, but they have suddenly been restricted, more severely than for people who do not live in border regions; and people crossing the border have been stigmatised as illegitimate. As **users of cross-border public services**, more severely affected than others. As **informed persons**, eager to understand what was happening, in order to act appropriately. Border residents, like everyone else, followed the pandemic in real time via the global media, informing them of policies in different countries; and at the same time struggled to cope with the confusion of information about their own lives, compounded by the lack of coordination of measures on both sides of the border. As **persons engaged in relationships**, in couples, families (children, disabled or elderly people in institutions) or communities, sometimes brutally separated by the closed border.

As **persons inspired** by their culture, their religion, their ethics, challenged by the closed border and the false representations it conveys. Suddenly, the inhabitant of the neighbouring country could be seen as a danger. Cross-border integration is not only based on economic, legal or functional opportunities, but also on common visions and commitments, developed through cooperation, which have been damaged. And finally, as **citizens** of nation states. Suddenly states were the only decision-makers, and citizens were hit by their uncoordinated decisions, even though they were also European - and sometimes bi-national - citizens.

People living in border regions have suffered a double penalty due to the lack of cross-border coordination. They must now be at the centre of public action, for human and efficiency reasons, in order to change the bureaucratic logic of the institutions, which have shown their limits. The only way to achieve this is to adopt horizontal, territorial and integrated approaches, instead of vertical, sectoral and silo approaches. Public policies need to take better account of persons; taking into account their daily lives (e.g. multi-objective travel (going to work, taking children to school, shopping, visiting family); within their living areas (with the different perimeters

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2 Echoing the 6 cities, 6 registers of justification highlighted by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (2006).

corresponding to these objectives, even when they cross administrative boundaries). In other words, adopt an approach in terms of functional regions (see Guerot 2020).

## **Lesson 2: Consider cross-border living areas rather than border lines**

Media coverage of the crisis has revealed many cognitive biases. The media generally presented the closure of borders as a necessary measure; but global mobility is a different phenomenon from cross-border mobility. In the European context - single market, free movement, common citizenship - closing a border with a neighbouring country is not of the same nature as with China. The crisis has confirmed two symmetrical impasses: hyper-globalisation - we should be less dependent on distant countries for our security - and self-sufficient territories - seeking solutions exclusively in closed territories would prove counter-productive. Designing post-Covid public policies requires answers to these questions: what interdependencies should be preserved, what modes of governance should functional territories have, and what variable-geometry logics should be used? The notion of 'cross-border living areas' should prevail<sup>3</sup>, where people's daily lives should be facilitated by cooperation; active interfaces mediating between national systems, rather than lines separating national sovereignties (see Perrier 2020).

## **Lesson 3: Build common knowledge and trust**

Around the world, it has been difficult to understand the nature of the threat, how to react individually and collectively, and the public policies to be implemented. The closure of borders, one of the tools mobilised, has been an additional complicating factor. The apparently simple fact of closing a border hides a complex reality. Since 2015, border controls have been re-established on several borders within the Schengen area. The Covid crisis is only a new episode, after the crises linked to migration or terrorism. Some border crossings have been closed outright, while many others have been subject to reinforced controls of varying intensity (from systematic to random), changing over time.

Another factor is the "dual" nature of the border. Each border regime between two countries results from their respective entry procedures, which complicates the situation of people who have to cross the border in both directions on their daily round trip. In the management of a border, not only its control is at stake, but also all public policies concerning the daily life of border residents (work, transport, education, etc.), which has been strongly disrupted by the lack of coordination. Moreover, the controls were often inappropriate, based on bureaucratic criteria such as national-

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3 Residents of border areas " have been recognised by the French government in measures taken in early 2021.

<http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/en/news/news/news/show/restrictions-aux-frontieres-francaises-les-bassins-de-vie-transfrontaliers-enfin-reconnus/>

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ity, not health; not proportionate; without consideration of the territorial reality of persons' lives; subdued to the subjectivity of officials. They acted in response to particular situations, but this generated the feeling that the measures taken were arbitrary, or at least not very understandable. Within the Schengen area, European citizens are supposed to live in an area of free movement.

The impacts of the border closure have also been intangible, psychological. It has led to a resurgence of mistrust on both sides, aggression towards 'foreigners', and even the temptation to make them scapegoats. Borders are ambivalent: they provide a sense of unity and protection - largely imaginary - but can have a violent impact on people living on either side of the border, and on representations. Even if they have not generally been completely closed, their unpredictable and seemingly irrational management has sent negative signals and provoked cumulative expectations, with adverse consequences for economic and social life. In order to return to normality and turn the crisis into an opportunity, it will be necessary to rebuild citizens' trust. The reactions of civil society have been essential and will help to boost the resumption of cooperation. Positive stories of expressions of sympathy and solidarity will need to be valued.

### Lesson 4: Cross-border organisations lead the way

During the crisis, solutions were initially found by people on the ground, not by organisations. The success of CB transfers of patients depended on the individual commitment of elected officials, civil servants and diplomats. But it was facilitated by the pre-existence of cooperation frameworks, which people managed to remobilise. As John Monnet famously stated, "Nothing is possible without persons, but nothing lasts without institutions." Where cross-border institutions - such as European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) - did not exist, the difficulties were often critical. Where they did exist, they reacted, even if with delay. Local cross-border cooperation structures such as the Franco-German Eurodistricts, close to the citizens, were among the first to act. Other more complex (multi-level) structures, active in larger areas, were later to react.

In light of these lessons, appropriate public policies should be developed to promote cross-border integration for the benefit of their inhabitants, supported by consolidated governance structures. The challenge is to develop their competences in both senses of the term: legal and technical capacity. These structures should have "appropriate competences, dedicated resources and accelerated procedures" (in the words of the Aachen treaty between France and Germany) in order to overcome the obstacles to cross-border cooperation projects, in times of crisis as in normal times.

Citizens of border regions, users of public services, are legitimate to ask for the deployment of **cross-border public services**, if they offer more efficient solutions for mobility, health, education, vocational training, employment; and their mainte-

nance in case of crisis. This is not only a question of optimising public action or the market, but also of citizen participation. For example, access to health care on the other side of the border, transfer of patients, border crossing for health professionals must be facilitated. For each public policy related to cross-border services, plans should be prepared and coordinated within an integrated territorial approach. EGTCs or other cross-border structures should be empowered to manage and update them. The recognition of a status for border residents, within the framework of conventions for border living areas, is gaining ground.

Many inhabitants of border regions find practical solutions on the other side of the border (in terms of employment, services, shopping, care for the elderly, tourism, second homes, etc.). This contributes to their own well-being as well as to the general interest, to the concrete realisation of the single **market**. Businesses (shops, services, etc.) can find resources and markets on the other side of the border. In crisis situations involving border controls, the mobility of people and businesses should not be restricted or even blamed by bureaucratic bullying, but respected and supported by the authorities. This would contribute to the legitimacy of national and European policies.

Citizens, including in a cross-border context, have the right to understand the situation and the measures taken by the public authorities, which should involve them, in a climate of mutual trust, rather than infantilizing them, leaving them subject to rumours. The cross-border structures (EGTC, etc.) played a major role in **informing** the populations during the crisis and should be given a more important role. They could act as mediators between local and national institutions on either side of the border, in order to improve understanding of border specificities. They should be informed before measures are adopted by governments, so that they can inform the inhabitants, explain the measures taken, and alert the authorities to the impact of these measures on the territories.

More broadly, the crisis should be an opportunity to foster a better collective understanding of border territories and their complex, multi-level interactions, through the development of observation. Information must be communicated to citizens, not only on economic issues (market) but also on the situation and perspectives of the territory, in general and in crisis situations. This requires access to solid and comparable cross-border data, making it possible to build a common vision. The trauma of the health crisis and the closure of borders has led to uncooperative words or actions between states, both at the borders and at the EU level, but also to outbursts of solidarity. Many citizens, politicians and civil servants have become aware of the impasse of non-cooperation. Jean Monnet can be quoted again: “Europe will be made in crises, and it will be the sum of the solutions adopted to these crises.”

**Culture**, ethics, trust between people and authorities, solidarity, are resources for the common good, to be preferred to bureaucratic control, also in a border context.

In the event of a crisis, and for recovery, the resilience of cross-border regions depends on the existence of a responsible civil society, and **links between persons**, which should be supported by social and cultural activities, promoting a common vision between the inhabitants of the cross-border territory. Finally, the crisis has had contrasting effects on border regions: sometimes it has undermined **citizens'** sense of belonging to an emerging cross-border community, sometimes it has strengthened this sense. In order to develop a **cross-border democracy**, defending people's rights, resilient to crises, citizens living on the borders should be more systematically involved in the governance of these spaces through civil forums. This can be a first step towards a more formal democratisation of cross-border regions.

### **Lessons and Actions in the Framework of Bottom-up, Multi-level Governance**

#### **Lesson 5: Encourage multi-level, bottom-up approaches for crises**

During the first containment, measures were taken by each state, without horizontal coordination, either at local or national level. This led to absurd situations, which had an impact on people's daily lives. The crisis revealed that borders remain a state institution, managed by the rule of law (police, customs). Vertical approaches prevailed on both sides: most actors looked first to "their" central authorities, and only then to the neighbouring territory. This lack of multi-level cross-border coordination continued for a longer or shorter period. Such border-specific situations appear unfair and discriminatory, in contradiction with free movement and European citizenship. It is true that COVID may have necessitated a limitation on the mobility of each person. States have been legitimate in taking coercive measures, but national measures have not sufficiently taken into account the real life of people in these border regions, which should not be more affected than other regions. Banning border crossings only makes sense if similar restrictions are imposed on similar situations, which has not always been the case.

Experts agree that in pandemic contexts, closing borders is a way to curb human mobility and the spread of the virus, but not to stop it, due to massive cross-border interdependencies. Within the European space, excessive closure of national borders is ineffective in containing the spread of the virus and hinders cooperation and crisis management. Stopping legal border crossings encourages illegal border crossings and prevents health checks.

This does not mean that states, or their officials, should be stigmatised. The local cannot act alone. States are key to managing such crises, and will remain so when the post-pandemic period is over. But they can only be effective if they act together, on every border and at European level. This argues for vertical and horizontal coordination in a bottom-up, multi-level governance of these regions, starting from the persons.



## **Lesson 6: The national level is still crucial**

By stopping cross-border flows, the crisis has revealed interdependencies (supply of goods, border work or seasonal employment) between systems, which need to be recognised and managed at national and not only local level. The cross-border metropolitan regions around Luxembourg, Basel or Geneva follow a logic of complementarity between employment centres and more residential sectors, separated by a border. The Governance Committee of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (CLRA) of the Council of Europe has adopted a resolution calling for a fair distribution of fiscal wealth in cross-border territories, which requires an inter-state agreement. As KH Lambertz points out in his report,<sup>4</sup> building cohesion in these regions requires cross-border co-development: an integrated territorial strategy, and cross-border financing of the necessary infrastructure and public services.

## **Lesson 7: Embrace the diversity and complexity of borders**

The reactions to the Covid crisis have confirmed that each border is special. Each one presented specific facts: interdependencies, lack of cohesion or coordination, but also resilience and solidarity. Throughout the crisis, decisions about the health crisis, as well as border management, were taken within national frameworks, characterised by their own political and administrative cultures, combining to varying degrees individual responsibility, social or state control, public or family solidarity, trust and civic engagement. In general, on every border, two cultures meet, which can make coordination more difficult, but can also be an opportunity to learn from other approaches. In border contexts, it is important to take into account political, cultural, convergent and non-convergent realities at the border, in times of crisis as in normal times.

## **Lesson 8: Coordinate border crisis management at EU level**

Border controls can be justified in a crisis, but they must be fair, proportionate and relevant (e.g. based on health criteria). Citizens are now demanding accountability from public policies, which institutions are not in a position to provide, being still in a learning process. This has been particularly true in Europe, with very different national strategies. As is often the case, Europe has proved to be a community of problems, the first step towards a community of solutions. Within its mandate, the EU has played its part in working towards coordination between states. Many regretted that it did not do more, especially in the very first phase. But the European mandate is limited in the area of health. The lack of coordination between states during the crisis obviously opens the way for more EU intervention. The challenge now is to devise a European public health policy in the face of crises.

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4 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/-/fairer-distribution-of-taxes-in-transfrontier-areas>



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The EU's competences in health policy should be strengthened, especially with regard to emergency situations. A zonal approach should be systematised, considering regions, possibly cross-border, and not whole countries. Criteria, measures and thresholds (green and red zones) should be harmonised. A European regulation on cross-border emergency plans should establish a single European document listing the different situations and purposes of cross-border movement, in order to assist citizens and police forces in their border controls, and to ensure a minimum of cooperation and openness of internal borders in case of crisis. The above proposals will take time. A first step could be the development of lighter measures. A European handbook on "how to close borders smartly" should be developed, including a set of recommendations to national governments on how to proceed, keeping in mind all the variables affecting life on both sides of the border (e.g. the legislation to be applied for border workers - social security and teleworking, etc).

### Lesson 9: Deepen the EU - States - Cross-border Regions partnership

Beyond the issue of border control and crisis management, EU intervention towards border regions includes on the one hand the financial incentives of the Inter-reg programmes - a tailor-made regional approach within the multi-level framework of cohesion policy (shared management); and on the other hand an emerging coordination framework, defined by the Commission Communication *Boosting Growth and Cohesion in the EU's Border Regions*, adopted on 20 September 2017. The crisis has confirmed its relevance. National states, even in a federal context, play a major role in border management. In the light of these lessons, multi-level cross-border governance, involving the national level and overcoming differences between national systems, and the European level itself, should be systematised, both in the context of crises and in the normal course of events.

It should jointly coordinate border affairs at all levels: across each border, but also within each state (horizontally: inter-ministerial coordination; and vertically, coordination between national and territorial authorities); and include cross-border governance structures such as EGTCs. Multilateral frameworks, such as the Benelux, the Nordic Council or the Visegrad Group, or bilateral frameworks, such as the Aachen Treaty for Germany and France, can serve as models. The latter has not only recognised the role of the Eurodistricts, but also created a multi-level cross-border cooperation committee, responsible for defining a common strategy for the choice of priority projects and for monitoring the difficulties encountered, in order to find solutions. This shows that cross-border cooperation can progress, despite the very different frameworks in each country. Such a mechanism prefigures the European Cross-Border Mechanism (ECBM) proposed by the European Commission, with its network of national or regional cross-border coordination points, coordinated by the European coordination point - even if a majority of States is currently opposed

to this project. The multi-level dialogue between the cross-border structures and the national and European institutions concerned would thus be strengthened, in order to provide joint solutions to the obstacles observed on the ground.

Citizens belonging to one or more countries have rights attached to their citizenship, with consequences for their personal and family life. These rights were sometimes undermined during the Covid crisis, and should be better recognised and respected, including in the complex cases that characterise borders. This should lead to a different approach by public administrations in their daily management. Citizens are not only nationals, but also European citizens, sometimes bi-nationals, and cross-border citizens. This should prevail, both in ordinary situations and in crisis contexts, when border controls are reintroduced. It is a prerequisite for the acceptance of such measures by citizens.

Border crossing should be made easier for border residents who need to cross the border for work, family reasons or to use services such as hospitals. Member States should adapt their national legislation and coordinate their actions across each border. The EU could provide a framework for this (e.g. citizenship documents issued in a common EU standardised digital form, automatically recognised in all Member States). Beyond crisis management issues, coordination and capitalisation actions are or should be undertaken in the field of cross-border integration by the European level. The EU should apply at its level, and provide national authorities with a procedure for assessing the impact of policies on border regions. It should establish a framework for cross-border public services, ensuring that they are maintained in the event of a crisis.<sup>5</sup>

At a time when all regions are planning investments for the next seven years, border regions deserve special attention because they have been severely affected, but also because of the potential they offer. REACT-EU funding has been opened to Interreg. Ambitious joint investments for cross-border regions would support a positive dynamic for their integration. This requires a greater degree of coordination at local and national level when planning strategies and projects, also within the mainstream programmes, with Interreg playing a catalytic role for cross-border projects and institutional cooperation.

**EU programmes should promote integrated territorial approaches, cross-border governance and the resolution of barriers to integration. The Interreg post-2020 regulation offers opportunities, notably territorial objective 5 *A Europe closer to its citizens*, and ISO1 *Better governance of cooperation*. The crisis has undoubtedly increased their relevance.**

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5 <https://cor.europa.eu/en/news/Pages/strengthening-cross-border-public-services.aspx>

## Conclusions

The crisis has shown that the border is a handicap when it creates obstacles, but an asset when it is open. It has amply confirmed the justification for CB regions to be identified by Article 174 of the TFEU - which underpins the objective of territorial cohesion - as deserving specific attention from national and European public policies. These lessons are not just about crises, but also about the ongoing issue of border management and cross-border development. Closed borders have been a counterfactual to cross-border cohesion. The interdependencies revealed by the crisis call for new cooperation policies: a functional approach taking into account people in their cross-border living areas; multi-level bottom-up governance involving cross-border regions, states and the EU.

Cross-border regions will be a test case for recovery and beyond. The current crisis represents a danger, but also an opportunity for Europe to develop new policies for people and their living spaces. The recognition of interdependencies now invites us to give a political dimension to cross-border and European integration. This is why the Committee of the Regions launched, in November 2020, the European Alliance for Cross-Border Citizens.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/Pages/cross-border-alliance.aspx>

## The Effects of the Pandemic in Border Regions

Martín Guillermo Ramírez

On 26 March 2020, we were about to commemorate 25 years of the establishment of the Schengen Area as a result of the entry into force in 1995 of the Schengen Agreement of 1985 and the Schengen Convention of 1990. This meant a full opening of most EU (internal) borders which had a strong impact on cross-border cooperation (CBC). However, the World Health Organisation (WHO) had declared the Coronavirus outbreak a global pandemic two weeks before (on 11 March) and by the day of the celebration, most European borders were closed. Actually, the first idea of the national governments of most EU member states (and most countries in the world) was closing their borders. A 'Europe without borders' seemed to have been set in stone, but this had to be removed to control the pandemic. Suddenly, many started to better appreciate this freedom of movement across EU boundaries, and its fragility. Covid-19 had changed the global scenario, at supranational and at the very local level. Europe had also stopped its rush, and priorities had changed.

All EU Member States had adopted measures to fight Covid-19, but the effects of the pandemic could hardly be predicted at that stage. There were no certainties yet, but most governments decided to limit mobility very strongly through lockdowns and borders closing. European health systems also reacted with alacrity, despite the huge task, and most European citizens had to accept the need to be at home for an undetermined time. The only result to be expected was the full control of the pandemic, sooner or later, and the authorities tried any measure to limit the spread of the virus. Citizens accepted these severe restrictions to their fundamental right of free movement to support the containment objective. However, this also caused serious problems in border regions, additionally to the general difficulties created by the Coronavirus for the whole population.

Two months of a strong lockdown followed, asymmetric anyway, as everything in the EU, which had very serious consequences in many sectors, but probably border regions were more affected than any other territories. The EU reacted quickly by opening *Green Lanes* in border crossings, but the severity of most closings, in some cases even after the release of home confinement measures left an impact in border regions that is going to be very difficult to overcome. Deconfinement started, though with lots of caution. It was particularly important to observe safety measures, social distance, etc., because new waves of infection should be avoided or, at least, minimized. On the other hand, very strong border controls were re-

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established after the declaration of the pandemic in those border crossings which were kept open, but others were closed and remained locked long after the first release of measures. Further waves of COVID-19 produced again border closings, as one of the favourite measures by member states. This created a lot of difficulties in border regions, where many citizens and enterprises depend crucially on the other side of the border. As Gyula Ocskay, Secretary General of the Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI) defined quite early in a very appropriate sentence, “now, solidarity means separation between persons, but there is no need to separate countries.”

The Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) and other organisations promoting cross-border cooperation started very soon to enquire how measures taken to control the pandemic were affecting border regions and cross-border structures, with the firm support of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR). In order to collect information to contribute to the better exchange and future debates to be carried out together with the CoR (EGTC Platform), the European Commission’s DG REGIO (Border Focal Point), the *Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière* (MOT) and CESCI, AEBR gathered experiences from its members and project stakeholders. The CoR launched a *COVID 19 Platform for local and regional authorities*<sup>1</sup>, where many experiences, stories and testimonies from around the EU were shown. The EGTC Platform, AEBR, CESCI and MOT concentrated their efforts in collecting cross-border stories of the pandemic but, beyond these stories, we also analysed many reports from different borders, members and partners, who were informing AEBR about the initiatives they were promoting to ease the conditions faced by many citizens in border regions. Many contributions arrived, and many posts can still be found on social media. From them, it emerges clearly the big disadvantage citizens in border regions must endure. Equally distinct is the crucial role that various euroregions, EGTCs or eurodistricts played, helping people and businesses to understand their rights within the complexities of the cross-border contexts. The MOT also coordinated the report *The effects of COVID-19 induced border closures on cross-border regions* with the support of the European Commission and the collaboration of CESCI and AEBR<sup>2</sup>, including an annex with 20 case studies<sup>3</sup>.

From the very start, we also received direct testimonies from border workers or entrepreneurs who were facing the impact of these measures: shops and other businesses which depend very much on customers or providers on the other side of

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1 <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/Pages/COVID19-exchangeplatform.aspx>

2 <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/studies/Documents/The%20effects%20of%20COVID-19%20induced%20border%20closures%20on%20cross-border%20regions/COVID-19%20induced%20border.pdf>

3 <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/studies/Documents/The%20effects%20of%20COVID-19%20induced%20border%20closures%20on%20cross-border%20regions%20-%20%20%20CASE%20STUDIES/20%20CASE%20STUDIES.pdf>

the border, landowners across national boundaries, etc. We should highlight that the EU institutions adopted various decisions in the first weeks of the pandemic which have been crucial to coordinate essential activities, among other on border management and Green Lanes<sup>4</sup>, cross-border workers<sup>5</sup>, free movement<sup>6</sup>, a roadmap to lifting containment measures<sup>7</sup>, and financial initiatives such as the Corona Response Investment Initiative<sup>8</sup>, the Pandemic Crisis Support Instrument<sup>9</sup>, the SURE Initiative<sup>10</sup> and, finally, the *NextGenerationEU* (NGEU) package<sup>11</sup>. However, stronger coordination between the Member States was missing, especially on what refers to the specific situation at and across borders. There is a clear need to increase EU integration in various policies which are still the full competence of nation-states, while asymmetries and discoordination prevail. Here, the EU is also expected to play a more relevant role overall.

And, of course, there were many more initiatives by associations and platforms of regions and municipalities at sub-national, national and European levels, involving the authorities to raise awareness and provide information on the impact that the crisis has in border regions. Social media have shown all their potential as information multipliers in these times, being particularly useful to share information and mobilize stakeholders, but they have also been used to spread fake news and other malware. Those initiatives aimed to raise the morale of citizens and stakeholders engaged across the borders acquired great importance, and various border regions have shown the effectiveness of the people-to-people support in their current daily life.

In the summer of 2020, de-confinement led to the return to what some called “a new normality”, characterised by remaining control measures, namely the use of masks, social distance, washing hands frequently, etc. Following waves led to the strengthening of measures, but the level of confinement experienced during March-June 2020 did not repeat, while border closings did. Various EU member states decided to close borders again, but they had to open them, in some cases, less than 24 hours later, due to the effects in essential services. For instance, many workers

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4 [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020XC0324\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020XC0324(01))

5 [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020XC0330\(03\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020XC0330(03))

6 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32020H1475>

7 <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/14188cd6-809f-11ea-bf12-01aa-75ed71a1/language-en>

8 [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information/publications/factsheets/2020/coronavirus-response-investment-initiative](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/factsheets/2020/coronavirus-response-investment-initiative)

9 <https://www.esm.europa.eu/content/europe-response-corona-crisis>

10 [https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/financial-assistance-eu/funding-mechanisms-and-facilities/sure\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/financial-assistance-eu/funding-mechanisms-and-facilities/sure_en)

11 [https://europa.eu/next-generation-eu/index\\_en](https://europa.eu/next-generation-eu/index_en)



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in social and healthcare services are cross-border commuters, and border closings, even if they were selective, created enormous difficulties for them, but also disruption of some of those services.

Another effect of this pandemic was the extraordinary development and use of web-based communication tools. However, while some countries shifted very fast to remote learning in schools and universities, others did not for different reasons: arguing that this would create inequalities between those students with easy access to technology and those without. Tele-working also spread enormously. Our Association shifted all planned events and visits into online activities, and all staff moved to work from home. And this was mostly the case for our members, both regional governments and cross-border structures. A very interesting consequence was the substantial increase in the participation of regions with a remote or (ultra) peripheral location, or not wealthy enough to travel to European events (or worldwide). With the generalisation of online events, everybody with a decent Internet connection and device could take part in this new generation of online events, in the first moment, and hybrid ones afterwards.

Already on 5 June 2020, the AEBR organized an online forum on **CBC in times of pandemic - New borders vs. new opportunities**, with a public session to exchange information on the situation in European border regions, which was web-streamed on YouTube. This forum offered a platform for a discussion on the situation in border regions after national and EU measures for confinement and de-confinement, border closings with exceptions for cross-border workers, the implementation of measures and the effects on cross-border labour markets, the provision of services, or the situation of SMEs. Then, in the following months, similar online events were organized, dealing with specific territories (e.g. EU borders with IPA countries and between them) or addressed to some sectors in particular, such as the SMEs in border regions. AEBR statutory meetings (general assembly, executive committee) and those of its task forces, working groups and project partnerships were also organized online and, from June 2021 on, in a hybrid format.

When the summer of 2020 was coming to an end, a second wave was present in most affected European countries and new restrictions to mobility started to be implemented when more than 30 million cases and almost a million deaths were registered in the world. The lack of coordination of measures between several EU Member States had led to some absurd situations—such as doctors and nurses driving 200 km more every day to go to the hospital where they work across the border; or entrepreneurs who live in one country but do business in the neighbouring one, who could neither receive support in the country or residence due to the lack of economic activity in that country, nor in the neighbouring country due to the lack of residence—, while the Commission had made some very welcome but insufficient recommendations. Closing borders does not seem to be an efficient measure, while



the citizen's responsibility to maintain social distance, washing hands, etc., does. It was also very worrying to see a high number of citizens demonstrating all over Europe against fair reasonable measures, against wearing masks, and even against vaccines when they were not ready (yet). This situation has persisted, and now we also face demonstrations of citizens who do not want to get vaccinated, or even insist that there is no such pandemic and everything responds to a huge conspiracy at global level.

It could be also worth mentioning that, in the first months of the pandemic, when strong restrictions applied to border crossings, we received various testimonies about citizens being harassed due to their origin on the other side of the border. However, it was also true that healthcare services mobilized to receive seriously ill patients from the other side of those same borders when their ICUs were about to collapse. And there were many more signs of cross-border solidarity in most cross-border areas. When most citizens could return to work in the summer of 2020, even across the border, asymmetric measures implemented by neighbouring states drove to demonstrations, now to preserve the right to work, including various essential services. All of this has moved scholars such as Hynek Bohm, who works at the universities of Liberec (CZ) and Opole (PL) to suggest “the emergence of a cross-border civil society”. We are following the research of Prof. Bohm with a lot of interest and look forward to reading his conclusions very soon.

In the meantime, the EU was setting the final touches to the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the new programming period 2021-2027, and the reconstruction package (NGEU) on top. Looking at the debates on the EU budget since the end of 2019 —when a strong cut was to be expected, risking the overall expectations to strengthen EU integration in the coming years and setting a big question mark on the European project— until the approval of the overall budget (including both the MFF and the NGEU) in December 2020, despite the Brexit, the pandemic, and a variety of nationalisms and populisms which got reinforced in this context, we can affirm that the EU has become stronger. In particular, the debates and decisions about the NGEU have ended by crossing various limits that the EU did not dare during the financial crisis a decade before, such as the type of measures to support most affected countries and the design of new own resources.

The approval of the new EU budget came together with very good news about the effectiveness of various vaccines, many of them developed in Europe as a joint effort of member states, as well as the guarantees to produce them quickly and safely, and to distribute them efficiently in all the territory of the Union. This has been another sign of this re-strengthened EU. The start of vaccination campaigns began to glimpse in the near future (at least in developed countries), but transportation, storage and administration of these vaccines in other parts of the world still mean an additional huge effort and an important test for global solidarity.

## The Effects of the Pandemic in Border Regions

Martín Guillermo Ramírez

Anyway, further waves in the winter of 2020-2021 led again to the closure of borders by some EU member states as the first option at hand in case of doubt — have we not learnt anything yet? Again, borders were opened the following day, in view of the unfortunate decision to close, creating additional troubles in increasingly interdependent territories. It was not Brexit, which closed the border with the UK in the days prior to Christmas 2020. This happened while the EU budget was adopted after strong negotiations in the *Trilogue*<sup>12</sup>. The reconstruction fund opened additional opportunities for border regions and cross-border organisations, but there were still some pendant issues. And this was also the time when the first vaccines were authorized in the EU and vaccination started before the New Year.

First to get their shots were the priority groups (healthcare and other essential professionals, and the elderly), a bit slow in some cases but getting a good rhythm in most countries until they came across negationists, anti-vaccine groups and other sectors which are still creating serious troubles. Actually, some EU member states have real difficulties in achieving a reasonable level of immunized population, despite the availability of vaccines. Therefore, the arrival of the vaccines was not the end of the story, particularly in border regions. In early March 2021, we faced a new wave of border closings, with immediate exceptions for cross-border workers (good news) but increasing difficulties due to what looked like a random closing of border crossings, and stricter controls, while most EU members were relaxing their lockdowns. Once again, it seemed crystal clear that more efforts are still needed to better coordinate measures in all phases of an emergency like this.

The management of complex immunisation procedures has also challenged national health systems, showing the worst and the best of humans, and the influence of geo-strategic and market-driven forces too. In any case, most EU institutions seem to have understood the growingly important role of cross-border workers and other cross-border interactions, but are also the EU Member States doing so when distributing reconstruction funds? Some countries showed a certain focus on subsidiarity in their plans, but robust and effective cross-border approaches to strengthen the resilience of (cross-)border regions were still missing.

The pandemic is not over, but vaccination progresses with ups and downs all over the continent. Nevertheless, we are privileged: when I write this text in early December 2021 more than 75% of the EU population was fully vaccinated (two doses), with some EU member states achieving 90%, while various were still below 55%. ‘Vaccine-divides’ should be avoided in a united Europe, but also globally! African

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12 The *trilogues* are a series of negotiations between the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission to fast-track legislation, to reach prompt agreements, in particular when the Council of the EU does not agree to the amendments proposed by the European Parliament at the second reading. The European Commission takes on the mediating function. Trilogue negotiations are not provided for in EU treaties.

fully vaccinated population was still below 5% by the same time, with almost half of countries below 2%.

In Europe, there is a growing concern about those countries not progressing (for different reasons) and the effects of new variants of the virus in the non-vaccinated population. This still creates uncertainties and produces changing measures across countries, adding more asymmetries to cross-border territories. New restrictions for planned events during the autumn of 2021, originally thought to allow a growing number of on-site participants, have forced them to become more hybrid or, simply, virtual. However, the borders are not touched by the restrictions, at least for the time being, and the level of vaccination, despite mentioned difficulties, allow us to be optimistic about the situation in Europe as of next spring. Time will tell.

# Trust: The Social Capital of Border Communities in the Nordic Region

Alberto Giacometti, Mari Wøien Meijer and John Moodie

## Introduction

Trust is the glue that holds Nordic countries, institutions, and people together. The high levels of trust that exists between Nordic countries is considered the ‘Nordic gold’ that drives cooperation and collaboration across the Nordic Region (Andersson 2017). Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fragility of Nordic co-operation, with the crisis reducing collaboration and weakening trust relationships between Nordic countries, thereby threatening the goal to make the Nordic Region the most integrated area in the world by 2030.

During the pandemic, Nordic cooperation infrastructures proved unfit to facilitate intergovernmental dialogue, with Nordic countries restricting movement across borders to their neighbours and retreating into splendid isolation to mitigate the threat of the virus. The failure to make use of existing Nordic collaborative platforms, and a perceived lack of communication between states, was met with surprise and frustration by Nordic citizens. This was particularly the case for residents in Nordic border areas who, accustomed to and reliant on freedom of movement, were left restricted, divided, and isolated from families, friends, and businesses. The soft governance structures upon which border communities are built have been weakened during the pandemic. Indeed, in the face of top-down centralised policy responses, sub-national level institutions, particularly Nordic cross-border committees as platforms for para-diplomatic relations, were left impotent and powerless unable to protect families, workers, and people in border communities.

As border restrictions between Nordic countries have been lifted, it is now time to examine the impact of the pandemic on border communities and trust. This article focuses on the impact of the pandemic on cross-border communities and assesses how the role and responsibilities of Nordic institutions and cross-border organisations can be strengthened to ensure that the rights of citizens in border areas are protected. We argue that adaptive institutionalization is required to establish a clear distribution of responsibilities across different levels of governance, so local actors in border areas can influence decisions pertaining their specific needs, particularly during crisis periods. Well-functioning Nordic institutions and cross-

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border collaborative structures at subnational levels is essential for citizens who have built ties beyond national borders. Strengthening their institutional capacities will be vital in mending Nordic trust, deepening integration, facilitating socio-economic recovery, and building Nordic regional resilience.

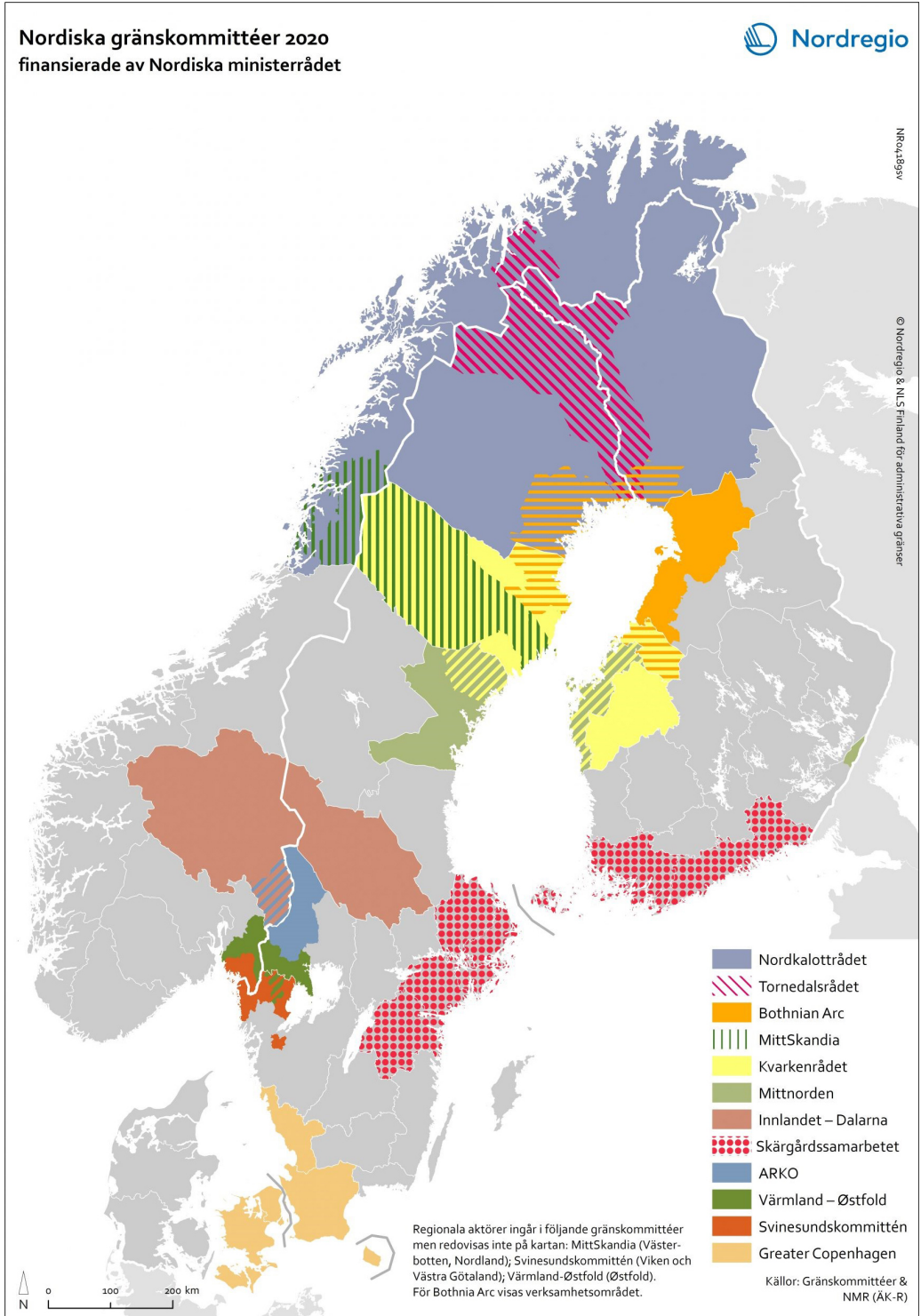
### **Historical overview of the Nordic cross-border cooperation**

The Nordic Region has a long tradition in dismantling border barriers and actively enabling cross-border living. Even before the Schengen Agreement was signed in 1985 amongst members of the European Communities, the Nordic Countries agreed on a Passport Union in 1952. This initially abolished passport controls to allow Nordic citizens to travel freely across national borders and was then extended in 1954 to let citizens live and work across countries without the need of a residence or work permit. These developments coincided with the institutionalisation of Nordic cooperation through the creation of the Nordic Council in 1952, which was formalized with the Helsinki Treaty of 1962 and consolidated during the establishment of the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) in 1971. While cooperation and dialogue at the intergovernmental level has laid the foundations of freedom of movement in the Nordic Region, local level organisations and actors in border regions have played a vital role in facilitating smooth cross-border living.

Cross-border co-operation in Nordic countries has, in part, been driven sub-nationally through cross-border organisations which cooperate on locally relevant matters across state borders, as well as through other regional actors and bilateral agreements. Some of the existing cross-border committees date back to the 1960's and were established with the aim to overcome hurdles to co-operation across borders and increase growth and development in border regions. In 2021, there were 12 Nordic cross-border committees in existence as depicted in Map 1. Rather than history or identity, the geographical delimitation of these committees depends on the jurisdictional boundaries of member municipalities or regions. However, membership is not limited to subnational governments, but occasionally includes local authority associations or organisations that deal with regional development. The elimination of barriers across states, along with a high degree of decentralisation, has facilitated direct ties between sub-national authorities in border regions. Using their relatively autonomous powers, municipal authorities are able to make long-term decisions about the provision of public services. In some cases, municipalities make investments and deliver services in agreement with their neighbouring municipality across the national border.

Nordic cross-border cooperation and living ran relatively smoothly until the 'migration crisis' in 2015 when after six decades of passport union, borders suddenly 'reappeared'. The passport controls imposed by Sweden on its border to Denmark in November 2015 came as a surprise to citizens living in border areas. The Schen-

Map 1. Nordic Cross-Border Committees. By Julien Grunfelder, Nordregio





gen Borders Code gives members states the right to implement temporary border controls “to prevent a threat against public order or inner security in the country” (Borevi – Shakra 2019). The 2015 border controls set a precedent whereby border restrictions became an optional political tool to ‘protect’ countries from ‘foreign’ threats, or arguably, to exert pressure on their neighbours to act on their interests. Since then, temporary border restrictions happened on a few occasions, which helped normalise this course of action. For instance, Denmark promptly introduced border controls on its border to Sweden in 2019, after Swedish criminal gangs were suspected of having carried several attacks in the Danish capital of Copenhagen (Henley 2019). Unilateral and prompt decisions by Nordic governments to introduce passport controls have exposed weaknesses in Nordic cooperation and dialogue infrastructures. These asymmetries have been amplified during the Covid-19 pandemic where the impact of unilateral and centralized decision-making has been particularly evident in border communities. They have been divided and caught in the middle of different infection mitigation strategies, including tougher border restrictions, and a limited role of local actors in decision-making processes in times of crisis.

### **The impact of Covid-19 on Nordic cross-border areas**

The social, economic, and political impact of border restrictions has been significant in Nordic border regions. Economic turmoil and losses were the direct result of the sudden absence of border shoppers and tourists, particularly in municipalities and regions with a low level of economic diversity. The longevity of border restrictions also contributed to unemployment, whether among frontier workers or in sectors connected to border trade, services, and tourism. This has led to discontent among many people. The uncertainties associated with border restrictions, alongside the confusing rules around social security and taxation, have generated distrust between citizens and authorities. Differences national level policy responses to the virus have also been a source of tension with the Swedish response based on individual responsibility perceived as inadequate by Nordic countries that enforced tough lock down measures. The struggle between supporting national approaches and remaining sympathetic towards neighbours became increasingly challenging with ‘corona shaming’ between Nordic citizens a common online phenomenon. The adverse tone that emerged from social media between people has worried cross-border actors about the potential for post-pandemic healing and reconciliation.

Although the initial repercussions are seen in the most evident way of all; divided communities and unemployment, the long-lasting effects are the hidden ones; a decline in trust between people and governments, and the ability to move freely and live borderless lives in the Nordic region. The trust built around free movement has, in very concrete ways, enabled the creation of interwoven societies. A failure to mend broken trust between peoples may in turn affect the future dynamics of both



border communities and Nordic cooperation in general. Despite the inward-looking concerns of national authorities, cross-border collaboration has continued during the pandemic. Cross-border organisations, municipalities and local actors redoubled their efforts to secure the availability of basic goods and services and lobbied national authorities to improve the conditions for frontier workers. Several border committees, information centres and services combined their efforts with the Freedom of Movement Secretariat at the Nordic Council of Ministers and Info Norden to monitor and assess the impact of border closures and lockdowns in border communities. The information they delivered to the national authorities played a significant role in the decision-making needed to solve critical issues around borders. Para-diplomacy should not be underestimated as a powerful social and political tool for retaining some form of normality in border areas during the pandemic, but also as a means to salvage trust post-pandemic between municipalities by the border. Cross-border collaborative platforms are also important for regional resilience. United cross-border organisations demonstrate their valuable role in working with local authorities on the ground in an attempt to make cross-border areas stronger by working together.

## **Empirical Evidence from three Nordic border areas**

In this section, we provide snapshot of the situation that unfolded during the first 18 months of the pandemic in three Nordic border areas between Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark. During the pandemic, the obvious need to monitor and document the situation arose. This was carried out in a series of empirical studies by researchers at Nordregio.

### **Tornedalen**

The Tornedal region is located around the Torne River which divides the land border between Sweden and Finland. The physical division, however, does not mark a cultural barrier, as a common identity has existed across national borders for a long time. Society and economy are closely intertwined, and many locals consider themselves as ‘Tornedalean’. Symbolically, Haparanda and Tornio have grown into a fully amalgamated city with no apparent border separating them. The ‘hard borders’ raised during the pandemic disrupted locals in ways they considered unimaginable. A fence was placed cutting through Victoria Square, which has been compared to the Berlin Wall, and barricades were placed in connecting bridges. Families and friends were divided. Residents could not access shops and services available just across the border. Frontier workers were distressed with daily interrogations by heavily armed border guards, occasionally searching their vehicles, and marginalisation from other members of the society for having been in contact with the ‘outside world’. Social media burst with tension between sympathisers of one or the other country’s

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approach to the pandemic, with hate occasionally transcending the virtual world. There were accounts of vandalised vehicles and aggressive tones amongst residents. Eventually, concessions were made to allow border residents cross more easily. Yet, this caused a new wave of criticism angering many people for creating new artificial borders within countries.

During this period, local authorities and cross-border committees were largely incapable of influencing decisions made nationally, but nevertheless collaborated closely to facilitate the transit of goods and frontier workers and inform national authorities of the emerging challenges. The lack of preparedness and sensibility to the specific needs of the border community was met with frustration and increased distrust by the local population. It reinforced the perception that national governments, governing from afar, have no understanding of the reality people live outside the capital cities, particularly in border regions.

### Öresund

With a labour market of 4 million inhabitants, and over 20.000 daily commuters, the Öresund area represents the busiest border region in the Nordic countries. Bringing together Copenhagen capital region, Malmö and other middle size Swedish towns, the area functions as one mega region. The bridge, which opened in 2000 was the response of an active political effort of integrating the regions' economies, labour markets and build a common identity. Despite the efforts to dismantling border barriers, serious concerns have been raised as to the functionality of the mega region in the context of un-coordinated national policies. Indeed, the measures applied amid the pandemic reduced the border crossings by two thirds in early 2020. However, this was not the first instance border restrictions were imposed on the Danish-Swedish border. The border controls implemented in 2015 and 2019, set a precedent and raised some awareness of the consequences of disrupting the normal functioning of border communities. However, the border restrictions amid the pandemic were the strictest and all-encompassing set of measures since the end of the Second World War. It largely affected private individuals and families restricted from social contact. Commuters were formally able to travel to work on the neighbouring country, still the hurdle of border controls and recommendations to work from home stopped many of them from doing so. Additionally, many workers have experienced different treatment at work based on their residency. For instance, residents of Sweden were discouraged from traveling to work by their employers in Denmark when residents in Denmark were allowed to work in situ. The prolonged commuting time, differing test regimes and documentation requirements generated discomfort amongst commuters during this period, and even caused concerns about the possibility to carry a normal life across borders in the future.

The Greater Copenhagen cross-border committee, the Öresund*Direkt* info centre and local authorities worked in close coordination with NCM organisations to monitor how the situation unfolded. This was key to identify pressing challenges that emerged with the restrictions and communicate them to national authorities. While these local actions were beneficial in raising awareness, local and regional authorities have questioned the relevance of the ‘outdated’ Öresund Agreement, and the ability of national authorities to address problems of local relevance. Consequently, they have redoubled their efforts in lobbying for a regional approach to manage cross-border issues.

### **Svinesund and Värmland**

Norway introduced some of the most stringent restrictions in Europe on their border to Sweden. Large functional labour markets were cut in half during the pandemic. For peripheral areas along the Norwegian-Swedish border, the invisible border is a promise of opportunity. As these areas tend to struggle with demographic decline, the border is seen as a way to counteract these trends. Parts of Värmland is considered part of the Oslo regional labour market and holds great potential for many young professionals. The uncertainties that followed the border restrictions made it difficult for people to know whether they were allowed to travel across borders to go to work, or indeed to see family and friends. Moreover, some Swedish residents with employment in Norway fell between the jurisdiction of two countries, as they were not entitled to receive social benefits from the Swedish government in a time where they were prevented from working. Norwegian companies could not offer furloughs as an alternative, as their situation according to national regulations did not allow it. Exemptions to cross the border were eventually made for those Swedish residents who were working in critical societal positions (nurses, etc.).

The border also offers employment opportunities for Norwegians in Sweden. Although Norwegians were able to travel to Sweden for work throughout the pandemic, they were required to quarantine at home and could not socialise outside their households for long periods of time. Different approaches to the pandemic between the two countries, and the lack of clear communication to back the different strategies, led to the surfacing of stories of mistrust that challenge the notion of Nordic integration. Swedes being bullied at work or being singled out in the workplace by having to wear different coloured vests on building sites, or as the only ones required to wear face masks in a work team, are stories that might damage trust built over years. Relentless testing at the border might have also contributed towards Swedes resigning from their Norwegian workplaces and seek jobs in their local areas.

Beyond social issues, the economy on the Swedish side of the border was hit hardest, particularly in border shopping areas. In the municipality of Strömstad, unemployment rates had increased by 70% by December 2020 which is heavily reliant on

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Norwegian consumers and tourists. However, throughout the pandemic, regional actors surrounding the borders and cross-border organisations have maintained dialogue. This continued dialogue was seen as essential for ensuring the transition back to smooth cross-border living once the border restrictions lifted. Cross-border collaborative platforms are viewed as an important source of societal preparedness and regional resilience around the border (Wøien Meijer *forthcoming*). The main task for border municipalities, regions and cross-border actors will be to find projects and visions that cement the idea cross-border collaboration.

## Conclusions

The Nordic Vision 2030 outlines the ambition to make the Nordic Region the most integrated region in the world, but the uncertainty generated by the interruption of free movement and an evident lack of cooperation between Nordic countries during the pandemic presents a different narrative. Based on our case studies, it is clear that none of the cross-border committees nor the Nordic Council of Ministers were consulted on how to deal with border communities within the national approaches to the pandemic. The response was swift and clear by national governments: the state is under threat, and thus it is closed. This realization, however, contradicts years of active integration and gives a strong signal of distrust to citizens and businesses that have built ties across borders. Covid-19 has exposed weaknesses within Nordic cooperation and severely weakened the high trust foundations upon which this collaboration is based. The crisis has highlighted significant power asymmetries between different levels of governance with national level top-down decisions to restrict movement between borders leaving Nordic cross-border committees and other sub-national actors without a voice and powerless to represent the interests of citizens living in cross-border areas.

The responses to the pandemic reveal the fragility of MLG approaches, and particularly soft structures such as cross-border committees and the NCM itself, which do not have a formal authority and rely almost entirely on trust. Paradoxically, however, while the pandemic has exposed the weak political and decision-making position of the sub-national level institutions and actors, the crisis has also revealed their vital role in maintaining local level dialogue and delivering vital public services during crisis periods. Indeed, soft governance bodies, including Nordic cross-border committees, actively raised awareness of the challenges to citizens in cross-border communities where the loss of free mobility was most acutely felt. The role of these actors was pivotal in facilitating agency within national authorities in taking measures to address cross-border issues, such as tax exemptions and social security rules for frontier workers, as well in ensuring the functioning of the labour markets, particularly within services dependent on cross-border mobility, such as healthcare and education.

Nordic processes of cross-border integration did not only happen organically, but the removal of border barriers has been part of a formal process based on the establishment of joint institutions and encouraged through Nordic programmes and funding. The way border communities and cross-border collaboration is treated in a post-pandemic context will shed some light on the future resilience in Nordic co-operation. There has perhaps never been a more opportune moment to build the institutional capacity of sub-national level to help facilitate cross-border para-diplomacy within the context of multi-level Nordic cooperation. The crisis can serve as a catalyst for empowering sub-national actors when addressing border relevant issues. However, this will require national governments to embrace active subsidiarity and ensure that cross-border voices and perspective are integrated into policymaking structures, particularly during periods of crisis (Moodie et al. 2021). More adaptable institutional and governance arrangements at the Nordic cross-border level will help rebuild trust between Nordic countries and encourage citizens to live and operate businesses across borders in the post-pandemic. This, in turn, will help deepen integration between Nordic countries and ensure that cross-border communities are sufficiently resilient to absorb the impact of future shocks and crises.

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# Local Perspectives on Cross-Border Tourism and Covid-19: A Study of Kirklareli and Bordering Countries

Prof. Dr. Volkan Altıntaş and Cemre Tokatli

## Introduction

Natural disasters, economic crises, political unrest, and war situations, particularly global epidemics, weaken or damage societies in every way. Many industries are harmed as a result of this situation. These situations, which cause significant harm to agriculture, industry, and services, make the tourism sector vulnerable, which is the most affected by such crises (Hall 2010: 402): Despite the disasters and crises experienced, tourism activities have continued developing and becoming an economic power as compensation. Tourism activities that were thought to be resistant to natural disasters, crises, and many possible adverse situations have shown that they still have a structure that can be negatively affected by the impact and consequences of the Covid 19 epidemic that occurred in 2019 (Gössling et al. 2020: 5). When epidemics occur in specific regions, the impact may remain regional, but when they have a global impact such as Covid-19, tourism activities have declined since the beginning of 2020 with no alternative option (Gümüş – Hacıevliyagil 2020: 72-74).

## Covid-19 and tourism

In late December, the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID -19) first appeared in China's Wuhan province. This disease, accompanied by respiratory symptoms (fever, cough, and shortness of breath), is a virus that was defined on January 13, 2020, due to studies on a group of patients. This disease, which is transmissible from person to person and spreads to other cities in Hubei Province, particularly Wuhan, as well as to other provinces in the People's Republic of China and other countries in the world, belongs to a broad family of viruses that can infect in airborne animals or humans (covid19.saglik.gov.tr 2021). According to the most recent data, between October 25 and October 31 in 2021, there was a modest upward trend (3% increase) in weekly new cases, with just over 3 million new cases reported. Other regions showed declines or stable trends, except for the WHO European Region, which reported a 6% increase in weekly new cases compared to the previous week. A slight upward trend (3% increase) in new cases reported weekly was observed between



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October 25 and October 31, 2021, with just over 3 million new cases. Other regions showed declines or stable trends, except for the WHO European Region, which recorded a 6% increase in weekly new cases over the previous week. The Eastern Mediterranean Region experienced the highest decreases (12%), followed by the Southeast Asian and African regions (9% each): More than 50,000 additional deaths were reported this week, up 8% from the prior week. The observed increase in new weekly deaths is mainly due to the Southeast Asian region reporting the largest increase (50%), followed by the European region (12%) and the Western Pacific region (10%). More than 246 million confirmed cases and approximately 5 million deaths were reported as of October 31 ([www.seyahatsagligi.gov.tr](http://www.seyahatsagligi.gov.tr) 2021).

In examining the studies on Covid-19, Akbab (2020) investigated the effect of tourists' fatigue on their purchase, referral, and payment intentions in the Covid-19 epidemic. As a result of the study, it was found that the level of fatigue and purchase intention, recommendation intention, and intention to pay more was low. In his study, İbiş (2020) examined the impact of the Covid-19 epidemic on travel agencies. As a result, it was found that travel agents were severely affected by the Covid-19 epidemic, suffered the loss of income, and needed support. Tourism academics studied how the Covid-19 epidemic will affect the tourism sector and found that the epidemic will reduce global demand for travel and tourism, but there will be an increase in demand for individual tourism after the epidemic, and tourists will have new expectations from tourism enterprises, such as hygiene and trust (Türker 2020). Bakar and Rosbi (2020) looked at the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on tourism and found that it created concern among the public and a drop in interest and demand in the tourism sector. International travel restrictions, national government actions, and news in the media, according to Menegaki (2020), create an atmosphere of fear that keeps tourists away from hotels, restaurants, airlines, and travel agencies. The study by Alaeddinoğlu and Rol (2020) examined the Covid-19 epidemic and its impact on tourism. The study found that the impact of the Covid-19 epidemic will be long-term, and tourism should be restructured as a result. The influence of the Covid-19 outbreak on the working lives of the chefs in Kars was investigated in a study performed by Zengin, Topçuoğlu, and Kaygın (2020), and it was concluded that chefs were not systematically trained in hygiene and had difficulty obtaining hygiene products. Furthermore, it was noted that some employees were terminated and had their paychecks reduced. Li, Nguyen, and Coca-Stefaniak (2020) examined the impact of Covid-19 on planned travel behavior after the epidemic and concluded that people prefer to travel for short periods in their private vehicles rather than by public transportation.

Furthermore, the impact of the Covid-19 epidemic on the catering companies operating in the Marmara region was investigated by Şen (2020). As a result of the data obtained from the officials involved in the investigation, it was found that all companies have taken health protection measures in their services due to the epidemic.



In their study, Mckibbin and Fernando (2020) showed the global macroeconomic consequences of Covid-19. In their study, Wilson and Chen (2020) explained the impact of travel from Wuhan in China to other countries and the impact of travel on the virus's rate of spread. The impact of the Covid-19 epidemic on tourism in Turkey and on tourism consumer behavior was investigated. In the study conducted by Aydın and Doğan (2020).

As a result of the study, it is predicted that the epidemic will lead to a change in the behavior of tourists and that tourists will develop new habits, such as orientation to alternative forms of tourism because they want to stay away from crowded groups. The impact of the crises caused by the Covid 19 epidemic on tourism activities was assessed by tourism scientists in the study by Kiper et al. (2020). As a result of the study, it was noted that tourism academics are concerned that the tourism industry may suffer serious losses and problems due to the epidemic. In their study, Meng et al. (2020) analyzed data from 1,209 Chinese travellers using the structural equation modelling (SEM) method. During the Covid-19 outbreak, he attempted to assess the relationship between travellers' risk perceptions, risk knowledge, and travel intentions. The study found that while making a travel decision, travellers pay more attention to interpersonal (contamination) risk, that demographic factors influence their travel decisions, and that female travelers are more risk resistant than male travellers. Neuburg and Egger (2020) investigated the relationship between Covid-19 perceptions, travel risk perceptions, and travel behaviour in the DACH region (Germany, Austria, Switzerland), which is a major tourism market. As a result of the study, covid-19 risk perception, travel risk perception, and travel behaviour were found to have increased significantly.

In their study, Perić, Dramićanin, and Conić (2021) examined the impact of Serbian tourists' risk perceptions on their travel intentions during the Covid 19 epidemic and concluded that Serbian tourists' risk perceptions (health, psychological, financial, and destination risks) negatively influenced their travel intentions during the Covid 19 epidemic. Furthermore, it was discovered that the participants' monthly income is a significant determinant in their ability to go abroad during the epidemic. Nazneen, Hong, and Din (2020) attempted to investigate the consequences of epidemic crises on tourist travel behaviour in their study. As a result of the study, Covid-19 was found to affect tourists' travel decisions, hygiene, and safety, and the Covid-19 process caused anxiety and reduced next travel plans. In their study, Rudyanto, Pramono, and Juliana (2021) attempted to assess tourists' risk perceptions throughout the covid-19 period. Tourists have concluded that they pay attention to the destinations' cost, time, and dangers. In their study, Çizel et al. (2021) examined the travel avoidance intention of domestic tourists in a model with a complexity theory perspective in a period of high risk and uncertainty such as Covid-19. The research involved 349 domestic tourists who were reached via an online survey. As a result

of the study, hygienic and economic concerns during the pandemic were found to influence tourists' intention to avoid travel.

In their study, Çetinkaya, Özer, and Kandemir Altuner (2021) examined tourists' perceptions of risk, hygiene, and safety during their travels in accordance with the restrictions and regulations that have arisen with the changing travel conditions during the Covid 19 process. During the Covid 19 process in Turkey, perceptions of tourism travel risk and hygiene safety were assessed. 1152 people participated in the survey conducted as part of the study. It was found that the arithmetic averages of tourists' perceptions of the Covid 19 epidemic, perceptions of travel risk, and perceptions of hygiene safety were at a high level, and these perceptions did not change according to demographic data.

### **Border countries and tourism**

Borders are also described as the line that determines the sovereign territory of a state and separates that state from its neighbors (Karabağ 2008: 3). Border regions are described as areas that, until the end of the twentieth century, nation-states did not prioritize their development due to international policies and military reasons but exerted political and ideological pressure to maintain their dependence on the center (Martinez 1994: 32). Borders or border countries are defined as artificial phenomena created and revealed by human beings, drawn through international agreements and wars, which allow nation-states to determine their sovereign territories in the international arena (Akyüz 2012: 139). Governments frequently propose and support cross-border tourism as an economic development incentive. In addition to this situation, many international organizations support cross-border visitor flows (Hampton 2009: 2-3). Tourists visiting one region can benefit from traveling to neighboring/cross-border regions or countries. Cross-border cooperation has cost advantages since countries share the cost of region promotion rather than solely responsible for marketing expenses. Establishing and consolidating peace processes between the two neighboring regions is another advantage. Co-creating tourism experiences benefit both parties, resulting in shared economic interests, trust, and friendship. Cross-border tourism revenues can be catalysts for lasting peace solutions if both sides recognize the benefits and risks involved. Such understanding can change the situation. As the sense of sharing from the same pool becomes stronger, the attitudes and behaviors of local people and businesses increase over time (Kozak – Buhalis 2019: 2).

## **Risk perception, tourism risk perception, and travel risk perception**

Tourism is built based on the security factor (Gümüş – Hacıevliyagil 2020: 72-74). The subjective assessment of the risk of a threatening situation based on its characteristics and severity is referred to as risk perception (Moreira 2008:17). The safety and risks issues for tourists are as attractive as they are serious (Sönmez 1998:1). People's perception of risk in times of disasters and epidemics poses a threat to their preference for tourism activities. The risk perceptions of tourists and local people regarding that destination hinder tourism development in that region (Moreira 2008:16-19). When the perception of risk in a country or destination rises, the overall perception of risk in tourist travel also rises (Cheng, Zhang, Fu 2015; Sönmez 1998). Therefore, perceived risk can be characterized as a function of uncertainty and its consequences, and some outcomes may be more desirable for the tourist (Weiermair 1998:107). Perceived health risks, income, cost changes, and consumption capacity influence consumer behaviour and travel demand. During the pandemic period, people's perceptions of health changed, economic contractions have been observed, and consumption capacities have changed, affecting costs. Individuals' fear of diseases and hospital processes impacts their behaviour during this process. The experienced fears, risks, and uncertainties lead to the prediction that the demand for tourist travel will decrease (Aydın – Doğan 2020: 77-80). The growing debate about the tourism industry and the COVID-19 pandemic requires a deeper understanding of travellers' risk and travel intentions (Khan et al. 2020). People are concerned about the impact of the Covid-19 epidemic on their travel intentions (Chen et al. 2020: 764-765). The assessment of a situation regarding the risk of making travel decisions, purchasing and consuming travel products or experiences is related to risk perception in tourism (Reisinger – Mavondo 2005). Maser and Weiermair (1998: 108) categorized travel risks like natural disasters, hygiene and diseases, crimes and accidents, and health problems, whereas Sönmez (1998) categorized perceived risk in tourism activities into financial, psychological, satisfaction risk, and time categories. Furthermore, media coverage plays a crucial role in the relationship between risk perception and travel intention. Tourists are more likely to rearrange their travel plans to avoid the perceived "unsafe" destination and seek a safer alternative when the media associates a particular destination with an adverse event or increased event risk (Sönmez – Graefe 1998).

## Research Methodology

### Population and Sample

This study was conducted during the Covid-19 process to determine the local people's perspectives in Kırklareli on cross-border tourism activities. The research population consists of the local population of Kırklareli district. The aim is to achieve the minimum number of participants (384) that must be reached for the sample to represent the largest population (Sekaran 1992: 253). Sekaran (2003: 294) states that if the population size is 35 thousand at the 95% confidence interval, the minimum number of participants should be 379, and if the population size is more than 35,000, the minimum number of participants should be 380. The population of Kırklareli province is 361,137 (TURKSTAT, 2021). According to Sekaran (2003: 294), the sample size should be 380, while the study's population is 361,137. Data were obtained using one of the non-random sampling approaches, 'convenience sampling.'

The most easily accessible individual is regarded as the most suitable participant in the convenience sampling technique, which is often used in social sciences (Coşkun, Altunışık, Bayraktaroğlu, Yıldırım 2015: 142). Between October 6 and October 3, 2021, the questionnaire was sent online to 555 local people living in Kırklareli who volunteered to complete the randomly selected questionnaire as we are in the Covid-19 process. The data for the study were gathered when the travel ban was removed and people were able to travel. The study questionnaire form consists of two parts. In the first part, participants were asked about their desire to travel during the Covid-19 period and which border countries they preferred, and questions were asked about people's demographic characteristics. The second part of the questionnaire contains a 21-statement scale developed by Deng and Ritchie (2018), Jonas et al. (2010), Fuchs and Reichel (2006), Wen et al. (2005), and Floyd et al. (2004), which was used to determine local people's perceptions of cross-border tourism activities during the Covid 19 process. The questions' content comprises questions designed to measure health risk, psychological risk, financial risk, destination risk, and travel risk. The researchers translated the questionnaire into Turkish. Expressions were measured using the Guttman scale. The reason is a clearer measurement of the local people's perceptions during the Covid 19 process. Anderson's (1988) Guttman scale consists of statements that relate to individual attitudes about a single topic. The Guttman scale is one-dimensional. The development of the Guttman scale has two characteristics. First, it consists of statements that show a high degree of positive feelings about the attitude toward the subject. The Guttman scale is distinguished from the Likert scale by this difference. The second is an affirmation of what each statement implies, and less affirmatively. This characteristic of the process differs from the Thurstone scale. Louis Guttman (1944, 1950) developed the attitude scale

technique, who worked for the U.S. Army, is concerned with “how consistently individuals respond to the statements in the scale during the examination.” There is a “scalogram” in the Guttman scaling technique to measure this consistency and numerous propositions about the intrinsic feature to be measured in the scale (Guest 2000: 347; Abdi 2010: 1). The fact that Kırklareli is a border city between Bulgaria and Greece is why it was chosen for the research sample.

## Objective and importance of the study

The purpose of this study is to determine the perspective and perception of local people living in Kırklareli province regarding cross-border tourism activities during the Covid-19 process.

## Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses have been developed in accordance with the study's objectives:

- **H1:** Covid-19 has influenced the travel preferences of the local people living in Kırklareli.
- **H2:** Covid-19 has influenced the travel trends of the local people living in Kırklareli.
- **H3:** Covid-19 has changed the perception of the local people living in Kırklareli regarding the health risk during their travel processes.
- **H4:** Covid-19 has changed the psychological perception of the local people living in Kırklareli during their travel processes.
- **H5:** Covid-19 has changed the perception of the local people living in Kırklareli regarding their financial situation during their travel process.
- **H6:** Covid-19 has changed the perception of local people living in Kırklareli towards risks in destinations during their travel processes.
- **H7:** Covid-19 has changed the perception of the local people living in Kırklareli toward the risks associated with their travel processes.
- **H8:** The perspective of the local people living in Kırklareli on tourism activities during the Covid-19 period differs according to their demographic characteristics.

## Data analysis

The SPSS (Static Packages for the Social Sciences) 23 program was used to analyze and interpret the data obtained within the scope of the study. Once the data were entered into the SPSS program, frequency analysis was performed during data entry to control for error and to see the distribution of participants by demographics, and each dimension was subjected to factor analysis and tabulated. The factor loading values were first checked, and then the factor reliability levels were examined. Internal consistency coefficients of “Cronbach Alpha” were calculated to determine the study’s scales’ reliability. When deciding which tests to perform in statistical analysis, the first step should be to check whether the data have a normal distribution (Karaatlı 2014: 3). George and Marllery (2010) found that data are considered normally distributed when the skewness and kurtosis values (*Skewness and Kurtosis*) are between +2 and -2. Because the *skewness and kurtosis* values on the normality test ranged from +2 to -2, it was concluded that the study data were normally distributed.

## Research findings

### Findings on demographic characteristics

According to Table 1, the age group with the highest number of participants in the study is 201 people and participants aged 35-44. These participants make up 32.2 percent of the total participants. 279 (50.3%) participants were female, while 276 (49.7%) were male. There were 201 (36.2%) married people and 354 (63.8%) single people. Looking at the educational level of the participants, it is clear that more than 285 people have an associate degree (51.4%): In general, for each occupation, an average of one participant from 7 different occupational options was attempted to be included in the study. Looking at the occupational groups of the participants, we find that they are mainly private-sector employees (20.2%) and public sector employees (18.0%): Looking at the level of the monthly income of the participants, 154 participants were found between 5001 TL and above (27.7%) and 136 participants below the minimum wage (24.5%):

Table 1: Findings of the Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

(555)	N	%
<b>Age</b>		
18-24	95	17.1
25-34	157	28.3
35-44	201	36.2
45 and over	102	18.4
18-24	95	17.1
Lost Data	-	-

(555)	N	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	279	50.3
Male	276	49.7
Lost Data	-	-
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	201	36.2
Single	354	63.8
Lost Data	-	-
<b>Educational Status</b>		
Primary Education Level	17	3.1
Secondary Education Level	28	5.0
High School Level	157	28.3
Associate's Level	285	51.4
Undergraduate Level	68	12.3
Postgraduate (Master Degree/PhD)	17	3.1
Lost Data	-	-
<b>Profession</b>		
Public Employee	100	18.0
Private Sector Employee	112	20.2
Tourism Sector Employee	73	13.2
Student	69	12.4
Retired	15	2.7
Tradesman	35	6.3
Self-Employed	71	12.8
Unemployed	80	14.4
Lost Data	-	-
<b>Monthly Income Level (TRY)</b>		
Below minimum wage	136	24.5
2900 - 3500 TRY	38	6.8
3501 - 4000 TRY	64	11.5
4001 - 4500 TRY	95	17.1
4501 - 5000 TRY	68	12.3
5001 TRY and above	154	27.7
Lost Data	-	-



### Local people’s perspective on border countries in the Covid-19 period and findings on travel preferences

According to Table 2, 472 individuals answered yes to the question “Do you travel or plan to travel during the Covid 19 process?” These participants make up 85% of the participants in the survey. 357 respondents selected both domestic and international travel when asked, “What trips have you taken or do you plan to take?” These participants make up 64% of the survey respondents. 450 participants answered yes to the question “Would you like to travel to countries bordering the city where you live?”. These participants make up 81% of the research participants. In response to the question “What countries would you like to travel to which borders the city where you live?” 347 people responded to Greece. These participants make up 62% of the total.

*Table 2: Findings Regarding Travel Preferences in the Covid-19 Period*

<b>Are you traveling or planning to travel during the Covid 19 process?</b>		
(555)	N	%
Yes	472	85.0
No	83	15.0
<b>Travels you have done or are planning to do?</b>		
(555)	N	%
Domestic	152	27
Abroad	46	8.3
Both	357	64.3
<b>Would you like to visit countries bordering the city where you live?</b>		
(555)	N	%
Yes	450	81.1
No	105	18.9
<b>What countries would you like to travel to that border the city where you live?</b>		
(555)	N	%
Greece	347	62.5
Bulgaria	208	37.5

## Findings of factor analysis and reliability analysis

The study's validity analysis was conducted using exploratory factor analysis. Each factor was subjected to separate factor analysis. The study used the KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) and Bartlett's test (KMO sampling adequacy statistics and Bartlett sphericity test) to analyze whether the factor dimensions were appropriate for factor analysis. If KMO values were less than 0.50, this was considered rejection; 0.50-0.59, weak; 0.60-0.69, moderate; 0.70-0.79, good; 0.80-0.89, very good; 0.90-1.00, excellent Sipahi, Yurtkoru & Çinko, 2010: 79-80): All factor dimensions (health risk, psychological risk, financial risk, destination risk, and travel risk) are found to have KMO values ( $KMO > 0.834$ ). The KMO value for the psychological risk factor was 0.884, and it was found to be at a very good level. With KMO values between 0.80-0.70, it was determined that health risk, financial risk, destination risk, and travel risk factors are all at a good level. By taking values between 0.70-0.79, it was determined that the KMO value for the dimensions of festival satisfaction and festival loyalty was at a good level. Data were found to be suitable for factor analysis when the p-value calculated for Bartlett's test was less than 0.05 (Sipahi, Yurtkoru, Çinko 2010: 79-80). Examination of Bartlett's significance value leads to the conclusion that there are factor dimensions that are significantly different across all factor dimensions (health risk, psychological risk, financial risk, destination risk, travel risk) ( $p < .000$ ).

According to Kozak (2015), factor loadings should be considered to determine which factor the items should be assigned due to factor analysis. The factor to consider here is that the loading value should be at least 0.40. The study found that the expressions under all factors were greater than 0.40. One of the most important criteria of factor analysis is that the explained variance exceeds 50%. For if the factor structure explains less than half of the total variance of the variables, it cannot be said to represent the population (Yaşlıoğlu 2017: 77). Looking at the variance rates explained for each factor, it is seen that the expressions of the health risk factor explain 57.4% of the variance of the health risk factor in the perception of the local people. In addition, it is seen that the expressions of the psychological risk factor explain 68.0% of the variance of the psychological risk factor in the perception of the local people, and 78.5% of the variance of the financial risk factor, 81.7% of the variance of the destination risk factor, and 79.6% of the variance of the travel risk factor. The explained variance rate for all factors exceeds 50%. Cronbach's Alpha values, which are used to measure the scale's reliability, range from 0 to 1. If the reliability measurement value is less than 0.50, it is considered unreliable, moderately reliable if it is between 0.50-0.80, and very reliable if greater than 0.80. (Salvucci et al. 1997: 115). Based on these values, it is clear that the factors identified as a result of the reliability analysis (health risk, psychological risk, financial risk, destination risk, and travel risk) have high-reliability values (0.805-0.908).

Table 3: Health Risk Variable Factor Analysis Findings

Factor	Factor Loading	Eigenvalue	Explained Variance (%)	Mean	Standar Deviation	Cronbach alpha
Health Risk - KMO:.825 / BKT:p<.000 (Chi-Square 884.948, df=10)		2.817	57.410	1.162	1.0779	0.805
Travel to natural areas like national parks is not risky.	0.834			1.103	0.3038	
Health safety is an important feature that a tourism destination can offer.	0.795			1.072	0.2588	
I pay attention to hygiene in accommodation facilities.	0.767			1.067	0.2497	
I pay special attention to the health system when choosing a destination.	0.756			1.101	0.3015	
It is important to have good health (travel) insurance when traveling.	0.620			1.114	0.3175	

Response Categories: 1: Yes- 2:No.

Examining Table 3, it is found that the local people who answered the questionnaire on the statements under the health risk dimension agree most with the statement “I pay attention to hygiene in accommodation facilities.” ( $\bar{x}=1.06$ ): This statement is followed by: “Health safety is an important feature that a tourism destination can offer.” ( $\bar{x}=1.07$ ), “Travel to natural areas like national parks is not risky. “ ( $\bar{x}=1.10$ ), “I pay special attention to the health system when choosing a destination.” ( $\bar{x}=1.10$ ), “It is important to have good health (travel) insurance when traveling.” ( $\bar{x}=1.14$ ): These statements correspond to Yes answers. In general, it was found that the participation of the local people in all statements in the scale was above average positive and perceived by them at a high level.

Table 4: Psychological Risk Variable Factor Analysis Findings

Factor	Factor Loading	Eigenvalue	Explained Variance (%)	Mean	Standar Deviation	Cronbach alpha
Psychological Risk - KMO:.825 / BKT:p<.000 (Chi-Square 2165.596, df=15)		4.083	68.053	2.717	1.6483	0.904
If I had to travel now, I would not feel well.	0.872			1.182	0.3862	
Traveling now is risky.	0.869			1.173	0.3786	
I am concerned that the risk of illness may worsen during the journey.	0.852			1.150	0.3570	
I will use disinfectant, mask, and gloves during the trip.	0.839			1.068	0.2528	
COVID-19 is a very dangerous disease.	0.787			1.103	0.3038	
I am concerned about the emergence of a new virus.	0.721			1.105	0.3062	

Response Categories: 1: Yes- 2:No.

Examining Table 4, which examines the level of involvement of the local people who answered the questionnaire in the statements under the psychological risk dimension, it was found that they mostly agreed with the statement “I will use disinfectant, mask, and gloves during the trip.” ( $\bar{x}=1.06$ ): This statement was followed by the statements “COVID-19 is a very dangerous disease.” ( $\bar{x}=1.10$ ), “I am concerned about the emergence of a new virus.” ( $\bar{x}=1,10$ ), “I am concerned that the risk of illness may worsen during the journey.” ( $\bar{x}=1.15$ ), “Traveling now is risky.” ( $\bar{x}=1.17$ ), “If I had to travel now, I would not feel well.” ( $\bar{x}=1,18$ ): These statements correspond to “Yes” answers. In general, it was found that the participation of the local people in all statements in the scale was above average positive and perceived by them at a high level.

*Table 5: Financial Risk Variable Factor Analysis Findings*

Factor	Factor Loading	Eigenvalue	Explained Variance (%)	Mean	Standar Deviation	Cronbach alpha
Financial Risk - KMO:.838 / BKT:p<.000 (Chi-Square 1557.962, df=6)		3.143	78.574	1.244	1.1154	0.908
I am concerned that my trip will affect my financial situation.	0.923			1.103	.3038	
I am worried that the trip is not worth my money.	0.922			1.141	.3479	
I worry that the trip will also bring some unforeseen expenses.	0.875			1.112	.3153	
I am concerned that food and beverage costs will be higher due to the crisis caused by COVID -19.	0.822			1.094	.2917	

*Response Categories: 1: Yes- 2:No.*

Table 5 indicates that local people who answered the questionnaire on the statements under the dimension of “Financial risk” agree most with the statement “I am concerned that food and beverage costs will be higher due to the crisis caused by COVID -19.”( $\bar{x}$ =1.09): This statement is followed by “I am concerned that my trip will affect my financial situation.” ( $\bar{x}$ =1.10), “I worry that the trip will also bring some unforeseen expenses.” ( $\bar{x}$ =1.11), “I am worried that the trip is not worth my money.” ( $\bar{x}$ =1.14): These statements correspond to Yes answers. In general, it was found that the participation of the local people in all statements in the scale was above average positive and perceived by them at a high level.

Table 6: Findings of Destination Risk Variable Factor Analysis

Factor	Factor Loading	Eigenvalue	Explained Variance (%)	Mean	Standar Deviation	Cronbach alpha
Destination Risk - KMO:.847 / BKT:p<.000 (Chi-Square 1723.735, df=6)		3.269	81.725	1.154	1.0741	0.908
I have a feeling that traveling will be more pleasant now.	0.920			1.207	0.4057	
Visiting museums and other tourist sites is not risky.	0.912			1.160	0.3673	
Visits to swimming pools and other water attractions are not risky.	0.903			1.186	0.3891	
Traveling to destinations near my residence is not risky.	0.881			1.207	0.4057	

Response Categories: 1: Yes- 2:No.

Table 6, which examines the level of agreement of the local people who responded to the questionnaire with the statements under the dimension of ‘destination risk’, revealed that they most agreed with the statement “Visiting museums and other tourist sites is not risky.” ( $\bar{x}=1.16$ ): This statement is followed by the statement “Visits to swimming pools and other water attractions are not risky.” ( $\bar{x}=1.18$ ), “I have a feeling that traveling will be more pleasant now.” ( $\bar{x}=1.20$ ), “Traveling to destinations near my residence is not risky.” ( $\bar{x}=1.20$ ): These statements correspond to Yes answers. In general, it was found that the participation of the local people in all statements in the scale was above average positive and perceived by them at a high level.

*Table 7: Travel Risk Variable Factor Analysis Findings*

Factor	Factor Loading	Eigenvalue	Explained Variance (%)	Mean	Standar Deviation	Cronbach alpha
Travel Risk - KMO:.724 / BKT:p<.000 (Chi-Square 856.245, df=3)		2.389	79.635			0.868
Due to COVID-19, I will avoid traveling in groups.	0.918			1.106	0.3085	
Due to COVID-19, I will only use my transportation for the trip.	0.890			1.146	0.3534	
Due to COVID-19, I will not travel by plane.	0.869			1.186	0.3891	

*Response Categories: 1: Yes- 2:No.*

Table 7 reveals that local people who answered the questionnaire on the statements under the dimension ‘travel risk’ predominantly agree with the statement “Due to COVID-19, I will avoid traveling in groups.”( $\bar{x}=1,10$ ): This statement is followed by the expressions “Due to COVID-19, I will only use my transportation for the trip.” ( $\bar{x}=1.14$ ), “Due to COVID-19, I will not travel by plane.” ( $\bar{x}=1.18$ ), respectively. These statements correspond to “Yes” answers. In general, it was found that the participation of the local people in all statements in the scale was above average positive and perceived by them at a high level.



## Conclusions and recommendations

In the tourism sector, determining risk behaviour in times of crisis and epidemic is critical for formulating marketing strategies to change travel intentions. With the Covid 19 epidemic outbreak, people's travel preferences were curtailed in some periods and replaced by other tourist activities. The measures were taken over time, and the implementation of various precautions has begun to travel at home and abroad. This study primarily examined travel preferences to border countries. The results suggest that the local people living in Kırklareli province travelled and wanted to travel to a high degree during the Covid-19 process. It was noted that the travel they have done or are planning to do is high both domestically and abroad. When participants were asked what they would prefer from Greece or Bulgaria bordering Kırklareli province, a high percentage preferred Greece. Considering these results, it was concluded that people now participate in travel activities and have the desire, participate in domestic and international travel and tourism activities along with the measures taken despite the risk of Covid-19, and their travel prospects to border countries are positive. Individuals prefer Greece because of the greater participation in tourism activities and the variety of tourism types available.

If we look at the demographic results of the study, we find that most of the participants are between 35 and 44 years old and that there are almost equal numbers of male and female participants. In addition, it was found that single participants have a higher level of education and people who belong to the income group of 5,000 TRY and above have the highest income level. At the same time, when examining the factor analysis results, it was concluded that participants paid the most attention to hygiene in accommodations for the health risk variables. This situation leads us to conclude that the priorities of people's expectations of an institution have changed with the pandemic.

Considering the psychological risk variables, it was concluded that they would use masks, gloves, and disinfectants during the journey. This situation shows how the behaviour of tourists changes with the Covid-19 process. Looking at the expressions of the financial risk variables, it was concluded that participants were most concerned about the increase in food and beverage costs during the Covid 19 period. This situation again shows that tourists are concerned about the rising costs and expenses associated with the Covid 19 process. Looking at the expressions of the destination risk variable, it was concluded that participants do not find visiting museums and tourist sites as risky as before. It can be said that this situation is due to the precautions and precautions are taken. When examining the expressions of the travel risk variables, it is concluded that participants will most avoid traveling in groups. It can be concluded that this is a precautionary measure to minimize the danger and reduce contagion even during travel times during the pandemic. In general, when studying the research results, it is concluded that people no longer

avoid traveling, they have the desire to travel to countries with borders, but they also want to participate in tourist activities by taking the necessary precautions, even if they are concerned.

Within the framework of this study, the following suggestions may be developed:

- More research on tourist and local travel behaviour can be performed with larger samples.
- Local people can travel safely by creating measures and practices between the two countries regarding travel to border countries.
- Studies may be conducted to eliminate risk factors in target areas.
- Studies can be conducted to determine the expectations of tourists and local people during and after travel during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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# Covid and Border Politics from the Perspective of International Exchange Students

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## Introduction

The Covid pandemic has affected us all in many ways. It has restricted our mobility, disrupted our everyday routines, made us change our ways of working, pursuing hobbies, interacting with friends and family, etc. The impacts of the pandemic are moreover both very local as well as global in scope, almost no country or region has remained unaffected. We are all aware the Covid is first and foremost a major health issue, but it is also very much about security, economics, geopolitics and political and social borders. We are struggling to understand how deeply the pandemic has affected human societies and what the long-term consequences might be. As a result, the social sciences are now busy analysing Covid and many publications have already appeared that focus attention on links between Covid and borders, human security, etc.

Among the groups whose mobility has been most affected by the Covid pandemic are international exchange students. Each year the University of Eastern Finland hosts a large number of Erasmus students from all over the European Union as well as international students more generally. Despite the severe restrictions on mobility and in-person teaching that Covid imposed on everyone, students were not deterred from coming to the 'Far North' and the exchanges continued during the academic year 2020-2021. During 2021 several Erasmus students attended the Border Politics and Security course offered by the University of Eastern Finland. This course targets the critical analysis of borders and security as political issues and socio-political concepts. Students are asked to discuss and familiarise themselves with the historical development of various concepts and theories as well as their applications in the contemporary world. Students are also motivated to read and discuss key works that have characterised the state of art and to contribute their insights into the politically charged debates related to borders and security. In this way, theoretical perspectives are related to practical and policy aspects of borders. The objective of the course is



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to provide students a deeper critical understanding of geographical knowledge and its production, making them aware of political agendas, interests and power relations that inform different political interpretations of security. The course also targets greater understanding of border-making processes as formal (political) as well as everyday practices. Furthermore, the students receive training and competence in discussing, presenting and writing their research and thus actively applying theoretical knowledge of border studies and geopolitics.

As part of the Border Politics and Security course, students, both Finnish and foreign, were asked to complete an assignment in order to relate their general understandings and personal experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic to discussions of border politics and security. The four assignment questions were very broadly defined in order to open up as much space as possible for discussion:

1. What in your opinion are the major societal challenges that Covid has generated?
2. How are these challenges related to political and social borders?
3. Might Covid provide stimulus for greater international cooperation or will it rather lead to isolated national approaches?
4. How have you personally experienced the Covid pandemic? What were the most serious impacts? Was there anything positive that could be gained from these experiences?

What follows are perspectives provided by eight students who attended my course on Border Politics and Security in the Spring of 2021. The responses reflect a wide variety of issues that also reveal a general awareness of the complexity of Covid as a wider social and phenomenon. The individual responses reflecting the central issues the students raised have been abridged and compiled by the editor.

### **Major societal challenges**

The pandemic of Covid-19 has affected our societies in many ways and most of these impacts are closely interlinked. There are only few places in the world that were not affected by measures directed towards controlling Corona's spread. In many cases entire societies changed their collective behaviour, everyday lives, livelihoods, and social norms. In our opinion, the impacts of Covid can be seen in the areas of: healthcare, social inequality, security and mobility, work, culture and education, research and science and indeed all of this indicates the resurgence of Foucault's (1979) biopower as an organising force nationally and internationally. At the end of the day, this Covid-19 pandemic has revealed a lot of social problems that would have been exposed at some point, this crisis has just sped up the process.

To begin with, one of the biggest societal challenges is connected to healthcare as Covid has revealed the weaknesses and strengths of the healthcare systems of different countries. For example, in the USA where there are lower levels of universal healthcare, lots of people have faced difficulties getting access to treatment. Moreover, around 20 million<sup>1</sup> workers have lost their jobs due to Covid-19 and as a result they have also lost employer-sponsored insurance. Covid has also shown substantial racial/ethnic disparities in the US healthcare system. African Americans make 13% of the US population, however, African American people account for 20% of coronavirus cases and over 22% of deaths caused by Covid<sup>2</sup>. In other countries, for example, Russia, healthcare has produced inequalities which are regional in nature. In Moscow, the healthcare system works well, but in the regions it is hard to get a free test and there also have been serious problems with available hospital beds. In addition, medical treatment and surgeries were delayed for many persons as priority was given to Covid patients.

Another challenge that Covid-19 has revealed is socio-economic in nature, resulting in more poverty and social inequality. Indeed, during this crisis the economic status of many people was seriously compromised because of the nature of their socially interactive work (service industries, for example). As public life was almost everywhere shut down many people lost their jobs while others either enjoyed the possibility of 'home officing' or continuing to work in essential sectors. There has been a clear differentiation between those who have easily worked from home, those who have chosen to be exposed to potential infection and those who had to take that risk in order to secure their livelihoods. Many indeed lost their livelihoods and in addition, many sectors have seen their economies decline and many workers their wages fall. Poverty has taken hold in many households, and especially food poverty has taken place in people's lives. As a result, during this crisis psychological problems increased as well.

One sector hit especially hard is culture. Even though the number of online events skyrocketed quickly, this is no adequate substitution for face-to-face cultural life which connects people and forms identities. Next to the economic struggles most countries faced (while many global companies did not) cultural aspects, might present the greatest challenge after the pandemic, but also has the biggest potential. A danger lies in the existence of unequal conditions for people from the global scale down until the individual, people lose touch and the ability to relate to each other's living realities, a trend that was evident along socio-economic lines even before the pandemic. An eroding sense of culture might increase this gap.

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1 News release: the employment situation — June 2020. Washington, DC: Bureau of Labor Statistics, July 2, 2020.

2 Demographic trends of COVID-19 cases and deaths in the US reported to CDC. Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020.

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During the pandemic virtual spaces have developed rapidly. Due to the lockdown, the internet and working from home became lifelines for many – at least for those connected to and familiar with the internet. This virtual space has made links between the continents much easier. Due to the virtual space, there will be more international connections because this connection will be easier. As part of culture, the area of education has also faced many challenges. In some countries (Russia, most of the EU countries, the USA and so on) lessons were held via online platforms such as Zoom, Skype and Teams. Of course, there are also fears that the quality of education has suffered, e.g., with students switching off cameras and not actually participating in lessons. So, on the one hand, education has experienced innovation in the form of online technologies for teaching. On the other hand, some countries/regions were not really prepared for switching to online mode. Lack of computers and good internet access as well as a lack of knowledge regarding the internet, especially among the elderly, have created divisions in society. Thus, there is the danger that digital gaps will increase inequalities between populations.

We can say that the pandemic has also brought many burning social issues to public attention again. If we think back to 2020, the death of George Floyd in the USA did not only spark discussions about enacted and structural racism but was also directly linked towards the fact that minorities in the USA (especially Afro-Americans and Hispanics) were hit harder by the pandemic as the white majority. At yet another level, the pandemic also revealed inequalities that operate globally, Rich countries were able to obtain vaccines first and in large quantities while poor countries have had to wait. Vaccination rates in Africa and India, for example, have been much lower and these countries have been forced to deal with thousands of deaths every day (BBC 2021).

Security, both in terms of national and human security, is another major societal challenge that also can be mentioned. Borders have been used to protect the populations within a 'borderless' Europe. If we look at the specific case of the Schengen area, we can say, as Daniel Thym and Jonas Bornemann (2021) argue, that it is important to recognise the symbolic significance of political but also social and cultural borders. Times of crisis are times when our world view can be transformed in a relatively short time. Social psychology informs us that threat perceptions tend to reinforce the distinction between 'us' and 'them'; we aim for protection within our group when we feel vulnerable. Therefore, 'who' protects us from both the immediate health hazards and the broader economic effects of the pandemic. If the European Union wants to be more than a fair-weather construction, it must ensure that its institutions, policies and rules are maintained and strengthened during the crisis. The sense of security within a given country is essential in order to desire to stay there. If you don't feel safe in a country you simply leave it, it's the case for hundreds of thousands of migrants who leave their country every year because security in their country is no longer present. Even if the inhabitants of the Schengen Area

know that they form part of a collective border regime because they have adhered to its rules of this group. But with the Covid-inspired closure of borders national security takes precedence over Schengen.

To achieve the paramount goal to re-establish the status quo, meaning a world without Covid-limitations, a number of different measures were taken. While some places relied on military force to guarantee the security of the population by keeping people inside, different countries worked with softer approaches, either less radical in nature or of a suggestive tone. Being denied freedom in the interest of public health is not easy accept, regardless of how rational lockdowns, quarantines and other measures are. However, one more problem is that dictatorial countries are operating (dis)information wars against democratic countries and spreading fake news about vaccines. For example, it sometimes seems that that Russia is ready to help poor countries with vaccines while Russia doesn't help its own people or its Eurasian Union neighbours like Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. Putin's 'positive politics and news' are more important than dealing with the real Covid situation.

Medical research and science have also faced some issues related to national Covid politics. Scientists all over the world have been involved in making Covid-19 vaccines under severe time pressures but rivalries between states have complicated the worldwide approval of some vaccines. Russia's 'Sputnik V' received much criticism, mostly from Western countries, because of lack of empirical data regarding its reliability. However, it is also clear that Sputnik V is a geopolitical subject! According to French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian: 'In terms of how it is managed, it (the Sputnik V vaccine) is more a means of propaganda and aggressive diplomacy than a means of solidarity and health aid.' Sputnik V was created in a really short period of time and it is still hard to determine its side effects that have even caused deaths (and possibly not all of them were included in the statistics). If we take a look at the countries that have registered Sputnik V we can see that most of them are 'friendly' with Putin's government (Belarus, Serbia, Hungary and so on) and it seems obvious that even the vaccine (that should actually be a scientific debate issue) became a political issue.

Finally, Covid-19 has indeed involves a reactivation of Foucault's (1979) biopower. The political response to Covid-19 is carried out within the framework of a political logic of make live and let die : the living is the object of state policies and their goal is to maintain life at its maximum. To do this, these policies are backed up by knowledges and powers that institutes a mode of government specific to the epidemic context. For this, expert figures are called upon and they mobilise a knowledge-power that reorganises the relations of power in accordance with their political objectives. Moreover, this biopolitics must necessarily be exercised at the level of bodies. For that, it subjects the individuals to prescriptions of bodily behaviours named

“barrier gestures’. Finally, to exercise these policies, techniques and technologies of power are born in order to subject individuals to the discipline deemed necessary to fight the epidemic. We can hypothesise that since the arrival of Covid-19, we have been witnessing a new form of governmentality that has for the moment taken the place of the previous one. The neo-liberal one is now replaced by the sanitary one. However, the two do not fulfil the same role, so they inevitably come into contradiction. Among these contradictions, we find, for example, the lack of medical means in times of epidemics due to the multiple budget cuts applied to the hospital sector for several decades. Another example is the extent to which the economic market, which was previously considered so stable, is now collapsing as the state has to take the necessary restrictive measures to contain the spread of the virus.

### **How are these challenges related to political and social borders?**

Covid has put borders centre-stage. We see new political and social borders emerging and old ones given new relevance. As Gérard-François Dumont (2020) has said, “The Covid-19 pandemic underscored the need for borders as a place of regulation”. During the Covid 19, the border was really important to make a distinction and to regulate the flow. This strong regulation of mobility will stay in place in many countries for some time. Among the border-related issues we can name in this regard are: border politics and security, migration, and everyday social borders.

Borders have always been important from a cultural, economic, social and mainly political point of view. Borders guarantee security within a country but also allow trade when open. Borders have a real and particularly psychological impact on the inhabitants of a country, one of the best known examples and which has experienced much controversy is the Donald Trump wall between the United States of America and Mexico. The former US president planned to build a wall between these two countries to symbolise ‘the power, impenetrable, great and magnificent,’ (BBC News 2017). This kind of campaign aims to exploit the symbolic function of borders that is anchored in all our minds.

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused significant changes in security policy and border policy in many parts of the world. State borders have also played a more prominent role on the political map of the European continent. The emergence and radical expansion of the virus posed a security risk to all countries. As the European Union still does not have a single coherent policy, epidemiological measures and restrictions have been organised according to member states’ preferences. Since the protection of its own citizens and residents was a priority for all states, national protectionism has intensified (Kenwick and Simmons 2020). As a sign of this, several countries opted for panicked action and brought their borders under strict control, so that the

country could only be entered for good reason and the conditions required by the country had to be met. However, in some cases, these conditions have resulted in discrimination on the basis of nationality, which has gone against EU legislation. In the Schengen area, a situation similar to that before the regime change, i.e. the free movement of labour was eliminated, resulting in significant problems for the national economy and negative consequences at individual levels – in the case of Hungary, for example, the Audi and Suzuki factories rely heavily on Slovak workers due to their border locations, but the border blocks have led to thousands of employees being forced to rest, which has negatively affected both employers and employees. The border commute has presented most countries with a significant challenge. This condition became untenable, so it was subsequently determined according to the type and importance of the work, which workers could and could not cross the state line. In the case of Germany, for example, seasonal work is a major part of the economy and is also socially indispensable, so there was no question that guest workers would continue to be able to do so.

The linkages between Covid-19, borders and human security can be described in terms of a crisis of wellbeing. Covid-19 has brought to the fore societal issues that might have seemed minor at first but that now challenge our sense of wellbeing: for example, access to food, access to schools, the burdens of homes-schooling, family violence and tensions of long lockdowns, isolation of the elderly but also of persons living in precarious situations, including students. In this way, not only physical but moral and psychological health have been affected. Basic things connected with physical and mental health were made worse by other threats to human security and wellbeing, such as the removal of the privilege to cross borders freely in Europe. Many people began to have doubts about their future, because they used to cross borders for employment and other needs. Moreover, from an economic point of view, the partial unemployment of hundreds of employees during the numerous French confinements revealed many differences between social classes and once again, some families have found themselves in a very precarious situation by being unable to meet these needs.

Covid-19 has also highlighted perspective of securitisation of European borders that are closed and people from abroad, e.g. tourists, businessmen or daily job commuters are seen as something dangerous and unwholesome. This form of ‘Covid nationalism’ was applied in several countries, including Czech Republic, Germany (blaming Czech commuters for the rise of Covid cases in Bavaria) (Fraňková 2021) or general distrust of Chinese people in several parts of world, because of Wuhan incident (Cheung 2020). Xenophobia, racism or other inappropriate feelings are unfortunately rising. More needed would be for example Covid solidarity. Talking about solidarity during these times, Czech Republic also gets a support from its partners in the European space. France has pledged to send 100,000 doses to the Czech Republic and Israel has also provided shots. Germany said it will look into



providing hospital beds to Czech patients from overflowing intensive care units, which has shown that there can be also opposite examples for covid nationalism. Special role in a covid crisis have also cross-border workers who for a certain time were completely stopped, had no assurance of coming to their work place and to get a salary. Cross-border communities or twin-towns were also hugely affected, causing separation of close ones even for months and impossibility for example to bury their relatives, for example in the case of Český Těšín (CZ) and Cieszyn (PL). Even worse and more dramatic is the situation around the EU's outer borders, particularly for migrants and refugees. The shift of the public attention together with the nationally-oriented isolationist politics in Europe has made their fate uncertain and their security is threatened more than ever (Nossem 2020). There is in fact no clear common method or strategy for all EU countries in Covid situation so they have to solve their problems mostly by themselves. Feeling of being alone and no hope for future can cause perceptible tensions and division making among states or even among societies and individuals. Possible solution and easing can be seen in a Covid solidarity, common strategy and dialogue about possibilities for future European Union and its neighbours behind external borders that are very often overlooked.

One final point: in many cases, family and personal relationships have been broken as a result of the impassability of state borders. Mobility between countries has become a privilege, but in many cases administrative borders within the country have also become real barriers and limited the mobility of individuals at regional or even local level. In the absence of freedom of personal mobility, 'transport bubbles' have developed. The vision of a 'borderless Europe' has been upended by the pandemic situation. However, as a positive result, it can be noted that the development of virtual technologies and the realisation of virtual cooperation between countries has progressed (Hajdú – Rác 2020).

### **Covid and the issue of international cooperation**

The phenomenon of Covid nationalism has been mentioned above. It is a major problem that is reflected in a failure of international cooperation and global governance. In this context, we see trend directly linked to these issues: national withdrawal and a lack of international solidarity. It is not a question here of saying that the national withdrawals of the countries have automatically led to a halt in the logic of solidarity between the States, but it must be noted that, in many situations, the failure of solidarity comes essentially from a national authorities' focus on particularistic interests and their own populations. The most obvious sign of national withdrawal during the health crisis is the closure of borders even though there is little evidence to suggest that border closures or reinforced control measures really work. There could have instead been international cooperation because all countries were in the same situation dealing with the pandemic. However, national security



has been given priority instead of international cooperation. Furthermore, a lack of solidarity is visible in the neglect of poorer countries, especially African countries, and the limited willingness of richer countries to make freely available medicines and vaccines. Sadly, that tells us that Europe and western countries see poorer nations as second-class people.

Ideally, collective action of the international community would be well suited to address the current global health crisis and would be necessary for all other types of global and regional challenges. We have seen how non-cooperation has isolated peoples and nations, increasing mistrust. This impact will also be long-term as Covid is just the first big virus that of the new Millennium. On a smaller scale, governments have tried to limit their focus on promoting their own local spaces, preserving collectivist interests at the expense of individual freedoms. The closing of borders is the perfect example. On the other hand, the benefits of international cooperation are clear. Public health actors, for example, recognise the urgent need for a ‘weak link’ approach (i.e. the global public health situation depends on countries with the most limited capacities). That is why multilateral solutions work naturally. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has played an undeniable leadership role in managing the Covid-19 crisis. It has certainly been the scene of political opposition, but it is clear that it has provided strong technical leadership. However, the technical aspect is only one aspect of the response to the health crisis. The proper management of such a situation is also at stake politically, and this is precisely where the WHO and more generally the political organs of the United Nations (United Nations) have shown the limits of their power of action and coordination. Indeed, the UN has also suffered the consequences, resulting in a lack of coordination between the Security Council and the organisation as a whole.

In a global context where a significant number of governments are explicitly competing to maximise domestic gains, the creation of win-win strategies through multilateral approaches becomes significantly more difficult to achieve. For example, most international relations manuals suggest a multilateral approach to managing the current pandemic and the underlying systemic weaknesses of the global health situation. In this regard, it is interesting to note that countries leading the response to the Covid-19 crisis have preferred to go through limited international groups, such as the G20, to coordinate an international response, rather than through UNGA. (UN General Assembly). This reflects not only a weakening of international democracy, of which UNGA is supposed to be the guarantor, but also a certain lack of relevance of the organisation in the response to the crisis. Thus, the UN merely confronts the particular interests of each State, rather than aggregating them into a global and common interest, setting aside purely national interests. Moreover, in the UN agencies, decision-making is generally done by consensus, thus requiring the aggregation of the interests of each. In this, because of its organisational form, the UN, and by extension the WHO, are unable to really take strong measures and impose them on

states, thereby depriving them of strong political leadership in the response to the virus. Also, faced with the limits of international bodies in crisis management, we have observed a resurgence of the local level through various initiatives.

## **Personal experiences – living with the pandemic**

### **Czech Republic**

Covid-19 and its consequences for a life of everyone is commonly discussed topic in almost every field. In this paper I would like to mark several challenges of disease from past 2 years with a special focus on my home country - Czech Republic and its borders with connection to Schengen Area. Czech Republic is one of the European countries that has been affected by Covid-19 a lot, even at this time being mentioned in several foreign medias (BBC, CNN, New York Times) mostly about death rates and sometimes about government, trying to cope with the situation that is not getting better. From the perspective of someone who does not trust nowadays the Czech government and who feels that also a majority of Czech society doesn't support latest decisions, I would like to make small summary to introduce the situation from the past and its consequences. One of the biggest problems was lack of awareness of Covid-19 among inhabitants, Czech government didn't promote the idea of protection safety sufficiently and useless casualties were happening. Also, media spaces were overcrowded by various people making statements to that time situation, caused by Covid-19 or about the disease itself. Unfortunately, most of the prime time was reserved for people who had a lack of competency or knowledge about it and more important medical or social scientists were hidden from the public space. Another one was seen in own decision making for restrictions by national government, without any visible advisory by epidemiologist who resigned for their function by themselves and were several times changed. These facts and also easing of restrictions for past summer holiday with no compulsory face masks wearing, inevitable local elections, lack of meaningful financial support for affected or failed reaction to new variants have caused unpleasant high rank of Czech Republic in Covid cases and death rates in terms of population in Europe and sometimes also for world (Kottasová 2021). All schools have gone online. Unlike in spring 2020, when the Czech Republic government was quick to impose a strict lockdown, shutting its borders and making mask-wearing compulsory in the summer of 2020, border restrictions were not reintroduced, although visiting the Czech Republic for tourism have been forbidden until this day (Cameron 2020).

## Finland

As a Ukrainian Finn I can understand what it is when it is hard to see your relatives in Ukraine or in Russia when borders are closed. In my opinion, controlling the movement of people is the biggest problem in these times. People always used to meet other people without limits and travelling came more and more popular thing to do day by day. Also, almost we all have good friends and exchange student friends from other countries around the world. Before the Covid-situation you just could buy a plane ticket from Helsinki to Madrid easily, but now you have to pay attention in many things like Covid-tests etc. In spring 2020 Finland closed the Uusimaa-area where my hometown, Helsinki, is located. So it meant for a certain time that it would be harder to visit Helsinki from Joensuu. Normally I visited Helsinki every third week, but during Covid-times I have not visited Helsinki that often anymore. And when I visit, I visit longer than just a weekend like I did in 2019. Normally I also travel a lot of post-Soviet countries, especially Central-Asia, Russia, Caucasian countries and Eastern Europe but now I travel more in Finland. I started to appreciate more sights what we have here in Finland. Before Covid I didn't was so interested about them. In summer 2020 I did a road trip around Estonia and Latvia. I hope in summer 2021 I can visit Estonia again and travel with bicycle to eastern border to Narva where the EU, Schengen and NATO meets Russian federation.

## France (1)

The Covid didn't impact me a lot and for many reasons. In France a lock-down was adopted three different times: the 17 March 2020 to the 11 May 2020, the 30 October 2020 to the 15 of December 2020, and from 3 April 2021 to the 3 May 2021. All of this lockdown was really different. During the first lock-down, my university was closed, but the university started to give the lesson online. The main problem was that many of the teachers didn't know how to use the computer as a support for the lesson. During this first lockdown all of my family was together, so this lockdown was an opportunity to be closer to my family. The second lockdown was smoother. Compared to the first one; everyone knew how to react. During this lockdown, the university was open for some lessons. The government put some rules in the university to reduce the number of cases inside it. All the lessons were with half of the capacity of each room, and every participant was sitting every two chairs. But in geography there are not many people, so this rule didn't impact me at all. The Covid didn't impact a lot because I travel in Finland. The restrictions in Finland are really easier than the one in France. For example, all the bars are open here, the majority of my lessons are face to face, and we can walk everywhere at any hour, even the mask is 'just' recommended in the shop.

## Covid and Border Politics from the Perspective of International Exchange Students

James W. Scott (ed.)

I will not say that the covid was (is) an easy time to live. But in comparison to many people, the covid didn't affect my life a lot. I have the chance to live in a small village (with a garden) and not in a big city, and I have the chance to leave France where the restrictions are quite drastic. To many people, the first lockdown was a way to learn new things (a lot of people learn how to cook, another language...), at the beginning people were happy to have time in front of them. But today, people in France 'start' to be tired of all the situations. The theatre, the cinema, the bar and the restaurant (which take an important place in the French culture) have been closed since almost one year and everyone wants to travel or just meet again with friends. Because of my Erasmus here, I find again all of that.

At the scale of the country, the main problem during this pandemic was the way that the government was talking about the virus. We had a lot of different information every week and sometimes the information was contradictory. I think after that the government will be more careful and clearer to what they said. The presidential election is in 2022, and I'm sure that the covid will be in the debate in the same position as the economy, migrant... The covid will be a political way to be elected or to denigrate another political party. The covid will affect the French society because the pandemic affects a lot of the way of doing politics. Right now, it's hard to see how big the impact of Covid in my life is. But I think that Covid impacts me more with its repercussions on the economy, social life and politics. And this impact will be there for a long time.

### France (2)

Personally, the Covid-19 pandemic has been challenging but not insurmountable, I am a student and I have been forced to continue these in remote locations at home. I still live with my parents, so I was able to see other people during this difficult period. Some of my friends must have stayed in their apartment alone when they didn't see anyone. I know I've been lucky to end up with other people because isolation can be hard to deal with. I feel lucky to have lived through this period safely and I am grateful to always be able to have something to eat on my plate. I was able to go to Finland as part of Erasmus and I am very happy to have been able to try my luck in another country. We did not experience an Erasmus like the others but at least we will remember it. On the positive side, this experience allowed me like many people to refocus on me, to observe the things and activities I like to do and especially one of the most positive things for me, is that I really realised how lucky I was to live as I wanted in complete freedom.

### France (3)

In France, the country where I come from, we were first told at the beginning of January that we should not worry and that it was ultimately not such a serious illness. Therefore at the beginning of March, when everything started to change, I was very surprised by the turnaround. Then, mid-March when the general confinement was announced I thought that all this would not last long, so I adapted myself by waiting for everything to quickly return as before. After that when I saw that the situation was getting worse I started to get scared and to be extremely careful and perhaps even too sometimes (I must admit that I can be a little hypochondriac at certain times). Finally, once summer arrived and when the confinement was lifted I began to regain hope because life was slowly returning to normal. However, at the beginning of the summer I had a big disappointment when I knew that my Erasmus mobility in Finland was not possible for the first semester, so I decided to postpone it to the second semester but it was not foreseen in my plans. In September, October we were even able to go back to class and it felt good because I was starting to have more and more trouble properly following my courses in remote. But on All Saints' Day holiday the situation came back in the red so we were reconfigured and the classes were back in the distance. At that time my only concern was then my Erasmus mobility because I was extremely afraid that it would be cancelled. However, from a personal point of view I began to be less and less stressed and to simply respect the rules put in place without doing too much. In the end, for me, the most difficult to manage in this pandemic has been the permanent reversals of situation and the social isolation of our friends, our relatives ... Indeed having maternal family scattered in different countries of Europe that are Belgium and Switzerland I have not seen some of them for almost 2 years!

Moreover, the isolation of our friends during the first confinement was brutal and quite unpredictable so it was difficult to adapt to the beginning for me. At the school level the hardest was at the beginning because it was necessary to put everything in place, to apprehend new tools, ... and in the end when this type of teaching drags on the length, it is increasingly difficult to keep a constant motivation. However, in spite of this, I think it is always necessary to draw from the positive of each situation and that is why I tried to find positive points such as feeling on the essential things, enjoying even more of the moments of 'freedom'.

### Germany

In the beginning I enjoyed the silence even within the city, when I went for one of many walks I did during this time, either alone or with friends. In addition, I drove the bike a lot to get to know the Region better. Once again, I perceive this freedom and the causing deceleration as a privilege, because I know that for many, this time was coined by financial insecurities and fear. This fear was not to calm by the poli-

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tics. In general, I recognised the denied access to public spaces and the rather occasional opportunities to take care about friendships, especially distant ones. I was lucky to live in a 4-people shared flat, which was why I never felt lonely, but deprived of present exchange about life, studying and what else there is to talk about.

I did not lose my job in a tea shop back in Germany, but we switched to delivery instead of face-to-face sale, only possible, because of the pre-existing online shop. Luckily enough to keep the store somewhat opened, the biggest negative impact was the delay of the new teas of the season, usually being imported from India, China and Japan. For me this was the direct experience of disturbed product chains, which in a less established store could have led to bankruptcy. Also, the team worked in the constant fear of one of the colleagues getting sick, which would have meant the closing of the entire store plus a stall or shortage of the salaries for at least a short amount of time. Furthermore, I stayed in my hometown Kiel the last year, because I did not undertake the many inner-German travels to visit friends I had already limited myself to. I know that not everybody did this and I am glad that people had the chance to choose. For me, living in a touristic area at the Baltic Sea, the absence of tourists from the beaches and the touristic towns was remarkable, as it was less stress for me to visit these beaches, but I knew that there was a whole business suffering. The Schleswig-Holstein tourist sector probably can be viewed as only one of many cases in which touristic regions experienced the missing of an important economic field.

I assess lock downs ambivalently. On the one hand, a strong lock down might be better to create contain the spread of the virus, on the other hand human and civil rights were at stake. Being able to worry about this in Germany means for me, that the country does not belong to those parts of the world where a struggle for these rights and a struggle for dignity was evident way before the pandemic. As such, Corona might lay the foundation for empathy, as people might get the idea, that escaping to a better place would be nice, weren't they not already living in the best conditions globally possible.

Also, I think the influence that Corona had on the perception of politics is highly interesting. Here, I see a difference between political actions and the public discourse. I will depict later, why I am reluctant that policies and the economy might change after the pandemic or already did to a certain degree. First to say: I do not now, if I like the idea of estimating the ability of politicians by how they handle the pandemic. Seemingly, there is no country that did not complain about the handling of the crisis through their governments, as they failed to show trust in their abilities, letting go the notion that they know what to do. But how could they? Finding the balance between suggested measures and their own estimation of what could be societal bearable is probably not an easy task. Rather I would like to think about how political measures favoured which parts of the population and the outcome in



many cases was clearly to be found along wealth. Here, a clear focus on economic stability can be observed, as ideas of re-opening shops came quicker than enabling social group meetings in smaller size. Especially European football is one example where money clearly served to avoid the Covid-restrictions in order to keep an economic field intact. To put it in a nutshell: The socio-economic imbalances that were evident before Covid-19 can now be seen as the line along which normal lives are re-established and privileges and possibilities had been cut back at all.

## Hungary/Slovakia

The pandemic affected me in ways I'd never experienced before. The entry into force of border controls, gave me faint, nostalgic memories, since before 2004 I had experienced the presence of border barrier. I am studying in Budapest, but because of I am from Slovakia, I don't have a Hungarian citizenship, and from this reason I have had many problems with the flaws of the bureaucratic system. There is currently negative discrimination based on citizenship in Hungary, for example in the case of the vaccination system and the issuing of a vaccination green card. Despite the fact that both Slovakia and Hungary are members of the European Union, the coordination of official administrations has not yet been carried out, and many Hungarians abroad are having problems.

Since in March 2020 all educational, cultural and sporting institutions in Hungary were closed and the country was placed under lockdown, I spent the first wave of Covid in Slovakia. For me, the feeling of being locked up was extremely stressful mentally. Under the regulations, we were not allowed to leave our own districts, or to stay in public spaces only in time bands. There was a time when the only way out of the apartment was with a negative test result - it was a bit grotesque and ironic when hundreds of people were waiting at test stations in the pouring rain for test results to keep them healthy. According to my acquaintance's accounts, small and medium-sized enterprises are in a state of bankruptcy and many workers have lost their jobs. The functioning of the whole country has become chaotic and opaque, with domestic political tensions and the government crisis contributing to this, which ultimately led to the resignation of several ministers. The weekdays were full of uncertainty, and it was not known how long the current regulations would remain in place. Residents began to stockpile panicked and tried to get as much food and goods as possible. Non-essential stores were closed and from December only food could be bought in hypermarkets, which made everyday life considerably more difficult.

## Russia

Actually, my life changed a lot with Covid. I guess the most serious effects were on my personal life. My partner and I have not seen for 11 months as he lived in Finland and I lived in Moscow. The Finnish border laws would let me enter Finland as



an unregistered partner, but the Russian border control would not let me out of the country as my partner was not my spouse that time and only a spouse counts as a relative. This law works only when crossing the border by land. The only option was going to Finland by train. I bought a ticket with Air France that went from Moscow to Helsinki through Amsterdam as there were no direct flights. Before buying the ticket I called Air France as asked if they are sure that I can go to Finland by this flight if I did not have any right to enter the Netherlands. The representative of the company said “yes”. However, in the airport I and lots of other people who bought this flight got stopped as the airport in the Netherlands had no transit zone and it meant that we could not enter the territory of the Netherlands. Air France just apologised and, of course, there was no compensation. Wasted money, lost hope and tears... that’s how I remember this day. After that I realised that I somehow should cross the border. I found an exchange program with the UEF at my university. I haven’t even planned to study abroad before the 4<sup>th</sup> year of education, but the exchange was my only option. I crossed the border on a mini bus in December. In the mini bus there were 5 more passengers with absolutely different stories. Two other people and I were crossing the border as a person with a residence permit (I got it as a student), also there was a lady and her little son. The mother of the lady had a terminal stage of brain cancer and she could pass away any moment. The Russian border officers let her out, but the Finnish ones did not let her enter Finland as the border officer decided that crossing the border to see a terminally ill parent was not a serious reason. The woman and her 5-year-old boy had to return to Russia, the other part of the trip none of the left 3 passengers and the driver said a single word. This is an example how borders, ignorance of some people and no common border laws between neighbour countries lead to tragedies. For Russia mother ‘is a relative’ even if the child is over 18, but for Finland it ‘is not’. As for the positive effects of Covid, I think, my family and I became closer when we had lockdowns, my partner and I understood how much we love each other, and we even got married this April. I hope the pandemic will soon be over and that people will be able to live a normal life again.

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# The Costs of Deterring Migration on the Polish-Belarusian Border in 2021

Alicja Fajfer

This research note uses the situation at the Polish-Belarusian border during the 2021 migration crisis as a case study to explore the question of responding to migration flows. Europe (EU and EEA) remains an attractive migration destination for Third Country Nationals. Nevertheless, there exist few channels that TCNs can use to reside in Europe under a documented status. As countries that ‘send’ migrants are often politically unstable; some individuals may feel compelled to move to countries where their needs (from basic safety to fulfilling dreams) have a better chance of being satisfied. As restrictive migration policies do not eliminate the demand for migration, it is necessary to analyze the sustainability of practices that countries implement to manage international mobility. The use of sustainable practices would increase the safety of migration routes, decrease human trafficking, and ensure adequate assistance for newly arrived migrants.

This study analyzes selected public communication and policy documents that reveal Poland’s response to the 2021 border crisis. Because of the nature of this paper, the material is limited to two ‘opposing’ actors: represented by the authorities on one hand, and activists participating in aid operations on the other. The choice of the case study offers a perspective on how a state with a shifting migration profile (from a country of emigration to a country of immigration) uses migration flows. The study assumes the conceptual perspective of migration studies and uses the analytic tools of Critical Discourse Analysis.

## Background

The crisis thrives on the nexus of global and regional politics, and any analysis needs to consider these two levels. The 2021 migration crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border refers to the occurrence of tragic events and violent incidents that accompanied the mass movement of people mainly to traditional European immigration countries via ‘the Belarusian route’ since the summer of 2021. After the Mediterranean and Greek routes lost their capacity, the Belarusian route became a viable alternative for undocumented migration from conflict-torn Middle Eastern and African states, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Kongo. For most of the migrants, Poland would not be an intended destination, but migration can be unpredictable. The 2021

incident is also referred to as a hybrid attack on Poland launched by the Belarusian regime, as a retaliation for regional politics, whereby Poland supports the Belarusian opposition and its leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. Indeed, Lukashenka's regime has actively facilitated the arrival of thousands of prospective migrants to Minsk. Consequently, the Belarusian authorities make sure that migrants reach the border and do not return to Minsk. Returnees are often met with violence from Belarusian uniformed service members.

Amidst the chaos of the second Covid year and post-election unrest in Belarus, groups of undocumented migrants started crossing the woods from Belarus into Poland and the Baltic states. These events echo the refugee crisis of 2015. Germany has already received more asylum application than in 2020, but still much fewer than in the record year of 2016 and the following years (Statista 2021). It must also be noted that persons arriving through the Belarusian route might have been bound for other countries, too. It remains unknown how many people have made it across the route, as not everyone will legalize their stay. However, the absence of precise estimates is a known challenge in migration studies.

The 2015 crisis was exploited to harden EU borders further. In discursive terms, the crisis polarized societies, as security-related topics filled the public debate and far right political groups gained clout. Although the state-level response of many destination countries was to welcome large groups of refugees 'just this once', it also became apparent that a similar event in the future was to be avoided at all cost. EU countries strove to deliver that promise. On one hand, money was offered to those who agreed to return voluntarily and to those who would stop new arrivals. On the other, measures were implemented to increase the risk of travel so that the stakes would be too high. However, as the 2021 crisis shows, these measures did not prevent more undocumented migrations for long. As recent geopolitical developments, for instance in Afghanistan, push communities towards migration, and aging western societies (Poland being no exception) plead for able bodies to work, large-scale mobility stays on the table, with humanitarian and economic dimensions intertwined and in conflict.

### **Push and pull factors**

One of the core conceptual frameworks of migration studies is the push and pull factors theory. In short, push factors are those elements of life that the individual wants to escape. Examples are the existence of direct hazards, lawlessness, and a low standard of living. But climate challenges (from years of drought to dark depressing winters) and lifestyle choices can also count as push factors. Pull factors are those elements that enable a more attractive life. They may be described as the negative other of the push factors: e.g. career opportunities, higher standard of living, support systems and safety from harm. What constitutes push and pull factors in each

case of migration is an individual matter, but some factors exist objectively. In addition, the theory states that the push and pull factors must be strong enough, aligned, and in the right proportion, for migration to occur.

Although the push and pull factors theory is useful to explain migration phenomena, it arguably has certain shortcomings. It is also applied differently with regards to migration policies, depending on the type of migration. For instance, EU's internal migration policies concentrate on efforts to reform shrinking regions where the population loss has become an acute problem. It is believed that ameliorating selected push factors would increase the region's attractiveness and residents would no longer feel compelled to move, preserving the status quo of local structures. The pull factors in centers of growth would lose their power.

Meanwhile, the example of asylum migration in Europe concentrates on introducing tethering factors that immobilize people. Cancelling flights, and tightening asylum or family reunification rules make migration more difficult but not impossible. This concept is introduced here because the present 'crisis response' does not mention levelling the corresponding push and pull factors. Of course, there are reasons for that: for a start, a crisis response is usually based on ad hoc means, that are reactive, not anticipatory. Also, attitudes to internal and international migration are a more complicated topic and will not be discussed here. Nevertheless, the two examples are juxtaposed here to show that large scale migration is considered problematic from each perspective. However, the question of 'sustainability' is approached very differently.

It must be mentioned that intensive international migrations may eventually lead to reforms that improve the situation in the sending societies. For example, the intensive emigration from Poland after 2004 has resulted in a shortage of workers, that communicated a strong need for improving local conditions. Now, however, it seems unlikely that the push factors that exist in Afghanistan, Syria and other 'refugee countries' could be ameliorated to a point where migration is not a prioritized option for those who have resources to undertake it.

## **Tethering strategies as migration deterrents**

As noted earlier, the border crisis response brought to the forefront the presence of tethering factors, in addition to push and pull factors. These factors operate at migration channels, making migration destinations accessible or not. Accessibility means the physical possibility to arrive at the destination and obtain the correct documentation for the stay. Indeed, accessibility can function as a pull factor, and prospective migrants may prefer states where legal residence is available. Accessibility can also be manipulated by traffickers who sell a variety of 'migration packages', with or without guarantees. However, since the escalation of the crisis, the EU has

forced airlines to cease ‘migration flights’ to Belarus from Iraq and Turkey, cutting off sending communities from a means to travel. Without accessible infrastructure, prospective migrants are tied to a place, or must find other options. At the same time, accessibility is just one example of a pull factor.

Tethering factors highlight the role of transit countries in mobility that implement deterring strategies targeted at those who had already arrived in Belarus. This strategy is not unique to Poland, and can also be observed in the Mediterranean or anywhere where nature works as a barrier and people must rely on others for survival. This is possible because all border crossings associated with this type of migration take place beyond official ports of entry. To block migration, in addition to putting up a makeshift wire fence, the Polish authorities exploit the dangers posed by natural barriers in the borderland: rivers, wetlands, and cold weather. The borderland terrain (some of it are nature reserves) can be dangerous or even deadly (border casualties include persons who drowned or died of hypothermia, Bielska 2021). To magnify the dangers, the authorities restricted the access to the borderland municipalities for non-locals. While this practice may serve as an obstacle for traffickers, it also poses a major legal barrier to aid workers and journalists. It deserves to be mentioned that dangerous conditions have motivated civil society and volunteer initiatives to run aid operations in the restricted zone and in its vicinity. Activists must keep their operations underground, and cases of intimidation and vandalism have been reported to the public, despite the assurances that activists do not break the law.

Despite the extra securitization measures, the border remains porous, which calls for a tightened tethering measures. The authorities refer to it as preventing illegal immigration and communicate their ‘successes’ through the number of individuals discovered crossing the border and a number of decisions issued. OKO.Press collected and described 24 controversial deterring practices implemented by the authorities. 13 practices concern migrants, and they range from forced returns to Belarus (beyond official border crossings and despite their attempts to apply for asylum in Poland) to cases of damaging their property and even violence (Boczek 2021a). 11 practices concern impeding activities undertaken by civil society actors in the vicinity of the closed borderland municipalities (Boczek 2021b).

As the borderland crisis has already claimed at least 12 lives, with some deaths caused by drowning or hypothermia (Bielska 2021), the grim consequences of ‘sealing off the border’ come to light. As the report below illustrates, the risks are serious enough that sometimes the safest option is to compromise the migrants’ whereabouts.

In December, 4 migrants requested help from activists by an online messaging service. As activists were unable to help, and the situation posed a direct threat, they had alerted the border guards who successfully rescued the four trapped in the wilderness, in cooperation with firefighters and the military. Official communication from the authorities typically depicts the ‘impenetrability of the border’ but



this update warms up the image of this cold and ruthless determination (typically this would be done by posting pictures of officers' children). Interestingly, none of these communications mentions the tip from the activists (c.f. Boczek 2021c), which echoes the narrative of the lack of support. The incident had wider consequences. By making the dangers of the passage closer, the Polish authorities hope to deter crossing attempts. However, implementing this strategy comes at a cost. Yet, migrants met by Polish activists report that Belarusian authorities keep pressuring people to cross, and block their return to Minsk. The crisis has been nicknamed a game of humanitarian ping-pong, with each side blaming the other for tragedies that occur in the borderland. Sometimes, the regimes cave in under humanitarian pressure. It is confirmed that several hundred people were able to leave Minsk voluntarily on evacuation flights. Considering this, the traditional understanding of the push and pull factors does not help, in so far as it does not mention transit countries with their specific circumstances, and the power to facilitate, re-route, delay or stop mobility. Controlling accessibility may be the only readily available tool for these countries, but this tool leaves little room for humanitarian treatment of undocumented migrants. It is also not sufficient to turn everyone back.

Figure 1. Twitter communication (machine-translated into English) from the Polish Border Guards (on the left) and the Territorial Defense Force, who helped to rescue four migrants lost in the wetlands.

**Straż Graniczna**  
@Straz\_Graniczna

Wczoraj [#funkcjonariuszeSG](#) z placówek w Michałowie i Narewce wspólnie z [@KGPSP](#) prowadzili przez kilka godzin akcję ratowniczą. Czworo nielegalnych imigrantów ob. Syrii i Iraku utknęło na bagnach. Udało się ich odnaleźć dzięki użyciu drona [#WP](#)  
Dwie osoby przewieziono do szpitala.

Translated from Polish by Google

Yesterday [#funkcjonariuszeSG](#) from the posts in Michałów and Narewka together with [@KGPSP](#) conducted a rescue operation for several hours. Four illegal immigrants from Syria and Iraq got stuck in the swamps. They were found thanks to the use of a drone [#WP](#)  
Two people were taken to hospital.

9:15 AM · Dec 15, 2021 · Twitter Web App

52 Retweets 18 Quote Tweets 323 Likes

**Terytorialsi - Zawsze gotowi, zawsze blisko!**  
@Terytorialsi

Wczoraj wieczorem wspólnie ze strażakami i funkcjonariuszami [@Straz\\_Graniczna](#) nasi żołnierze [#4WMBOT](#) uratowali 4 migrantów, którzy utknęli na bagnach na Podlasiu.  
Tu więcej: [bit.ly/3oUPj4o](#)  
[#Terytorialsi](#) [#SilneWsparcie](#)  
[#PolandHoldTheLine](#) [#polandborder](#)

Translated from Polish by Google

Yesterday evening, together with firefighters and officers [@Straz\\_Graniczna](#), our soldiers [#4WMBOT](#) saved 4 migrants who got stuck in a swamp in Podlasie.  
More here: [bit.ly/3oUPj4o](#)  
[#Terytorialsi](#) [#SilneWsparcie](#)  
[#PolandHoldTheLine](#) [#polandborder](#)

9:10 AM · Dec 15, 2021 · TweetDeck

52 Retweets 5 Quote Tweets 338 Likes



## The Costs of Deterring Migration on the Polish-Belarusian Border in 2021

Alicja Fajfer

So far, the analysis concentrated on the prevention of the act of crossing. However, crossings continue, and some migrants are able to start the asylum procedure in Poland. This point raises the question of reception centers, background screening, and finally integration programs. As noted above, a spike in the number of asylum applications can overburden the reception system, forcing the state to tighten asylum rules and extending application processing to years. For the sake of brevity, we will omit this point and move straight to integration programs.

The number of international migrants in Poland has been increasing, despite a strong anti-migration narrative coming from the top. In fact, Poland is the leader of TCN economic migration, having granted more first residence permits in 2020 than any other EU country (Eurostat 2020). Ukrainian nationals are a vast majority of migrants in Poland. Perhaps this explains why Poland downplays the need for integration policies. While Ukrainians are often considered ‘culturally similar’ to Poles, migrants’ everyday experiences show that a state-level integration policy could facilitate their adaptation (Fajfer 2020). With an absence of organized state-level support, integration relies on individuals’ creativity, dedication, and resilience. Examples from schools attended by children with migrant background present a variety of experiences. These experiences depend on the attitudes of teachers and civil society organizations. Integration practices at schools take the shape of grassroots initiatives and experiments. Reports of more or less overt discriminatory practices are also noted.

Against this backdrop, Poland’s neglect towards developing integration policies appears as a method; another tethering factor sending a message that ‘all doors are shut’. While individuals’ creativity, dedication, and resilience go a long way when it comes to supporting migrant integration, it is a risky long-term strategy. When migration from Ukraine started intensifying, Poland could justify not having an integration policy by the novelty of immigration phenomena (Fajfer 2019). More than a decade and at least one migration crisis later, the context has changed. While the majority of TCNs who take the Belarusian route might be bound for other countries, for some Poland will become a destination for longer. A reactive approach and delayed plans seem like bad choices in the times when diversifying societies are becoming a reality, and neglecting integration matters leads to serious challenges.

## Conclusion

This paper introduces the idea that transit countries along migration routes employ strategies to encourage (force) or deter migration. These strategies manipulate tethering factors that give meaning to push and pull factors, by helping individuals become mobile or tying them to a place, at any point of migration. They operate at different levels, from planning mobility to planning adaptation. As seen in the Polish-Belarusian borderland, these strategies are reactive, rather than proactive. They are manifested through threats or acts of violence. While tethering factors correspond to the pull factor of accessibility, they do not necessarily change the constellations of push and pull factors. As a result actions based on deterrence are unlikely to manage migration flows sustainably on the global scale. Regionally, however, they can push the challenge into another country's backyard if the geopolitical status quo allows for it.

Admittedly, this is a 'sketch' of a paper, hence the analysis has had to be economical, and many important points be omitted, forcing the reader to explore the details of the 2021 border crisis on their own. The situation on the Polish-Belarusian border is dynamic, and the crisis is still developing and is expected to continue long-term.

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## The Costs of Deterring Migration on the Polish-Belarusian Border in 2021

Alicja Fajfer

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# Thoughts on Cross-Border Cooperation, Spatial Justice and Place-Based Development

James W. Scott

## Introduction

To a degree, cross-border cooperation (CBC) – or Territorial Cooperation (TC) in EU-specific technocratic usage – has always been a counterweight to spatially and sectorally focused member-state biases of Cohesion Policy. Despite the relatively modest funding of TC, it has succeeded in creating European communities of interest in dealing with specific development issues. However, the limits of TC in supporting the ambitious aims of Cohesion Policy and European Spatial Planning are evident. Despite continued support for CBC, it still can be portrayed as a policy framework that merely ‘fills in the gaps’ within Cohesion Policy. Even though CBC has made considerable progress as development practice, they are far from realising their full potential (Svensson – Balogh 2018). Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed, yet again, the vulnerability of cross-border cooperation to border biopolitics, with national governments acting in isolation, openly ignoring the concerns of border communities and borderlands commuters and flouting Schengen Area principles of open borders (see Novotný 2021; Ocskay, Jaschitz and Scott 2021). This is unfortunate, particularly within the present context of multidimensional crises that are challenging the cohesion, legitimacy and prestige of the European Union. The contribution of cross-border cooperation to a greater sense of solidarity deserves increased attention; more cross-border cooperation combined with greater welfare effects would be one as yet underutilised strategy to address the crisis situation.

This ‘thought-piece’ ponders the significance of place and place-based development within the context of CBC assuming that such cooperation is an important element of European social and territorial cohesion. Moreover, a necessary complement to place-based approaches is the targeting of spatial justice and thus the generation of opportunity and more responsive provision of public goods and services to communities across borders. The results of the EU-funded H2020 project RELOCAL,<sup>1</sup> confirm that local development experiences provide rich examples of experimental

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1 Reference is to the project “Resituating the Local in Cohesion and Territorial Development”, RELOCAL, which received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under Grant Agreement. No 727097. See the website at [relocal.eu](http://relocal.eu).

governance and institutional learning that could receive greater support from EU and national policies. Furthermore, these results could be highly relevant to cross-border contexts, despite the added governance complexity of coordinating development strategies that they involve. Place-based development is, of course, not a placebo for rectifying all that is wrong with ‘mainstream’ policies. Conditioning factors and various institutional and social constraints need to be considered in the crafting of place-based strategies – particularly if they are of a cross-border nature. However, with more targeted and improved opportunity structures and incentives, both the effectiveness and impact of CBC might be enhanced. Moreover, thinking about European cohesion from the perspective of borders and borderlands highlights the urgency of a place-sensitive development philosophy more globally.

Discussion begins with a brief elaboration of the policy and research rationales that formed the basis of the approach developed by the RELOCAL consortium. The research agenda was informed by a heightened sense of urgency given the EU’s ongoing political crises that include the politicisation of socio-economic inequalities and territorial divisions. Some detail regarding the enduring nature and consequences of Europe’s socio-spatial imbalances is offered. Discussion then moves to the salience of place, spatial justice and the ‘localities’ approach developed by the RELOCAL project. Here the focus has been directed towards a better understanding of the drivers and constraints that condition place-based development initiatives. Although the case studies involved were within national contexts, the results suggest potential for enhancing cross-border cooperation through a focus on community-building and spatial justice – an approach that in fact could build on much of the accumulated experience of CBC over the decades. In the concluding section I then elaborate some of the potential consequences of place-based thinking based with regard the development of cross-border cooperation as a development resource. Ultimately, sustainable place-based development across borders will require substantial innovation and reform at the level of EU and national policy.

### **Cohesion and European crisis**

The European Union has created a supranational context for peaceful coexistence, cooperation and governance. Europeanisation, understood as the emergence of common rules, values, social agendas, etc., has been in many ways a success story. However, the EU is presently confronting political forces that would roll back progress in all manner of areas. Indeed, processes of *counter-Europeanisation* have gained traction, supported by those who demand a Europe of nations and nationalisms, those who see in the EU an agent of globalisation and exploitation, and, more generally, those who question the EU’s legitimacy. Populist and neo-nationalist political forces interpret the pluralistic and agonistic nature of democracy as a weakness (Müller 2016). They also suggest that the EU is unable or unwilling to

protect member-state interests, pointing to ‘uncontrolled’ migration as an existential threat to European societies, economies and culture (Schmuck and Matthes 2015). At another level, the ongoing Covid pandemic has questioned the sustainability of the EU’s cherished goals of open borders and the viability of the Schengen Area as an integration project (Opilowska 2021). These and similar tendencies could have grave consequences for the future of cohesion and the European Union as a political community more generally (see Chilla – Evrard 2021).

Concerning the diagnosis of the EU’s ills, it is not surprising that economic and territorial inequalities continue to represent the EU’s single greatest challenge (from Bachtler, Martins, Wostner and Zuber 2019). There can be little doubt that the global crisis of 2008/2009 was much more than financial in nature; its negative effects on the legitimacy of the liberal world order and international institutions were profound (Tooze 2018). Moreover, as part of the aftermath of the financial crisis, the refugee crisis, etc., the EU’s legitimacy crisis has been clearly linked to popular perceptions of inequality and a failure to promote solidarity (European Commission 2016). As several EU Reports on Social and Economic Cohesion document, despite increases in general welfare the imbalances between Europe’s core areas and its vast peripheries remain and depopulation of many rural zones continues unabated (European Commission 2004, 2007, 2014). Ketels and Porter (2018: 3) provide a sobering assessment of Cohesion Policy:

*“In our view the growing concerns about the benefits of EU integration are to a significant part the result of a structural disconnect between what is needed for higher competitiveness across Europe and what the EU is offering ...the traditional EU model of aligning rules and regulations to ensure similar conditions across Europe was appropriate when removing barriers to market integration among structurally similar countries was the key. But it is failing to meet the current demand for context-dependent strategies that help locations specialize around unique value propositions in a Europe that has become dramatically more heterogeneous.”*

Indeed, the sobering results of EU Cohesion Policy confirm that while overall levels of welfare have improved, spatial inequalities and regional divides persist. Processes of growing territorial differentiation are characterised by the EU’s (increasing?) cultural and political heterogeneity and driven by 1) relative abilities to attract/generate investment, especially into innovative sectors; and 2) relative proximity of and accessibility to economically dynamic urban centres. Gorzelak and Smętkowski (2010) describe this as a process of ‘metropolisation’: a general pattern of spatial concentration of economic opportunities and a steady decline of rural, semi-rural and old industrial areas. Hence, a consolidation of territorial patterns based on core-periphery inequalities has thus taken hold in many parts of Europe (Magone, Laffan and Schweiger 2016). Moreover, there are demographic issues involved - demographic

shifts reinforce the metropolisation of Europe's economy and the more accentuated ageing of smaller and rural centres.

These polarised spatial patterns present a stark contrast to the policy goals of social and territorial cohesion, understood as societal well-being and harmonious and stable social relations that promote economic and social progress (see Council of Europe 2008). Socio-economic and territorial inequalities expose the EU to economic and political vulnerabilities and even existential threats; the Covid pandemic is but one example of a crisis situation that both reflects and has exacerbated political and territorial divisions within Europe (Gräbner, Heimberger, and Kapeller 2020). In effect, these processes indicated a potential 're-bordering' of the EU according to socio-economic, demographic and political characteristics. For this and other reasons, the territorial consequences of these re-bordering trends and the regional divides they generate underline the importance of achieving greater spatial justice and a more equal distribution of social opportunity within the EU. As the International Labour Office has documented (Vaughan-Whitehead 2015), austerity and 'fiscal correctness' have eroded social protections and solidarity, very fundamental elements of the European Social Model. Mere redistribution towards disadvantaged areas thus cannot be equated with promoting spatial justice (Connelly and Bradley 2004). But also more proactive instruments supporting local development, such as that of polycentrism through urban-rural partnerships need to be critically assessed. Social cohesion has been prioritised by the European Union since the 1990's but the inclusion of more socially targeted and context-sensitive elements in Cohesion Policy has been a relatively slow process.

The increasing socio-economic and political complexity of debates regarding European cohesion is evidenced by the gradual infusion of policy concepts that emphasise social fairness and responsiveness to local needs. Moreover, notions of cohesion promoted by place-based development and spatial justice have acquired political salience due to the polarising effects of spatial inequalities. Fabrizio Barca (2017), a major architect and policy advocate of place-based thinking, has characterised the EU's cohesion problem as one of threefold inequality - income inequality, social inequality, and recognition inequality. It is third aspect that is the most intractable. As Barca states: recognition inequalities involve "recognizing the role of people"; in rural and crisis areas people "feel like they don't belong in history, like they're far away from modernity, as if it was only cities that were inevitably made creative and pioneering thanks to globalisation's technological processes". The political costs of ignoring peripheralisation, regional divisions and socio-economic divides within the EU for the sake of competitiveness will come at a very high price. Andrés Rodríguez-Pose (2018) has captured the essence of this dilemma with regard to Cohesion Policy and questions of European cohesion in more general terms. His main argument is that a one-sided focus on centres of innovation has relegated many areas of the EU to the status of places "that don't count" and that this could in fact destabi-



lise the EU, providing support to populist and extremist groupings. More carefully developed and place-sensitive policy instruments are needed to deal with this issue; it cannot be resolved with the traditional efficiency/equity trade-off.

Rodríguez-Pose's message has been understood, particularly after Brexit and populist challenges which aim to 'take back control' of local affairs. This is reflected in the very broadly defined objective of getting the EU 'closer to citizens'. The EU's focus on innovation and synergies – which in itself can be seen to strengthen regional disparities – has thus also begun to incorporate the idea the 'knowledge' itself is a more basic resource and one that is in addition ubiquitous. As Barca (2017) states:

*“The aim of [the place-based] approach is to unleash knowledge, remove barriers towards innovation and encourage a lively exchange between local knowledge and global knowledge. In this sense, we are glocalists: knowledge of the territories must “speak” with the knowledge of the major centres, universities and corporations. But the latter cannot stand by itself without a knowledge of the territories.”*

## The Salience of Place and Spatial Justice

The research project RELOCAL departed from the assumption that a greater focus on place and locality, not merely as sites of policy intervention but as communities where meaningful policy action can be co-owned and co-created, is an essential part of addressing socio-economic inequality and territorial disparities within the European Union. It was assumed that one important step in advancing current debate regarding the role of place-based development, local strategies and sustainability within broader understandings of cohesion would be to elaborate notions of locale and the significance of the local in terms of theoretical conceptualisations, development scenarios and potential policy options. The project also recognised the subjective nature of place-based development and the roles of place identities, a sense of belonging and perceptions that development policies are directed towards community and citizens' needs.

Attachment to locale is a major resource for the articulation of individual and collective interests. Furthermore, as a process of bounding space, place-making entails the incorporation of and adaptation to increasingly networked realms of social life. Following Tuan (1979) places are a product of human intellect and social uses of space in which formal and informal practices of organising everyday life mutually reinforce each other. Places also reflect a need for rootedness and a sense of being in the world (Relph 1976) and in providing a sense of ontological security, establish conditions for social and political agency (Malpas 1999). For this reason, RELOCAL adopted a bottom-up focus on place-making as a continuous and iterative process of defining community needs and aspirations that at the same time is embedded within different scales of policy definition and delivery. Moreover, given the

development needs of the case study communities, the project eschewed an obsessive policy focus on innovation and competitiveness, which are inherently subject to political capture, but instead emphasised socio-spatial stabilisation as a goal in itself and as a means to achieve a more equitable distribution of opportunities.

Taking Sen's (1999, 2009) concept of capabilities and fairness, and Fainsteins's (2009) "just city" as starting points, the RELOCAL project targeted localities (rather than specific individuals) and social difference in terms of socio-economic, ethnic, gender-specific, mobility-specific and other issues that characterise such difference. As an element of spatial justice in territorial cohesion, the project worked from the assumption that fairness would require greater social understanding, more targeted engagement with different groups and their specific needs, and sensitivity to questions of access, opportunity and local capabilities. Following Abrahams (2014), RELOCAL adopted a pragmatic understanding of place-based development and spatial justice that eschewed essentialist a priori definitions and instead focused on what place-based action actually does and how it is approached by involved actors. This required facing the difficult but essential question: what freedoms and what kind of opportunity spaces might a specific locale need in order to sustain its inner workings, stabilise its economic existence and provide future prospects for the local citizenry? In addition, this approach recognised the importance of understanding specific enabling conditions under which local promotion of social justice and development strategies can potentially flourish (see Nordberg 2020).

The RELOCAL project consortium understood its mission as one of providing robust, evidence-based inputs for innovative and responsive place-based development policy. It is perhaps a commonplace to define regional, urban and community development as a spatially embedded process. And yet, the actual practice of regional development and European Cohesion Policy have most often operated under assumptions that targeted, largely top-down, investments will somehow initiate growth and positive change. The path towards recognising the significance of place-based perspectives within wider policy arenas has thus been a long and complicated one; it has been informed by decades-long experiences of community development practices, the relational and participatory turn in planning and political pressures for more effective regional (territorial) development instruments. The European Union's targeting of place-based approaches is evidenced by the emergence of instruments such as Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) and Community-led Local Development (CLLD) as well as networks facilitated by the EU's Urban Agenda. Arguably, these vehicles of policy reform are still in an embryonic state.

Patsy Healey (2007: 11) has suggested that pragmatic steps towards reform along these lines are possible if localities are comprehended not in terms of the normative rationality of masterplans but rather as local cultures composed of "(...) complex socio-spatial interactions through which life in urban areas is experienced." Further-

more, Susan Fainstein's (2009) notion of the 'just city' eschews the application of a universalist approach based on rational choice; in her reading of spatial justice one major and necessary step is changing the dialogue in order to counter the marginalisation of equity concerns. For Fainstein, this entails the recognition of demands and needs rather than mere redistribution. As Attoh (2011) has argued, the right to the city can also be interpreted as a concrete democratic right based on citizen involvement. Similar to Fainstein, Sen (2009) suggests a comparative and situational rather than transcendental and universalist approach. Sen also suggests that the definition of the specific polity that is involved in the achievement of justice needs to transcend the contractual collectivity of nation-states and encompass a more global outlook. This insight is highly relevant to the case of the EU where the principle of territorial cohesion can be read as a partial recognition of an interconnected and interdependent nature of the contemporary world.

Jones and Evans (2012) have indicated that development and planning practice must pay greater attention to place-making and the affective relationships between townscapes, communities and a sense of neighbourhood that it involves. Consequently, to emphasise place as territoriality and locale means to take seriously the idea that all territorial assets and services of general interest are both shaped by place as well as themselves place-shaping factors. This includes understanding local forms of 'territorial capital' which, according to Camagni and Capello (2013: 1398) encompasses "a wide variety of territorial assets, both tangible and intangible, of a private, public or mixed nature."

In addition to a focus on place, the idea of spatial justice as fairness can be understood as both a vision as well as a critique of the political objectives and ambitions associated with EU policies. The notion of cohesion as territorial connectedness has often served to enhance national scale within the European context with cities and locales often reduced to mere beneficiaries rather than partners (see European Parliament 2014; Vaughan-Whitehead 2015).

As an aim of Cohesion Policy, the promotion of harmonious development and reduction of regional inequalities should basically serve spatial justice as well. This goal is emphasised several times in official declarations, including the 3rd Cohesion Report (Commission of the European Communities 2004: 27) which states that "...people should not be disadvantaged by wherever they happen to live or work in the Union". The notion of spatial justice also informs the 1999 European Spatial Development Perspective (Dabinett 2010) which targets balanced and sustainable spatial development. Furthermore, the Europe 2020 strategy emphasises the importance of job creation and poverty reduction as a means to promote territorial cohesion and spatial justice. But it is not exclusively jobs or factors directly related to job markets that are at issue, fairness requires that attention be paid to a variety of social needs which are oftentimes group specific (e.g. youth, elderly, persons with impaired

mobility). This goes beyond the equitable provision of services of general interest; for example as part of Europe 2020, the Disability Strategy emphasises the need to increase the quality of life and access to opportunity of people with disabilities.

### **RELOCAL results and their potential relevance for cross-border cooperation**

RELOCAL responded to a need for more sophisticated place-sensitive policy tools and a targeting of fairness. These were understood both in terms of social inclusion (see European Anti-Poverty Network 2018) and in the accessibility of development opportunities (see Farole, Goga and Inonescu-Heroiu 2018), that at the same time promote local capacities for action. As the project demonstrated, the experiences of Europe's cities and localities, particularly those in more marginalised regions, provide a wealth of valuable information along these lines. The overall results of RELOCAL (see Jelinek, Keller and Virág 2020) point to experimental governance, institutional learning and local knowledge as development resources. Furthermore, the results confirm the significance of a long-standing question, that of making Cohesion Policy more accessible and attractive to the local level. The project results thus corroborate several important insights of policy debate. Among the areas where not only innovation but also tangible political support would be needed are institution-building, social and human capital development, the provision of public goods tailored to various development needs and regionally specific incentives for entrepreneurial networking. These are general recommendations that have been circulating for quite some time and that are a product of critical reflection regarding context-blind regional development doctrine (see Asso 2021). RELOCAL's case studies of place-based development also indicate the importance of governance contexts and partnerships, it is seldom a question of local agency alone. However, the division of labour, quality of communications and political relationships between localities and other levels of authority are highly diverse within Europe. Place (a city, neighbourhood, etc.) is a site where community interests, various levels of governance, multiactor networks, funding modalities and sources of general support coalesce, but always in highly contingent and specific ways in which the 'top-down' meets the 'bottom-up' (see Davoudi and Madanipour 2015). The quality of this 'meeting' is decisive and European contexts include a wide spectrum of arrangements from paternalistic redistribution to working partnerships.

How does all of this relate to cross-border cooperation? The salience of place and spatial justice does not end at state borders in an increasingly interdependent world – CBC is both an indicator and driver of integration and will play an important role in identifying alternatives in the search for greater socio-economic, territorial and political cohesion. A number of studies also point to the economic benefits of CBC over time (see Basboga 2020) as well as largely intangible impacts, such as

the development of social and cultural capital (Wevers, Voinea, de Langen 2020). Moreover, despite the limitations imposed on cross-border action there is no question that CBC has had empowering effects on local government, giving them remits of a both international (cross-border) and regional nature. CBC has been struggling both with the consequences of Covid and ‘Covidfencing’ (see Eduardo Medeiros’ contribution to this Yearbook and Medeiros et. al. 2021) and attempts to centralise Cohesion Policy within the remits of member states. The Committee of the Regions (CoR) has voiced its concerns over the future of CBC and suggested in a 2021 resolution that:

*“...Member States (...) look into establishing joint strategies for integrated cross-border areas and foresee dedicated resources for the development of cross-border projects, spatial planning, infrastructure, economic strategies and an integrated labour market. Funding for the development and implementation of these strategies would be provided as part of INTERREG under the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework.”*

Here we might add to the CoR’s observations and suggestions that CBC has been a relatively unrecognised and perhaps neglected pioneer of place-based thinking. Cross-border cooperation has existed for some time now as community-building projects that create a sense of shared purpose in promoting development goals across borders.

The results of RELOCAL’s case studies suggests a number of things of relevance to CBC. The proposition is that in order to achieve its potential, CBC’s significance as a place-making and community-building project, and not just functional integration across borders, requires greater policy recognition. We also propose that in the quest for spatial justice within CBC, we need to think in terms of more effectively stimulating multilevel partnerships and communities of practice. Moreover, the categories of *inequalities, aspirations and capabilities* offer central focal points for the conceptualisation of development strategies:

- *Inequalities*: what are they, who do they concern, how can they be measured? This entails gathering local information from various sources regarding social development and territorial factors that influence opportunities and abilities to satisfy needs.
- *Aspirations*: what are the locally set development priorities and how do they resonate with sustainability and cohesion goals? To what extent and how are stabilisation, greater social equity and/or growth objectives reflected in local strategies?
- *Capabilities*: the ability to articulate social needs and goals and to act upon them. This includes the level of participation and visibility of the most disadvantaged groups in agenda-setting as well as the quality of multilevel governance relationships.

Keeping these three concepts in mind, successful place-based action would incorporate local knowledge, actor networks and social networks through inclusion of different community groups and interests. Often, there is an element of complementarity in play in which successful development initiatives build on locally existing and working cooperation. Effective place-based action also takes the form of civil-society initiatives that fill local niches, taking on tasks that local municipalities cannot fulfil individually. Moreover, well organised civil society actors can develop strong partnerships with the local public sector, and private sector actors to an extent, and in this way, enhance continuity and a degree of institutionalisation of development strategies. Moreover, inclusion of different target groups in designing interventions is crucial in order to raise and harness local social capital and local/inhabitant knowledge, to map and understand spatial injustices – and hence more effectively fulfil actual local needs.

As important as design is the actual implementation of development strategies. All stakeholders and affected groups must be able to perceive tangible results, even if only partial, in order to maintain horizons of expectation. The visibility of concrete results, even if only a preliminary step in a longer process, is vital to the sustainability of place-based strategies; it is furthermore necessary in order to maintain community involvement and participation in projects addressing local needs and spatial justice. Similarly, essential to community-based and citizen-oriented approaches are a clear communication of the benefits to the citizens of a given initiative and so raising their interest, then including them, their perceptions and their ‘inhabitant knowledge’ as a resource in the definition of actual solutions. Such positive experiences must be programmed into the process. Additionally, if citizens are consulted not only about the expected positive outcomes but also potential risks, and ways to avoid them, tensions and emergent obstacles in the implementation are easier to sort out. For example, small grassroots action groups can be mobilised by the municipality to realise these citizen consultations and bring those into the local decision-making process.

As such, the role of local co-creation and co-ownership of policy, also across borders, needs to be taken seriously. As part of policy development and future implementation it will be important to identify areas of social and cultural activity that: 1) resonate with local aspirations and local conceptualisations of policy priorities (e.g. in education, research, entrepreneurship, gender issues, health, linguistic rights, regional development), 2) promote partnerships between civil society organisations, public and private sector actors, the EU as well as other international organisations, 3) enhance everyday social mobility in educational, cultural, and economic terms. A more innovative CP would also need to focus more attention, for example, on the role of social services (child care, health care, education), social entrepreneurship, housing and group-specific services which, perhaps in contradiction to certain categorisations, have important spatial components as anchors of local community



and locale-building, suggest that a specific focus on the role of civil society, public sector actors and potentials for social entrepreneurship. We can envisage through well-functioning cross-border networks of civil society organisations and social entrepreneurs the generation of opportunities for youth, enhancing for example local cultural scenes, vocational training opportunities and otherwise improving the quality of life by increasing a sense of belonging and motivation to stay in the place. This could be achieved by acquiring and allocating small-scale funding for this purpose by, establishing youth associations, or promoting engagement through strengthening community platforms of associations working with marginalised groups.

Assuming that greater emphasis on place-based approaches and spatial justice will be forthcoming, some consequences for Cohesion Policy can be suggested. Above all, and as the Committee of Regions has urged, the impulse to centralise and nationalise CP must be restrained. At the same time, the design of Cohesion Policy needs to consider and address the limitations inherent in many institutional settings for CBC EU-wide. As the experience of EGTCs indicate, highly different multi-level governance contexts make for uneven patterns of CBC effectiveness (Ulrich 2020). Despite greater potential for more effective and long-term strategic development across borders, state interests can at times intervene and frustrate local-level aspiration.

Spatial justice can be promoted through place-based action in CBC (and more generally as well) if Cohesion Policy instruments are developed that would better enable local communities to access resources (e.g. funding opportunities and partners) and develop capacities (strategy design skills, grant-writing skills, participatory toolboxes, etc.) that allow them to put in place activities that address local needs. Place-based approaches, as currently adopted and implemented by higher policy tiers, do not necessarily result in increased local capacities to act according to perceived local needs. Moreover, in order to effectively achieve spatial justice, policies have to address both its procedural and distributive aspects. The sense that place-based action is co-owned and informed by the concerns of those most affected can only be truly achieved if tangible results will be generated by such action. Hence, a combination, harmonisation and strategic coordination of bottom-up initiatives, top-down policies as well as of procedural and distributive interventions is vital and should be explicitly promoted by Cohesion Policy through targeted measures. The main message is that CP's contribution to institutional change – understood as change in formal and informal ways of doing things – can be enhanced through providing capacity-building tools and greater support for strategy development.

As an agenda for a reformed cohesion policy, the Barca Report (2009: 22) refers to Sen (1999) who promotes the role of individuals "...as active agents of change, rather than passive recipients of dispensed benefits." This should be seen as a key issue in strengthening spatial justice through territorial cohesion and cross-border



cooperation as well. However, the present reality indicates much reform and innovation of existing policies will be needed in order to enhance community-building across borders. Most importantly, institutional change is required in order to fix procedural imbalances through which fairer distribution could be attained. This would also require a change in government-mentalities in many of EU member states (e.g. from monopolistic and paternalistic approach to genuinely ‘enabling’ state and EU level). Applying lessons of place-based spatial justice from national case studies to complex arenas of cross-border governance would seem to be a tall order and given present national obsessions with borders, perhaps almost utopian. However, borders are not only constructed by states, they are also made by everyday individuals as well and are defined by patterns of interaction and exchange. If Cohesion Policy succeeds in mediating between EU-level agendas, national interests and local aspirations and concerns, the conditions for more impactful and just CBC would undoubtedly improve.

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## Narratives of Central Europe

Goran Bandov and Martina Plantak

### Introduction: history, identity, and borders of Central Europe

The term Central Europe has been the subject of various academic debates for decades, and there is still no precise definition that would define it, be it from a geographical, cultural or political point of view. The most common and broadest definition considers Central Europe to be the area between the Baltic and the Mediterranean. For example, Neff (1970 in Ruppert 1994: 96) concludes that, geographically, the area of Central Europe is well defined in the north as it is bordered by pronounced coastal borders, and in the west and south, where it extends to the Swiss Jura Mountains and most of the Alps. Still, there is a problem in defining its eastern borders, and as a solution, he sets the border of the former Soviet Union or present Belarus, Ukraine, Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia. A similar definition of the Central European area also gives Klemenčič (1997), considering Central Europe as a part of the Old Continent bordered by the Alps, the Adriatic and the Baltic seas, the French border on the west, and the former Soviet border on the east, while also including Slovenia and parts of Romania. As Kocbek (in Vodopivec 2003: 8) in 1940 highlighted, the area of Central Europe encompasses little over a million square kilometers of land between Europe's East and West, populated by at least fifteen ethnically and culturally diverse nations, and its major misfortune is that these nations have failed to integrate this diversity into the larger European context.

A similar proposal for the definition of Central Europe is given by Krzysztof Pomian (1992) who sees Central Europe as a part of the European continent inhabited by nations, mostly Catholic or Protestant, who were connected for decades or even centuries through the territorial neighborhoods, or coexistence within the same political entity, or by rule or obedience with at least one major Orthodox nation. According to this interpretation, Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Austrians, Hungarians, Slovenes, Croats, and partly Germans belong to "Central Europe".

However, even though Pomian's understanding of Central Europe does not include the whole of Germany when considering the very concept of Central Europe, it is important to emphasize that the modern understanding of Central Europe is based on the cultural and historical understanding of the concept of *Mitteleuropa*

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(Švob-Đokić 1997), i.e. the German understanding of Central Europe, that is, on the formation of the Habsburg-German economic-military confederation with an emphasis on the German language and German culture (Naumann 1915: 248). In a comprehensive German geographical reference work published in 1819, Hassel described a median strip running north-south across Europe, encompassing the German states, Austria-Hungary, Switzerland, and the Italian peninsula. As a result, the Alps, as well as the mountain ranges and plains connected with them, were classified as *Mittleuropa* in a German geographical textbook published in 1839 (Sinnhuber 1954: 21-22). Furthermore, even during the rule of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, Germany's foreign policy was characterized by a strong Central European focus. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the German cultural public was preoccupied with theoretical and political concerns, debating the unification of Germany, which gave rise to the subject of *Mittleuropa*, whose content was frequently questioned (Cord Meyer 1955).

In this context, Central Europe was defined by the use of German as a common language; the influence of Christianity (Catholicism), and the Habsburg Empire as state's legal and political framework that unified numerous nations and cultures (Švob-Đokić 1997; Blokker 2008; Sinnhuber 1954). Precisely, the diversity of nations and cultures in which German culture was dominant made Central Europe understood as a geopolitical idea of spreading the German *lebensraum* or zones of direct German cultural and political influence. On the other hand, the Western European tradition viewed this area as a preventing factor for German and Russian (Soviet) penetration. But also, later, with the bipolar Cold War division, Central Europe was divided into eastern and western parts, and, from the Western point of view, has lost its function and thus its basic meaning (Klemenčić 1997: 200-201). For this reason, Bufon (2004) emphasizes that Central Europe must be viewed in the context of its geopolitical position among the primary centres of power.

Brzezinski (2021) explains this by the fact that for centuries Central Europe was a testing ground for the strategic games of the great empires, namely, Austria, Germany, the Ottomans, and Russia, which competed for strategic control over this region. However, after World War II, most of the countries of Central Europe fell under the borders of Soviet Union, and thus became the western border of the Soviet empire, reducing the strategic role of Central Europe. Despite this, countries such as Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Poland still culturally differ greatly from, for example, neighbouring Belarus or Ukraine. The fact is that Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic were considered the main core of Central Europe, which spent decades within the USSR, to which they do not belong, neither historically nor culturally nor religiously.

It is here that the historical and cultural complexity of the Central European area can be seen so that Sinnhuber already in 1954 emphasized that the Central European



area must be viewed through four different terms: that Central Europe or, as he calls it, Middle Europe is both a topographical term, as well as a physical region. Besides, Middle Europe is a political or historical idea as well as a geographically defined territory characterized by cultural aspects and natural features (Ibid. 20). It is for this reason, moreover, that Central Europe must be viewed not only from a geographical perspective but also from a cultural, historical, and economic point of view. Also, as can be seen from the text written above, by the simplest division, Central Europe is on the very border of the opposing West and East. As Kundera, in his famous work “The tragedy of Central Europe“ stresses, the area of Central Europe is in fact the “kidnapped West” which is the political East, the cultural West, while geographically it belongs to the middle of the European continent (Kundera 1984).

Between the opposing East and West, Central Europe itself is beginning to divide into Western, Central Europe, which includes countries such as Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein, while Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Slovenia are becoming parts of East-Central Europe (Bufon 2004). A similar definition gives Joachim F. Weber (2001: 102), stating that Mitteleuropa nowadays seems to consist of two parts: “Germany, or the area where the German language is spoken constituting its western half (Westmitteleuropa), and a number of small or medium-sized nations between Germany and a line somewhere to the west of the River Bug and the Carpathian Mountains (Ostmitteleuropa).” Still, even if the area of Central Europe lasted for many decades and functioned on the principle of the point of separation of Western Europe from Eastern Europe, the geopolitical role of this area changed greatly with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

### **Central Europe after 1989 and the “Return to Europe”**

With the end of the Cold War, the weakening of the influence of the USSR and the intensification of ethnic conflicts in Yugoslavia, the concept of Central Europe was revived in the 1980s. Strengthened national and collective identities emerged (Blokker 2008), through which certain countries of the former Soviet bloc tried to rediscover their Central European identity in order to get rid of the negative Eastern European connotation. The same thing happened in the former Yugoslav countries, respectively, Slovenia and Croatia, where, especially in the 1990s, to move away from the connotations of the chaotic and bloodthirsty Balkans as successfully as possible, strong national and strong (central) European identification appeared at the same time. With the disintegration of the Soviet bloc and Yugoslavia, the primary interest of the new political leadership of the Central European states was to join NATO and the European Union to “confirm” their Central European identification. After the fall of the communist regimes in the former Soviet Eastern Europe, the debate on Central Europe, despite Austria’s attempts to put itself at the forefront of the new Central European integration and despite the various alliances that were sup-



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posed to economically and politically unite the renewed Central European states in independence and democracy, was pushed to the second plan. As early as the 1990s, Europe became a central political theme that was supposed to be synonymous with the European Union and Western Europe (Vodopivec 2003: 14-15).

Nevertheless, in enlargement policy, the Unitarian vision of common European identity seemed to prevail, which resulted in expectations that the countries of the former Eastern bloc should accept and internalize the already existing set of European values and norms, which are primarily based on Western European understanding (Blokker 2008: 258). As the author further adds, “such vision was not only promoted by Western European political forces but also actively endorsed by some of the newcomers themselves, who, in a way, embedded the unitarian understanding of a European identity in their local self-identification as ‘Central Europe’” (Ibid. 258). Many authors call this process “the return to Europe”, (see Batt 2001; Blokker 2008; and more); that is, a return to European traditional values, of which they are culturally, geographically and historically a part.

Batt (2001: 248) points out that central Europeans’ idealization of Europe in 1989 reflects not only their lack of engagement and contact with the European Union but also “their underlying sense of the precariousness of their geopolitical situation and the frailty of their new political and economic institutions” (Ibid.). Since, except for Poland, these are primarily small nations, the question of “threatening Other” also arises, respectively, the re-sinking under the influence of a much larger and stronger Russia, i.e. Yugoslavia.

As Kundera stresses, “the moment Hungary is no longer European – that is, no longer western – it is driven from its own destiny, beyond its own history: it loses the essence of its identity” (Kundera 1984: 33). As he further argues, for central Europeans, national identity is inseparable from European identity (Ibid.). But despite great aspirations to embrace Western European values, Blokker (2008) underlines that the difficulty with states in the Eastern European bloc, and particularly those under the Ottoman Empire, is that they are far behind states that have been ‘barely touched’ by the communist experience, and hence have less possibility for accepting Western European principles. As he further explains it: “the historical, civilizational dimension to the argument is that the countries belonging to Central Europe have a long-term experience with liberty, autonomy/ self-rule, and law, acquired *inter alia* in the context of the Habsburg Empire, whereas those countries that cannot build on such experiences, and, even worse, suffer from negative legacies (Byzantine and Ottoman domination), are deemed to have been in a much less favourable position in 1989” (Ibid. 263). Also, another problem that has arisen is that Western Europe viewed Central European countries as inferior (Blokker 2008), so there was an additional expectation that these countries needed to complete subordination in

accepting Western norms and values, without opening space for the formation of any potential Central European identity.

*‘Bringing the state into line with ‘European norms’ of democracy, the market economy, the rule of law, and the protection of human and minority rights has become a prerequisite for admission to the EU and NATO, which most central and east European states have identified as their top priority in foreign policy, the basis for guaranteeing their future security and prosperity. The idea of ‘returning to Europe’ thus inextricably linked the internal and the external dimensions of change and simultaneously expressed both psychological motives of identification with ‘Europe’ and more pragmatic expectations of security guarantees and economic benefits to be gained from membership. The potential tensions between the aspiration to national independence and the demands of joining an ever more tightly integrated Europe were readily passed over in a peripheral region anxious to escape from the history of external domination and internal instability. At the outset, the broad terms of the political and economic conditionality set by the EU and NATO seemed in line with what the people of the new democracies wanted for themselves as ‘normal’ Europeans.’ (Batt 2001: 251).*

Nevertheless, belonging to Central Europe still sounds much better than belonging to Eastern Europe or the Balkans. The narrative of Central Europe is closely linked to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and Catholicism, and thus the historical connection with the developed countries of Western Europe, namely, Germany, Austria or Switzerland. It is also interesting that the somewhat justified fear of falling back into Eastern Europe or the Balkans, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, forced Central European countries to accept imposed Western values. Despite that, they have in the same time very quickly reaffirmed and revived the concept of Central Europe, which is best seen through the establishment of various inter-state projects.

The best example of this is certainly the Visegrad Group, founded in 1991 by Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, which in fact form the very core of Central Europe. “The Visegrad meeting of the three countries adopted a declaration that highlighted the ‘values of civil society’ and highlighted the common historical and religious traditions of Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, and sought to strictly demarcate Central Europe from Eastern and Southeastern (from the Balkans)” (Švob- Đokić 1997: 170). But, on the other hand, one of the primary goals of the Visegrad Group was mutual assistance on the path to European integration, which shows the duality of identification of these countries with Western Europe, as well as Central Europe. A year later, CEFTA (Central European Free Trade Association) was founded, which was most often interpreted as an alternative to the lost eastern market, as the signatory states agreed to exchange goods in Central Europe and develop and improve economic and financial relations. Later, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia joined CEFTA, which, upon joining the European Union, later withdrew

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from this association. It is interesting to mention that the current members of this Central European Association are all the countries of the Western Balkans.

It is also important to highlight the Central European Initiative, created as cooperation between Austria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, and the former Yugoslavia (Slovenia and Croatia). At the end of the 1980s, this plan was increasingly identified as Central European and began to spread rapidly under the influence of Italy, including an increasing number of Central European regions. However, due to the lack of a clear concept of cooperation, political changes in Italy, and the collapse of Yugoslavia, the Central European Initiative never came to life to the extent the member states wanted it to (Švob-Đokić 1997: 170). Also, later in 1996, the Quadrilateral was established, i.e., the cooperation between Slovenia, Italy, and Hungary, which was joined four years later by Croatia. The Quadrilateral's primary goal was also to support accession to the European Union. All these newly formed associations point to the reaffirmation and revitalization of Central Europe as a region that differs from both Western and Eastern Europe in its cultural and historical characteristics. It is evident that throughout history, the area of Central Europe has always been a "junction" between different superpowers. For this reason, Švob-Đokić (1997) concludes that there is room for the concept of revitalized Central Europe as the authentic reality of a time, as well as that Central Europe has the potential to become a proctor of "contradictory confrontations of what emerged from the West, i.e. integrated Europe, and what remained of the East, i.e. chaotic, unstructured conglomerates of bankrupt economies, impoverished and disorganized societies and desperate attempts to turn it all into an orderly civil society" (Ibid. 169).

### **National, Central European, or European Identity?**

Each person does not have one clearly constructed identity, but may have several that change depending on the context and situation. For this reason, Južnič (1993) divides identities into four primary groups: personal identity, group, cultural, as well as ethnic, and national identity. While the first three groups of identities are usually not directly endangered, but may even directly overlap, ethnic and national identities, in addition to being very complex in themselves, and their distinction, can become endangered by a stronger nation or by joining a supra-national community. As Such (2000: 84) explains, the identities of nations are constructed in opposition to the identities of others, most often neighbouring nations, and have played an important role in the history of emerging nations.

This is supported by the example of the identity of the Polish nation, which crystallized as a result of feelings of non-belonging to either the German or Russian nation, which were seen as a potential and real enemy that later occupied Polish territory (Such 2000: 84). He further emphasizes those national identities in Europe, explaining that they have been the subject of constant scrutiny, precisely because

of the process of integration and globalization. As he stated, "new identities of European states are born not from a 'horizontal relationship' with the identities of other nations, but from a 'vertical conflict' with a 'higher order' (i.e. pan-European) identity. There is no doubt that in addition to the obvious problem of identifying the content of European identity, there is also the problem of recognizing the new (changing) identities of the nations that make up the European Union or want to join it" (Ibid.).

As much as states nurture their national characteristics and national tradition itself, and even so much that in some countries it borders on nationalism (Such 2000), economic interest is what always prevails and why Central European countries, after the collapse of the USSR and Yugoslavia, aspired to a faster entry into the European Union, which could, in addition to a strong confirmation of their Europeanness, also bring them a very important economic recovery. Such (2000) emphasizes that it is more than clear that "without the integration function of the economy, Europe (including the West) would still be militarily and politically divided" (Ibid. 85).

However, the construction of a common European identity also calls into question the national identity itself; i.e., there is a fear from below whether the European identity will surpass the national one. As Toplak (2003: 127) stresses, there are different nations, such as the German or American, „but there is no European nation because Europe is not a nation. National identities take precedence over the idea of a single European identity. They are alive, reachable, fortified and have been encouraged and believed in for a long time". For example, back in 2000; Such pointed to problems that could occur in the countries of Eastern Europe, which, after the collapse of socialism, had great potential to revive ethnic elements and nationalist views. (Such 2000: 86) It is clear that the construction of European identity is primarily based on economic prosperity, especially in the countries of the former Eastern bloc and Yugoslavia. However, the history of military confrontations in Europe points to the problem of the narrative of the "Other" or neighbouring nations that have been at war throughout history and have often been perceived as "threatening others" that will deprive the other nations of their hard-won freedom and nationality. Also, we must not forget the importance of language, which is extremely diverse in Europe, especially when considered that Central European nations primarily identify through their ethnicity (Kohn 1944), while language is used as the primary means of identification.

According to Ančić (2008), the national identities of the European continent can be divided into four types of European nations, i.e., Western Europe, where nationalism as an ideology was shaped by the existing authorities, while in the case of the successor states of the Ottoman Empire, nationalism imposed itself through opposition to central imperial authorities. Besides, there is a group of Central European nations, namely Germany and Italy, which first encountered nationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup>

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century in response to the existing forms of government at the time. The last group consists of the so-called East-Central European countries, which belonged to the great multi-ethnic dynastic empires. It was in these countries that nationalism found itself as a central tool in conflict with the state. The characteristic of this group was the large number of different identity classifications and languages that were in direct resistance to the creation of any nation-state within the then Austro-Hungarian Empire. Thus, the issue of European and Central European identity is to be put into direct comparison. If Central European identity has failed for centuries to suppress or diminish strong national identities created in response to perpetual oppression by stronger nations, can European identity really come to life in Central European countries? The Central European identity was revived as a response or resistance to the USSR and Yugoslavia, and as a means of facilitating integration into the European Union. But now, when all of the countries that are considered (East) Central European states, are a part of European Union, can we still talk about their Central European identity or has their identification merged with a supra-national European identity?

## Conclusion

Throughout history, the area of Central Europe has always been a “junction” between different superpowers, and, although there are no strictly delineated borders, in the cultural, historical, and even identity sense, Central Europe certainly exists. Just as Edward Said considers Orientalism to be the “Other” from which the West differs; the same as Maria Todorova does with the Balkans as the Other or the semi-periphery of Europe, the same way Central Europe becomes the Other in relation to both the Western and Eastern Europe. It is described as something that does not have a clearly delineated boundary, meaning that its boundaries are imaginary (Kundera 1984). For this reason, it can be concluded that the term Central Europe itself largely coincides with Anderson’s “imagined community“. According to Anderson’s theory, a particular community is designed on the principle that its members imagine their community based on something undefined, although they do not know each other or are not aware of the existence of every individual within that community. Also, their imagined community is conceived in a certain area; i.e., the members of the community are aware of the limits within their community, how far it extends, and where one begins. (Anderson 1990: 17-18) Weber raises the question of how to define Central Europe when we cannot claim, in geographical terms, whether Europe itself exists at all. He further states that the definition of Europe up to the Ural Mountains has often been challenged, as Europe is only the western part of the great continent of Eurasia, making the notion of Europe only a cultural and subjective matter (Weber 2001: 99).

Furthermore, within the imaginary community of Central Europe, there are countries that are not considered completely Central European, such as Romania, which is historically and culturally located at the crossroads of Central and Eastern Europe, or Croatia, whose northern part certainly belongs to the Central European cultural circle, while the southern part nurtures its Mediterranean heritage. Thus, the area of Central Europe does not have a clearly defined border, but it still imposes itself as the “Other” through which Western, as well as Eastern Europe, have defined their identity. In this way, if compared to Todorova’s imaginary Balkans, Central Europe becomes even more complex than the Balkans because it is not so patronized, nor does it contain so many negative connotations at its core. Compared to Balkans, Central Europe in its subject does not contain the so-called chaos, aggression, and backwardness. Although considered inferior to Western Europe, Central Europe still possesses the history, culture, and mentality that make it, for someone, perhaps less European than Western, but still European.

Following Anderson’s theory of imaginary communities, the author himself emphasizes the importance of religious communities (1990), confirming the above thesis about the area of Central Europe as a predominantly Catholic area. But there are also differences here if we consider that in the Czech Republic the percentage of Roman Catholics is just over 10%, while in Slovenia Roman Catholicism as a religion is not as strong as in Poland or Croatia (which historically and culturally does not fall entirely into Central Europe).

As Vodopivec points out, from a historical point of view, there is no doubt that Central Europe cannot be said to be a special, supranational cultural and geographical entity. He also emphasizes that in this region, the differences between national cultures are much greater than their similarities. Still, he highlights the importance of space and heritage in creating a common Central European identity (Vodopivec 2003: 15). But what certainly unites these countries the most is the desire to be part of Europe. From today’s point of view, it is more than obvious that all Central European countries have succeeded in this, and in time became part of the European Union and have confirmed their Europeanness. However, the question remains whether Central European identity has managed to survive in these countries or whether supranational European identity has convincingly won here. Likewise, we must not neglect the issue of national identity itself, which has developed in each of the countries in parallel with the European one. Considering the given facts, we can conclude that Central Europe exists as a state of mind, connecting the countries mostly through their similar historical and cultural experiences. The disintegration of the USSR and Yugoslavia led to a series of transition processes that were applied differently in each country, as well as to the strengthening and intensification of ethnic and national identities whose primary goal was to revitalize the concept of Central Europe, which mainly served them as aid in becoming the so-called “true Europe”.



For this reason, we can only conclude that Central Europe, although it has no strictly defined borders, certainly exists at least as a state of mind, revitalized in favour of European integration and resistance from the occupying nations. But also, as many authors claim, with the entry into the European Union, Central European identity begins to lose its significance. We can only partially agree with this, if we consider the economic and cultural potential of Central Europe, which still works well, as can be seen from the example of the Visegrad Group. Also, the opening of various universities, foundations and institutes, which have the term Central European in their subject, and especially on the example of different cooperation between Hungary and Austria, shows that Central European identity still exists. Still, it is narrowing and uniting countries which form the very core of geographical Central Europe, while countries such as Slovenia, Croatia or Romania, are left aside. How much of this is due to historical connections with the Balkans, state-political narratives aimed at intensifying national identity, or integration into the European Union itself, remains to be discussed.

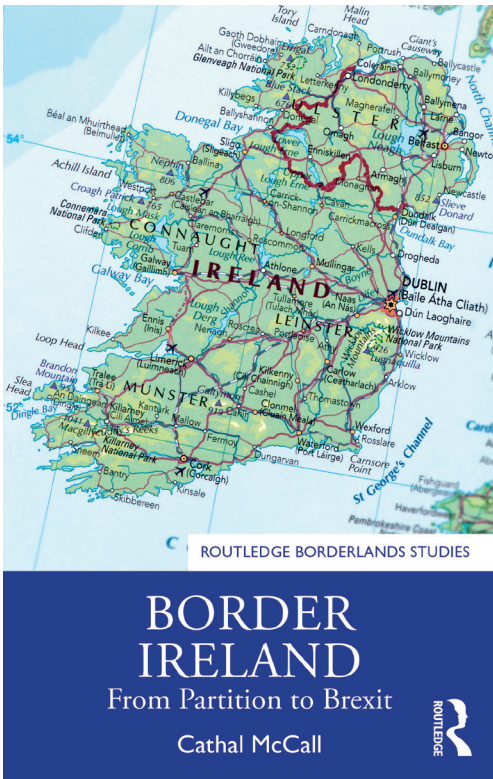
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## Book Reviews

**Cathal McCall (2021): *Border Ireland: From Partition to Brexit*. London and New York, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, p. 104.**



In his new book, Cathal McCall attempts to grasp and analyse one of the most mixed, entangled and interesting border in the Western part of the European continent, namely the land border on the island of Ireland, between the states of Ireland and the United Kingdom (including Northern Ireland). This border is the real evidence that state borders continue to matter in Europe even

though the long de-bordering processes, deregulation attempts and cooperation processes through the frames of the European Union and Schengen Agreement.

The Irish border has been existing for a century now and it was established by the Government of Ireland Act (1920) and confirmed by the Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921). As a result, two separate, even antagonistic, political entities emerged on the territory of the island, namely the Irish Free State (later renamed as the Republic of Ireland) and the Northern Ireland that remained integral part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The border between the two established sovereign political entities has been experiencing strong oscillation, specifically once experiencing the process of hard bordering and once experiencing the process of smooth debordering. In other words, the border has been already applied as a 'barrier' and also as a 'bridge' during its century long existence.

A strict and hard bordering process was triggered in the 1920s that included construction of border infrastructure, deployment of custom officials and border security personnel. At the same time, powerful binary distinctions had

been forged between ‘Self’ and ‘Other’, ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘friend’ and ‘enemy’ or ‘here’ and ‘there’, and border violence, from both sides, further aggregated the binary and antagonistic divisions. Both sides actively exploited the bordering process for their own political and narrative goals that paved the way to strong and long-term mutual hostility between the two governments and communities. The Ulster British unionist leaders and communities became strongly committed to bordering, thus pushing for fortifying the border as a barrier between the North and South of the island. The border was an existential barrier for the Ulster British and it represented ‘the last line of defence’. On the other side, the border represented a scar for the Irish nationals and republicans and it represented a barrier to the consolidation of their national home place. This means that there was a hostile approach, narration and strategy, namely the Irish republicans wished to eliminate the border and unite the island of Ireland, while the unionists wished to maintain, reinforce and preserve the border. Simply, it was a dead end situation for long decades with no end in sight.

The media played major role in fuelling, inducing the hostility and generating mutual antagonism that led to intensification of conflict in the 70s and 80s. The British security infrastructure was reinforced at the border and the Irish Republican Army insurgency was in full swing with the aim to destroy the border. Consequently, cross-border mobility between the North and South was robustly degraded between 1920s and

1990s and the border became associated with fear, violence, limitation and loath, hence “*violence became an endemic feature of the Irish border region*” (McCall, p. 53). However, Europeanisation partially offered a path out from this dead end decades of bloody conflict and a debordering process was launched.

Serious and positive contacts were signalled by the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985, where the two parties signalled their commitment to intergovernmental cooperation, by the Irish Peace Process and by the Good Friday Agreement (1992). The Good Friday Agreement generated a mutual friendly environment, where the Irish republicans could enter power-sharing government with Ulster British unionists and they abandoned their exclusive claim on Northern Ireland. This means that the Agreement opened the path towards power-sharing, cultural parity and shared home-place enterprise. What is more, the maturing process was influenced also by the changing international environment. Ending of communism and the rocketing of Islamist jihadism had impact on IRA, on its strategy and on its leadership, namely the ideology of violent liberation struggle has to be substituted by matured political struggle. Reduction of the violent threat of Irish nationalism and republicanism convinced the Ulster British unionist leaders to reformulate their opinion about the border, thus lessening the significance of the Irish border and opening up space for cooperation and communication.

What is more, the relationship between Ireland and the United Kingdom was

profoundly influenced by Europeanisation during the 90s, especially by the membership in the European integration structures (1973), by the signature of the Single European Act (1986) and by assuring the funding for cross-border cooperation (e.g. Interreg programmes). Europeanisation gave an appropriate platform for discussion, provided supra-national framework in order to boost conflict transformation process and it helped to 'mature' the relationship between the two governments and communities. As McCall (p. 19) writes, "*The old 'cold war' relationship between the two governments, marked by political hostility and Irish economic dependence on British markets, gradually gave way to a new one based on a loosening of Ireland's economic shackles and intergovernmental cooperation between nominally equal member states. EC membership enabled the Irish economy to diversify and expand to European markets, thus reducing its dependence on British markets.*"

These supra-national structures supported the process of debordering, dismantlement of physical border infrastructure, dispersal of border security personnel, development of intergovernmental and cross-border interactions. This means that the European Union assured funding and appropriate space for cooperation, hence McCall (p. 40) notes, "*On the island of Ireland, the EU Peace programmes produced a wealth of projects that redress this gap between peacebuilding theory and practice.*" Subsequently, hard border security infrastructures, border customs and inspections melt away and new cooperation formula was intro-

duced, namely North-South cross border cooperation.

Cross-border projects were promoted with the aim to interlink the two communities and to decrease the mutual hostility and suspicion towards each other. These cross-border programmes widely contained cultural, linguistic and sport dimension, like cultural links between camogie and hockey players. History was discussed, debated and diversity became recognised among the Irish and Ulster British communities, thus stereotypes were significantly challenged. Subsequently, an Irish cultural borderscape was formulated that aimed to capture cultural and political complexity of the neighbouring communities, to tame cultural and political struggles and binary divisions (inclusion and exclusion) in border regions and borderlands, thus alleviating the accumulated tensions and grievances during the decades. McCall (44) explains it in the following way, "*The cross-border measures (...) developed an Irish cultural borderscape. In that borderscape, cross-border, cross-community contact, communication, and cooperation for long-term peacebuilding and conflict transformation took many forms.*" Hence, "*An Irish cultural borderscape (...) has helped address the political culture of threat and insecurity, downgrade communal antagonism towards 'the Significant Other', and led to the articulation of cultural difference and commonality in a constructive way.*" This means that the Irish borderscape became linked with communication and culture instead of violence.

With rise of cross-border cooperation and with increasing mutual trust, secondary roads were reopened, the mili-



tarised sections became gradually demilitarised and the British Army border checkpoints were removed, thus “*The result was that the physical manifestation of the Irish border itself became barely discernible except for a change in road markings and some ‘Welcome to Northern Ireland’ signs erected by the Northern Ireland Department of Regional Development in 2012*” (McCall, 24). However, sustaining the cooperating borderscape significantly depended on EU framework, on British-Irish intergovernmental cooperation and/or on favourable economic circumstances.

A major international impact was the global economic crisis that broke out in 2008 and which deeply challenged the developed Irish borderscape. The Irish economy experienced serious economic downturn in 2008. The European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund had to intervene and rescue the Irish economy in 2010. The economic hardness generated influence on the British-Irish intergovernmentalism since both governments aimed to solve the crisis through economic austerity measures. Consequently, it was clear to everybody that the cross-border institutional infrastructure will lose its dynamism and vitality. An even more dramatic event was the Brexit referendum in the UK in 2016. The referendum was in favour, with very short margin, of those who expressed their support for an exit from the EU structures. McCall (p. 73) aptly describes the event of Brexit that “*catapulted the issues of territoriality and borders back onto the political agendas of Britain and Ireland*”. Exit from the EU structures means that the UK borders

are shifted into substantially new dimension. This shift involves a rebordering process with reintroduction of custom posts, inspection (agri-food) posts, immigration checkpoints, border security infrastructure and recruitment of border security personnel since the British mantra ‘take back control’ demanded clear and hard territorial security borders that is impenetrable and the UK should be separated from the outsiders. In other words, rebordering was an essential mechanism to ‘take back control’.

There were three rebordering options. The first option was to reborder the UK, including the Iris Border; the second one was to reborder Britain, excluding the Irish border; and the third one was to reborder the British Isles, including the island of Ireland. From these three options, only two of them were potentially realistic, because there is no Irish government which could agree to give up its hard-won sovereignty over the island and over the Irish state and to risk its EU membership because of Brexit.

The first real option was to reborder the Irish border. This rebordering option involves significant logistical problems since the Irish border runs for 499 kilometres through mountains, loughs, fields, farms, townlands, towns and it traverses even through some homes. The border intersects roads, including the M1 Dublin-Newry motorway, while border intersects key arterial roads more than once. Moreover, this option includes political problems, too. Namely, it could reignite political problems, explode political Irish nationalism and/or militant Irish republicanism, hence



resurgence of violent borderscape can easily happen. This option would return the border into its old frame of violence with fear and loath.

Furthermore, economic problems of this rebordering are also significant because the two decades of successful debordering and cross-border interactions generated the formation and development of the all-island economy, where the South and North of the island have become interconnected. As a results, complex cross-border supply chains were built up with considerable economic output, e.g. milk sector. This all-island economy could be deeply disrupted by the imposition of tariffs, regulations and it could ruin border regions and livelihood of many families. At the same time, rebordering goes hand in hand with smuggling and revival of illegitimate economy which could finance criminal gangs. As McCall (56) concludes this scenario, *“In this scenario, mobile security patrols along the unwieldy 499 kilometres of the Irish border would have been almost irresistible, not least to help protect vulnerable customs officials and agri-food inspectors working in isolated border terrain. Such an introduction would have been made more likely by the fact that the peace process and the openness of the border led to the closure of 40 per cent of police stations on either side of the border.<sup>19</sup> In these circumstances new security personnel would have been required from outside and would have been unfamiliar with the area, unknown to borderlanders, and characterised by them as ‘nameless, faceless strangers’. Alienation and antagonism would have seeped back into the borderlands as a result.”*

The second and real alternative option could be to reborder Britain itself. This rebordering option could respect the already organized and developed cross-border structures and it could avoid the re-emergence of hard borders that nobody wants to see on the island of Ireland. From the perspective of logistics and economic costs, this option would be logically easier. Moreover, this option could effectively avoid the return of political agitation and violence associated with the re-introduction of hard borders on the island. McCall (p. 64) expresses this in the following way, *“rebordering Britain would be relatively simple to establish and would cause the least disruption given the fact that border portals – seaports and airports – are long-established and accepted sites of identity-checking and border portal security regimes.”* However, this option is deeply problematic for the Ulster British unionists in Northern Ireland and feeling of abandonment could rise among their communities. After heavy debates during the Brexit negotiations, the option of rebordering of Britain, in the form of an ‘Irish Sea Border’, was chosen, thus *“From 1 January 2021, Northern Ireland was a constituent part of two diverging unions: the EU and the UK. Ostensibly, the Irish border would remain as was – open and devoid of border inspection and control.”* (McCall, p. 64)

It cannot be said that the story is over. A referendum was signalled by Sinn Féin on reunification of the island of Ireland. However, a reunification could unleash huge clashes in the realm of cultural politics, because it needs to answer whose culture-history shall be pri-

oritised and whose culture-history shall be subordinated. The idea of a united Ireland needs to answer very sensitive questions, like which currency should be used, the Euro or the British pound and we should keep in mind the cultural identity element of the British pound; which historical memorial days should be celebrated, etc. Hence, a borderless and united Ireland does not have the ability to close the Irish and Ulster British culture war. Quite the opposite, it would provoke and intensify further conflict and 'culture war'.

To sum up, the book of Cathal McCall, 'Border Ireland: From Partition to Brexit', offers a historical descriptive approach towards the Northern Ireland border. It explains the origins of the border, its hard - militarised and its soft - cooperative versions and it summarises the events after the Brexit referendum. The book is primarily recommended for the academic community, historians, students of political sciences, international relations, history and for those readers who are interested in the topics like Brexit, EU, borders, British-Irish relations and Self-Other nexus.

*Teodor Gyelnik*

**Martin Lačný (ed.) (2021): The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and Its Impacts on Cross-Border Cooperation. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, ISBN (10): 1-5275-7220-X ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-7220-1, 228 p.**



The collection of articles prepared in 2021 by a team of authors from Slovakia, Poland, Romania, Ukraine, edited by Martin Lačný (PhD., Assistant Professor at the Institute of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, University of Prešov, Slovak Republic) is almost the first work to analyze various aspects and spheres of influence of the Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine on different processes near Ukrainian-European border.

The publication consists of ten parts, of which the introduction and the first relate to common issues of influence

of the Agreement on cross-border cooperation of communities and regions of Ukraine with European border territories; five chapters are devoted to changes in norms and practice of cooperation 'across the border' with Slovakia. Two contributions deal with the spatial, ethnic and cultural development of the Northern and Eastern counties of Romania bordering Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk and Chernivtsi regions of Ukraine, one part (the second on the list) analyzes the role of EGTC Tisza in the Europeanization of the Western border of Ukraine and another – the specifics and practices of the functioning of border crossing points between Ukraine and Poland (Part 6). Such dominance of the Slovak-oriented topics is explained by objective and subjective factors. Firstly, it was with the Slovak Republic that Ukraine, since 2008, after the gas crisis caused by problems with the transit of Russian gas to the EU countries was solved, has no conflicting lines in relations. The development of the cross-border cooperation is done with the spirit of goodness, which is the ambush principle of CBC according European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (Madrid, 21.V.1980). On other side, the editor of the collection – Martin Lačný

– is directly indicating that most of the articles proposed by the Central European researchers were prepared within the framework of the governmental grants of the Slovak Republic.

Empirical data collected by researchers, tested methodology, ‘deepening’ in the issue of changing the practice of cross-border cooperation on the Eastern border of the European Union, in particular under the influence of institutional, regulatory framework of relations with the EU as a dominating entity, which essentially affects the regime of border functioning and the practice of border development, and a state that only adapts the common European legal achievements, is a good prerequisite for further projects. In particular, Ukrainian authors (V. Ustymenko, A. Sanchenko, A. Tokunova) try to identify the main political and legal determinants that influence the cross-border practice of national, regional and local actors in the context of commitments to sustainable development. Through the use of only institutional analysis to cross-border cooperation, which limits the understanding of motivation, best practices of interaction at the European border, scientists draw a predictable conclusion about the need to modernize Euroregions, the application, if possible, of the ECG and EGTC frameworks, which requires Ukraine to ratify all protocols to the Madrid Convention.

Gyula Ocskay, exploring the case of a single EGTC with the participation of Ukraine, namely ‘Tisa’ on the Ukrainian-Hungarian border, concludes on the moderate effect of Europeanization,

which this innovative model has on the development of EU neighbor countries. We are talking about the extermination of decentralized cross-border management on the territory of Ukraine, the push ‘from the bottom; to the modernization and national legislation regulating cross-border cooperation. However, we will add from ourselves – the practice of recent years shows that the effectiveness of ‘Tisa’ depended from the political configuration of the regional authorities of the Zakarpattia region, which confirms the hypothesis proposed by other researchers about the significant subjective role of local leaders in the implementation of cross-border projects. This thesis correlates with the conclusion made by Alexander Duleba that the implementation of the Association Agreement creates a chance to decentralize decisions on cross-border cooperation to the level of regional/local authorities. And this is a positive trend that can neutralize the effect of centralization of cross-border governance by Brussels, which arose after the accession of Central European states, in particular Slovakia, to the EU.

At the same time, we note the holistic, thoughtful and comprehensive - on different levels, forms, actors - methodology for analyzing cross-border cooperation, which was used to study this phenomenon on the Slovak-Ukrainian border. It is based on clarification of the current situation regarding the movement of people across the border, and, therefore, determining which – barrier or unifying – the function that the frontier performs, the analysis of the so-

cio-economic development of the territory, the institutional state of relations between states that share geographical location. Other factors that influence the dynamics of cross-border interaction are the influence of different managerial levels - sedative, interstate and regional/local - as well as the assessment of their "cross-border" activities and interaction mode by actors who represent these managerial levels.

Reading the collective monograph and its reflection gives grounds for conclusion and recommendations that European border studies lacks a holistic study of the norms and practices of cross-border cooperation around the perimeter of the EU Eastern border, in particular bordering Ukraine. Such comparative analysis would allow, first of all, to identify the binding and unifying influence of European institutions on the development of different border areas, provided that various regional/local actors and an excellent culture of cooperation of citizens are involved.

A slightly eclectic selection of cases in the peer-reviewed edition can be developed into a holistic monograph, which will trace the change in trends in the practice of cross-border cooperation (in the understanding of the Madrid Convention) between the Ukrainian territories and the 'matching' areas in the Republic of Poland, Slovak Republic, Hungary and Romania after 2014-2017. Thus, it will be possible to carry out a factor analysis of determinants - institutional and regulatory dominance of the EU, national legislation, practices of local self-government bodies of Ukraine

and neighboring countries, cultural and ethnic characteristics, economic potential, migration flows, the influence of social networks - and access the significance of each of them.

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