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STRENGTHENING COOPERATION IN CROSS-BORDER REGIONS IN THE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

BENDRADARBIAVIMO PLĖTRA EUROPOS ŠALIŲ PASIENIO REGIONUOSE

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Introduction

Tourism has emerged as one of the most dynamic and fastest growing industries worldwide representing about 6% of international trade in goods and service and accounting for 30% of the world's export of commercial services. Globally, tourism also ranks fourth as an export category, after fuels, chemicals and automotive products.¹ It is projected that the contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP globally will rise from 9.2% (US \$5,751 billion) in 2010 to 9.6% (US \$11,151 billion) by 2020. The contribution of the Travel & Tourism Economy to employment is also expected to rise from 8.1%, or 235,758,000 jobs across the world in 2010, to 9.2%, or 303,019,000 jobs, by 2020.²

Cultural tourism (or culture tourism) is the subset of tourism concerned with a country or region's culture, specifically the lifestyle of the people in those geographical areas, the history of those people, their art, architecture, religion(s), and other elements that helped shape their way of life. Cultural tourism includes tourism in urban areas, particularly historic or large cities and their cultural facilities such as museums and theatres.³

Cultural tourism is one of the largest and fastest-growing global tourism markets. Culture and creative industries are increasingly being used to promote destinations and enhance their competitiveness and attractiveness. Many locations are now actively developing their tangible and intangible cultural assets as a means of developing comparative advantages in an increasingly competitive tourism marketplace, and to create local distinctiveness in the face of globalization. OECD's publication titled "The *Impact of Culture on Tourism*" examines the growing relationship between tourism and culture, and the way in which they have together become major drivers of

destination attractiveness and competitiveness. Based on recent case studies that illustrate the different facets of the relationship between tourism, culture and regional attractiveness, and the policy interventions which can be taken to enhance the relationship, this publication shows how a strong link between tourism and culture can be fostered to help places become more attractive to tourists, as well as increasing their competitiveness as locations to live, visit, work and invest in.⁴

Cultural tourism can also include tourism in rural areas showcasing the traditions of indigenous cultural communities (i.e. festivals, rituals), and their values and lifestyle. It is generally agreed that cultural tourists spend substantially more than standard tourists do. This form of tourism is also becoming generally more popular throughout the world, and a recent OECD report has highlighted the role that cultural tourism can play in regional development in different world regions.⁵

Cross-border tourism, regional development, and social capital

Studying cross-border regions requires an interdisciplinary approach consisting of among others micro-economics (competitive firm behaviour, local labour markets), spatial economics (rural and urban planning and architecture), policy analysis (regulatory function of government), urban geography (migration patterns), institutional sociology (administrative culture), social psychology (social cohesion) and cultural anthropology (comparative religion and values).⁶

Regional economics, the precursor of today's spatial economics or economic geography, goes back to the 19th century with major contributions from continental European theorists like Thünen, Weber, Christaller, Lösch (Arnott,

1996). Some of their studies focused on the causes for variance in regional development in the newly unified Germany at the time of the creation of the German Zollverein (customs union). The main impact of the Zollverein was the creation of new market boundaries offering economies of scale, which previously did not exist in the previous era of multiple German kingdoms and city-states. Some of the German regions thrived with the creation of a larger internal market; others stagnated or decreased in importance. The cause for growth and decline of these German regions was one of the research interests of the above-cited continental European spatial economist.

There is more to regional development than the assumed rational economic behaviour of firms and the equally assumed efficient allocation of resources through assumed perfect and transparent market mechanisms as postulated by neo-classical and neo-liberal economic theory. These unsubstantiated claims have been refuted by institutional economics whose economic models offer a more interdisciplinary and holistic picture of human behaviour. Regional development consists of different, at times contradictory and conflicting factors of human behaviour which together create a mix which makes regions so uniquely different from each other.

Collecting information concerning trans-border regions has been difficult because cross-border data is not easily comparable and hence cannot easily be aggregated due to different practices of national statistical data processing. Lack of regional aggregate data, such as trans-border investment flows, cross-border joint ventures and ownership patterns or comparative cross-border migration flows, makes it impossible to apply Porter's concepts of national competitiveness to assess competitiveness of a given European trans-border region.

A second source of information which provides very illustrative insights on the importance of Cross-border initiatives in the context of regional development is the Economic Reconstruction and Development in South East Europe (ERDSEE), a programme under the auspices of two joint institutions (European Commission and World Bank) and several donor institutions (European Investment Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, etc). Among the many efforts of the ERDSEE, there are several infrastructural programs (World Bank, 2001) and environmental projects (European Commission,

2000) destined to support economic growth and regional integration, as well as cross-border projects which focus on the promotion of networks and exchanges among the South Eastern Europe (SEE) countries.

Importance of Cross-border Regional Development: Example of the Upper Rhine region

Developing social capital is a pre-condition for regional and trans-border development. For example, the WB infrastructure program defines from the outset that "...*building large infrastructure without sound policies and institutions for private sector development and social cohesion and inclusion, means wasting large amounts of resources without achieving the objective of sustainable economic growth and prosperity for the region*" (World Bank 2001, italics added).

The current efforts demonstrate the recognition that a cross-border regional development cannot solely be achieved through economic conditioning. It needs to be streamlined with the improvement of social cohesion and social capital, if sustainable economic competitiveness at transborder and regional level is sought.

Let us make use of a concrete example of a trans-border region, the Upper Rhine Valley region consisting of adjacent sub-regions from Switzerland (Province of Basle), France (Province of Alsace) and Germany (Province of Baden and Southern Palatine).⁷

Transborder cooperation in the Upper Rhine Valley has been in existence for centuries and movement of goods and people across the three borders were very common practice dating back to the late middle Ages. In addition, parts of this transborder region have been politically connected in the past and economic exchanges have only been restricted during the last two World Wars when the German and French provinces were drawn into war which opposed France and Germany and left Switzerland in an isolated position of neutrality.

Today, the transborder cooperation has been formalized within the framework of a tri-national convention and organization called *Conférence du Rhin Supérieur (CRS)* which was established in 1975 by the respective three country governments (France, Germany, and Switzerland) as depicted in figure 1 below. The territorial dimension of the CRS is 21,500 Km² whereby 38,5% are French (Alsace), 44,8% German (Baden and Southern Palatine), and

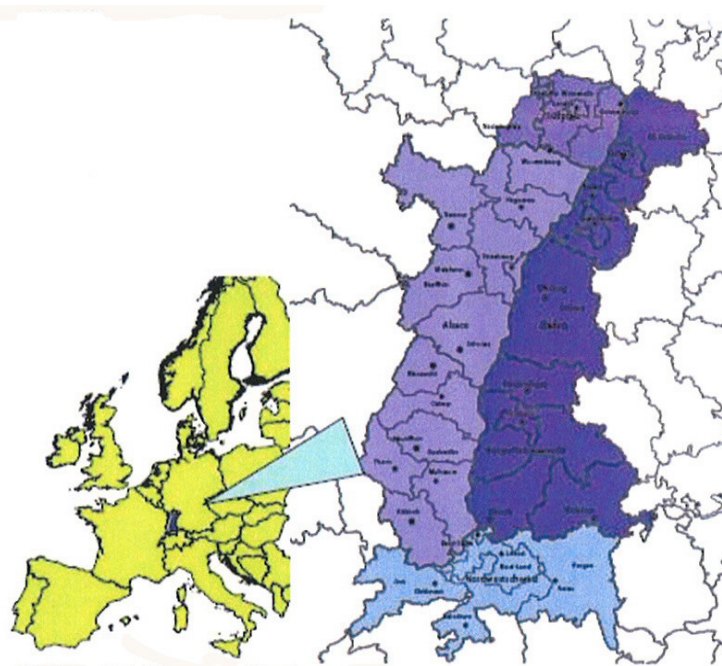


Figure 1. *Tri-national Upper Rhine Region*

16.7% Swiss (Basle and Northwest Switzerland). The total population in 2003 amounted to 5.813 million people who live and work in one of Europe's most densely populated territorial regions.

The CRS trans-border region has four main universities (Basle, Freiburg, Strasbourg and Karlsruhe), several world-known multinational companies (like Novartis, Hofmann-LaRoche, UBS, Schlumberger SA) and houses the seat of the Council of Europe, the EU Parliament, European Court of Human Rights and Eurocorps (Strasbourg).

The estimated per capita GNP for 2005 as compared to 1998 showed the following

progression namely 25'800 (22,500) Euro for Alsace province, 36'600 (30'900) Euro for Basle and Northwest Switzerland province, 29'300 (26'300) Euro for province of Baden, and 23'100 (19'100) Euro for the Province of Southern Palatine (Figure 2 below).

Many inhabitants of the transborder region speak or understand Allemanisch, a German dialect spoken around the Upper Rhine Valley region. The common roots in terms of language and history made it easier for people to move across the border and 94'000 persons do cross the respective three borders both ways every day on the way to work (see figure 3 below).

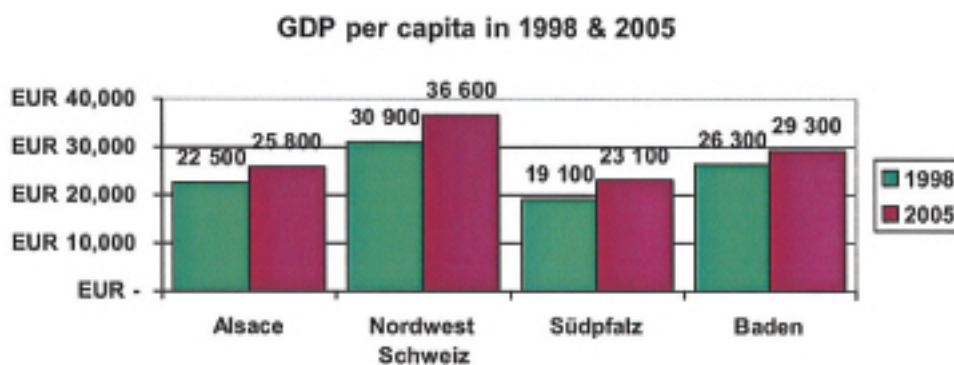


Figure 2. *GDP per capita in 1998 & 2005*

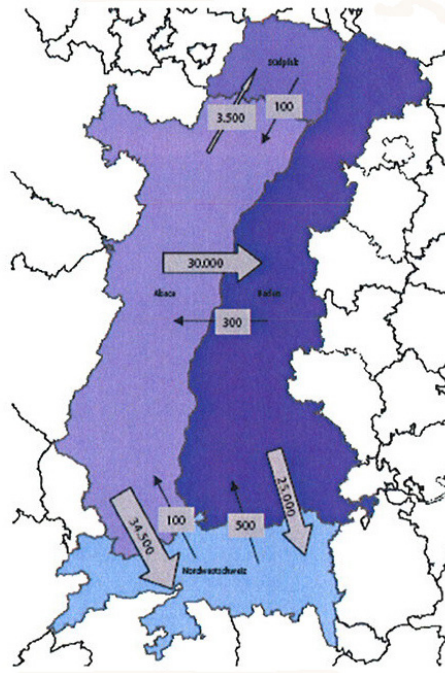


Figure 3. *Daily cross-border movement of workforce*

Due to a mix of economic development and historical openness to immigration, all three parts of the tri-national region show relatively high levels of foreign populations living in the three cross-border regions with Basle city showing the highest percentage of foreigners living within its territory (see figure 4 below).

While all three sub-regions benefit from historical and linguistic common roots, the situation is not as simple as it might sound on first sight. Due to mandatory and exclusive use of French in the Alsatian province, French has become the preferred language of many Alsatians living in larger urban agglomerations like Strasbourg,

Mulhouse or Colmar. Also, in regard to the official language to be used for legal, political and contractual transactions, French and German are the two official and mandatory languages.

Complexity of Cross Border Cooperation. Cross-border regional cooperation between companies, governments and social society requires the management of more interfaces than is the case within national regions. To take the example of small enterprises of one country conducting business across the two borders, would imply managing multiple interfaces namely dealing with three national administrations (e.g. concerning business licenses), three national labour markets

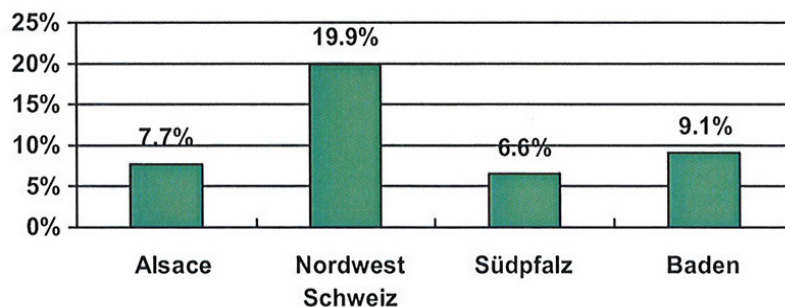


Figure 4. *Foreigners living in region*

(e.g. recruitment of employees) and three national markets (e.g. potential buyers-sellers).

Taking this example further and imagining a Basle based enterprise conducting business in Alsace/France and Baden/Germany, the complexity of interfaces would include dealing with German and French national and provincial administrations (e.g. in order to obtain business licenses), German and French national and provincial labour organizations (e.g. in order to employ people), French and German local and sometimes national associations (e.g. in order to become member of a professional organization, religious group or neighborhood organizations etc.). This complexity of multiple interfaces would further increase with a change of personal residence or the opening of companies on the other side of the national borders.

In addition, the hypothetical Swiss entrepreneur domiciled in Basle would also have to interface with Swiss administration officials (e.g. concerning customs declarations for goods exported or imported into Swiss territory), provincial and national authorities (e.g. federal, cantonal and municipal tax declarations and payments). The interfaces are multiple and to each cross-border interface one has to add the inevitable difficulties, which would arise due to difference in national laws, administrative practices, local values and customs including the mandatory use of the French language if business or administrative transactions involve official exchanges between Alsace and Basle.

The difficulties encountered by this hypothetical Basle entrepreneur illustrate the current limitations to the creation of competitiveness within the CRS transborder region. Transaction costs remain high, administrative obstacles substantial and the influence of the respective three national governments cannot be ignored despite all the official pronouncements of pan-European integration. All these could make it prohibitive for small to medium sized companies to benefit from growth potential of such trans-border cooperation.

Need for Additional Boundary Spanners. Realizing the limits of existing cooperation mechanisms, different think tanks have come up with suggestions how the CRS trans-border region could deepen cooperation mechanisms by creating common physical and social infrastructures and by further increasing the existing, albeit still light weight, cooperation in

areas such as education, joint marketing, joint-venturing etc.

Taking into account the existing competitiveness in all three sub-regions in regard to financial resources, highly educated and skilled work force, world class research institutes and large companies, successful SMEs and established cultural affinities, such efforts should succeed provided the people involved in these cross-border development actions are cultural and

professional boundary spanners who can be at home in different professional and cultural milieus, thus instrumental in fostering bonding and bridging social capital for trans-border cooperation. The need for boundary spanners becomes clear when one considers the actions which have been proposed to create a CRS Technology Valley. Detailed proposals have been tabled to strengthen economic integration across the three national borders. Yet, as long as the three borders with their separate legal and administrative realities exist it will be difficult to see neither full economic integration nor leveraging the potential synergy from combined resources and competitive advantages.

What follows is a selected list of the economic initiatives, which have been proposed by CRS planners. In specific, six of the 22 proposals are identified here to illustrate the needed competencies to meet these challenges.

Unbundling the existing proposals from a boundary spanning perspective. The six initiatives have been grouped into three categories according to the presumed role competencies required of the experts who might be selected to implement some of them in the near futures (Table 1). The three boundary spanning roles are: a) Business Diplomat (Saner, Yiu & Sondegaard, 2000), b) Entrepreneurial Politician (Saner, 2001), and c) Cultural Ambassador (Bassand & Hainard, 1985).

The three roles suggested above should be seen as competencies which would complement or expand the expertise of traditional actors. They are entrepreneurs, government officials and politicians and representatives of civil society and cultural institutions. Together, they form the team to accumulate the social capital in support of the CRS regional development strategy. Figure 5 highlights the complementary social roles as discussed above, namely the Business Diplomat, the Entrepreneurial Politician and the Cultural Ambassador.

Table 1. Transborder Initiatives and Role Competencies Requirements

Proposed Trans-border Initiatives	Suggested competencies required of experts
A.	<i>Business diplomats</i>
Promote regional economic market structures and networks. Develop inter-municipal energy grids and telecommunication services (groupings of municipalities as "market partners")	Ability to develop and discuss business plans with business partners and non-business stakeholders (e.g. communes, schools, associations), understanding different national laws and practices governing employment, creation of companies and foundations, being familiar with different national management and leadership styles dominant in French, German and Swiss businesses.
B.	<i>Entrepreneurial Politicians</i>
Put in place legal and financial inter-municipal structures in order to better respond to entrepreneurial needs. Establish the coordination mechanism and/or define specializations once the location of sites on the upper Rhine Valley will have been attributed. Establish collaboration among the training and research centres and between them and the enterprises of the region.	Ability to initiate projects spanning German, Swiss and French legal and administrative laws, creating efficient cross-border administrative procedures, involving private and public sector actors to create new ventures, knowing how to mobilize financing for cross-border physical and social infrastructure projects.
C.	<i>Cultural Ambassadors</i>
Develop the project titled " Cultural roadmap of the region"	Ability to appreciate German, French and Swiss contemporary and classical art and culture, creating
Create a joint offer for the regional tourism sector Develop an administration which can manage the transborder region in a competent and effective manner.	cultural events offering participation and benefits to existing cultural institutions of all three sub-regions, understanding processes of budgeting and approval of new initiatives in the domain of culture and tourism in all three sub-regions and respective national governments.

Creating competitiveness for trans-border regions requires different inputs and personal competencies than in the case for regional development at national level. This is partially due to the fact that the number of cross-border interfaces is greater and partially because specific competencies are needed to manage these inter-cultural (administrative, entrepreneurial, individual) interfaces (Gmür & Rakotobarison, 1997). Specific competencies would include for instance:

- ◆ foreign language proficiency (e.g. French & German for CRS region)
- ◆ “global-regional” mindset and a natural curiosity which enables the trans-border actor to remain open for continuous learning

- ◆ basic knowledge regarding administrative law and regulations of all three member countries
- ◆ basic knowledge regarding policy making procedures and framework in all three member countries
- ◆ Cross-culturally effective negotiation and communication skills
- ◆ Skills in leading and working with temporary and project task teams from one, two or all three member countries
- ◆ Networking skills suitable for different cultural contexts.

Trans-border regional development requires political will, business acumen and, most



Figure 5. *The Trans-border social roles and corresponding linkages to main domain of activities and constituencies*

importantly, the bridging roles of the Business Diplomat Political Entrepreneur and Cultural Ambassador. These social, economic and political actors could span the social and institutional boundaries and generate social capitals to support new business development and regional dynamism.

Call for further research

Further research is called for to address the following topics important for European cross-border cultural tourism and European integration namely:

- ◆ *Behavioural and identity aspects*: the ways in which young generations of Europeans of different European regions appropriate, enrich, promote and transmit cultural heritage and values in multicultural societies, including through the use of new technologies. In this context, the role of cultural actors, infrastructures such as cultural foundations or museums and their networking should be investigated, as well as the interface between cultural heritage, behaviours and identity in order to forge a sense of cross-border identity.
- ◆ *Social and territorial cohesion*: how the emergence of new uses and the re-use of historical buildings and sites could generate sustainable models for cultural heritage preservation, restoration and management; how cultural heritage could

contribute to developing the attractiveness and quality of life of the European cross-border regions addressing more intangible issues (i.e. going beyond the GDP perspective); the added value created by cultural tourism and specific regional aspects, such as landscape and gastronomy and the contribution to the economic and social development of the European cross-border regions.

- ◆ *Economics and measurement*: quantification of data relating to the impact and the value of cultural heritage in European cross-border regions, the potential for creating jobs, of economic growth or economic growth, and for exporting good practices to third countries; how cultural heritage relates to the development of new cultural industries, as well as the major spin-offs that this sector produces in other sectors of local economies of cross-border regions.
- ◆ *Traditional skills and know-how*: how to protect and promote traditional skills and professions in the area of cultural heritage. How can this competitive advantage be further developed and appreciated internationally?
- ◆ *New artistic careers*: their legal status, new roles and the specific conditions related to creativity and flexibility (e.g. fashion, design, crafts, electronic editing) should be explored.

Further research covering cross-border regions could greatly contribute to the appreciation of cultural and historical diversity while at the same time finding substantive common ground to support further cross-border interactions and cross-border collaboration.

Conclusions

In summary, cultural tourism in cross-border European regions could help reduce unemployment of the youth and increase cultural understanding and cooperation thereby reducing the likelihood that simmering old conflicts and animosities could erupt again during times of economic and social crises. Building trust and engaging in cooperative activities could improve border relations which in turn would be very beneficial to help regions collaborate with each others to reduce occurrence of clandestine migrations, drug and human trafficking and other criminal activities requiring active and sustained cooperation by authorities and citizens on all sides of a cross-border region.

Cross-border European regions have ample cultural assets and could credibly expand cooperation in cross-border cultural tourism. For this to be viable, the European Cross-Border regions need competent Business Diplomats, Entrepreneurial Politicians and Cultural Ambassadors. In order to understand the functioning of these three roles and social capital theory could be used by to elucidate success factors that contribute to successful development of these three roles crucial for sustained cross-border cooperation in general and for cross-border cultural tourism in specific.

Notes

¹ 2010 World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Tourism Highlights. See www.unwto.org/facts/eng/pdf/highlights/UNWTO_Highlights10_en_HR.pdf

² 2010 World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), Progress and Priorities Report. See www.wttc.org/bin/pdf/original_pdf_file/pandp_final2_low_res.pdf.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/cultural_tourism

⁴ <http://www.oecd.org/cfe/tourism/theimpactofcultureontourism.htm>; The Impact of Culture on Tourism, OECD, 2009

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_tourism

⁶ This section builds on a previously published article by Saner & Yiu (2000).

⁷ For more information on the Upper Rhine region and its cross-border dynamism, see : Saner, Raymond; Yiu, Lichia; “Sustainable transborder business cooperation in the European regions: the importance of social entrepreneurship” in Handbook of Research on Social Entrepreneurship: Editors; Fayolle A., Matlay, Harry, Edward Elger Publ, UK, 2010.

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