

# Euroviews 2011



**LEAPING  
ACROSS BORDERS**

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Euroviews 2011 is the culmination of a major project by students from the international journalism course, Europe In The World.

The project involves a two week travel period where the students are expected to plan, research and write articles from the areas of Europe they visit. In 2011 the theme of Euroviews was 'The Borders of Europe' and the group of 15 students travelled to four separate border regions within the European Union.

The Euroviews project is the second last project of the Europe In The World course.

Europe In The World is run by Hogeschool Utrecht (The Netherlands) and the Danish School of Media and Journalism (Denmark). It starts in September in the Netherlands and continues in Denmark from January until June. 2010/11 is the 20th edition of the course.

The twentieth class of Europe In The World represent nine different countries: Australia, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, the USA and the United Kingdom.

**Euroviews 2011**  
Danish School of Media and Journalism  
Olof Palmes Allé 11  
8200 Århus N  
DANMARK  
<http://www.dmjx.dk>

**Contributors:**  
Bart de Bruijn, Anna Buch, Andrew Codd, I. Miguel Durán de Barbozza, Piers d'Orgée, Kai Heijneman, Michael Huguenin, Camille Lepage, Anouk Mentink, Ana Muñoz Padrós, Beatriz Paúl Naya, Margot Perrier, Anna Rydholm, Bobbie van der List, Karoline Vallum Møllgård Hansen

**Sub Editors:**  
I. Miguel Durán de Barbozza, Michael Huguenin, Camille Lepage, Ana Muñoz Padrós

**Design Coordinators:**  
Henrik Møller & Susanne Sommerah

**Editor in Chief:**  
Asbjørn Slot Jørgensen

# 'Border Trotting'

On the ground,  
Euroviews journalists  
investigate border issues

March-April 2011

**Karoline Vallum  
Møllegård Hansen**  
*Ghost City Ørestad*

**Ana Munoz Padros**  
*"No Denmark for Lovers"*

**Piers d'Orgee**  
*"Proud to be Polish"*

**Camille Lepage**  
*A Year After a Natural Disaster*

**Andrew Codd**  
*Beautiful Outdoor Tourism*

**Michael Huguenin**  
*Next Generation's Historical Gap*

**Bart de Bruijn**  
*Cinema on the Border*

**I. Miguel Duran de Barbozza**  
*Updating Border Region's Gates*

**Anouk Mentink**  
*Legislation Challenges Hunters' Relationships*

**Bobbie van der List**  
*Bilingual Education*

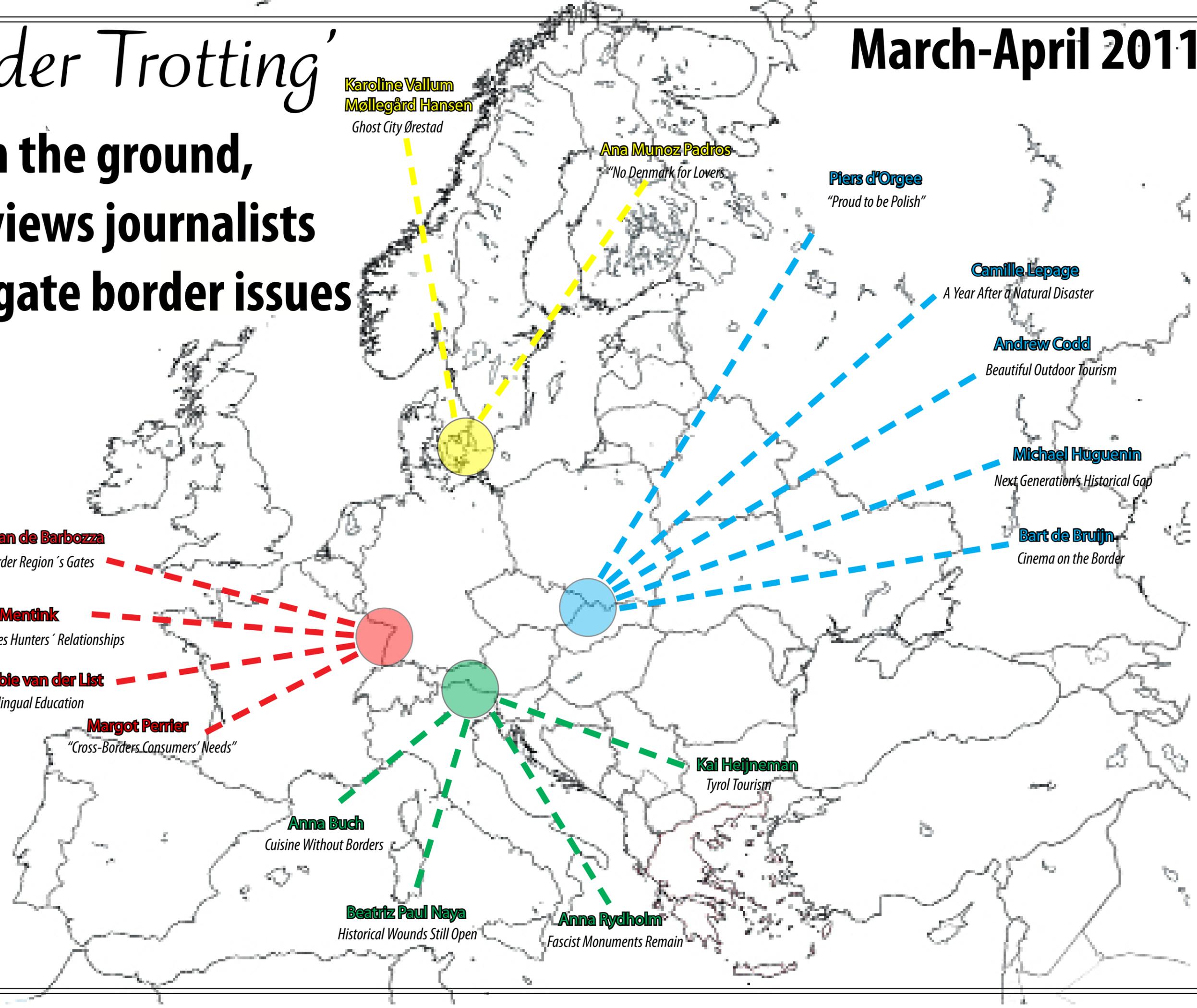
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*"Cross-Borders Consumers' Needs"*

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*Cuisine Without Borders*

**Beatriz Paul Naya**  
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**Anna Rydholm**  
*Fascist Monuments Remain*

**Kai Heijneman**  
*Tyrol Tourism*



# The Attractive Ghost City

The only ten-year-old city Ørestad that is in the outskirts of Copenhagen has for a long time been called a ghost city or the deserted city. But more and more people move to the area and big companies move their headquarters to the new city. The company behind Ørestad think it's a success while a landscape architect finds the planning outdated.

Karoline V. M. Hansen

Dark, cold, windy and empty. That was the words that struck Helle Harboe, the first time she went to Ørestad to look at an apartment. It was in the beginning of 2010 and the snow was covering the empty fields and it was difficult to imagine the area full of life. But Helle Harboe and her boyfriend took the chance and moved in to the more or less deserted city with their newborn child.

## Perfect place for the "City Family"

In Ørestad more than 20 percent of the population are families with children – that figure is only a little more than 10 percent in Copenhagen.

The brand new, functional and light apartments are one of the reasons. At the same time you have the nature close by and in less than 10 minutes you can be in the city centre of Copenhagen. It's the perfect mix of city and country.

This was exactly why Helle Harboe moved to Ørestad with her boyfriend and their newborn child.

"We had some demands when we started to look for a new apartment. The apartment should have balconies, room for a dishwasher, a washing machine and dryer and if it was an apartment higher than the ground floor it should have a lift," Helle Harboe explains.

Because of these demands the possibilities of where to get an apartment was very limited. Helle Harboe and her boyfriend decided very fast, that Ørestad was the place they wanted to live.

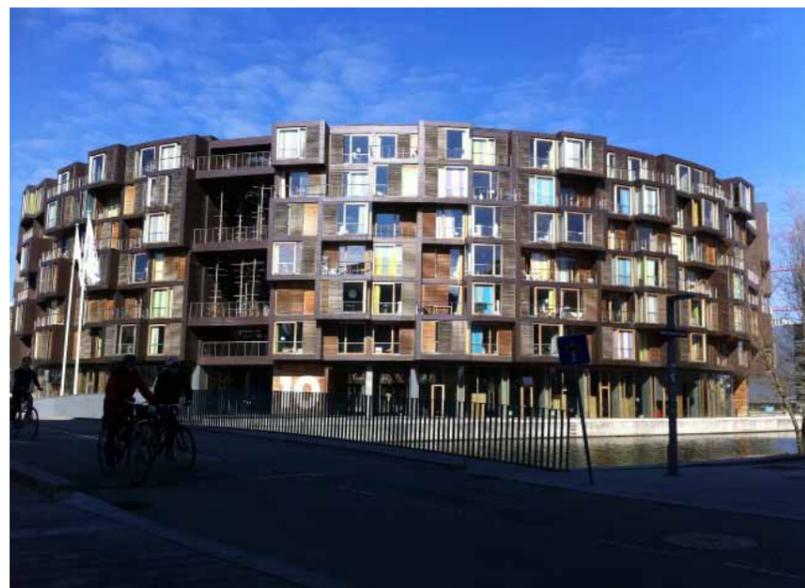
"We haven't regretted one single time. This is all we need," says Helle. Her boyfriend interrupts from the couch and says

that if it hadn't been for their newborn son they would never have moved to Ørestad and complains that there's no Blockbuster in the area.

"Maybe he's right. But with a child living here is just a 100 times easier because of the lift, our own washing machine and so on," Helle Harboe explains.

## It could have been so much better

But even though Helle Harboe hasn't regretted the move to Ørestad – and that numbers shows that more and more people move to the new city, the landscape architect, Jacob Kamp is sure that Ørestad could be much more successful.



The Tietgen Dormitory is one of the only buildings in Ørestad that Jacob Kamp actually likes.  
Photo: Karoline V. M. Hansen

"As an architect you should give the people what they didn't know they wanted. What if people would be even more happy about living in Ørestad, even more people would move to the area, if they thought a little bit different and not just only in big scaled building," Jacob Kamp says and points out what is wrong with the city from his point of view.

"This project is from the time of industrialism and modernism. In this period you wanted big business district and then again other big districts where people live. In the future knowledge society and sustainable society you would much rather prefer mixed facilities," says Jacob Kamp and states that the reason why this project is failed is, that they stick too much to the original master plan, where the ideas and planning of the area are developed and decided.

Jens Kramer Mikkelsen is the managing director of CPH City and Harbour development and he has no doubt, that Ørestad is going to be a success no matter what all the critics say. Kramer Mikkelsen is the former mayor of Copenhagen and the decision of building Ørestad is from the time when he was still a politician in the Danish capital. In 2004 he stopped as a politician and started the job at company administrating Ørestad.

"One of the most important things in the planning of Ørestad was, that the pmaster plan should be strong enough to give room for new and good ideas and new and exciting buildings to be developed. Nobody had thought about a round building as the Tietgen Dormitory or a building formed as the number eight, but this all shows that our plan is strong enough for changes to occur compared to the original master plan," says Mikkelsen, but the landscape architect find it hard to believe.

"That is very difficult to see," says Jacob Kamp. "Even though The Tietgen Dormitory is one of the only good houses in Ørestad, it is still a very huge building and in the same big scale as all the other houses."

Kamp thinks that the only way to make Ørestad better is to build more and build in many different scales. Something that Kramer doesn't think is necessary.

"We thought big, when we planned this. It's not supposed to be some kind of tiny romantic city," Kramer says. "Then all the architects and connoisseurs can say what ever they want. This area is going to succeed and people flock to Ørestad."

"Something that you have to be aware of when you build a city is the time. There is no greengrocer's here or that many cafés and the threes are not that big. But they will be," says Jens Kramer Mikkelsen.

And Helle Harboe definitely noticed that when time passed by – suddenly the people came by as well.

## Waking up from the winter hibernation

Spring finally came. Trees were planted and the park was suddenly not just a big open lawn. Playgrounds and barbeque spots were also popping up everywhere. People were waking up from their winter hibernation, and the deserted city was all of a sudden waking up. Suddenly Helle Harboe discovered that the area wasn't that empty all year round.

"It is mostly in the winter time. In the summer I don't think it is deserted at all. The parks are swarming with people like ants coming out of their anthills," Harboe explains, but she understands the criticism of the city.

"But it can sometimes seem a little bit deserted out

“The parks are swarming with people like ants coming out of their anthills, Helle Harboe”

here, because there isn't that many shops and café except inside Field's" Helle says and it is easy to notice that she says "out here" about Ørestad because she doesn't see it as a part of Copenhagen yet.

## Dedicated society

But as Jens Kramer Mikkelsen pointed out, it will take time, and he is sure, that with more people in the city more shops and cafés will open around the city.

And the numbers tells that more and more people are moving to Ørestad. Also the number of empty apartments is decreasing year by year. Of course the number will still vary – for example when new apartment blocks are done and no one have moved in yet. That is the reason why the number of empty apartments is bigger in 2011 than 2010. The building of the 8 House with 467 flats was done this year and therefore more empty apartments. But already half of them are sold so there are not that many apartments available anymore compared to the graph.

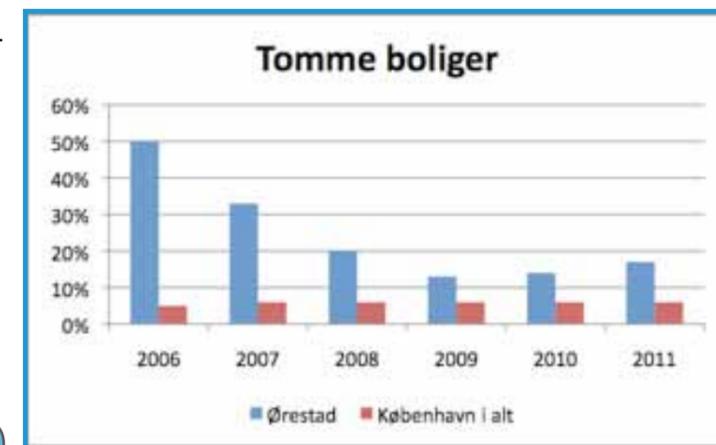
The most important fact is not the numbers; it is if the people already living there are happy. And Jens Kramer Mikkelsen states that they are.

"It's only people from the outside complaining about Ørestad. The people living here are happy. The only complain we have had recently is from a woman who complains about a tree in one of the parks that has become too big according to her," Kramer tells.

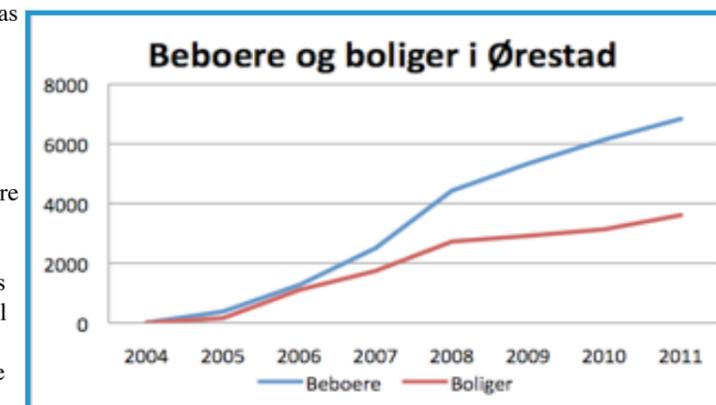
It shows that people are satisfied the way Ørestad is. That is something that Helle Harboe has noticed as well. She finds people living in the area very dedicated to make this new city a good place to live.

"Last summer there was music for the children and different events. At Christmas time there was tents with gløgg and Danish doughnut while there was a Lucia parade," the young mother tells.

"But everything is sparkling new and shiny and the charm will come to the area with the people moving here. It proofs that it is the people who create the life and not the buildings," Helle Harboe says.



Empty residences in Ørestad (blue). The number of empty residences is bigger in 2011 compared to 2010 but mainly because a big apartment block was finished. Already half of the apartments have been sold and the decrease in empty apartments is clear from this graph.  
Source: Copenhagen Municipality the 1th of January



The population (blue) and residences (red) in Ørestad. Where it is clear to see that more and more people move to the area. Source: Copenhagen Municipality the 1th of January



They thought big when they started to build Ørestad. Big houses and big roads.  
Photo: Karoline V. M. Hansen

## A big house on a big empty field

Not only people living in Ørestad are dedicated to the city. Also big companies believe in the area and move their headquarters to the city. Mainly because they are able to build very big buildings, which are not possible anywhere else in Copenhagen, and also the very good infrastructure.

The first work day in 2002 Ferring Pharmaceuticals moved into its new headquarter in Ørestad. It was the first building in the big empty field. The metro wasn't done yet, but even though they were all alone the Chairman of the Board in Ferring Pharmaceuticals never doubted if the city would succeed.

"We never had the thought if this was going to fail. We knew from the very beginning that this area was going to be attractive because of the international railroad, the metro, the airport very close and a bus stop at the foot of the building," says Ole Kjærulf Jensen who is the Chairman of the Board in Ferring Pharmaceuticals.

And they were for sure right. Right where Ferring is placed in Ørestad is actually called the best intersection in Scandinavia – and it's no doubt the biggest. This makes it much easier for the company to cooperate with other companies all around the world and at the same time it is much easier to attract employees from other countries as well.

At Ferring 30 percent of the 400 employees are from Sweden and they are crossing the sea everyday to get to work. Beside the Swedish people from 24 other countries are working at the pharmaceutical business, and this is only possible because of the place Ferring is situated, Ole Kjærulf Jensen states.

"It is much easier to attract a better work force when we are situated in Ørestad; especially when it comes to our Swedish employees. If they had to travel much longer, they would probably prefer to stay in Sweden. But now if we can't find a qualified Danish laboratory technician for instance, then we have no problem in attracting the Swedish," Ole Kjærulf explains and points out that they haven't regretted one single time, that they situated their headquarters in Ørestad even though it would have been cheaper in Sweden.

Ole Kjærulf also learned to close his ears to all the criticism of the city. Suddenly there were houses everywhere and when the big shopping mall Field's were open it brought a lot of

people and life to the area.

"It even happened before we though," Kjærulf Jensen says, and Jens Kramer Mikkelsen is also surprised about the very fast development in Ørestad.

"If you had asked the most optimistic of us ten years ago what we expected, then we are much further than we thought," Kramer Mikkelsen explains. There is simply build much more when it comes to both offices and residences.

But even though everything seems like a bed of roses in Ørestad, the landscape architect Jacob Kamp will not call the new city for a success.

"I will call it an evidence of a time and thinking of planning that we are hopefully going to put behind us very soon," Kamp says. ■

### Facts about Ørestad

- The buildings in Ørestad are going to contain 60 % office buildings, 20 % apartments and 20 % to other buildings to use for culture, service, trade and institutions
  - 80.000 people are going to work in Ørestad
  - 20.000 are going to live in Ørestad – around 6800 people live there now
  - Close to 20.000 already study in Ørestad
  - The plan for the region is going on for the next 20 years
  - The area of the region is 3,1 million square meters
  - The company behind Ørestad is called "By og Havn" (City and Harbour) and has to take care of the development in Ørestad and Copenhagen Harbour. The company is owned by the Municipality of Copenhagen (55 pct.) and the Danish State (45 pct.)
- Source: CPH City and Harbour development

## Copenhagen and Malmö: Competitors or Collaborators?

The cooperation between Denmark and Sweden has become much stronger during the last ten years. Cross the border between the two Scandinavian countries a lot of things has happened. The Øresund Bridge was made and Copenhagen airport expanded which Sweden also benefited from.

Karoline V. M. Hansen

**M**etro, international trains, regional trains, the airport 5 minutes away. When you stand in the middle of Ørestad the entire world is more or less in front of you.

Infrastructure is crucial to the development on both the Danish and the Swedish side of the border divided by the sea Øresund. A development that politicians on both sides of the sea are welcoming.

"There is no doubt, that the expanding of Copenhagen Airport and the construction of Ørestad has strengthened the cooperation between Denmark and Sweden," says Anders Rubin, deputy mayor in Malmö.

"The economic pressure in Copenhagen has spread to the rest of the region across the border, and it would never had happened if it hadn't been for the Øresund Bridge," Rubin explains. The cooperation is very important for the Malmö area, because the city gets closer to a capital – even though it is the Danish.

"We are 600 kilometres from Stockholm and our capital. But because of the bridge we're suddenly only 7 kilometres from the Danish capital, Copenhagen," Rubin says. Bo Asmus Kjeldsgaard a member of Copenhagen city council agrees.

"The two countries are much closer now because of the direct train between Ørestad and Sweden. A lot of people are crossing the sea every day and it is strengthening the growth in the region," says Bo Asmus Kjeldsgaard mayor of the Technical and Environmental Administration in Copenhagen. He makes it clear, that they would like to have even better cooperation between the two sides of the sea, because both countries would benefit from it.

Anders Rubin can definitely feel the growth on the Swedish side of Øresund. Back in time the Malmö region always did worse than the rest of Sweden. But now it's the other way around. When Sweden is doing good, the Malmö region is doing even better. And when it is all bad in Sweden, it is never that bad in the region. But Rubin also thinks that Copenhagen benefit a lot from this cooperation cross borders.

"Copenhagen are competing against Stockholm, Berlin and Hamburg and it hasn't really been possible for the city to increase the growth. But when you integrate the airport as the centre between the two countries then we are suddenly able to compete on an international level because we are much stronger together," says Malmö's deputy mayor Anders Rubin.

### Still competitors

But of course the cooperation is not a bed of roses. Even though they are dependent on each other in the matter of growth – the two countries are still competing. Especially when it comes to the new city on the Danish side Ørestad and the new city at the Swedish side called Hyllie.

These two cities are very similar. Ørestad has the metro while Hyllie has a city tunnel that goes straight to Malmö. Both cities have a big shopping mall. Hyllie has a multi arena and Ørestad is going to have one as well. In both cities it is possible to build very big office buildings and therefore house companies

that couldn't be situated in either the centre of Copenhagen and Malmö, because there wouldn't be enough space. All of these similarities are the reason why the two new cities are not only collaborators but also competitors, because they are able to attract the same companies.

But the managing director of CPH City and Harbour development Jens Kramer Mikkelsen hopes that the two urban areas can create a synergy.

"Then we will have the potential to attract interesting companies even though we are competitors," Kramer says.

And at the Danish side they can rejoice a little bit because they are a little step ahead of the Swedish. The area around Hyllie isn't developed

that much yet because they didn't want to build before the city tunnel was opened.

But the Swedish doesn't see it as a lost battle. They look at their competitors and collaborator on the other side of Øresund and are able to do things different – things that they don't like about Ørestad.

"Ørestad is too big. To be honest we think, that the scale that Ørestad has been build in is too big. It is not very human and there is a lack of life in the area," Anders Rubin says and continues:

"They have a lot of very nice buildings, but it is also an area where the structure isn't that good. That's why we're now building smaller buildings and at the same time more."

This is exactly the solution that the Danish landscape architect Jacob Kamp is suggesting in the matter of bringing more life to Ørestad. But Jens Kramer Mikkelsen wouldn't change a thing and strikes back at the Swedish.

"They have a shopping mall that is bigger than Ørestad's shopping mall Field's, huge office buildings and an arena that we don't even have yet, so they have big scale buildings as well. This is thought big," Kramer says.

One of the latest companies, that moved in to Ørestad one year ago, is the Danish company Rambøll, which counsel engineer companies. ■



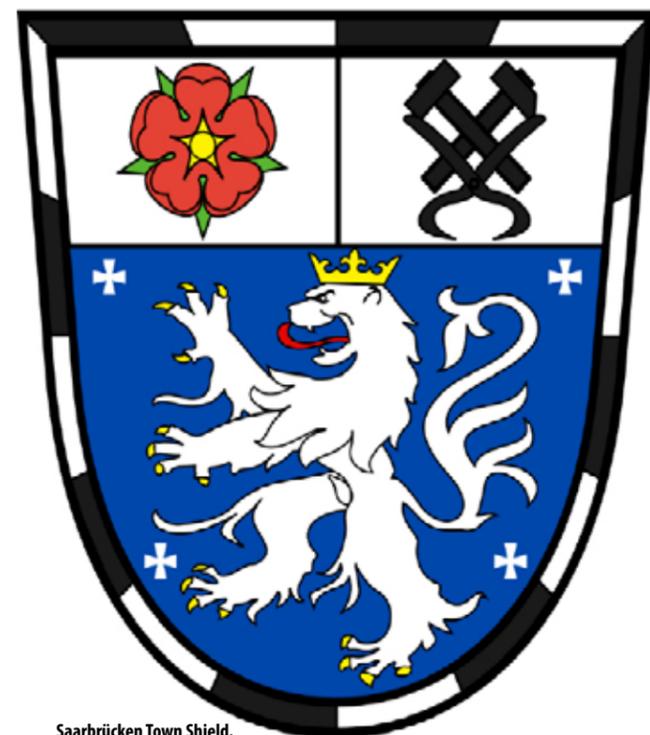
The shopping mall Field's is the biggest mall in Denmark and is situated in the middle of Ørestad City just next to the metro.  
Photo: Karoline V. M. Hansen

# Tuning the Border Gates, to Let Them Flow Better

Europe has become a worldwide example of merging policies, with many cases of cross-border projects that lead the way in this 'togetherness' process. The German city Saarbrücken is one of the best examples of the project within the frontier of France and Germany, the most important countries in the European Union. Many political developments were needed to improve the social side of the region.

*I. Miguel Durán de Barbozza*

It was not so much time till I noticed the special ambience of Saarbrücken. From the moment I set foot in that town, everything seemed normal, but it took time until the particular aspects of the city would show up. Not so many cities have a bigger purpose than only taking care of themselves, which is not the case of Saarbrücken, the capital city of the German Federal State Saarland, located thirteen kilometers from the German-French border. This Federal State is the principal connecting gate in that region between France and Germany, leading the main studies on the analysis of the relations between both countries. With that starting point, and specially inspired by the hometown population, the field was ready to start (or continue) international cooperations with close regions from the River Saar, developed and studied from different levels.



Saarbrücken Town Shield.  
Photo: Saarbrücken City Council

On a larger scale, there is the QuattroPole, which is formed by the hypothetical square made by linking on the map the cities of Saarbrücken (Germany), Trier (Germany), Metz (France) and Luxembourg (Luxemburg). The main purpose of this coalition is to unite different cultures together by sharing the common project duties between them, like management (Luxemburg), social issues (Trier), economic improvement (Saarbrücken) and capacity and behavior of the projects (Metz).

On a medium sized perspective: the Region du SarLorLux, formed by the French territory named Lorraine, the German Saar Region and Luxembourg. The basis of this first union between cities from different countries was settled in 1969, which were involved with the banking sector and the industrial market of coal and steel. Of course, this first administration union was regulated by the previous version of the European Union (EU), the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), becoming the inspiring seed of this self-regulation between close regions from different countries that share common interests. This shared market and business background guided this region to lead in Europe a successful common-business region, developing common programs, like energy supplies to that region, regulated by themselves.

And finally, on a strictly atomic level, in May 2010, the political forces of both countries conformed what we know nowadays as the Eurodistrict of Sarmoselle, formed by the French and German cities between the rivers Saar and Moselle. In Saarbrücken's City Council press manager Thomas Blug's words it's "a cooperation between different French and German towns, with the purpose of being more efficient in creating common projects, such as building streets. It is a brand new European concept".

Many projects and institutions were born because of this special interaction between France and Germany, such as the Regional Verband of Saarbrücken (Regional Association), which regulates all the issues involving the German cities of the Saarland to expose their regional development, social issues, construction permits or services for citizens, as a



The river Saar. Historical symbol of French and German disparities  
Photo: City of Saarbrücken

member of the Eurodistrict du Sarmoselle.

The concretization on the cross-border policies has become crucial for this new SPD government in Saarbrücken, lead by their Lord Mayor Charlotte Britz, who is obviously aware of the strong French influence in Saarbrücken, physically represented on its narrow streets at foot of the castle or in the pedestrian precinct at the St. Johanner Market Square. Saarbrücken's political duties are supported by other political structures like the European Group for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), a public French structure that has its own statutes, assemblies or political committees, with was designed to facilitate and promote cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation, without requiring a prior international agreement to be signed and ratified by national parliaments.

This type of organizations in the French-German frontier are made to create European projects with European grants, locating new external partners from each sides or to demand subsidies in different sector, like public transportation, cultural themes, turism, infrastructures or university education.

The communities pay 80 cents per inhabitant in order to do these common projects for the Eurodistrict, and with 600,000 inhabitants, thats about 500,000 Euros just from this side. Through all these projects that are being developed at a lower scale, it is being indicated the level of interaction between the participants and future proyections of the union, also creating the breeding ground of what tomorrow would be the first steps of political and social union of different countries.

### Border-crossing, the consensus

The actual status of the border-region cities is gradually changing over the past years. Common interests and projects are the main reason to erase this political frontiers drawn on the maps, with the urge of uniting people that live closer to other towns in different countries than others in their own country.

The decision to create new definitions of social organizations, like Eurodistrict, is mainly caused by the non-stopping interaction between cities that belong to a same region but to different countries. These lines on a map are no longer any restriction to the establishment of economic, cultural and social projects with common aims and benefits. I had the huge luck to meet Jan-Philipp Exner, a cross-border regions policy expert, who wrote a PhD thesis comparing the regional status of two hotspot cross-border cities, Copenhagen and Saarbrücken.

“The barriers are dissapearing because people are realizing that the people from other side of the border are similar”



French border sign from Saarbrücken (Germany) to Forbach (France).  
Photo: I.Miguel Durán

He had the kind gesture to walk me around the city center, the Bürguerpark and even give me a ride to another country: France. The difference between the German shaped cities like Saarbrücken, and the French ones like Forbach is outstanding.

“You notice when you are in France just because of the type of houses they have. French people are more preoccupied to improve the inside appearance and comfort of their houses, that is why the outside of their houses is less cared for. In Germany, your neighbours would scold you if you have not taken care of your garden, at least once a week,” said Jan-Philipp.

His solid opinion left no space for any doubt. “The barriers are disappearing because people are realizing that the other people from the other side of the border aren't that different from them. After the Second World War, the politicians founded the European Union and made, in a way, a good job, creating the most stable part of the world over the past decades, without any serious war, because 60 years ago there was another story going on”.

It is clear that the cultural, mental and historical background differences between France and Germany are clear, but that

does not stop these borders from slowly fading away. Jan-Philipp also explained the typical particular conduct between both countries as a fun thing to deal with, like the typical German punctuality or the French culture of having lunch or dinner after the reunions to develop the concepts that were arranged in the meetings.

Although these attitudes may collide with each other, it is a matter of getting used to it to keep moving towards the normalization of frontiers. But not only the cultural or mental differences are the only stepping stones on the way. Some cross-border cooperation imply many difficulties between the French way and the German way. The French system is very centralized, which prolongs the bureaucratic process within and from France, while the German one is more independent and faster, divided in Federal States that have the same povwers and jurisdiction, homogenizing the political process all over the country.

“An atmosphere of confidence has to be created to get along with every aspect”

Its not that one is better or worse it is just that both are different and it takes more time, especially when it comes to corporations projects, to calculate and establish the working framework for any common process between both countries, but that does not stop the urge of regional cities to pickup the baton of the Euro-merged 'utopia'.

After a couple of days in Saarbrücken, I finally got to visit the Eurodistrict Headquarter, located right next to the city castle. The impression that I percieved while I was getting inside this lounge was priceless. People asking a few questions in German and receiving the answer in perfect French, asking another follow up question, this time in French, and being answered in German. They were especially pleased by the fact that a non-German/French journalist was interested in their cross-border situation.



Saarbrücken train station sign.  
Photo: I.Miguel Durán

### A bit of Saarbrücken's History

- 1806: Becomes part of the First French Empire.
- 1815: After the Congress of Vienna, the city is under the control of Prussia.
- 1870: Franco-Prussian War
- 1918: At the end of WWI, it's regulated by France.
- 1935: The population is in favor of the re-accession to Germany, so it becomes part of the Third Reich.
- 1945: At the end of WWII, it is entirely destroyed by the Allies.
- 1957: Political reunion with the Federal Republic of Germany.

My surprises weren't over. When I met Johanna Fischer, the Conference Interpreter of the Saarbrücken Headquarter of the Saarmoselle Eurodistrict, she welcomed me with fluent Spanish.

That aspect stunned me and there was no other option to talk about the advantages of speaking those three languages in Europe and the actual situation of the Old Continent and its future based on actual cross-border policies. “At the end, an atmosphere of confidence has to be created to get along with every particular aspect, but the Saarland Region is more developed that any other region in Germany,” said Johanna.

One of the goals of the Eurodistrict, in Mrs Fischer words is “in a long term planification, to create a transborder structure between France and Germany, but many judicial differences still exist, and they have to be respected, but in a personal level it is absolutely plausable, people cross the border everyday without being checked or identified”. This Eurodistrict tries to regulate the urge of every citizen to



“European Fund for Regional Development: Investment in your Future”.  
Photo: I.Miguel Durán

achieve better standarts.

“At an economic level, it is better to present yourself with some partners than trying to make it on your own. You are always going to get more profit if you work along solid partners, like our case. Saarland is not a very visible region seen from Berlin or Paris, that is why we need to cooperate more, like a Metropolitan Region,” said Johanna.

### Saarbrücken needs its professionals

The cross-border city of Saarbrücken is lacking in professionals, which actually are developed in the city. The broad cultural aspect of the city makes it a perfect spot to study, but not to stay. It has nowadays a huge tasks ahead trying to get their new European status on, and move forward from their border-German policy.

Its motto is “Know How to Live“. Apparently, it does know how to focus its political and regional projects towards that goal. To achieve those purposes, it is a must to improve the communication (digital and physical) between the city and its surroundings. New trans-European networks, hi-speed connections



Traffic sign indicating the French-German School location.  
Photo: I.Miguel Duran

that connect Saarbrücken with Paris in less than two hours are just a few examples of the high improvement and relevance of Saarbrücken within its area. Thomas Blug explains. “In Germany, Saarbrücken is located on the frontier of our country, but in Europe we are at the center point, together with our French neighbours. The future of Saarbrücken is in the center of Europe, not on a side of Germany.” This privileged location of Saarbrücken has made it the perfect spot to develop new ways of progress.

The historical background, cross-border job locations or French-German couples living on one side of the frontier are a few reasons why several institutions were created to merge both cultures together in some sort of way, like the particular case of the French-Deutsch School. All over Germany, English is the official second language taught in the school, but in the Federal Region of Saarland, the second language is French. This is possible because of the Federal status of every German State. They can decide individually their own modus operandi.

This French-Deutsch School is quite special in Saarbrücken, where the lectures are partly taken in German and some others in French, giving the students the opportunity to complete two degrees. The German Abitur and the French Baccalauréat. Of course, the students that comes from that school are fully bilingual but there is another issue to be tackled. Saarbrücken has proven to have one of the best computer engineering centers in Germany and it has an amazing central business district, 5 km south of the Saar River, but apparently it is not enough. These highly educated students tend to go to bigger cities, like Strasbourg or Munich, because Saarbrücken isn't as renowned as other cities, even though it is the capital of the Saarland Region.

That is why Saarbrücken has shifted their global development towards the tourism sector, to make the city more attractive and keeping those highly educated students. This exemplary case of Saarbrücken is the perfect example of the first steps that are need to be taken to enclose the border differences, and a head start dealing with the political barriers that have been implemented over the past centuries, based only on the will of a few. ■



The flags of the European Union, Italy and Bolzano wave together in the centre of the capital of South Tyrol. Photo: Beatriz Paúl Naya

# A Harmless Weapon for a Lifetime Fight

The German-speaking minority in South Tyrol, a former Austrian region annexed by Italy after World War I, is still struggling for self determination. European tools like Euroregions are feared in Rome but not even taken into account by Eva Klotz, one of the most renowned activists.

Beatriz Paúl Naya

**B**right eyes and a warm appearance. Friendly with recognizable Central European features and a long braid lying on her left shoulder. She travels everyday by bike to her office in the centre of Bolzano, the capital city of South Tyrol, in the north of Italy.

The headquarters of Süd-Tiroler Freiheit, where Eva Klotz spends much of her time, is a true reflection of her intentions. A large map of Europe that covers much of the wall shows with different colors the regions of the continent struggling for self-determination. Opposite to it, a Catalan separatist flag, a gift from the Spanish counterparts.

“I am in favor of the reunification of Tyrol as a region, but as the European Union does not recognize regions as states, I fight for the re-annexation to Austria.” This is the dream of a woman who defines herself as an “old lady, forgetting a lot of things” and with a dictionary at hand she apologizes for her English. “I did not have the opportunity to study English at school; we could only learn Italian, Latin and Greek. So I went to an evening school at the age of 30, but I have not had many opportunities to practice the language.”

Her mother was a teacher in elementary school and her father Georg Klotz, a blacksmith. However, he was known as a prominent activist in the 60s for the independence of South Tyrol, which was once part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and annexed by Italy after the First World War I. Eva is the eldest of six children and very proud of her parents.



The parliamentarian Eva Klotz is an important activist for the self-determination of South Tyrol. Photo: Beatriz Paúl Naya

## PROFILE

**Name:** Eva Klotz

**Birth:** St. Leonhard in Passeier (Bolzano), 4th June 1951.

**Profession:** President of Süd-Tiroler Freiheit, Parliamentarian in the Autonomous Province of Bolzano and in the region Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol.

**Interests:** Mountain walks, swimming, skiing, classical and popular music, singing and family.

**Examples in life:** My parents. They educated us in the right to fight.

**Dream:** South Tyrol free, a future without Italy. We can have good relations as neighbours, but not as a colony.

“*Before the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, asking for self-determination was a crime*”

“They always said that they could not give us houses, but education,” she says. After attending primary school in the same valley as Andreas Hofer, hero for the people of South Tyrol because of his fight against Napoleon, Klotz went to high school in Merano. There she took her diploma as a teacher, but as she was too young to teach, she decided to go to the University of Innsbruck to study History, Philosophy and European Ethnology. That was followed by a doctorate and the examination to validate her title in Italy, through which she could teach high school for eight years.

## From the blackboard to Parliament

The adoption of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted by the United Nations in 1966 and ratified by Italy and Austria in 1977, was important for Klotz.

“Before it was a crime asking for self-determination and it meant going to jail, but since then never again,” Klotz affirms. At the age of 25, she began to fight with “democratic and legal methods” in small political groups. Her interest in politics was inevitably linked to the struggle of her father.

She started in politics in the Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP), a political party governing the region for more than 60 years now. Not as a member but as the image and spokesperson for political problems. She started her political career in Heimatbund in 1976. Between 1980 and 1983 she was a councilor in Bolzano. “It was a hard political school for me with all fascists and communists. In this German-speaking country is my Italian is not

very good. This experience was to learn,” explains Klotz.

Later, Klotz was the leader and founder of the Union für Südtirol. On 5th May 2007 she left the party, with part of the management team, for disagreements with Andreas Pöder. “Not idealist people joined the party and they had different interests,” Klotz says. On 11th May 2007, Klotz and the rest of the group founder Süd-Tiroler Freiheit, political party she represents in Parliament nowadays, both in the Autonomous Province of Bolzano (South Tyrol) and in the region Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol.

In one political party or another, Klotz has always fought for the same goals: self-determination, language, culture and tradition. “We must seize the moment for change, because with

“*We must seize the moment for change, with the arrival of immigrants in a decade we will be less, so we have to do it now*”

the arrival of immigrants in a decade we will be less, because 80% of them integrate the Italian group when they come. We have to do it now,” she ensures.

## The Euroregion strains relations

However, the situation in South Tyrol is peaceful now, leaving behind the bombing of the 60s. Only recently, two topics have raised again the debate about the independence of South Tyrol: the refusal from Luis Durnwalder, president of the region, to participate in the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the Italian reunification, on the 17th of March, and the delay in final approval of the Euroregion Tyrol-South Tyrol- Trentino by the Italian government.

Nowadays, the last step in the institutionalization of the Euroregion is in power of the Italian Council of Ministers. Since last October, when the managers of the Euroregion sent the documents to Rome, Berlusconi’s government has taken issue with some points, what has lengthened the process. Matthias Fink, on behalf of Tyrol in the new organism, says that “the problem is not in the content but conceptual with the term ‘Euroregion’”.

In Rome they agree with the existence of cooperation in transport, culture, environment... but the fear is “the creation a political entity under the name of Euroregion” says Maurizio Vezzali, councillor of Popolo della Libertà (PDL) in Bolzano.

The case of South Tyrol is becoming more important given the characteristics of the region. With the Euroregion, the former



The Euroregion Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino is formed by an Austrian federal state and two Italian Autonomous provinces. Photo: Wikipedia



Matthias Fink and Birgit Oberkofler are the representatives of Tyrol and South Tyrol in the Joint Office of the Euroregion in Bolzano. Photo: Beatriz Paúl Naya



The Euroregion Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino and the European Academy (EURAC) share building in the city of Bolzano. Photo: Beatriz Paúl Naya

region of Tyrol, now Tyrol (Austria) and South Tyrol (Italy), will cooperate closely again. From the office of the Euroregion in Bolzano they hope that after the “reassuring call from Durnwalder to Rome”, an affirmative answer will come soon.

### The EU and the regions

The Euroregion Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino was formed under the framework of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) of 2007.

“The majority of European regionalists and nationalists are clearly identified with the process of European integration”

“A new European legal instrument designed to facilitate and promote cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation with legal entity and as such, it enables regional and local authorities and other public bodies from different member states, to set-up cooperation groupings with a legal personality”.

The European integration process seems to have changed the role of the regions, increasing their power and acting against the nation-state as political organization model. As explains Dr. Constantino Cordal, Spanish political scientist, in his thesis *The regional participation in the decision making process of the European Union*.

“The decentralization of the member states of the European Union and the regional claim have taken place simultaneously with the process of community building, and changing the structure of states forming the EU.”

“The majority of European regionalists and nationalists are clearly identified with the process of European integration,” Dr. Cordal adds.

In this situation, the European integration process may go against the interests of centralist countries like Italy. “The Italian government is always critical of the cooperation between regions and other countries. It is not the first time, and there were problems when the Valle d’Aosta, Piemonte

“This case will be more carefully observed by Rome when dealing with South Tyrol”



Maurizio Vezzali is representative of Popolo della Libertà (PDL), Berlusconi's political party, in Bolzano. Photo: Beatriz Paúl Naya

and Liguria want to cooperate with other French regions,” says Alice Engl, researcher in the European Academy of Bolzano. However, she admits that “this case will be more carefully observed by Rome when dealing with South Tyrol”.

### “An strategy to avoid the main purpose”

The PDL remains skeptical because “South Tyrol just looks north, not east and west. They should consider the entire Alpine area for the Euroregion,” Vezzali affirms. Moreover, for the Italian politician a clear symptom of the real objective is one of



The president of the region Alto Adige (South Tyrol)-Trentino, Luis Durnwalder, is also the president of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano. Photo: Beatriz Paúl Naya

the proposals made during the Parliament of the three provinces of the Euroregion. They meet every two years since 1991 and the last one was celebrated the 30th of March in Merano. “The Liberals called for a joint bid to host the Olympic Games,” tells Vezzali surprised.

“South Tyrol has many rights in education, executive and legislative branches, but they never cease to ask for more. Although they have everything they need as minority,” Vezzali says.

This opinion is shared by the researcher Engl.

“After achieving the autonomy, the minority parties in South Tyrol need another project on the fight; otherwise they have no reason to be”.

Durnwalder, president of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano and the Autonomous Region of Trentino-South Tyrol, conceives the Euroregion as a connection between two

However, the president is aware that from Rome they may think that the establishment of the Euroregion is a danger and they could fear that the terror of the 60s is back again.

But Durnwalder reassures Rome.

“If we wanted the independence, the Euroregion would not be the appropriate tool to achieve it. This is in the context of the European Union and it is too formal.”

For the central government the Euroregion could mean a threat and for the president of the region it is only a matter of cooperation. Even for the new generations of the German-speaking minority “it is a very important opportunity,” says Matthias Hofer, secretary of Südtiroler Schützenbund.

In this situation, the ‘menacing’ Euroregion should be also welcomed by the political parties for the German-speaking minority that struggle for the self determination. It could be a first step to approach their goal: Austria. However, Klotz seems sceptical.

“It’s just a label, there is no content.”

“If we wanted the independence, the Euroregion would not be the appropriate tool, it is too formal”

“If we cannot have our own administration and laws, for me the name it is not important,” she adds. “They already refused to accept the name Euroregion Tyrol and they changed it for the one with the name of the three provinces,” Klotz complains.

Even the idea of the common Parliament has no sense for the politician. “We are able to make recommendations, but we have no power,” Klotz claims. Moreover, “we come with nice ideas for working together, but then the states say ‘no, it is our competence not yours’”. For instance, “in Merano we passed a recommendation to recognize the right to health in the three provinces. But I am sure that it has no future in the national parliaments,” says Klotz.

Referring to Durnwalder, she declares that “he can say that he is working for something, but in fact it is just nothing.” “It is all an excuse to avoid the really important step,” Klotz asserts.

### An inherited commitment

For Klotz what is being done in South Tyrol is not enough. It seems she wants to settle her father’s fight, the bad times she experienced in her childhood.

Georg Klotz (11th September 1919-24th January 1976) was an activist of Befreiungsausschuss Südtirol (BAS) in the 1960s for the independence of South Tyrol. Born just one day after the Treaty of Saint Germain, what meant the split of Tyrol, he was accused of bombing, so he fled to Austria to escape from prison.

This experience is described by his daughter Eva in a biography about his father, *Georg Klotz. Für die Einheit Freiheitskämpfer Tirols*. "My father ran away with a friend who was killed by the Italians. He had to walk for 42 hours with three shootings in his body to reach Austria. There he showed the bullets to prove that Italian soldiers had tried to kill him," Eva tells while showing pictures illustrating the book.

"It was a hard time for the family," says Klotz. The activism of his father also made the Italian secret services focused on the rest of the family. His wife was charged with possession of explosives and bombing and was jailed for 14 months and 10 days. During this time they were divided. Finally, they let her free because of the lack of evidence.

"My mother was a smart and hardworking woman with six children; she would never do such a thing. It was all a strategy of psychological terror to keep my father distracted. An old and effective method of pressure: guilt by association. If you can not have the father, take the wife or the children."

That is the reason why Klotz still has many objectives to achieve for South Tyrol, as if her conscience guided her fight. Some of the most important are related to education, culture and language. All of them are indispensable in shaping the identity.

"The Italians think we were barbarians and that they brought us the culture, when 60 years ago Italy had many more illiterates," Klotz shows her discontent.

“There is no right to take our country, not for language, not for history, not for mentality”

countries and a way to harmonize.

"In Austria they only speak German, and in Trentino they are Italian speakers, so Bolzano is the bridge between two cultures in Europe."

She also shows a sharp opinion about the current debate about the fascist monuments in the region. "If Italy is a democratic state they should remove the monuments, as they did in Germany, Russia and Spain," she affirms without hesitation.

"The problem is that with the removal, they would recognize that this ideology was not good and the right to take our country would be away. Not for language, not for history, not for mentality. There is no right," Klotz shouts.

One of the priorities for Süd-Tiroler Freiheit is the language. "We want equality for Italian and German at the official level,

including the police".

The language was one of the main elements in the Italianization of the region during the Fascist era, and its main driver was Ettore Tolomei. "They changed not only the names of valleys, mountains and streets, but also family names. My surname was not Klotz, but D'Algepo Molio Clodi. It is a falsification of history," says Klotz while she shows a book with all new Italian surnames.

However, Klotz thinks the key for Rome to worry is the

“Bureaucracy and laws are made for Italian mentality, always trying to cheat the administration”

region's wealth.

"We have energy and hardworking people paying taxes." Hofer, maybe her successor in the future, supports the idea. "When from Rome they say that they care about the Italian-speakers in the region, they actually refer to money."

But Klotz does not think southern Italy is poor, but "the administration is not good." "Bureaucracy and laws are made for the Italian mentality, always looking for the way to cheat the administration. We can not always pay, they have to work alone and we have the right to have our own administration," Klotz affirms.

### The enemy is at home

Since the adoption of the new autonomy in 1972 South Tyrol has more rights and more powers were given to the Provincial Council. However, in Klotz's opinion there is still work to do. "We have more representatives, but we still can not decide on important issues like education, finance or administration," Klotz complains. "On March 17th we could not decide if we wanted to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the reunification of Italy. Schools had to close," Klotz exclaims. Only Durnwalder could decide not to participate in the celebrations, decision that caused a high-profile controversy in the country.

And he is also the person appointed by Klotz. The parliamentarian thinks that the main obstacle for South Tyrol is the SVP, the party in government, and the president of the region, Durnwalder.

"The future of South Tyrol cannot be based on policies of 60 years ago. They are free to decide on small things, but they content because they have other privileges such as jobs for friends."

"They have the majority because they tell people they need to be just one against 60 million Italians in order to show Rome that we are united". For Klotz they are not realistic. "Italy said that Sudan had the right to a referendum, and why not us?" ■

The Klotz family. Photo: Georg Klotz. Für die Einheit Freiheitskämpfer Tirols, by Eva Klotz

# Momentum for South Tyrol

Anna Rydholm

*Almost 70 years have passed since Benito Mussolini was overthrown. But in South Tyrol in northern Italy, the monuments that were raised during his fascist regime still provoke dismay. A recent agreement with the government in Rome has opened up for the possibility to remove the monuments— but this has also brought new life into the old conflict between German- and Italian-speakers in the province.*

Although not a big issue for Spisser, the sight of this nearly 20 meters high marble gate would perhaps cast a shadow over this sunny afternoon for many others of her fellow Bolzanini. The Victory monument was erected in 1928 on the personal order of Mussolini. Officially, it was said to honour the Italian martyrs of the First World War. For many South Tyrolean, though, it merely symbolized the 1919 Italian annexation of this traditionally Austrian region, which overnight made the German-speaking population foreigners in their own homeland. The annexation was followed by a massive immigration of Italians from the south, as a solution of the "South Tyrolean problem". These newcomers got huge privileges in terms of jobs and housing, whereas the German-speakers were systematically discriminated and denied the right to their own language and culture. Today, South Tyrol has the status of an autonomous province, but the tensions between the ethnic groups still lingers.

### From paralysis to progress

It is not yet April, but it is well beyond 20 degrees and office time. The inhabitants of Bolzano—the regional capital of South Tyrol— have resorted to horizontal position along the banks of the Talfer River, or drinks in shadowy pavement cafés. The atmosphere is relaxed in a continental, Italian way— merely the silhouette of the Alps, standing out over the rooftops, reveals that Bolzano actually is the last outpost towards Austria. On a bench in the small park behind Piazza Vittoria, Helen Spisser is relaxing with a friend. Occupied by their conversation and her daughter's wild camper, Spisser is barely aware that she's sitting merely a few meters from one of the hottest issues in South Tyrol right now. "You mean the Victory monument? Actually, I never think about it— but I am not very politically interested either. Of course, it wouldn't be a bad thing if there was a sign with information about the history behind it."

The regional government, lead by the German-speaking South Tyrolean People's Party (SVP), have therefore been trying to find a solution to the problem with the monuments for decades. Dr Martha Stocker, vice president of the party, thinks that it is a very urgent question.

"These monuments just tell the rest of the world that we are barbarians, since they show the history and glory of fascism."

The Victory monument is not the only example— there are also other memorials from the fascist era in South Tyrol; the Alpini monument in Bruneck, the ossuaries along the Austrian border and the Mussolini relief that adorns the façade of the tax office in Bolzano. This is by no means exceptional— such monuments can be seen all over the Italian peninsula, and normally people just don't take any special notice of them. In South Tyrol, though, they have become a distinct reminder of the past and the barrier between the different language-groups. One might

### The History of South Tyrol 1915-1992

1915	1919	1920	1921	1923
The Triple Entente of Great Britain, France and Russia offer Italy the region of South Tyrol, if the country joins the First World War on their side. Italy declares war on the Austro-Hungarian Empire on May 23.	As a part of the First World War peace treaty, South Tyrol is annexed by Italy. This means the split of historic Tyrol.	10 October— South Tyrol is finally incorporated into the Italian state.	28 October— the March on Rome. Benito Mussolini and the fascists seize power in Italy.	23 March— A new law for changing the all the place-names in South Tyrol into Italian versions is implemented. Over 8000 places re-named. 15 July— A 32-point programme for reaching full Italianisation of South Tyrol is implemented— affecting schools, public authorities, the police etc.

think that an easy solution would be to simply remove the monuments from South Tyrolean ground. This has not been possible, though, since they remain under the protection of the state. Discussions with Rome suffer from the notoriously frosty relationship between the capital and South Tyrol. This has not improved during the latest years of Berlusconi-lead governments, dominated by his different political parties Forza Italia and The People of Freedom (PDL).

But the status quo has now transformed into progress, as the matter reached something of a breakthrough three months ago. Luis Durnwalder— leader of the SVP and Governor of South Tyrol— then received a letter from the Italian Minister of Cultural affairs, Sandro Bondi. The letter was surrounded with a large portion of hush-hush, but the essential part was nevertheless soon on the public record; an agreement that transferred the right of decision for the monuments from Rome to the regional government. Dr Stocker doesn't find it very surprising that the agreement came right now. "Berlusconi and his government is not in a good situation at the present moment, and they need our support to reach the majority in the parliament. This agreement was the only possibility that our representatives in Rome wouldn't vote against their proposals."

The agreement meant that the regional government now could start to work with a plan for the monuments. Due to the sensitivity of the matter, though, it was clear that it would not be easy to find a solution that was satisfactory for all partners. As a first step, the regional government decided to appoint two committees working with the Victory monument and the Mussolini relief- since these two are considered to be the most problematic ones. The members are people with expertise in history and Art; they also represent both language groups. Governor Durnwalder thinks that this is the right way to go. "We have these different monuments, and they all have to be treated in different ways. We need to find a solution that doesn't provoke people and makes it clear that the South Tyrolese people are not fascists. This doesn't mean that we have to transform everything into gravel, but the monuments have to be interpreted from a historical context. What we now want is to reach an agreement and finish this discussion for good."

**Split opinions**

One of the members of the Victory monument committee is the historian Dr Christine Roilo. She says that the issue is

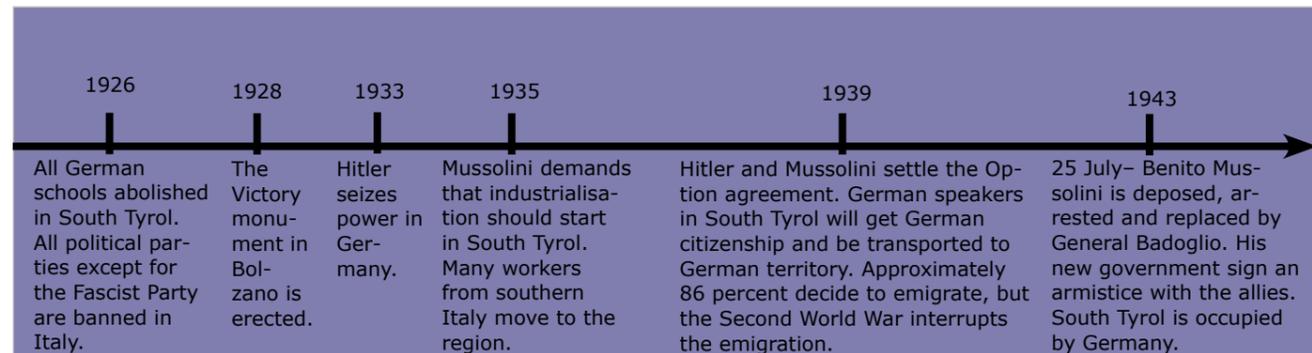
complicated in many ways. "The problem with these monuments is that they are still here without being explained, so there is no consciousness about why they were built. This also leads to misunderstandings between the different ethnic groups. Many German-speakers are not very happy with the presence of the monuments. They connect them with a time of suppression and discrimination—



The inscription on the Victory monument  
Photo: Anna Rydholm



Matthias Hofer is not very fond of the current sight of the Victory monument  
Photo: Anna Rydholm



Maurizio Vezzali, Regional Director of the PDL  
Photo: Anna Rydholm

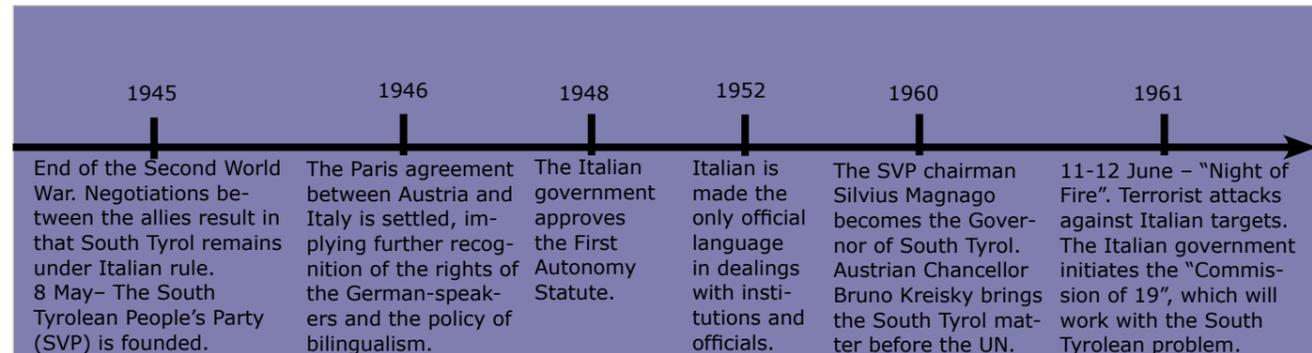


Dr Martha Stocker in her office  
Photo: Anna Rydholm

and would happily see that the monuments were removed from South Tyrolean soil already tomorrow. One with this opinion is Matthias Hofer, a 23-year-old student from a village near Bolzano. Hofer is a member of the Südtiroler Schützenbund – a German-speaking organisation working for South Tyrolese freedom and the return to Austria. He thinks that the monuments are obsolete and does not fit in a modern city. "I just think that it is strange that we have such things in our streets in the year of 2011. I mean— you would never see a statue of Hitler in Germany."

Hofer thinks that the fascist monuments in South Tyrol are a "disgrace". One thing he finds particularly offensive is the inscription on the façade of the Victory monument, which reads, "Here at the border of the fatherland we set down the banner." From this point on we educated the others with language, law and culture". Hofer thinks that this is a clear sign of Italian imperialism. "This text is a bullet in the chest of every German-speaker in South Tyrol. As you can see the picture is pointing towards the north- a symbol of how the Italians educated' the occupied

Germans." Not surprisingly, the Italian-speaking part of the population has been less enthusiastic about the agreement and the subsequent discussion about the monuments' future. Michaela Biancofiore, a representative for the PDL in the national parliament, has emerged as one of the most persistent critics. In an interview in the local newspaper *Südtirol Online*, Biancofiore described the feeling among the Italians in South Tyrol as "broken, humiliated, offended and upset". She meant that the Italian-speakers never got the possibility to have a say in the matter. "As an Italian in this region I feel hurt. We have been ignored completely, this agreement was settled over our heads." Her party colleague, regional Director of the PDL Maurizio Vezzali, uses more downplayed language. But he also says that Biancofiore's statements merely reflect the opinion of most Italian speakers in South Tyrol— that the monuments should stay since they are a significant part of Italian identity in this region. "For the linguistic group of Italians these monuments also have a meaning which is not fascist. For me they represent Italianity, not fascism. Fascism as such is dead and doesn't interest me.





The Mussolini relief on the facade of the tax building upset many people, others doesn't seem to mind

Photo: Anna Rydholm

German extremists want to delete the monuments, but it is a part of history and should be understood as such.”

Dr Stocker also recognizes that the monuments have a special significance for the Italian-speaking group. She thinks that this is mainly because of their lack of historical connection with South Tyrol.

“The problem for the Italians in this region is that they all came from the outside. They don't have any other symbols, so the monuments have become kind of an identity-marker for them.”

### The beauty in evil

To complicate the issue further- some debaters also claim the purely artistic value of these monuments. An open letter, signed by 41 historians from both language groups that advocated this viewpoint was published in *Südtirol Online* in early February. Dr Stocker says that she is concerned that this discussion might obscure the historical awareness.

“This is another problem- that a lot of people claim that these are monuments by important artists. This might be true, but they are made in the fascist time, and I think it is important to

give information about that.”

Dr Roilo, on the other hand, thinks that it should be possible to acknowledge the fascist heritage of the monuments and appreciate them for their artistic qualities in the same time. “The Victory monument is made by Marcello Piantentini who was Mussolini's favourite architect- like Albert Speer was Hitler's. Piantentini was a good architect, a typical representative for the rationalist style, and he made several important constructions.”

The rationalist style with its roman-inspired elements like colons and white stone has had a great impact on Bolzano's townscape. The city grew rapidly in the wake of the industrialisation, and a whole new district was built on the other side of the river. Also the Mussolini relief can be found in the area. The 36 meters long and 5.5 meter high relief (which makes it the largest in Europe) adorns the façade of what was originally the house of the fascist party. Nowadays, the building houses the tax office of Bolzano, and the fact that so many people are working here is considered to make its fascist symbolism even more problematic. The relief was made to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of fascist rule, and displays

Mussolini as a victorious emperor on his horse. It also includes the fascist motto: “Crede, obbedire, combattere” (Believe, Obey and Fight). Dr Roilo says that the piece can tell us something about the nature of regimes.

“The Mussolini relief is made by Hans Piffraeder, who was an German-speaking artist. This might sound strange, but we have to keep in mind that artists always have worked for the regimes. Also the design of the relief makes it typical for totalitarian regimes. They generally have a preference for this larger-than-life style, it doesn't matter whether you look at Hitler, Mao, Stalin or Mussolini- it's always the same.”

### The art of overcoming history

The future of the monuments is still unclear. Bondi resigned as cultural minister on 23<sup>rd</sup> March, since his controversial statements about the movie industry had soaked public confidence for him. New cultural minister is Giancarlo Galan, and it is not certain whereas this switch will have any effect on the agreement.

In the meantime, the committees are working with their proposals, which will be presented later this month. The details are still not settled, but Dr Roilo says that, in the case of the Victory monument, it is very probable that the crypt under the gate will be turned into a museum of South Tyrolean history 1919-1945. The fence that currently surrounds the monument will also be removed, so that people can visit it.

Dr Stocker says that she thinks it was a wise decision to appoint the committees, and she has no doubt of that they will be able to find good solutions that satisfies all inhabitants of South Tyrol.

“I am sure of that whatever the outcome might be, it will be accepted. In this region, we always have to consider both language groups every time we make a decision. It should not be so hard to find out something that everyone can approve with to the major part.”

Also Dr Roilo hopes that the current debate will lead to something good.

“Here in South Tyrol history is always overwhelming us, whatever we want to do. The most urgent problems we have here are due to the conflict between German- and Italian speakers, and it is very hard to unify the population. But what we have at this present moment is a very interesting opportunity. Something is changing, we are all becoming aware of our history, and that can also help us to understand each other.”

In Bolzano city centre the sun still warms, but has moved considerably closer to the western rim of the Alps. The

sunbathers are leaving the riverbanks and people in the pavement cafés have switched their cappuccinos to red wine and the ,for the region typical Spritz cocktail. Close to the bridge connecting the old city with the new part, German-speaking Kuki Cont is about to close his new-age furniture shop, from which he has constant overview of the Victory Monument

“For me personally it's of course not so pleasant, but I still think that it should stay here. History is history, and- whether it's good or bad- you can never change history.”

Dr Roilo thinks that this is an opinion shared by many people, - that the South Tyrolean are now tired of conflict, and ready to



Are the Bolzanini ready to come to terms with their past?

Photo: Anna Rydholm

1963

The election of Aldo Moro as new Prime minister means a new political climate in Rome. He continues the work with the “Commission of 19”, he also has close talks with Magnago. Leads to negotiations with Austria.

1972

Negotiations with Austria result in the Second Autonomy Statue. New measures, as the right to a provincial flag and the equality between German and Italian.

1976

Implementation of the Proportional Representation Decree. Jobs in the public administration now have to be allocated proportionally among German- and Italian-speakers. The Italian-speakers lose many of their former privilege.

1989

South Tyrol acquires further economic independence. A reform of the state taxation system ensures that the provincial authorities will retain 90 percent of the tax revenues.  
17 March- Luis Durnwalder replaces Silvius Magnago as the Governor of South Tyrol.

1992

30 January- Remaining regulations for the fulfilment of the Paris agreement is approved by the Council of Ministers in Rome.  
19 June- Italy and Austria presents the Declaration of Settlement of the Dispute for the secretary General of the UN. Officially, the conflict is over.



Pigs who wallowed on dark green South Tyrolean meadows before they become South Tyrolean speck? Unfortunately, this is not reality.

Most of the pork meat used for The South Tyrolean speciality has to be imported from abroad. The same applies to other meats and vegetables. The reason is the lack of space in the mountains.

“I often have to buy products from abroad because the region does not offer everything I need,” explains Herbert Hintner, Michelin starred cook in Eppan, South Tyrol. “But I try to support local farmers as much as I can.” He calls that the “social component” of cooking.

Johanna Fieg conducts a farm in Meran with her husband. They produce five different wines, sausages, speck, fruit juice, and much more. “It is difficult for us to maintain our small farm”, she explains. Because of the steep landscape large-scale production is impossible. ■

More about South Tyrolean food on p. 72 and [www.euroviews.eu](http://www.euroviews.eu)

Johanna Fieg, farmer in Meran, Italy, on her field: The steep mountain scenery does not allow farmers to produce large amounts of products. Photo: Anna Buch



Wine barrels, salami and South Tyrolean Speck: Cooks prefer local products but they cannot be produced on a large scale. Photo: Anna Buch



Michael Huguenin

Students in Central Europe are widely condemned by older generations for having little knowledge of their countries' Communist past. But there are signs that the problem isn't the next generation's interest in history. Their education systems are simply letting them down.

Jana Benicka is about to change the Faculty of Philosophy at Bratislava's Comenius University forever. In September, the 40 year old professor will open the faculty's first bachelor degree taught entirely in English. *Central European Studies (Visegrad Studies)* is part of Comenius University's push to become more attractive to foreign students.

Fund has provided grants to universities to develop individual courses or entire programs. Prof. Benicka's course is one of two new programs that received €50,000 grants under the Visegrad Fund's latest allotment of the Visegrad University Studies Grant (VUSG).



Photo: Petr Kratochvil

“We decided that we should have programs that should attract students from abroad,” explains Prof. Benicka. Prof. Benicka will coordinate the program. It is based on courses that have been taught in Slovak for many years at Comenius University. The lecturers know the subject matter back to front but now have to convert that knowledge into English. The program has received some extra funding to help. “Most of the teachers are teaching in our faculty for many years but basically they were teaching in Slovak,” Prof. Binecka points out. “So it's a new situation for them to teach the courses in English, that's why of course we have the money from [the International] Visegrad [Fund].” The International Visegrad Fund was founded in 2000 by the Visegrad Four (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) to support cross-border projects. Since 2008, the

**Something needs to be done**

Prof. Benicka believes that courses focused on the history, culture, language, politics or society of the Visegrad Four (V4) is crucial. The Slovakian academic has noticed a gap in the knowledge of Central Europe's next generation. “[It] would be very that students living in this area or studying in this area would be more educated in history of this area,” explains the professor. Dr Tadeusz Siwek has noticed the same phenomenon in his course *Poles and Czechs - Today and History*. Dr Siwek is a proud member of the Polish minority in the north of the Czech Republic and a lecturer at the University of Ostrava in the north of the Czech Republic. The Poles live primarily in the Czech part of Silesia, a region that spans the Czech-Polish border,

and are a reminder of the changing nature of borders in Central Europe throughout history. Dr Siwek has taught his course for eleven years and in that time has noticed that students are less and less aware of the history of the Visegrad region.

"Many of them [are] surprised... 'Polish people here? They must be immigrants, maybe?' But this Polish minority is not immigrant because they live here for many generations," says the human geography expert. The Visegrad Fund's backing of Prof. Benicka's program and others like it is the next step in filling that gap. Public Relations Coordinator, Jiří Sýkora says education is crucial. "The educational and youth exchange projects by definition deal with [the] younger generation of recipients and deal predominantly with people whose knowledge about the region might be insufficient," says Sýkora. "It is important that the youngest generation is given the chance to discover Central Europe and to learn about the immediate neighbourhood."

In total the Visegrad Fund gave out €220,000 in January of this year under the VUSG program. In the three years of the VUSG program, 32 different programs and courses have been supported by the Visegrad Fund. A total outlay of €690,000. In fact, during its history the Visegrad Fund has assigned just under 24% of its total funding to education and youth exchange grants.

## Education systems to blame

The knowledge gap of Central Europe's next generation is widely accepted.

Dusan Janak sits in a pub in Bratislava shoveling goulash into his mouth. His hair is tied back in a ponytail. A classic academic from the social sciences, Janak's sense of style isn't well developed. But contrary to his unkempt look, Janak's mind is sharp. The young academic coordinates a sociology course at the Silesian University in Opava in the north of the Czech Republic, which received funding from the Visegrad

Fund at the start of 2010. Janak noticed in the first year of the course that his younger students lacked an understanding of Central Europe's recent history. "It surprised me that the best students there were the older students, which can compare the lectures with their own experience, life experience," states Janak. The Opava-based sociologist admits he started the course more for his own research but has realised during the first year that there is a desperate need for



Veronika Kulová says history affects how people understand themselves. Photo: University of Ostrava

similar types of education in Central Europe. "Young students have no clear idea about [the] history of the really close countries from [the] Visegrad Group," Janak explains. "They have no clear idea about what happens in these countries nowadays, also in history." Dr Siwek believes that the fall of the Iron Curtain and the accession of the V4 to the European Union (EU) have both played a big role in this ignorance. But the Ostrava-based academic says the education systems of the V4 are the real culprits. Dr Siwek believes they are struggling with the

region's Communist past.

"In the basic schools or high schools, modern history after [the] Second World War [is] not very [intensively taught] because many teachers are confused how to teach [it] because when they were young it was during Communist regime and history was [taught] in different way to now and now they are confused and they try to avoid this."

## Youngsters say 'it's not our fault'

Members of Central Europe's next generation also blame their schools. Vladimír Zapletal was brought up in village outside of Olomouc, south west of Ostrava. The 24 year old is studying English Philology at the University of Ostrava. Zapletal knows he is much better educated than both his parents but says he still lacks understanding of his region's recent history.

"At high school, [history] always started with prehistoric era and went to World War II," Zapletal explains in a frustrated tone, as he waits for his next class to start. "So basically, people don't know anything about what happened after World War II because it's not in the curriculum. They don't teach about it." Zapletal's classmate, Veronika Kulová, agrees the historical curriculum for children could be improved. Veronika definitely considers history to be important to modern day life.



Alexandra Panajotidisová is fascinated by English. Photo: University of Ostrava

"Because it has much to do with our relations today," Kulová points out. "Historical events shaped our relations, shaped our understanding of our culture, of ourselves." But according to the older generations of Central Europeans Kulová's interest in her own region puts her in the minority. Dusan Janak has theorised that his students' lack of local historical knowledge is because the West is now available to young people from Central Europe and it is very attractive. "Maybe there is a shift in focus to the more global interests, the more global topics, which follows the media as well as the education process," Janak says. "The focus of not only young people but also researchers is to get grant from [a Western] university, from the West research centres." Jana Benicka from Comenius University sums it up simply. "Young people go to the West."

## Bi-lingual Books Break Open Borders

A trend has begun in education in Central Europe. Bi-lingual books are being published to help develop a sense of camaraderie across borders and nurture cross-border cooperation in the next generation.

Dr Tadeusz Siwek is constantly trying to improve cross-border understanding through his subject, *Poles and Czechs – Today and History*. "It's a review of Czech-Polish relationship, good and bad," Dr Siwek explains. "But in the frame of this subject I try to break some prejudices and some ignorance."

One tool that the professor uses is a book he has written that turns history upside down.

"It is history but changed, [the] Czech-Polish relationship [is] reversed," continues Dr Siwek.

The book takes copies of Czech and Polish newspaper articles and on the opposite page Dr Siwek has written his own version putting Czechs in the Poles shoes or vice-versa. The professor

believes that this ability to empathise with neighbours is crucial, particularly in border regions.

"For example, [the] Polish minority has [the] right for Polish signs [in Czech Silesia] and some Czech people are not very glad for it and think it's not very important because old Polish people can understand Czech," says the professor. "[But] it's not for understanding it's for esteem [and] if [a] Czech minority should be [on the] Polish side...and this Czech minority [wanted] some signs... the Czech people [would consider this] normal but Polish [signs aren't] normal because it's another point of view."

Dr Siwek is the personification of Central Europe's ability to understand each other. The professor is half Czech, half Polish and studied in Bratislava in the 1970s. Dr Siwek says he has two first languages, Czech and Polish. He also speaks decent Slovak.

## Keen on England

Alexandra Panajotidisová is a classic example of Janak's theory. The 25 year old also studies English Philology at the University of Ostrava and is fascinated by the world's most powerful language.

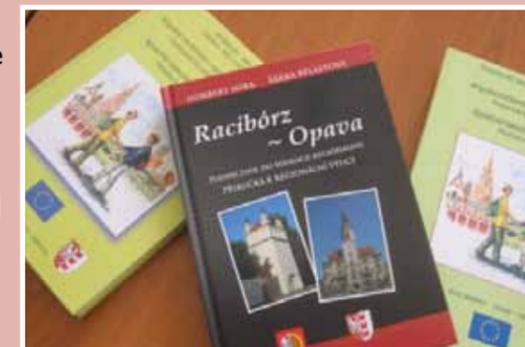
"I was one year in England [during grammar school]. It was great. I loved that," Panajotidisová says with a smile.

Panajotidisová sits in a crowded corridor surrounded by classmates. It's break time at the University of Ostrava. The half Greek-half Czech student happily relates her life story, almost shouting to be heard above her classmates.

Panajotidisová was born in Greece but moved back to the Czech Republic with her family soon after she was born and grew up in Krnov, a town north west of Ostrava. She is heavily influenced by her mother who was frustrated by the travel restrictions during the Communist era.

"My mum is always telling me, 'travel, travel and travel, I couldn't, [but] you can,'" Panajotidisová says.

And Panajotidisová plans to do just that. Her face breaks into



Bilingual books are becoming a key resource in Central European education. Photo: Michael Huguenin

Dr Siwek isn't the only educator to produce his own book that deals specifically with the cultural connections of border regions.

A Polish teacher called Norbert Mika and his Czech colleague, Sarka Belastova has just recently published a new edition of their bi-lingual Silesian history book. Euroregion Silesia provided crucial funding for the book, which was first published in 2002.

The book covers the history of the Polish town, Racibórz, and the Czech town, Opava, in both Polish and Czech. It has become a crucial text for the subject *Regional Education*, which is taught to all Year 6 students at primary schools in Racibórz.



Vladimír Zapletal is frustrated by the lack of Communist history in Central European schools. Photo: University of Ostrava



The students from Gymnázium Ostrava-Hrabovka. Photo: Michael Huguenin

another wide smile when asked about a potential semester in the EU's Erasmus study abroad program.

"[I would go] to England or to English speaking country... and why go to Poland or Slovakia... [we already] understand each other," argues Panajotidisová.

### Visegrad students flock to Western Europe

Panajotidisová reflects a trend in the Visegrad Fund's study abroad program. Since 2003, the Fund has awarded scholarships to exchange students. In the Intra-Visegrad section it's become clear that Czech students are the least interested in travelling to other V4 countries. The other three V4 countries have all averaged over 16 Intra-Visegrad scholars per year since 2007 but the Czech Republic has had less than ten per year.

In the EU's Erasmus program the statistics also back up the idea that Czech students wish to go west. 6,045 Czech students took part in the Erasmus program in 2008-2009. Just 4.84 percent went to another V4 country. In comparison, 38.28 percent went to Germany, France and Spain.

In fact, the numbers from the Erasmus program show that students from all V4 countries are more interested in heading west than to

their Visegrad neighbours. From 2004-2005 to 2008-2009 the number of Erasmus students per year from the V4 has risen from 15,863 to 25,524. Of the 25,524 students from V4 countries involved in the Erasmus program in 2008-2009, only 14.39 percent travelled to another V4 country. Germany was the destination for 17.35 percent of Visegrad exchange students.

That trend of a pan-European focus is also evident in even younger Central Europeans. English researcher Alistair Ross is currently researching children's perceptions of identity in the former Communist countries of Europe. Ross says that kids between the ages of 12 and 16 generally believe they have a different view of the world to their parents.

"They [see] Europe as being free of frontiers, easy to travel in, good for potential study abroad," Ross explains. "The institutions of Europe made that very good for them."

### Teach them, they want to learn

A recently completed extra-curricular history program could be a sign that, while Central European students know very little about the region's recent history, they do have the desire to learn more.

Fifteen students at Gymnázium Ostrava-Hrabovka (GOH) in Ostrava have just completed a semester long, Communist-history project. The project was organised with a school in Strumien, just over the Czech-Polish border, and the response from the students is obvious.

"In school we usually just sit and listen to the teacher and now we had a chance to try and see [the history] for ourselves," says Lucie Fiserova enthusiastically. "A lot of concentration camps, we could hear explanations and other points of view of these eras. I was very pleased I did join, it was great."

Principal Josef Svrčina says he never hesitated to approve the project. It was the second voluntary history program run by the school. In the second semester of 2010 GOH also organised a program with the Polish school based around World War II and Nazism.

"[The projects] had an effect not only on the students involved but [also] the others who saw the results," the principal explains.

But Principal Svrčina believes that the Communist-based program was even more crucial for his young students. All the students involved were born after the fall of Communism. The principal of GOH is concerned that ignorance could lead to the mistakes of the past being replicated.

"The real danger for young people is they don't know anything about [the Communist era]," Principal Svrčina points out.

English philology student Vladimír Zapletal agrees that ignorance is dangerous.

"How can you understand the world if you don't know what happened last forty, fifty, sixty, seventy years?" argues the 24 year old, clearly frustrated. "I mean that's like three generations. It's ridiculous, basically."



"With the Soviet Union forever...but not one minute longer" - A display from GOH's special Communist project. Photo: Michael Huguenin

### Filling the gap

One month after the Communist-based program was completed and the group of students from GOH is together for a feedback session. The students give presentations on what they've learnt. This is a special group. They aren't shy with their opinions and are excited to share their experiences of the cross-border program. It's clear that the past semester has changed their understanding of their own country but also the Visegrad region as a whole. All the students are in their second last year of grammar school, 17-18 years old. The Communist project opened their eyes to a part of their history they've hardly understood before.

"Our parents don't want to talk about it, because they're angry about it," reveals David Syba.

The teenagers believe that the program they've just completed should be available to all young Central Europeans. "They would learn more about Communism," explains 18 year old Magdalena Krejci. "Our history is the most important thing we have."

Dusan Janak from the Silesian University in Opava has also noticed that his students have a thirst for knowledge about Central Europe's recent past.

"A colleague from Hungary [gave] two lectures about [the] history of Hungary in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and because he's from Hungary [he had a lot] concrete information from real life... and there were...many questions," the young lecturer explains. Dr Tadeusz Siwek is glad that programs like the one held at GOH are trying to fill the gap in the next generation's knowledge but he reckons only one thing will truly solve the problem.

"I think it will change after [the] changing [of a] generation because when new teachers...because, now there are teachers [that are] very good and they are mainly younger teachers." ■



Gymnázium Ostrava-Hrabovka, Ostrava, Czech Republic. Photo: Michael Huguenin

### EU's Open Borders Cultivate Regional Identities

An English researcher reckons that the European Union's legislation on borders has helped dormant regional identities grow again. Alistair Ross has noticed that teenagers in the Czech-Polish region of Silesia are becoming more aware of their unique identity.

Alistair Ross believes that the openness of the internal borders of the European Union is helping regional identities develop again. The English researcher has spent time in Silesia on the Czech-Polish border during his project *Young Europeans' Constructions of Identity and Citizenship: Crossing European borders*.

"It seems to me that the sense of being Silesian was re-emerging as a cross-border identity," argues Ross.

"[Children there] were quite happy about talking about their relatives across the borders, you know, we're all Silesians."

The Englishman has noticed in general that the youngsters of the Visegrad region are rejecting the historical baggage of the older members of their families. He believes Central Europe's next generation sees itself as very different to their parents. "One girl describes her grandparents as being almost paranoid about the Germans and [the children] themselves didn't see that at all."

Ross argues that most of the children he has spoken to, aged 12-16, consider accession to the European Union as positive.

"They [are] all of an age where they [can] actually recognise that the frontiers had changed with accession," Ross says. "An event that had happened in their memories."

One of the big changes was the rejection of an aggressive nationalistic sense of identity. "When I was in Warsaw in December, the kids there were distinguishing themselves from the older Poles, who were being quite nationalistic and very Catholic about the cross to commemorate the air crash [that killed Polish President Lech Kaczynski]," Ross points out. "[The] older Poles wanted it to stay [outside the presidential buildings] as a memorial and the younger Poles thought they were behaving rather old-fashioned."

# Bilingual Education is Getting a Grip on the Alsace Region

*In the French-German border region Alsace bilingual education in primary schools is winning territory. It's a gateway to the German labor market, parents say. At the same time the regional language of the area – Alsatian – is losing territory. "It's a pity, because Alsatian is a great tool to learn German," says the teacher Stefanie Anquetin.*

*Bobbie van der List*

Surveys show that bilingual education is gaining grip on the Alsace region. In Alsace bilingual education automatically means French-German education, since Alsace is next to Germany. In normal classes in public schools children get taught German 3 hours a week. But nowadays 90 percent of the pupils between 3 and 18 years old and are taught with the bilingual method. That means 12 hours in French and 12 hours in German per week. The idea of bilingual education comes from the private school Association for Bilingualism in Primary school Classes (ABCM Zweisprachigkeit in Alsatian).

## "We're forced to speak French"

Behind the lemonade stand in the back of the Social Cultural Center of Haguenau, Stefani Anquetin watches the children of the ABCM perform Alsatian songs on stage. The theater is packed with mothers and fathers. Mothers waving, while fathers try to get a good spot to put their kids on video. The performance of today is the kick off for the Week of Alsatian Culture and Language, which is an annual week of festivities in Haguenau, from the first until the 8th of April.



This way for the theater night of the ABCM school at the Social Cultural Center in Haguenau.  
Photo: Bobbie van der List

## ABCM Zweisprachigkeit school started the bilingual revolution

In 1990 parents founded the ABCM Zweisprachigkeit school, to teach in the regional language Alsatian. Until then teachers only taught half an hour in German per day at primary schools. Before the foundation the national government's response on parents request for bilingual education was time and again negative.

Slowly ABCM schools were opened throughout the Alsace region. The school was partly financed by the Alsace region and imp. Most of the ABCM schools were primary schools. In the beginning in 1991 ABCM opened bilingual schools in Saverne, Lutterbach and Ingersheim. Not that long after that other cities and villages followed these three cities. Nowadays there are also ABCM schools in the following places in the Alsace area:

- Sarreguermes
- Sarreguermes Beausoleil
- Schweighouse sur Moder
- Haguenau
- Saverne
- Strasbourg
- Dingersheim
- Bindenheim
- Lutterbach
- Mulhouse



Teachers serving drinks and cakes behind the lemonade stand.  
Photo: Bobbie van der List



'Freedom for our language', the poster of the ABCM school says.  
Photo: Bobbie van der List

Hand in hand the pupils between 3 and 5 years old walk past the parents towards the stage. Once on stage they form a circle and start singing songs. Behind them a poster with the text Friehjoher fer unser Sproch. It sums up the goal of their gathering: 'Freedom for our Language'.

After the songs, some of the older children of the ABCM primary school read texts on stage. Anquetin can't help laughing when she translates the last part of all their performances. "They read some old Alsatian texts, but each of them ends with 'I speak Alsatian, but I'm forced to speak French.'"

After World War II everything that was associated with Germany was banned in France. And so was Alsatian. It's a Germanic language and sounds pretty much similar to German. For French speaking people at least. President Jean Peter of both the elementary and primary ABCM school says that now they can freely use the language, "without being ashamed". Anquetin calls them provoking texts.

Whereas in the countryside the chance of finding people speaking Alsatian is large, the chance of finding Alsatian speaking persons in Strasbourg is little. That doesn't mean that the ABCM concept didn't resonate in other parts of the Alsace. The private ABCM initiative eventually even led to the political decision to introduce bilingual education within public schools.



'Don't open the door' sign at ABCM school.  
Photo: Bobbie van der List

“It was already in the 60s up

### Paris doesn't care about the frontier

Vice-president Pascale Schmidiger of the Alsace Regional Council is in charge of bilingualism in the Alsace area. She just finished a meeting in Strasbourg with the Office for Alsatian Language and Culture (OLCA). That's the organization which was set up by the region Alsace to promote and preserve the Alsatian language.

She arrives 20 minutes late because the meeting was delayed. Together with the director of OLCA, Isabelle Schoepfer, they were mapping the number of children who are currently following bilingual education. "How old they are and what kind of people." 23.000 pupils in the age category between 3 and 18. She's happy with that number, she says. But not satisfied yet. Her ambition is that bilingual education eventually will be obligatory. Both women are heavily defenders of bilingual education. Schoepfer seems to have all the know how when it comes to bilingualism in the region. Besides that it soon becomes clear that she is very much attached with the Alsatian culture.

"Today the state of Alsatian is a real question. In the past speaking Alsatian was a big facility to speak German. The structure of the sentences were the same. German was the mother language." It made it easier to find a job on the German side of the border. "The government doesn't support Alsatian. The region does however. In France we are a country with Paris, and the rest. Paris doesn't care about the frontier. We and Germany, together with Spain and Italy all have regional dialect." Just like teacher Anquetin she points out that France didn't sign the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

They alized the national government wouldn't support their dual ambition of bilingual education and preserving Alsatian. That was why people who created ABCM took initiative in their own hands. In that respect the regional authorities have the same goals as ABCM: maintain Alsatian and establish more bilingual classes. The growing importance of bilingualism has been going on from the 90s, in bilingual private and public schools. Why do they think now it the time to develop the language even more?

"We try to convince parents of the importance for their children to learn German. I do that when I talk at conferences about Alsatian or bilingualism. And they say they understand now. The mind of the parents has changed, because they realize they need the language." Schmidiger explains how many inhabitants of the Alsace lost their jobs in Germany, because of their lack of knowledge about the German language.

and 70s that people gave on Alsatian”

Besides that, entrepreneurs in the region aren't doing well on the German market, OLCA director Schloepfer says. "The Chamber of Commerce is always angry about the situation. For the Alsatian society it's difficult to sell, without being able to speak German. German firms were always used to people from the Alsace speaking their own German."

Nowadays people speak English to communicate. When she thinks about it, Schloepfer almost turns red. That's how angry it makes her. "The message gets lost when they speak English, because it's not my language, neither is German. "There's a generation, people around their 30s and 40s, that Schmidiger and Schloepfer both call 'the lost generation'. "It's a big problem, people from that age category were sacrificed, they don't speak German. Now they sometimes need to learn German just because of a job offer in Germany." Those people are the parents of the children that go to the bilingual elementary primary schools today.

### Dialects are disappearing everywhere

Professor Roland Willemys is specialized in linguistics and has studied the regional dialect Alsatian and bilingual education in the 90s. "Bilingual education is meant for parents who want their children to find a better job in Germany. Wages are higher in Germany and work is far more interesting. Besides, the Alsace isn't as good developed as the German regions when it comes to the economic level."

So if parents want their children to learn German for only economic reasons, does that mean there isn't a real need for the Alsatian language?

"The dialect is disappearing everywhere in the world. It's difficult to do something about it and I think it's too late to protect it. If I look at that situation I think it can have negative results when the dialect would disappear. But that's just because I think it's bad when a language dies. But people who are supposed to use the language think differently, I'm a linguistics professor." He doesn't believe that learning German for the most people is related to their affection for the Alsatian culture. "It was already in the 60s and 70s that people gave up on



Pascale Schmidiger (right) and Isabelle Schoepfer in front of OLCA.  
Photo: Bobbie van der List

Alsatian. But some parents did start free schools, where there was the possibility to get education in both languages," says Willemys – referring to ABCM. Later on, the government supported this way of teaching in public school. "First on the primary school and then in the high school." Overall Willemys is positive about bilingual education. He can't see any negative consequences on getting taught in German for half of the time. "No, everywhere you see that bilingual education has positive effects. Children are learning German on a playful way." insists Willemys.

The French institution responsible for education is called the Academy. It has done several studies, and each time children who got bilingual education scored higher than pairs who followed monolingual education, Willemys argues. "Even the national government is getting more positive." Although Vice-President of the region Schmidiger and the ABCM community believe that the central government is working against them, he needs to think pretty hard to find organized resistance. "Well, the only resistance there is, comes from the trade unions. There are competitive exams (called 'concours' in French) for teachers if they want to get a position in a school. The one who scores the best gets a permanent nomination. But in the Alsace that gave problems. Because there they wanted and still want teachers who speak both French and German. The trade unions were against these measures."



The hallway of the kindergarten school ABCM in Haguenau.  
Photo: Bobbie van der List

**Not allowed to talk German with pupils**

At the office of the Alsace trade union of primary school teachers (SNUiip) it looks rush hour. The phones are ringing constantly at the trade union for primary public school teachers in the Alsace. As if a disaster just happened. Doors open and close. National television is coming in a few hours. Just a few hours ago the government announced that 120 teaching posts



Corinne Nicolet behind her desk.  
Photo: Bobbie van der List

at a primary school. It really upsets her that they are forced to teach in German the Alsace. But one would say learning German is a good. Especially near the border, with an interesting labor market on the German side. So why be against bilingual education?

“We are against bilingual education because it’s imposed on us. We don’t have a say during the whole process of implementation,” Nicolet explains. If parents want to get bilingual education for their children, they have the right to go to the municipality where they live and ask for a bilingual class.

“We are against bilingual education because it’s imposed on us and we don’t have a say during the whole process of implementation”

If the regional Academy (Académie de Strasbourg) gives a green signal, nothing stands parents in the way to open a bilingual class. “It’s a private school, within a public school,” she shouts. All of the schools in the Alsace are obligated to open such a class, whenever at least 16 children can be found to go in that class. As teachers and board of the school you don’t have any say in this procedure or while the implementation process.

It’s frustrating, and causes a lot of practical problems, Nicolet explains. First of all she believes bilingual education is an elitist thing, just for children with higher educated parents. “It’s a strategy to get more attention.”

That leads to another issue which seems to make Nicolet even more angry. She holds up a piece of paper with statistics about bilingual classes and monolingual classes that had to close down or were opened during the first months of 2011 in the Strasbourg area. Her finger goes from the top of the page, to the bottom. “Bilingual, bilingual, bilingual. Only bilingual classes opened.” At the same time she shows that most of the monolingual classes closed their doors during that same period.

And bilingual education costs the government more money, she emphasizes. While everywhere in France there are cutbacks, here more expensive classes open and the cheaper ones have to close.

**Bilingualism in a transition phase**

Vice-president of the regional council advises to be aware of the trade union rhetoric about bilingual education.

“They are politically against bilingualism. They always say that bilingual education isn’t for the republic, as if it’s something elitist. But in my village Saint Louis in the Southern part of Alsace, most of the people who use bilingual education are lower educated people, and a lot of immigrants.”

Parents realize that their children have a chance to learn German, and might be able to go to a German university, or even work in Germany when they finish, she explains.

However, she acknowledges the practical problems in bilingual classes within public schools. “We are in a transition phase.” Although the ABCM school mentality and ambitions are different from the public schools, ABCM seems like an example for all bilingual schools.

After the children have stopped singing and most of them went home, she’s enjoying the sunny weather just outside of the theatre. “We know students who went to school in the ‘90s, and work in Germany now. After elementary school and primary school students can go on to ABCM high school to get a German Abitur and a Baccalauréat.” Then they can go to one of the French universities, but also to one of Germany’s universities.

But for head master Jean Peter it’s not only economic reasons that make bilingual education profitable. “Children need to think in French, when they talk in French and think in German when they talk in German. But you should also be able to laugh in both languages and make jokes. When you can tell a joke in German, you know you’re truly bilingual,” Peter explains. ■

# Proud to be Polish

The small town of Cieszyn has a long and rich history as Poland’s oldest town, legend would have us believe it is over 1200 years old. Due to territorial dispute in 1920 over the region of Cieszyn Silesia between Poland and Czechoslovakia many people found themselves living in another country overnight.

Piers d’Orgee



A Divided Town: The River Olze separates Cieszyn in Poland on the Right from Cesky Tesin in the Czech Republic on the Left  
Photo: Piers d’Orgee

The small town of Cieszyn has a long and rich history as Poland’s oldest town, legend would have us believe it is over 1200 years old.

This action has left many of Polish heritage on the Czech side of Silesia, which is now called Zaolzie. Still today there is a minority of Poles living in the region that number roughly 38,000, of which 3,500 remain in Cesky Tesin formed in 1920, separated from Polish Cieszyn by a river that flows through the centre of the town.

**An irregular situation**

There has been some unrest between the Czech and Polish community however, as many Czechs believe that the Polish minority should be speaking the national language. The argument is that as the Polish were already in the region before the borders were set, why should they assimilate?

“We didn’t move here, our ancestors have lived here forever, we love our traditions, our culture, our language of course,” said Daniela Durczok, an English teacher at a Polish school in Cesky Tesin.

“I for example do not have any family in Poland, it’s a very usual question ‘you have family in Poland?’ and I say no, for we have lived here for an age, and it is normal for us to be here,” said colleague and Biology teacher Ewa Troszok.

In 1910, a census took place that counted 124,805 Poles in Zaolzie (69.3%) of the population, just eleven years later the figure had fallen to 68,034 due to the feeling that ethnicity was defined by state citizenship. Despite the long legacy of Polish community, there can often be discrimination from Czechs towards the Polish, particularly visible since the EU directive to give extra rights to minorities that are more than 10% of a region’s population.



“Put Polishness First”: A sign urging members of the Polish minority to declare themselves Polish on the census

“In communism, the communist program was to have one nation, they do not want to have any minorities and children in communism didn’t learn history. Even now if you meet somebody in the street you hear ‘what are you doing here? You are Polish? Go across the border!’ so I say I am at home, my ancestors were born here, I live here, I didn’t move here.” Said Durczok.

The lack of knowledge of historical events in the region may be partly to blame for the discrimination. Others believe that there are other reasons among the younger generations for such acts.

Roman Wirth, of the Polish minority in Cesky Tesin, said that many of his Polish friends believe that the amount of money the government spends making bilingual signs for two languages that are so similar is a waste of money.

The language issue has also become a problem, Wirth was at the Kongres Polakow (Polish Kongres) looking for advice. “I come from my office of work, and the woman who works there says I have to speak Czech, because I am in Czech Republic, but this is not true.”

The Kongres Polakow President, Jozef Szymeczek said: “We represent the Polish Minority politically, and independently and if there is a problem we can do something about it. We have a newspaper (Glos Ludu) and we also look after the Polish schools in Czech Republic. We are looking for media, as we only have one show a week in Polish for 5 minutes.”



A local newspaper for the Polish minority  
Photo: Piers d'Orgee

## The History Of Cieszyn/Cesky Tesin

The History of the region, specifically the immediate vicinity of Cieszyn, and its designation in terms of nationality is one of constant change. The region was hotly contested by the Czech, Polish and Hungarian Kingdom’s back in the middle ages, as the ill-defined borders met in the mountains to the east of the ‘Duchy of Teschen’ where Cieszyn is now situated. In the 1700s, the region of Silesia came under control of Austria. In 1742 the Kingdom of Germany took control of much of Silesia, leaving the southeastern part, including Teschen, to Austria.

In the wake of the First World War there was much political unrest over whether Poland or Czechoslovakia would take the whole Silesian region. The argument resulted in a Czech invasion that was triggered by the Polish taking an election in the Cieszyn area. The Czechs stated that there should be no poll as the region was under dispute and was not allowed sovereignty until its future was definite. The area was important to the Czechs as a Czech railroad went through the region to Slovakia and was one of only two railroads that did this. After these events, the River Olze divided the Duchy of Teschen. The West side was given to Czechoslovakia and the East to Poland.

At the dawn of the Second World War, Poland retook control of Zaolzie under the Munich Agreement of 1938, which annexed large parts of Czechoslovakia to Germany and Zaolzie to Poland. The Polishisation of the region led to local government officials being fired and replaced by people from Warsaw, and Czech and German being made illegal in the area, many of these ethnic groups felt forced to leave. The region then stayed within the borders of Poland after the German invasion of 1939.

As Poland came under control of the USSR the 1920 borders were once again restored and thus the border has stayed the same shape ever since. The German minority that had been around for hundreds of years were driven out leaving only Poles and Czechoslovaks. A treaty was signed in 1958 between Warsaw and Prague agreeing on the status of the border.

Since the joining of the both the countries to the EU, and thus entrance to the zone encompassed by the Schengen Agreement, there has been next to no dispute over the territory as the borders were opened and free movement of individuals was implemented.



The bilingual insignia of the Polish Congress in Cesky Tesin

## The politics

“The relations between the government and this organisation (Kongres Polakow) are really good, and correct. The Polish and Czech governments are in similar organisations such as NATO and EU so this relationship is now really good and the best it has been in history. However, in this area the problem comes from history, before there was a problem of this territory, there

“I have a problem in The office, the women who is working there say as usual that I have to speak Czech, which is not true. As the minority I think we are 10 or 12% here in Cesky Cieszyn and they are lying that I have to speak Czech. So I am here (Kongres Polakow) to find out what the truth is.”

**Roman Wirth**  
Polish Minority, Cesky Tesin



A Poster promoting Polishness shows a couple in classic attire.  
Photo: Piers d'Orgee



A Year 7 Biology Class in Cesky Tesin's Polish School  
Photo: Piers d'Orgee

were people fighting here about whether this territory will become Poland or Czech... it is a very complicated history, and to be correct is difficult.” said Szymeczek.

This sort of history reflects the policies the Czech and Polish governments have towards each other, and how they have behaved through history. Dr Artur Wolek, of the Polish Institute of Science, “I would say that there are two channels one is that officially Poland and the Czech Republic are close allies and they declare close as possible cooperation. On the other hand, I would say the second channel is that they do not cooperate. There are small projects for cross-border cooperation, for NGOs but strategically I would say there is no cooperation at the EU level, or even at any level.”

Whether or not this reluctance on a national scale to be truly close to each other and treat one another as neighbours has much to do with the feelings of the people is not concrete, however it does show that there is a certain amount of unease between the two nations, despite being geographical neighbours.

## The people

“I won’t call it a prejudice, but you know, a small nation (Czech Rep.), quite similar and you can’t take them seriously, I suppose it is a definition of a stereotype, you can’t take Czechs seriously. They don’t fight, and it is quite important in Polish culture to be brave. Their view of Polish culture is a strange mixture of peasants and a military culture. They are richer, and everyone knows Czechs dislike Poles,” said Wolek

“On the Czech side, there are intellectuals and politicians who like Poland and and it is very similar but many see the Polish as catholic bigots, and they are poor and not industrious.”

“Some would say that it is only really the language that makes the nations close, but on the other hand they are extremely far and opposite to one another. They are opposites, like Britain and America, on one hand the language brings them close, on the other hand they are quite far.”

In Zaolzie, as the two cultures mix there has become a different trend between the two communities, as the knowledge of

local history is generally not so great. The sprouting of many Polish organisations in the region and the implementation of bilingual signage has meant that the young have become more nationalistic.

“The problem is the new generation have this idea about identity and nationalism about these historical files and legends. Their knowledge is not so great and from this came the xenophobia,” said Szymeczek. “From this came the xenophobic vandalism. Some individuals or small groups they paint colours over the Polish.”

These problems of Czechs and Poles are not solely related to the Polish minority in Zaolzie, and the numbers of those of Czech heritage who dislike the minority are also small in number. There is also a problem of drug tourism to the town of Cesky Tesin, as the laws on drug possession are far less strict than in Poland. There has also been the problem of fights between groups of Czechs and Poles.

“When you are drunk sometimes you find a group of another nationality and you may start a fight, and hit one another.” said one Czech source.

It is not always Czechs starting the fights, “some guys from Poland come here and they drink they are looking for a fight from the other side of the river, they are from Poland, not about minority.”

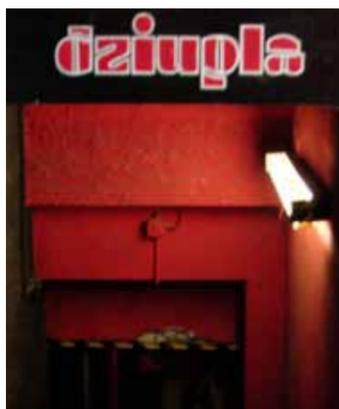
“Many of us live in the same neighbourhoods, so from our childhoods we had no problems but the problem is that some people come from Poland looking for drugs, because the law don't get you.”

And so it may well be that the prejudice is not simply aimed at the Polish minority of Cesky Tesin, but also at the Poles that come to the area looking for trouble. The lack of historical knowledge and understanding of the situation among the people is also key to discrimination caused.

## The culture

One of the challenges facing the Polish Minority is keeping their culture alive. There are organisations that keep the Polish-Silesian culture alive. These include art exhibits, dances and plays.

One such place is the small establishment of Dziupla, aimed at young people it is a place where artists and acts from around Zaolzie can show their art to others, keeping culture alive. Tomasz Pustowka helps organise many of these events and he believes that the wealth of the region comes from its great mixes of culture. “All these cultures together make up the special spirit of this region and for me I think it



**Dziupla: Displaying the artwork of a local Polish artist**  
Photo: Piers d'Orgee

is of huge happiness to have two languages, and it is of huge advantage to life.”

“I think there is always some problems at borders, because borders are complicated, you have two nations with problems from history that is more difficult to solve now as some are hundreds of years old. Yes, we have problems but we shouldn't think about it too much, I think. We should just fight to maintain this culture.”

Along with the culture there is also the language spoken in this region. While the community calls itself Polish, many of them think themselves as Silesian and speak a dialect that is based on Polish but now includes many Czech words.

“Because we didn't have any relatives in Poland, so we didn't have the contact with any original Polish people, we just live here, we use for communication we use our dialect, we don't use strict Polish language, it's a language based on Polish, but it is a dialect. There is more and more – especially with the younger generation – there is more Czech words,” explained Daniela Durczok. “It is now closer to Czech than it is Polish due to assimilation.”

“I am a teacher of ballroom dance also and we have some show, and at this show we have Czech and Polish students so my partner was speaking in Czech and I was speaking in Polish. This woman came to me and she said to me: How can I imagine to speak in Polish in show like this? She paid for a ticket to see a show in Czech, not Polish, she didn't understand anything. She said: 'I am Slovak and I am not here speaking Slovak!'. On the other side someone had coe from the middle of the Czech republic and he had never seen anything like it, and that it was a really good bilingual show.”

**Ewa Troszok** Biology Teacher



**Cieszyn Town Square: There has been little interaction between the side in Poland and the Polish minority in Cesky Tesin since the border opened**  
Photo: Piers d'Orgee

## The two towns

Since the border opened there is now free movement for all the people in both halves of Cieszyn. During the Communist regime there was very little movement over the river as people looked across at a land that was so difficult to get to but no more than 100ft away.

To cross the border required a special invitation approved by governments that were very hard to get hold of, part of why many Czechs in the wider region of Moravia, where Zaolzie is placed did not understand the presence of this Polish community when they went travelling for university or to work in other places. Many people asked “If you are Polish, why are you not in Poland?”



**Czech - Polish border**  
Source: Google Maps

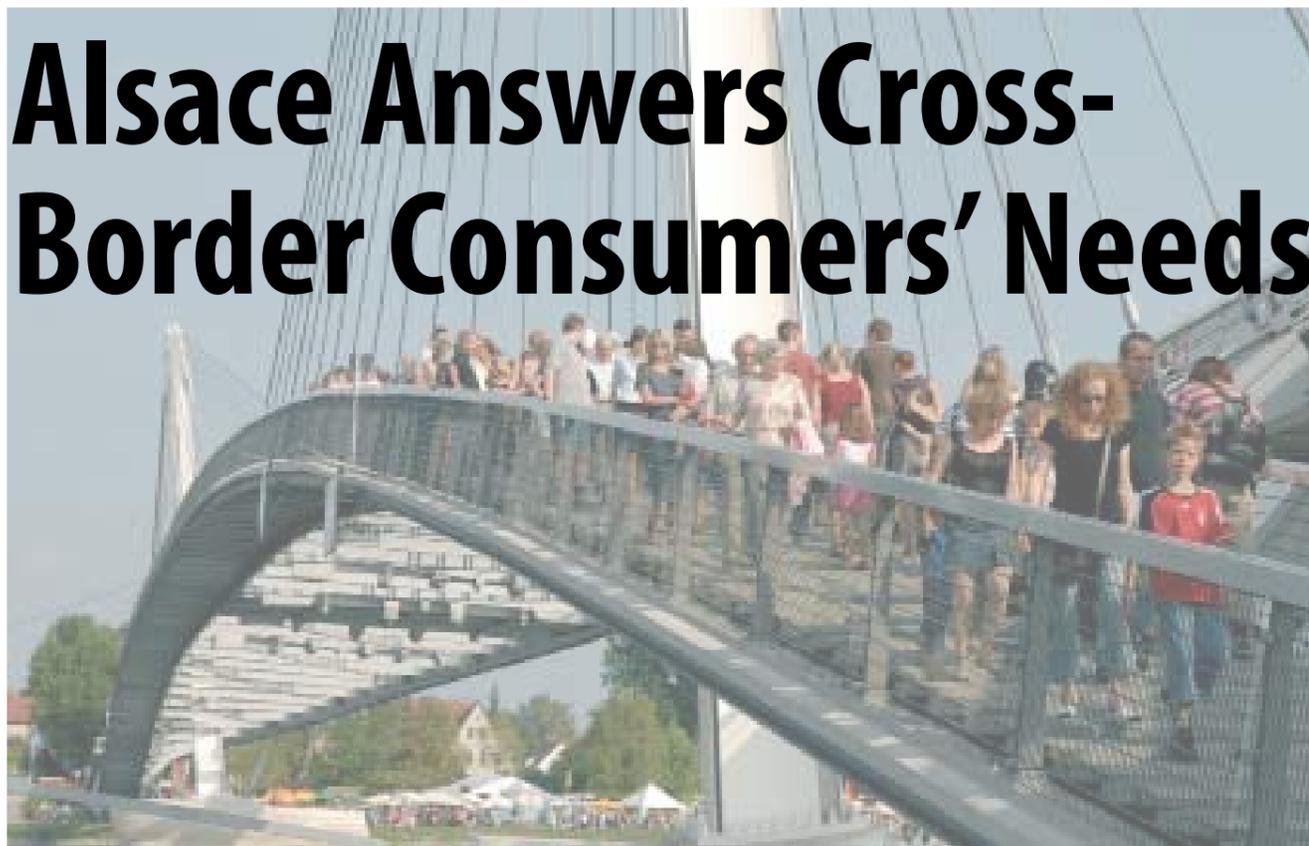
“When I was a student at University I lived and shared a room with a person from Opava, a town nearby and I told her I was Polish. This was many years ago during communist time, and in this hostel for students, and at ten to four there was a show on the radio, only for ten minutes, in Polish. The whole station was check, but for ten minutes there was a show for Polish minority. She prepared two alarm clocks for when the program started and so I could not hear, then when that one stopped another one started. So for ten minutes I couldn't hear a word!”

**Daniela Durczo** English Teacher

However, in the present day, the border is completely free, you can walk over the two bridges that join Cieszyn and Cesky Tesin over the River Olze without any hindrance or inconvenience. ‘It is better, you do not have to give your passport, there are no Police there, and during communism you needed an invitation. It was really a problem, I remember that with my mother they did not want us to pass and on the opposite side my father was waiting,’ said Roman Wirth.

“The town mayor's say that the relationship between the two towns is really good.” Szymeczek agreed with the statement as a whole but added that the community on the Polish side did not want much to do with the Polish Minority on the Czech side. People still think of it as a border, and allowing free movement doesn't always change the way people think. ■

# Alsace Answers Cross-Border Consumers' Needs



Mimram Bridge, built in 2004 between Strasbourg and Kehl. Photo : City of Strasbourg

Public institutions coordinate to build a real common market between the two sides of the Rhine. Strasbourg and Kehl became the European laboratory of cross-border consumption. Although there is still difficulties to implement it mainly because of the shopkeepers in Alsace.

Margot Perrier

The bus stops in the main street of Kehl. When the doors open a stream of French costumers get off it. They are relieved to breath a bit of fresh air after being crammed together like sardines. Every Saturday is the same, bus full and no free places in the carparks of the little German town. In the main road you feel surrounded by French people running from shop to shop to fill up their baskets with groceries. On the edges of the Rhine, Kehl is very close to Strasbourg (5km). And French costumers do not hesitate to cross borders to shop there.

Cross-border consumers are the perfect example of the "homo economicus" from the third millennium. Consumers always find a way to pay less for their shopping bags' contents. Samira lives in Strasbourg and she goes every Saturday to Kehl with her children. According to her, life is really expensive. "We do not have the choice. We don't cross Rhine for pleasure but because it is less expensive."

Quite ordinary this movement of population within Schengen area is developed between the two regions of Alsace (France) and Baden-Württemberg (Germany). Thus 11% of Strasbourg's citizens' expenses is spent in Germany.



This rush on German shops has been studied by different public organisations. The purpose is to know more about this phenomenon. Mainly all economics actors want to help French consumers buying in Germany. Mostly because "Transborder commerce have good repercussions on the regional economy," explains Gerard Traband. In his book, this former regional politician describes how important the cooperation is between the two sides of the border.

## Shopkeepers defend their position.

But not everybody likes the promotion of German shops to French consumers. The shops are the most reactive to this cross-borders activity. Pierre Bardet is the president of the "Vitrines de Strasbourg", a corporation of shopkeepers. He expresses his fear with the flight of more and more French costumers, even if "they are not the richest ones".

“What is the purpose of destroying borders if there is still taxation frontiers?”

To avoid French consumers' escape, the shops in Strasbourg have decided to stay opened during public holidays. For example last year nearly all shops in Strasbourg stayed open on Saturday the 8th of May. The German city of Kehl "scowled" adds Pierre Bardet, laughing like a child proud of his new trick.

According to him the most efficient reply is to "drag the German consumers from Germany". To do so, he has invented the first German-language magazine about Strasbourg, published in Germany. *Bienvenue* comes out four times a year. And the success is guaranteed: the number of German consumers increases during the weeks following the publishing. At the same time, Strasbourg encourages its citizens to cross Rhine via new transport, "it is fair enough we try to charm costumers in Germany," says Pierre Bardet.

After the increase of the value added taxes in Germany prices are less different. Since 2007, the value added taxes represents 19% of the retail price (as against 16% previously) It was not enough to ease Pierre Bardet. First of all, the increase does not concern all products as food goods. So the discount shops will still be more attractive.

Secondly, the taxes linked to tobacco are not part of the value added taxes but the excise duties. These very specific taxes increase much faster in France than in Germany and the price of German cigarettes still makes the French smokers dream. Since November 2010, the price of a packet of cigarettes is around 6 euros in France. In Germany even after the increase of 6% of the packet's price, it is still lower at approximately 25%.

Pierre Bardet regrets a European Union "which is not equal for all members". He complains, "what is the purpose of destroying borders if there is still taxation frontiers?" This owner of shops in Strasbourg understands how difficult it can be for the tobacconists. Once again they were scared in November 2010 to lose the market. Since the tobacconists in Strasbourg had to find other products to sell: groceries, drinks, "when they had not declared themselves bankrupt."

Pierre Bardet's worst fear currently is not about taxes but about the new tramway line between Strasbourg and Kehl. "To be honest I am not satisfied. The tramway won't bring many German consumers from the little city of Kehl." The tram will reach the metro area of Strasbourg (639,000 inhabitants) with Kehl (34,000 inhabitants). However it is going to make life easier for the customers who use public transport. The consequence of the tram could be a raise of French consumers in Kehl.

## All roads lead to Kehl

In 2014, the tramway line will open between Strasbourg and Kehl. The regional actors want to improve the exchanges and help the French consumers going there. This tram project is French. It has been built by the public transport's company of Strasbourg : CTS.

CTS created nearly 50 years ago the bus 21. Created in 1962, it was at the time the easiest way to go to Kehl : after 20 minutes drive the bus stopped in the city centre of Kehl. It was also the cheapest. Still now the bus 21 is really important for people living in Strasbourg. 3.000 people take the bus everyday. And the price is the same as a normal bus ticket in Strasbourg : meaning € 1.40. Generally there are two buses and on Saturday a third one is sent on the circuit. In spite of this effort the people using bus 21 on Saturday complain because of the crowd and the regular delay.



Bus 21 from Strasbourg stops in the city center of Kehl. Photo : Anouk Mentink

According to Camille Janton, press officer at the CTS, the delays are a real problem. "I cannot lie : Strasbourg needs the Tram line as soon as possible. It is not a viable system with the few buses." Till then the bus users will have to sweat themselves out. On on hand Joël Merand bus driver for the line 21 admits the existence of a recurrent issue. On the other hand, speaking in name of his colleagues, Joël refuses to integrate a fourth bus on Saturday. "It is going to change all our working conditions."

The trade Union defending the drivers is worried. The bus-drivers from the bus 21 do not belong to the CTS as bus drivers from the other lines. They have been hired by an independent company : Transdev. There is less employees to defend their rights. In December 2010 they have decided to go on strike to have a 2,7% wage increase. This amount will count for the severance pay when the bus 21 will stop. But officially it is for the severity of working conditions.

“ 44 %  
of Kehl's  
customers  
are French. ”

### Know Thyself

The idea to create a new tram line came because the public institutions took notice of cross-border shoppers' needs. To understand their needs different regional politicians have ordered surveys about Alsace and Strasbourg the last five years. Even the Regional Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) has created over 2009 an observatory of trans-border consumption.

According to it, between 40% and 44% of costumers in Kehl are French. It represents 11% of Strasbourg households expenditure. Compare to the German costumers coming into Strasbourg it is an important phenomenon. German people in Strasbourg do not spend more than € 44,000 in shopping: only 1% of their spending.

Thanks to this survey, it is known what consumers are looking for across Rhine. In fact, the consumers spend more money buying non food goods (75% of their purchase). It is especially for cleaning products, tobacco and make-up. In this survey all money spent abroad is called "flight of capital". It seems that the acceptance of that phenomenon has its limits.

More important, the surveys are also about the expectations of these consumers. Kehl shops want to offer the perfect match with French needs. Fiona Härtel is director of Kehl Marketing. She is glad about the surveys. She wants to know about the influx of consumers in our city to improve the services. "I do not see there's a concurrence between the two cities. It is a common space where people move naturally."

It is essential for the German city to be sure that all French needs will be satisfied there. Always in the same survey from the CCI, the consumers also express the problem of parking in Kehl and the traffic jam on the bridges. They admit that it is difficult to reach Kehl.

This regular response allowed the authorities to act accordingly. The construction of the passerelle Mimram in 2004 for pedestrians is an example. Alsace has opened the access to the Bade-Wutemberg investing millions for cross-border infrastructure . Yves, a French student goes at least twice a week in Kehl to buy tobacco. He takes the bus in the winter. And when the sun is back he rather prefers wearing his rollers to go there through the passerelle.

All these projects are not funded by Alsace. The new bridge for very fast trains (TGV), built in 2010, has been funded by Germany. It was one of the consequences of German bombings during the Second World war. Road-bridges are very important because most of the people who cross borders take their car. But it is a problem. For example during a legal holiday in France, when shops are only opened in Germany, bridges are completely stuck. Strasbourg is the main contributor to projects as bridges or new trains to reach Kehl and its shops. Mainly because the city is bigger and richer than its German neighbour.



Yves is from Strasbourg. Currently he studies in Berlin. Today, he came with his mother and his sister.  
In the bag : teats / shower gel / cereals / tooth brush / chewing-gum / deodorant / Easter decorations.

Photo : Anouk Mentik

Franscesco and his twelve years old Marco have been roped into shopping. He complains because of the price of parking places.  
In the bag : washing powder / toothpaste / cleaning agent.



Photo : Anouk Mentik



Girl shopping for Justine and Fabienne. According to them, the clothes could be less expensive.  
In their bags : cigarettes / a dress for a wedding / a belt / a black top.

Photo : Anouk Mentik

### Three reasons for such different prices

The national level of taxation is the main reason. Value added taxes and excise duties are not the same and so the price of cigarettes for example is lower in Germany. The packaging is the second one. The packet of cigarettes seems less expensive in Germany because it contains only seventeen cigarettes as against twenty in the French one.

The third reason is the most insidious. Some products have already captured the French market and so they can increase the prices without loosing the consumers. But in Germany the same product has to seduce the German customers. It is the tactic of L'Oréal. The French company slashes prices in Germany. The hair fixation (brand L'oreal) costs 8,42 euros in France as against 3,89 euros in Germany.



Consumers in Kehl. Photo : Anouk Mentik



On the window of a Kebab restaurant appears the sticker : "Here we speak French." The shopkeepers in Kehl need to communicate with the consumers coming from France.

Photo : Anouk Mentik

“ We don't cross Rhine for pleasure but because it is less expensive. ”

They publish a booklet every year in French 'The Guide for a European Consumer: Buying in Germany'. In it, the French consumers can find all information about the number of cigarettes they can bring back in France, or where to pay the value-added taxes when they buy a car in Germany.

Based in Kehl, the association has been recognised as useful by European Union. So it is now linked to the French and the German European Centre for Consumers (ECC). It is the only region which welcomes a bi-national European organism to take care of cross-border consumers. European Commission has decided to associate it with Euro-Info-Conso because the association already knew the situation. The ECC is more and more well known as an institution to help citizens. In 2010, the ECC of Kehl received 7,800 complaints. It is 30% more than in 2009. The ECC has a new hobbyhorse: defending the web consumers (see the second article). The ECC is also very attached to two files: an equal access to trans-border healthcare and the creation of a cross-border telecom package.

According to the costumers they would rather prefer not to cross the Rhine and stay in Strasbourg. To Samira, the main important thing the public institutions should do is not to help her to reach Kehl easily but to give her back her former buying power. ■

### Protection for the costumers

Helping trans-border consumers to reach Kehl is not always in their interests without any protection. "Ici on parle français" ("Here we speak French"). This little sticker is glued on many Kehl's shop windows. In streets of this little German town French speakers are everywhere, bags in two hands. Most of the French do not speak German and can sign contracts without understanding it. More often they do not get what is written on the packaging and then are badly surprised back home.

A bi-national association described these consequences of a wild trans-border consumption. Euro-Info-Conso was born in 1993. This organisation tries to help French and German consumers in the border region. Its main purpose is to inform consumers and public institutions and to solve conflicts between costumers and sellers.

**Q & A : Gerard Traband**

Gerard Traband is a former professor of geography and a regional politician. He wrote *Erase the Border?*.

He explains why German-French border in Alsace is still established. According to him the border "has not disappeared and citizens still have to get over it."

**What is the main reason of your theory?**

There are two tied reasons. First of all the past in the region Alsace has built this border

stronger than any other in France. Alsace became French and German many times during the past 150 years. People memory is more powerful than books of history. And French citizens from Alsace still act and believe in this border even if the frontier post disappeared.

**Even the Schengen Agreement in 1985 abolished border controls. And so it permits to the consumers to buy freely in both countries.**

Trans-border consumption proves that the border still exists! Political institutions via the Schengen agreement put into contact two very different societies. This difference of price pushes people buying in Germany. If the two regions

were similar there would not be all these exchanges and all this wealth.

**Does that mean that Alsace and Strasbourg needs this difference for their economy?**

Yes. In one hand we need to thrive on this difference and develop it. But on the other hand we should be very careful. Difference is not indifference. And we need the contact to increase local economy. Contact means a total reorganisation of the territory with less borders. And as I told you the geographic space is one thing but the mental one is another. Soon or later we will have a problem because people won't understand their space anymore. They need time.

## Mediator for E-Consumers

The bi-national European Centre for Consumers (ECC) is the new mediator for web-consumers. In 2009, the ECC has decided to take care of a new form of consumers: the e-consumers. The mediator has been installed to solve the problems between them and the sellers and web-sites.

The French consumers who cross borders for shopping are not always physically present in the other side of Rhine. Using the Internet, French costumers go on German web-sites to order hardware, hi-fi, or small/major appliances. The data from the web-consumption in France are even significant. The Mediаметrie poll institute reveals that 28 million of French have bought at least once on the web in 2010 (as against 25 million in 2009)

The ECC in Kehl received more and more complaints about the Internet. In 2010, 72% of cases they dealt with were about e-costumers. In this context, Felix Braun in charge of the e-commerce point at the

centre has asked in 2008 for a pilot scheme. He wanted to prove that French and German societies need a mediator in that e-commerce field. His idea was to create the first position of mediator in the region of Baden and then extend it in Germany.

French consumers from Alsace could ask for help to the mediator, only if they bought on a web-site from Baden. Andrea Klinder, jurist, is the mediator. "I am never bored because there is so many cases to treat." Andrea Klinder is in contact with the consumers via internet. In two years, she has treated 500 cases and has solved 80% of them.

Thanks to this proximity with the consumers, the ECC is able to discover the new rip off techniques on the web. "We need to be constantly on alert. When you found a swindling an other one appears," explains Felix Braun.

According to him, it is a real success. He has already given advices to public institutions about it. "It will come for sure in Germany." But Felix Braun is less confident about France. "This country does not have a culture of mediation." France does not have any mediator for consumers. Felix Braun complains "We have to work on our own."

## No Denmark for Young LOVERS

Copenhagen's train station. Trains to Sweden.  
Photo Ana Munoz Padros

*Falling in love is not easy. But if you do so to a Danish citizen, more intricate problems, rather than the expected culture shock, related with bureaucracy and immigration laws will be sum to the usual issues in every couple.*

Ana Munoz Padros

This is what happened between Nanna and Basir. Coming from different cultures and having different backgrounds was not a barrier big enough to give up on trying to work out what began as love-at-first-sight.

However, Denmark does not look like as "the happiest country in the world" if you are a non-European willing to live here with your partner or spouse. Eva Ersbøll, Senior research fellow, PhD at the Danish Institute for Human Rights, reckons that Denmark might have the "most restrictive legislation" among the EU when it comes to family reunion. The 24-years-rule might be the most famous one, even in an

international context. It bans marriages between Danes and non-EU foreigners under 24 with the aim of preventing forced marriages.

But this is something Nanna and Basir were not aware of in the very beginning. They did not know that they were going to find so great barriers. Now, even that they consider themselves to be in "the lucky group", as they finally went through obstacles and currently live together in Denmark, Basir prefers not to see his real name written on coated paper. Being reluctant is understandable, as he believes that the Immigration Service could still make some trouble.

**Tourist visa, already a hard step**

“We met in Turkey. I was on vacation. We met each other at the hotel where he was working as a masseur. Actually it was just accidentally, because me and my friend we were just there for having fun.” Nanna remembers.

Later on, that accident led to decide that their relationship deserved a try and Nanna moved to Turkey. After some months living together she wanted to continue with her studies, so she had to return back to Denmark.

Problems already showed up when Basir asked for a three months tourist visa for coming to Denmark. He had to give the authorities a good reason for that and proof it with pictures showing how happy they were together. He has not even left Turkey yet and difficulties already started in the embassy.

“They made us feel like animals. The first time we went there, I had to wait outside the embassy. I am a Danish citizen and it was the Danish embassy we went to and I was not allowed to go in with him because i was not applying for a visa.” Nanna tells.

Tourist visas only last for ninety days and it is not possible to ask for the next one immediately after the one being used is out of date.

“This has also been a thing difficult in our relationship because every time that Basir applied for a visa then I was just nervous about what was waiting for him.”

**Difficult problems require difficult decisions**

After some time, tired of travelling back and forth, they decided to apply for family reunion. This way, Basir would have a residence permit in Denmark and would no longer have to worry about living on a 90-day calendar. They could not be more surprised and disappointed when they receive the response back to their application, as Nanna explains.

“The staff of the immigrant service call me and asked me if I had a child with a Danish citizenship or if I were handicapped or if there was anything special about me, so that they could give us family reunion without being old enough, you know, you have to be 24 years old both of us if we are under the national rules, but I didn’t have any child, I was not handicapped, I was just studying and it was all I could tell them and she said that we were going to have a rejection; they were not going to give us a residential permit.”

“ I am a Danish citizen and it was the Danish embassy and I was not allowed to go in ”

One lost battle does not decide the course of a whole war. They have heard from the media that Europe could give them a chance. Furthermore, through an organization called Marriage without Borders they got some help and further information. This organization believes that there should not be borders for forming a family. They give advice about Danish legislation and show couples as Nanna and Basir what possible solutions exist for any particular case.

This is how they found out that an alternative way for avoiding Danish national rules actually existed. Many couples had already tried to apply for family reunion under European legislation and succeed. This involved moving abroad for about half a year, but otherwise, they would have to wait to fulfil the Danish criteria.

**European rulings, key for an alternative**

The European Court of Justice has determined through several rulings further rights for European citizens. The Eind case in 2007 and the Metock case in 2008 enlarged rights concerning free movement of people.

In short and with regard to this topic, a European citizen can apply for family reunion of his or her spouse, but ‘is interpreted

(in Denmark) in the way that only comprises citizens who are using the right of free movement,” Ersbøll explains. This means that you first have to activate your right of free movement as a European citizen and then apply for family reunion under the EU rules.

“When I first met Basir I didn’t know about the European rules. They were not into the public knowledge until 2008. During the summer, there was a media who covered that those rules were actually possible. But the Government haven’t told the public that it was possible to use those European laws. They just expected that we had to wait until we were 24,” says Nanna.

Ersbøll explains that this is also the so-called reverse discrimination. “If you from Spain as an union citizen want to bring your family here you would be able, while I will be not. So this is reverse discrimination but it is legal, because this is the way the EU law has been interpreted until now in Denmark.”

**New home in the neighbour country**

Getting married and moving to Sweden looked as a plausible option. Without any special ceremony, taking the decision and marrying at the City Council took place in the same week. They would have waited to celebrate a proper wedding later on, but circumstances push them to re-schedule their plans.

“I think it was 2 days after I have finished my last exam we moved to Sweden with our suitcases and bikes on the train, which was all that we needed.” Nanna remembers.

Although it was a brave decision, it was the best and almost unique chance they had, they still think.

“We chose to go the safe way because I knew, I don’t know how, I knew we couldn’t handle another rejection. We had to make sure, that was my plan, that we got it the first time we applied. That is why we decided to apply for Basir’s residence in Sweden before we applied in Denmark and he got that after four months and a half.”

**Best but not always comfortable solution**

Despite of being happy and grateful that Sweden turned to be a lifesaver, that period up north in the neighbour country was not a path of roses. Nanna had to demonstrate that she has been working for at least three months before anything could be done about their case. She found a job in Copenhagen, an hour and a half away from their home at that time in Akarp.



Ministry of Integration post box. Photo: Ana Munoz Padros

Sometimes she was out for sixteen hours as her job as a waitress included shifts of twelve hours.

For Basir was not either like spending a dreamed seven months honeymoon abroad. Adapting to a new situation and dealing with a new country was not easy for both of them, but they could handle it. Nevertheless, for him was tougher than would have been to another person. He was not able to work, as he did not have a residence permit yet. A “luxurious jail” is how he remembers his period in Sweden.

“He was sitting there waiting for his residence, he was not able to do anything, he was not able to leave the country, he could just sit down and wait for his case being fixed in Sweden,” Nanna remembers.

After Sweden gave the green light for their family reunion under European rules, they got the permission from Denmark after twenty five days and immediately went back to Denmark. “I was in shock, but the reason because it was so quick it was just the European rules,” Basir says. They were expecting to stay and wait in Sweden for a time between three and six months. Once again, they had to adapt to a new situation out of their non distant future plans.

“The European laws have to be the same all around Europe. So if in Sweden they had already said that I am under the European laws, then Denmark would be really silly if they said that I am not under the European laws. But it was just a matter of time. Sometimes they do have trouble with people anyway.” Nanna reckons.

**The end is almost there**

It has been just one month since they arrived back to Denmark. Now they have to wait five years until Basir is allowed to ask for a permanent residence permit. Although they are thankful for how fast went everything at the end and the good welcoming they have received in their coming back, there are

**DENMARK’S REQUIREMENTS FOR FAMILY REUNION**

Over the age of **24 years**

Combined **attachment to Denmark**

**Accomodation** of adequate size

**64,000DKK** in bank-backed collateral

still some differences between them and the rest of Danish population. They are not allowed to ask for public subsidies unless it is for medical assistance in the next five years.

“Normally as a Danish citizen, I have always felt safe, there is always someone to catch you. But right now, there is no one catching us if we are falling.”

“We are on our own the next five years until he can get a permanent residence. But that’s also fine. That’s something I’ve accepted although it feels strange. We have been through so much to get this residence permit and still we have to be different than anybody else.”

### Why not move to Turkey?

Perhaps an easier solution for avoiding so much trouble would have been to move and settle down in Turkey, an observer could think. Lars Kyhnau is the spokesperson from Marriage without Borders. Kyhnau believes that the reason for Denmark to put so many obstacles is that you can easily live in the country of your spouse. This seems to be the shared opinion among the population. However, Nanna and Basir did not chose to stay in Denmark because they do not stand warm Turkish weather or because they love challenging the bureaucracy system.

After two years of marriage, Nanna will have the same rights as a Turkish citizen. “All she has to do is book online the flight ticket,” Basir says. For Nanna the most important thing has always been having an equal relationship, therefore, having the same rights both of them.

“If we were living in Turkey and then decided that we wanted to move back here, then he would always have had to apply for a visa and couldn’t stay here for so long time. So that is the most important thing. The next five years we make sure that he can be here and live here as he wants and then we can move to Turkey if we want one day.”

As born and raised Danish, Nanna understands the reason of some laws to exist. The Danish welfare system needs to be planned in order to make it work. It must be sure that there are more people contributing than asking for subsidies, that is logical. However, this whole issue still does not fit in her conception of life.

“Our values say you should be able to marry who ever you want. But then it’s wrong that the society tells me that I can marry who I want but then I cannot live in Denmark.”

## EUROPEAN RULINGS

### EIND CASE. 2007

“In the event of a **Community worker returning** to the Member State of which he is a national, Community law does not require the authorities of that State to grant a right of **entry and residence to a third-country national who is a member of that worker’s family** because of the mere fact that, in the host Member State where that worker was gainfully employed, that third-country national held a valid residence permit.”

### METOCK CASE. 2008

“A Non-Community **spouse of a citizen of the Union can move and reside with that citizen in the Union** without having previously been lawfully resident in a member state.

The right of a national of a non-member country who is a family member of a Union citizen to accompany or join that citizen cannot be made conditional on prior lawful residence in another Member State.”

### ZAMBRANO CASE. 2011

“Citizenship of the Union requires a Member State to **allow third country nationals who are parents** of a child who is a national of that Member State to **reside and work** there, where a refusal to do so would deprive that child of the genuine enjoyment of the substance of the rights attaching to the status of citizen of the Union.

This requirement applies **even when the child has never exercised his right to free movement** within the territory of the Member States.”

## Important changes in the horizon, perhaps

Perhaps, no more couples will have to experience that big struggle in applying a residence permit. A new European ruling could make a big change in Denmark. The European Court of Justice decided last March that Colombian Gerardo Zambrano and his spouse had the right to work and stay in Europe. The reason is that their children were born in Belgium, therefore, they were European.

No one is quite sure about what could happen after this new ruling within family reunion rights. Kyhnau, reckons that it depends on how the Danish Government interprets it. “They can choose what they have done with other EU laws and interpret it as narrow as they can.”

On the other hand “in an objective way, all European citizens have the right to live in the Union. That right should be real and not in a paper. You need the right to have your spouse,” Kyhnau believes that some clarification from the EU might be needed.

Ersbøll reckons that the natural consequence of the Zambrano ruling would be allowing the parents of the kid to stay in Denmark, even if they are foreigners without a residence permit..As Kyhnau, she is waiting to witness the Government’s interpretation. “The interesting question to be answered is if grown-up people could have the right to have their spouse staying here, even though they have not used their right of free movement.”

Søren Pind, immigration minister, in recent declarations to Politiken newspaper, did not seem worried about a great effect of this new EU ruling. “I don’t think it’s in any way fair to say that the previous legislation has undermined Danish legislation. I find it hard to see the problem,” Pind asserted.

Nevertheless, the overlap between EU rules and national rules “is a central issue” in Denmark, as Anika Liversage, Researcher PhD at the Danish National Centre for Social Research (SFI), acknowledges. Ersbøll believes that, even if the ruling is interpreted as narrow as possible “definitely, is going to have consequences”.

## Collateral effects of restriction

Having a deeper look on the effects of these rules, it seems like there are more unexpected consequences than perhaps increasing Swedish immigration statistics. A visible example has been already seen in the point system, valid since November. It was aimed to make easier the entry of the ‘good’ foreigners, high skilled workers willing to raise Denmark’s competitive labour market. At the same time, it is a barrier for those foreigners who might not contribute much to the Danish welfare system. The level of this system and its immigration test is so high that almost no one can fulfil the requirements.

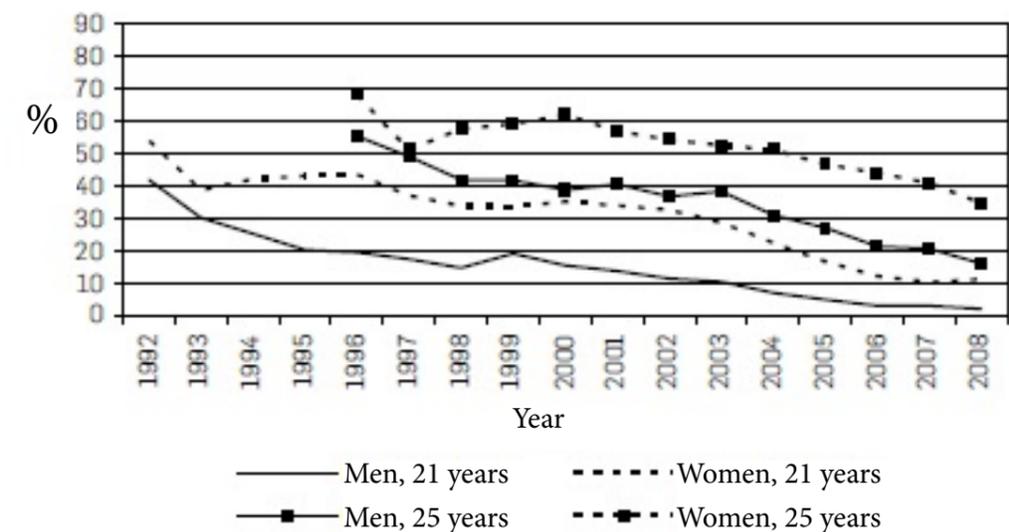
“We can certainly see that the immigration (policy) is hurting the image to attract high skilled people from abroad,” Liversage asserts.

“Since then (enforcement of the point system in November 2010), there has been five approvals for permanent residence out of 400 rejections,” Kyhnau acknowledges.

## Denmark is not likely to change

Despite these cons even for the country itself, immigration and family reunion national policies are not likely to change in a non distance future, experts think. “Even though if we had a new Government, nobody knows yet of course, but even though this was the case, I don’t think this will change for instance, the 24 years rule,” Eva Ersbøll reckons

Percentage ethnic minorities originating in non- Western countries married as respectively 21-year-olds and 25-year-olds, 1992-2008. Source: SFI rapport 09:28



Immigration laws have been hardener since 2002. This coincides with the empowerment of the Dansk Folkeparti (Danish People's Party). This right wing party have become well-known for its anti-immigration vision and their euro-scepticism. Despite being a minority party, since ten years ago, the Government have needed their support when taking decisions.



"There must be a limit", advertisement by the Dansk Folkeparti in Copenhagen. Photo: Ana Munoz

## 24-year-old rule and its social context

From the Danish Institute of Human Rights, they found out that marriages between second or third generation immigrants in Denmark with someone of their own country have just been postponed, but not have not disappeared.

"The Government would say that this is the whole idea, the protection of young women for instance, that they are not forced to marriages against their will, so now they have time for education. But of course there might be problems that you don't see because people could be abroad, waiting, in order to be old enough for family reunification," Ersbøll says.

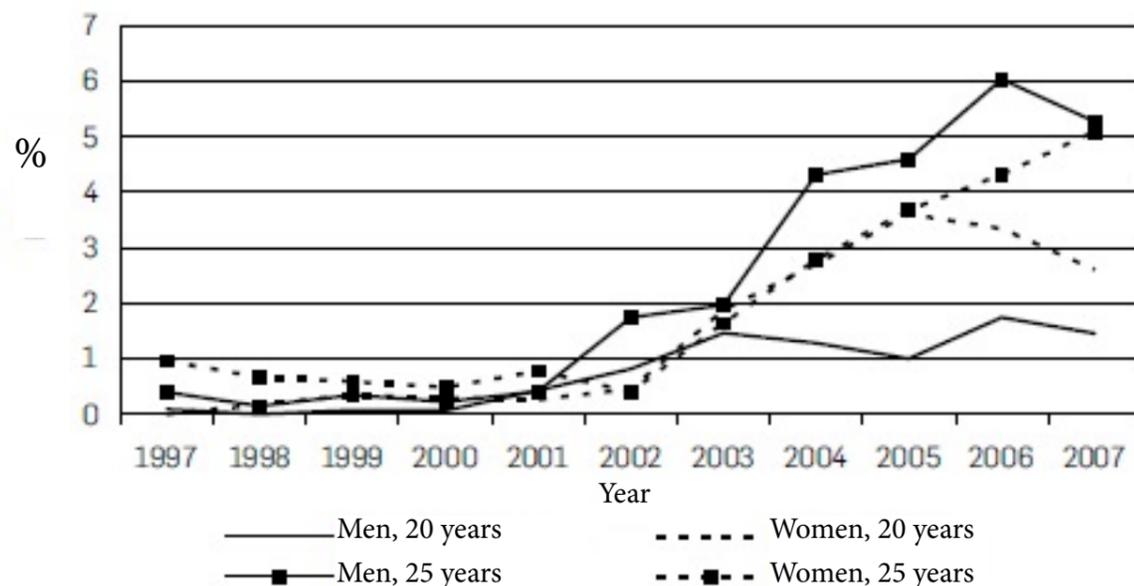
There are currently two thousands Danes married to a foreigner living in Sweden. Before European ruling after Metock

case came into public knowledge in summer 2008, many couples moved at least for five years to Sweden, and many of them stayed there. It is what was known as "the long Swedish solution". After five years, the foreigner spouse could ask for Swedish citizenship. Between two thirds and half of all of them, want to stay in Sweden, and the rest wish to come back to Denmark.

In 2009, 75% of the Danish citizens married to a foreigner and coming back to Denmark from abroad, did so from Sweden. The majority of their spouses where from Turkey or Pakistan. Statistics, according to Kyhnau, also show a decrease in the number of people with a Danish residence permit under the EU family reunion rules: in 2009 they were 470, whereas in 2010 this number dropped down to 285 permissions. In each year approximately 200 applications were refused.

Numbers showing how many people like Nanna and Basir have moved to Sweden for a short period of time and then come back to Denmark are difficult to know. However, according to Marriage without Borders, "one third of the people moving from Denmark to Sweden are not from Denmark nor Sweden." Perhaps, loving reasons could be behind this numbers. ■

Percentage ethnic minorities who have emigrated from Denmark to Sweden as 20-year-olds and 25-year-olds, 1997-2007. Source: SFI rapport 09:28



# Public Transport: The Last Border?

What is the value of removing borders if you can't travel to another country? Traveling by road isn't that hard, but public transport offers more challenges. Just try to get into Poland from Slovakia in the morning. See you at dinner!

Bart de Bruijn

If you work on the other side of the border than where you live you better have a car. That's what Jiri Sykora, Public Relations Coordinator at the International Visegrad Fund in Bratislava says. "Getting into Hungary by public transport is almost impossible. Take a look at the trip from here (Bratislava, BB) to Győr. It's crazy."

Let's try that. Győr, one of the biggest cities in the north of Hungary, is just 70 km from Bratislava. Say you are an engine technician and work in the Audi factory in Győr where in 2007 1,913,053 engines were built. Then you better have an Audi or other car yourself.

According to Google Maps the distance between Bratislava and Győr is 70 km, which would take you around 52 minutes by car. Sounds decent right? You wake up at seven, have your breakfast and coffee while reading the newspaper and can be in the factory before nine.

## Long road to nowhere

Now let's try that by train. You wake up at seven, quickly eat your breakfast and skip your shower to be at the train station at 7.30 when the train leaves. The first train takes you to Vienna in Austria and 5 hours and 24 minutes later you are in Győr, at 12:56. Just in time for lunch.

From/Change/To	Arrival	Departure
Bratislava-Petržalka	7:32	7:32
Wien Südbahnhof Ostbahn	8:29	9:04
Wien Meidling	9:14	9:38
Sopron	10:48	11:35
Győr	12:56	

Graph: ZSR

Of course it can be done faster, as shown below, but that's later in the day and it involves taking five different trains. 70 kilometers in 2 hours and 50 minutes.

From/Change/To	Arrival	Departure
Bratislava-Petržalka	13:32	13:32
Pandorf Ort	13:56	14:07
Neusiedl am See	14:13	14:18
Fertőszentmiklós	15:12	15:29
Coorna	15:49	16:02
Győr	16:22	

Graph: ZSR

According to Peter Drozd, coordinator at EURES T-Beskidky this isn't the only problem in the area. "Connections between Slovakia and Poland are pretty much non-existent."

Peter works in Žilina in Slovakia quite often, but has to be in the Polish town of Bielsko-Biała now and again. This trip, which is less than 100 kilometers, takes you at least six hours by train. It explains why Drozd says infrastructure is keeping up borders that are already erased in the heads of the people in the region.

From/Change/To	Arrival	Departure
Žilina	7:48	7:48
Bohumín	9:33	11:30
Zelaznyowice	11:48	12:38
Czechowice Dziedzice	13:12	13:27
Bielsko Biala Główna	13:47	

Graph: ZSR

And attention to English speakers! You better try to learn some words in another language. The emergency brakes in Czech trains have a caution sign in five languages: Czech, French, Italian, German and Russian. ■



English and in distress. What to do? Photo: Mediainfluencer.net

Work has stalled due to EU requirements. Photo: Michael Huguenin



# Legislation Challenges German and French Hunters' relationships

They both want to save the deer, a solution for the surplus of wild boar and the promotion of biodiversity in their forests. German and French hunters in the border region of Alsace and Baden often express their wish to work together on these issues. Despite this willingness mutual differences block their way, which makes cooperation rare and only appear at local level.

Anouk Mentink

That is not the image you get if you take a look at the list of organisations who support hunting associations. Hunters in these regions are members of European and interregional organisations. However, when talking to municipalities and hunters at the border of the region of Alsace and Baden, that image changes. Hunting associations don't experience that much active cooperation between other hunters.

As biologist Klaus Lachenmaier of the Landesjagdverband Baden-Württemberg points out, "We are neighbours, and there are some personal contacts between German and French hunters. Only, there is no such thing as an established cooperation between us."

So why don't German and French hunters work together on a larger scale? "National regulations and hunting customs make it too complicated for us to cooperate," says Bertrand Iffrig. He works at the city hall of Wissembourg, a scenic French village which lies next to the German border. Iffrig - responsible for the hunters in his municipality - experienced that rules are the main reason why cooperation on a high level seems to be impossible. "Even the German rifles aren't the same ones as we use. And that goes for many other things."

Next to different regulations and habits, every border area has its own problems when it comes to hunting. In those rare occasions that hunters in these places cooperate, it is either a local initiative, an annual event or for a demonstration. Read the following stories about cross border cooperation to understand why this wished cooperation sometimes works and sometimes doesn't: how the border towns of Wissembourg and Rhinau deal with boar together with the Germans, how the Hunting federation of Bas-Rhin (FDC) protests with other associations and how the FDC Bas-Rhin has imported the German hunting permit to France.

## The wild boar and its nine lives

Bertrand Iffrig ponders behind his desk in his tidy office in border village Wissembourg. During the three years he has been in office he has faced the mutual differences between German and French hunting legislation many times. "The wild boar surplus illustrates perfectly the kind of paradox we're in. We - the French - have too many wild boars. These animals cause a lot of disturbance, as they are wandering down on the main roads and eating the farmers' harvests," explains Iffrig.

## Why this border region is unique

The regions of Alsace and Baden are connected at the border of Germany and France. Some villages lie in the middle of the border line, such as Rhinau, and still own large parts of forest and agricultural land in Germany. The border between Germany and France has moved back and forth after the World War II and due to this shifting many legislation in these regions looks similar to the German system. The churches in Alsace are for instance subsidised by the French state, which is common in Germany, but does not apply in the rest of France. Another example is the distribution of hunting territory, which is in the Alsace the same system as in Germany, but also does not occur in the other regions of France.



Cycling routes being built in Racibórz, Poland. Photo: Michael Huguenin

The manager of a Polish commune has blamed the European Union's complicated cross-border bureaucracy for project delays.

Barbara Juraszek of Krzyżanowice Commune on the Polish-Czech border believes the EU's Cross-border Cooperation legislation is delaying a cross-border cycling route her commune is building.

Work has stalled on the cycling route as Juraszek's team has had to wait for approval from a large number of EU-required institutions.

"[There needs to be] more trust from the institutions to the communes," argues Juraszek. ■

Read more about cycle paths on p. 62 and at [www.euroviews.eu](http://www.euroviews.eu)



To prevent the wild boars eating the crops of the farmers, it is allowed in France to feed them. That policy irritates the Germans. "They want us to quit feeding the wild boars," Iffring says. "Their boars are namely crossing the border to look for food. When these animals come back, they are stronger and are going to multiply themselves."

The debate of 'to feed or not to feed' causes friction between stakeholders like hunters, farmers and municipalities in the border areas around Rhinau and Wissembourg. The discussion will last until the French ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development takes a decision. Until that time, there is nothing that regional stakeholders can do. Despite the fact that municipalities are powerless on this topic, it won't improve the relationship with the German side of the border.

The feeding of the wild boar is probably one of the reasons why the population in Germany keeps on increasing. "Even though we shoot more of them. The French hunters nevertheless say that the Germans should start feeding the boars themselves, so that they don't cross the border to France. The Germans reply again we should stop it, because it leads to a high surplus. And that story goes on and on," Iffrig continues.

The municipality of the border town Rhinau has the same problem as in Wissembourg. "We have way too many wild boar," says mayor Danièle Meyer with a serious voice. Meyer has been Rhinau's mayor for fifteen years now and has to cope with the challenges of a border town every day. "Rhinau lies on both sides of the river the Rhine. All the French hunters feed the wild boar, for they won't destroy the agricultural land. In this way hunters have many animals to shoot and they keep the farmers happy at the same time. That happiness does not apply for the German part of Rhinau."



Jonathan Fischbach practices in shooting centre Cyné'tir.  
Photo: Anouk Mentink

*"We have joined forces at the demonstration in a more expressive way, because we are all fighting for the same cause."*

*forces at the demonstration in a more expressive way, because we are all fighting for the same cause."*

### Hunters don't like to shoot all animals

Surprisingly, apart from debating about feeding, hunters do work together to keep the amount of boars down. Once a year, German and French hunters team up in the forests close to Wissembourg to shoot these animals. "We have invited around forty to fifty hunters the last three years to shoot from a hundred up to two hundred boars." Mayor Meyer organises the same kind of corporate hunt in Rhinau.

However, the municipality of Wissembourg is not going to organise these hunting days this year, because of the disappointing outcome of the last edition. "Last year, we invited eighty German and French hunters to hunt in the Forêt du Mundat – a German forest which used to belong to Wissembourg – and hundred people to help them to search the woods for boars," says Iffrig. "They were supposed to shoot between a hundred and two hundred of these animals, but they only ended up with fifty," he says.

What happened? The German and French hunters consulted each other in advance and made the wild boars run away before they started the hunt. As the representative for the hunters, Iffrig understands perfectly why. "Shooting that many boars at once is bad for business. As it is hard to sell them if you shoot them at the same time. There won't be enough supermarkets and other shops who can buy the outcome of the hunt." As a result, the prefect of the region Alsace has sent hunters of the government to shoot the boars, because otherwise no hunter from the border regions would have finished the job. "Which made many hunters upset, because, they have paid for these territories to do hunting in. Now someone else shoots on their territory without paying them any money for it."

In Rhinau, this annual hunt will take place again this year. "Although we realise that this is a huge tragedy for the hunters," Meyer points out. "They prefer to have the wild boar in their hunting areas and shoot them on a small scale. But we have just too many boar in our region, which threatens the security of our traffic and so forth."

"Wissembourg is not going to organise a corporate hunt anymore," says Iffrig. "Apart from the fact that hunters refuse to shoot that many animals, we have to take a lot of extra measures when German hunters hunt on our soil. When German hunters hunt on French territory in this region, the German legislation has to be applied. We have to close down all the roads within and around the hunting area. That costs a lot of money and is an administrative hassle. That is another example of different legislation and explains why we can't work together more closely."

### The deer unites interests

"Fraternity of all European hunters!" These were the fierce words of Kurt-Alexander Michael – head of the interregional board l'Action Interrégionale Nature et Chasse (AINC) – during a demonstration to save the deer from the region of Alsace. French, German and Luxembourger hunters in Strasbourg protested for this cause at Place Kleber in Strasbourg on the 5th of February this year. Together with many hunting associations from those three countries, the AINC and the Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the European Union (FACE).

The demonstration was held because the hunters have to shoot thirty percent more deers, as the French ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development believes

that the French region of Alsace has a surplus of deer. "These animals would be a threat to the biodiversity in the forest." Only, the hunters don't want to, as they fear that the population will become extinct.

During the demonstration, the speeches of many protesters contained a sense of brotherhood and unity. As regards the AINC, it's goal is to unite and represent the interests of hunting associations in Baden and Alsace. In the case of this demonstration, that purpose worked out well. All the above mentioned organisations wrote a manifest together to save the deer and by doing this together they have emphasized their demands.

Although the mere existence of such organisations implies that there is much cooperation amongst hunters. Its activity got stuck on two annual meetings to talk about the state of affairs. According to hunting associations like the Landesjagdverband Baden-Württemberg, it has never led to more. "Twice a year, we meet together with other partners in the AINC. That are the only high level meetings we had so far," says their biologist Klaus Lachenmaier.

Gerard Lang – Head of the Federation des Chasseurs Bas-Rhine (FDC) – is one of the people who are behind the organisation of that demonstration. According Lang, this was the very first time that German and French hunters have protested together. "Before this demonstration, we only had two meetings per year with the AINC. But this time we have joined forces in a more expressive way, because we are all fighting for the same cause. By saving the deer, we also save our upcoming hunting seasons. However, there is more to what they are protesting about. Apart from their disagreement on

### HOW TO OBTAIN A HUNTING TERRITORY IN ALSACE

In the region of Alsace, the municipalities organise an auction every nine years to rent out the available pieces of hunting territory. Hunters in turn can rent pieces of this land from their temporary owners. In Wissembourg, there are nine areas where people can hunt. Three of the nine places are owned by the municipality of Wissembourg itself. The other territories belong to private owners. Even if you own such an area, you have to pay money to the city hall to use it as a hunting area. In France you pay to get a hunting license in one of these areas. With this permit it is not possible to hunt in Germany. If you want to hunt in Germany you have to pass an exam first.



For the German permit you need to be able to shoot at a target from a distance of hundred meters.  
Photo: Anouk Mentink

the new shooting norms, the hunters want an ecological road for the deer. This green highway would go through Germany, Switzerland and Austria. The route would connect all living areas of the animals with preserved nature. Thus the deer population would get a chance to spread itself over a larger territory.

German hunting associations are already working on such a route. However, without the help of the French. That is one of the reasons why the Germans are protesting together with their neighbours. "There are very few areas left to conserve between Alsace, Baden and Switzerland," says Lachenmaier. "It is important for us to cooperate with the region of Alsace to improve the connectivity between these areas." In the case the hunters get the ecological route, the question is whether they'll work together to establish this green highway, or will go their own way on their soil.

### Improvement without cooperation

Cross border cooperation is hard for German and French hunters, due to legislative obstacles. One of those obstacles is the hunting license for the other side of the border, which is easy to obtain for the Germans, but not for the French. This hindrance is about to be made much more passable.

If a German wants to hunt in France, he or she can get a three day permit straight away, based on their existing license. When French hunters plan to cross the border, they need to take an exam in Germany in order to receive their hunting permit. The main reason for that inequality is that the German hunting test requires more skills than the French exam.

French hunting associations can not change German policy making. But they can make some parts of it a lot easier. That is why the Hunting Association of Bas-Rhin (FDC) is building an outdoor centre next to its indoor shooting centre. The Cyné'tir will be in Geudertheim, in the countryside surrounding Strasbourg. When ready, French hunters who want to obtain a German license can come to this place to practice and finally, take the exam.

This initiative is not a result of cooperation. The hunting association of Baden-Württemberg does not even know that their German exam has been exported to the Alsace. "I'm not aware of this fact," says Lachenmaier. "We did not work together on this exam, but I definitely think this can improve contacts und mutual understanding."

### Different skills

"There is a high demand to get this German license in France," says FDC-president Gerard Lang, while he walks towards an iron sentry box on the site of the outdoor centre. "Especially from the people who live far away from the border. Usually, they don't have the time to travel into Germany to do the test. From May, when the centre will be opened, they will be able to do the German hunting test on French soil."

Jonathan Fischbach, who is a technician for the FDC, explains what it takes to get a German permit. "You need to be able to shoot with a pistol, as well as a gun. For the purpose that you can take out a wild boar quickly, in case it's still alive. If you are not sure it's dead, those animals can be dangerous."

Apart from that, for the German permit you need to be able to shoot at a target from a distance of hundred meters. Whereas in France we are less focused on the shooting results, but more on security."

A large part of the French exam is based on security handling. "For example, the hunters have to carry and use their weapons in a secure way, otherwise they don't get their permit. Of course they will have to learn how to shoot and hit the target with precision. But in France hunters do that part after the exam, by themselves," says Fischbach.

He points at a rail, which is hidden in the grass. "When people are practising here, they have to wait for the fake wild boar which moves from the left to the right on the rail. And shoot it at the right spot." The outdoor shooting centre cost the FDC 50.000 euros and it will be opened at the end of May. The first German hunting exam will be taken in September this year. ■

# No Borders to Natural Disasters: A Year Later in Central Europe

Camille Lepage

*All year around, natural catastrophes hit hundreds of people on each corner of the globe. Earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, landslides, hurricanes: they ruin, shatter, raze and wreck everything in their paths.*

*Spring 2010, Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia suffered from floods and landslides due to heavy rains. There, people are usually not aware of the danger that lies nearby their homes or do not want to acknowledge it.*

*Once stroked by a catastrophe, their houses are the mirrors of their lives: destroyed, shattered and torn into pieces. They should get them both back to normal, but at what cost? And how long will it take?*

*One month before the tragedy's first anniversary, families are still in distress.*

In the evening, Andrzej Czernikowki manages to call the emergency boat to come and rescue him and his neighbours. "Within 20 minutes, the water invades my house. It comes very fast, sweeping aside everything on its path. I'm running from one window to the other watching the water coming in, but I'm hopeless, helpless," remembers the Polish hotel manager who lives in Tarnobrzeg in Poland.

41 days later, his house is finally emptied of water. Just like many families he stays at his hotel during this period of time. The local government requisitions it to offer a roof to people in need. An alternative accommodation that was meant to be temporary...

Ten months after the floods and landslides in Poland, Slovakia and Czech Republic, families still suffer from the aftermaths of the floods. In Tarnobrzeg, Poland, the situation differs from one place to another, but the ghost of the floods is still discernible. Driving around the city, one can discover the leftover damages, houses are being rebuilt, while some others being destroyed. A few are still standing, but it's only a matter of time before it gets turn down by either the owner of the local authority.

### May 2010 in Poland: Floods hit Tarnobrzeg

Andrzej lives in Tarnobrzeg, a town located 250km south from Warsaw.

Even now, he struggles to describe how he felt when from all of a sudden, his life changed, and hasn't been back to normal since.

"The day before the floods, we went to and check on the Vistula river as the media mentioned floods in Krakow. Nothing seems unusual. At 4am on the next day, the police made an announcement: Leave your house, take your work clothes, documents," recalls Andrzej.

Despite the warming, he doesn't realise neither the emergency of the situation nor the amount of water running among the streets and destroying the villages nearby. He decides to stay there to save as much stuff as possible. Later the emergency boat comes and taked him to a non-flooded area.

In April 2011, 20 families are still living in the hotel, a solution to cope with the after floods situation, which was meant to be temporary. Andrzej's family is one of them.

Looking back, he realises that nobody told him about the danger of living in the areas. He actually thought it was safe, despite being right next to the Tizesniowka river. "We would like to move, but it also means getting no money from the government. To get any financial help we have to rebuild the house where it was and move back in."

**“ It’s on Children’s day, we are making pancakes, suddenly a small crack appears on the wall ”**

In fact, if Andrzej decided to get his house rebuilt elsewhere, he would not receive any money from the government. A dilemma that he cannot afford. The government’s financial support isn’t a solution, explains Rafal Sefarin, Director of the Foundation for the Environment in Poland. "The more you build in these areas, the more people there are and the more damage is caused so you have a double catastrophe. That’s why you find fewer flood events in less populated areas," explains Rafal.

**Arek and Małgorzata Fornal, their dream house from hell**

A few kilometers away from Andrzej’s house, the floods hit Arek and Małgorzata Fornal and their children. This time they weren’t living in a flood area. Far from blocks of flats and the noise of the town, they bought their dream house a year and a half before the flood. It surprises them even more, they cannot save anything but the

communion apparel of their youngest and their two dogs. Małgorzata tells her story, the emotion in her voice, her look and her body language exhibit the traumatism that she still suffers from. Once safe and far from their house, they find out that the only way for them to get some money from the local government is to go to a hotel and leave their house in same state as it was after the floods and wait for an expert to come.

**In a one-bedroom flat for 5 months, the landlord doesn’t want to install a central heating**

They find a two-bedroom flat on the top of a grocery store. "We stayed there five months, but when the winter came, we had to leave because the landlord didn’t want to heat the place," remembers Małgorzata. "One month away from the flood anniversary, we don’t feel safe. The levees aren’t completely built yet, spring is coming and the situation might repeat itself. No, I don’t feel safe here." Moving out would imply a huge cost for them, and they cannot afford it. "Our dream turned into a nightmare in less than 24 hours and nothing will bring our life back to normal".

**June 2010 in Slovakia: Landslides shake Nizna Mysla**

"It’s on Children’s day and we are making pancakes. Suddenly a small crack appears on the wall. It becomes larger and larger. My sister and I start panicking. I call my dad and he tells us to dig a gutter around the house so the water wouldn’t come in. But it’s already too late. The police and the firemen arrive; they say we have to leave because it’s going to collapse. I was only

able to take my dog with me", remembers redhead teenager Andrea Petercakova. With a little voice and fear in her eyes.

In Slovakia, the landscape Nizna Mysla looks abandoned. This tiny village, 100 km south from the polish border, was wrecked by landslides caused by heavy rains. Walking by the church is terrifying: stairs are broken and unstable, the field in front of it is split into parts and the road seems to have melted. Around it, nothing, scrap, crumb and detritus are lying in the middle of what used to be the walls of a house. A dreadful landscape that is the first overview of the disaster that slapped the villagers last spring.

**“ We never used to do anything together, now we have to, it makes us stronger ”**

Two kilometres away from the village, a field appears from nowhere. There, a dozen of colourful containers. At the first sight, no one could guess that 29 families are living in those big metallic boxes. Yes, they are. Among them we meet Maria Petercakova’s family. Her daughter, Andrea remembers that 1st of June just like it happened yesterday.

**Living in a container smaller than their former garage**

Now they live in one of the containers. It’s smaller than the garage they had in their house. They bought it for one symbolic euro and have been living there since September. Ideally, they’d like to buy a part of the field on which they could start over with a brand new house. But reality isn’t as easy as they wish. The field belongs to people who are not willing to let it go for less than 30€/m2. It’s too expensive for Maria and her kids.

NGOs and associations help them and give them some money. They haven’t received a penny from the government despite its promises. When asked where they wanted to go when they have enough money, Maria says " the only possible area is this field. Even if we want to rebuild a house where we used to live, there is a 10 years restriction on the land. Another place would be by the river but it’s a flood area, so our only option is to stay on this field, but we can’t afford it."

Andrea tries to see the bright side of their living conditions "we’ve never been that close to each other, before we never used to do anything together, now we have to, and it makes us stronger to face this tragedy." ■

**A Czech School flooded in Karvina**

Floods hit individuals but not only. In Karvina, Czech Republic, the Private secondary school of protections of persons and property, located by the river, was also affected by the floods. Slavka Krystova Florkova, its chairwoman tells that everything happened on the 17th of May 2010. Her main priority was to save all the important documents. One of the school policies

is to scan every single assignment and to store it on the server. This server is on the 2nd floor of the building so didn’t get damaged. Facebook, or how to inform students about the floods. "All the information about pupils were in my office, so inaccessible. Facebook did the trick and became our way to share updates with our students. It worked well, no matter at what time we updated our status, we knew they would check it".

The cost of the restoration went up to 2 million Czech Crowns (82 000€). They managed to get 300 000 Crowns from the Ministry of Education (12 300€). They had to finance with their own expenses the left 1.7 millions Crows (€67 700) for the reason that they are a private school. Today, every time it rains for more than two days, they fear another floods and sometimes they take the pupils to the second floor of their building just in case another flood happens.



May 2010, Floods in Tanobrzeg, Poland. Photo: Andrej Czernikowki



Road damaged by the landslide in Nizna Mysla, Slovakia. Photo: Camille Lepage



Landscape from the church in Nizna Mysla, Slovakia. Photo: Camille Lepage



Containers in which victims from landslides live in Nizna Mysla, Slovakia. Photo: Camille Lepage

# Non Governmental Organizations Need Cross Border Cooperation

*When disasters take place, the first ones to react are usually NGOs. In spite of their wish to help, their actions are often compromised by the lack of preparation and organisation. The solution is international cooperation. A key very close to be reached but at the same seems so far away.*

Camille Lepage

The borders eliminated by the EU, thanks to the Schengen area seems to be brought back up by such an environmental crisis. A tragedy that shows the limits of the border-free EU.

"It is necessary to cooperate between countries. We are geographically so closed to each other, we suffer from the same problem and we're not able to help each other," explains Radovan Gomulak from Caritas Slovakia.

## A similar role between countries but almost no combined effort

Their role is mainly to provide people necessary goods and to support them going through this hard time. They also help the victims financially. Rev. Bogdan Kordula, director of Caritas Krakow explains "people who didn't get affected by the floods give money spontaneously which allows us to get some equipment, like dryers and the rest is given to those in need." Some organizations such as Red Cross, or Caritas do get help from their foreign sisters, but it depends mainly on the relations that they have. Marek Prášil from Red Cross Ostrava, Czech Republic, is glad that they are able to maintain good relations with Red Cross Poland.

They use each other's ambulances, material and any kind of things that one or the other requires. "Their help is necessary and we need them as much as they need us when facing an emergency. This relation is special and only exists between Czech Republic and Poland, we almost have no contact with Red Cross Slovakia".

## Neighbours' experience: an undeniable and rare asset

A chance that only a few organisations enjoy. Radovan Gomulak regrets that they didn't get help from Czech Republic. "Their experiences in floods and landslides would have been a great asset during such an emergency."

Nevertheless things are slowly moving forward. The last year floods made NGOs realise the importance of cooperation on different levels: local, regional, national and international. Gomulak went to Brno during the last week of March to get more prepared for the next catastrophe.

"The aim is to get some material because we didn't have enough tools, gloves and rain boots, to clean the houses. When the floods occurred we didn't have anything to we had to buy them which delays help as it took us 1 or 2 days to get what we needed."

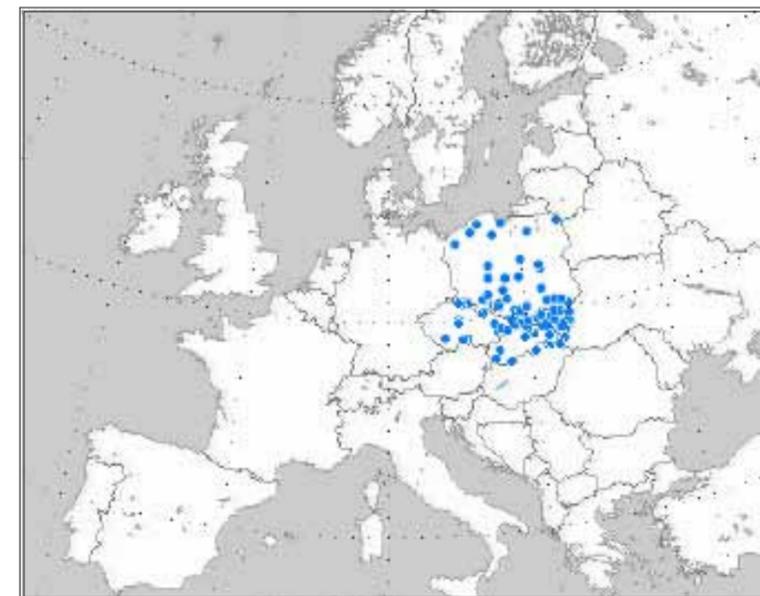
In Brno, they are going to prepare a manual, which will contain basic information and advice for families. "I'm hoping to find an agreement so if they would need any humanitarian material, we could bring it to them or if we need help they could help us Because it's a cross border region we are very close and could we help each other in the future," says Gomulak.

## NGOs and their inexhaustible involvement

The role of organizations usually don't stop overnight, it takes place on a long-term basis. Vlado Fricky one of the local coordinators from People in Peril, Slovakia follows the evolution of their situations. In the second week of April, he is going back to Nizna Mysla to check on families who live in containers (see previous article). Make sure that they are ok, and that they get the money they should from the government are also one of his duties.

Cooperation between foreign NGOs is often difficult because not spontaneous and require arrangements. Central Europe is gifted with quite a similar language between Poland, Slovakia and Czech Republic but not enough. Joint action between organizations is a key element to help those in need faster and more efficiently. ■

# Time for Borderless Disaster Prevention



Map heavy rains that took place in Central Europe between May and June 2010 - Map: European Severe Weather Database  
● Heavy Rains in Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia in May/June 2010

*Natural disasters with almost the same intensity hit Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia in May and June 2010. Yet, their consequences are incomparable. In Poland and Slovakia, the damages have become a part of the landscape, people are still shocked and struggle to find words to describe what happened. In Czech Republic, damages are hardly perceptible and the Czechs relate the events in a much more relax way. A difference that hasn't mostly to do with the prevention process that applies in those countries. The Czechs were prepared, while Poland and Slovakia were off their guard.*

Camille Lepage

One thing needs to be done: "to counteract natural disasters we are looking for projects to develop, which meet the requirements of both (Polish and Czech) sides," says Dariusz Tkocz, Administrator in the Department of Transborder Cooperation, City of Racibórz, Poland. Getting together to be stronger and face the natural disasters is the credo of the Department of Transborder Cooperation.

## Consequences of a natural disasters: A though reality to face

When a natural disasters occurs, it last a few hours to a couple of weeks, a tragedy that hit thousands of families every year. Those events are rather well covered in the media. But the actual consequences of this tragedy appear later, when the reality slaps the victims right into their face: furniture to be thrown away, house to repair or sometimes demolish, and the endless wait for expertise in hope of getting some money from the State. This hell can nevertheless be moderated thanks to prevention. A task that many organisations have undertaken, a task that people and government do not often pay attention to.

## Puzzling solutions

Prevention is often believed to start with environmental agencies, which are usually able to predict when a disaster is to occur and can warn people on time. Yet, people's reaction to

forewarnings is often passive and they tend not to believe that such an event would happen in their neighbourhood. According to Rafal Sefarin (see Text Box), Director of Environmental Partnership Foundation in Krakow, Poland, one of the solution to avoid huge loss “depends on the preparation of the community that are affected.” In fact, the first step to prevention begins before a disaster is even forecast. The step that involves the people and the government.

“The difference between men and women’s first reaction: men want to safe the TV set and women important documents”

Roman Konieczny, Institute of Meteorology and Water Management in Krakow, believes there is a need to be in contact with local government to understand their needs and requirements and to be better prepared to floods.

Konieczny has run a survey among people who got affected by the disaster, “the main difference between men and women’s first reaction: men want to safe the TV set and women important documents”. An amusing anecdote that reveals the lack of preparation and understanding of the consequences of such a disaster.

Konieczny has come up with the idea of prevention through education, starting with the youngest. In collaboration with schools, the institute makes pupils do homework with their parents about floods prevention. A rock that kills two birds: both generations are aware of the right behavior to adopt when such a disaster smash into their home.

**Awareness must cross the geopolitical borders**

The knowledge of floods, its prevention and its aftermaths should reach a larger scale and become international to broaden their neighbouring countries’ know-how. “ We have a sister foundation in Czech republic, says Sefarin, and we’ve had some attempts to draw experiences from ours. The idea is to get at least two levels, what do you do when you’re flooded and strategic things such as engineering projects. It would work better if we could do that together. There is an interconnection with them and the idea to make a on-going sustainability works.”

Cross border regions have the advantage of being able to help each other in a very short time when facing an emergency. An asset that governments and organizations have to work on to make it as effective as possible. A challenge that is now eased by the EU cross border policy but which is flawed by the lack of international corporation. ■

**The Director of Environmental Partnership Foundation in Krakow, Poland, Rafal Sefarin answers our questions about prevention:**

*How can floods be prevented?*

Much of what we do to make the floods less impactful increases the catastrophe of the event. The impact of the floods depends on the preparation of the community that is affected. It’s more a people problem than a nature problem.

*What would the solution be?*

Let the rivers run their natural paths WWwhich means not straightening them, not do any of this engineering work, allow flood plants to fulfill their role and not to allow construction in flood area.

*When engineering work and housing are already there, what can be done to prevent the floods?*

First doing more engineering work, which is very costly. Built higher levees in fact they are never high enough. Secondly, the people, if you have a 100 years flood event, so in the current 4 years, no one believes that the floods will take place. One hundred years is a long way away. After the floods, people forget about it. That’s why prevention is essential.

*Are floods related to climate change?*

Some says so, but there are some controversies. The floods have increased in intensity: they are greater than predicted and overflow the heights of the designed floods defenses.

*What is the role of the government?*

Local government says it’s not their problem, they’d say it’s a regional issue. Then on, the regional level they’d say it’s a national level and so on. In May 2010, everyone was looking for who is to blame rather than finding solutions. Environmental groups were being blamed for the ineffectiveness of the floods prevention system. So when the floods came it was the fault of the environmentalists who made the engineering work wrong.

# Erasing Borders With the Beauty of the Great Outdoors

*The largely underdeveloped region between Czech Republic and Poland hosts natural beauty that has long been underutilized. However, through help from the European Union (EU), work is being done to transform this area into a hub for outdoor recreation.*

Regional groups wish to make the natural beauty of the Czech-Polish region attractive to tourists  
Photo: Andrew Codd

**Andrew Codd**

Heading northwest from the bustling streets of Ostrava, one will quickly find themselves in an entirely new environment. As busy streets, honking horns and exhaust fumes are replaced with meandering rivers, the sound of birds singing and fresh air general demeanor changes immediately. Though only traveling a few kilometers the beauty of the river Oder and surrounding land near the border region seems worlds apart from cities in both Czech Republic and Poland.

**Utilizing the border region for recreation and increase tourism**

Cultural differences are irrelevant when Czech and Polish people can both enjoy many of the same hobbies and the outdoor environment they share.

These two countries are now trying to use their border region as a means for economic growth while also improving the lives of its inhabitants. In building up recreation infrastructure, in conjunction with some cultural projects, the regions of Moravian Silesian in Czech Republic, and Silesian in Poland are hoping to attract more tourism to the area.

With cycling growing in popularity in both countries, the most extensive of these projects is the creation of a network of cycle paths. These routes will wind through both Czech Republic and Poland, stretching 53km in total.

The EU has provided the regions, Moravian-Silesian in Czech Republic and Silesia in Poland with the financial means to start a host of projects to work to transform the region into the outdoor recreation hub envisioned. Furthermore, being a part of the Schengen Area has broken down the barriers that previously made cross-border development more difficult, and for a project like this rather impossible.

“I think that cycling is very popular in this region and now its possible to cross the border,” said Ceslav Valosek, the project manager from the Regional and Engineering office of Karvina.

**The decision for a cycle path**

Between greeting new customers and old friends, Jaromir Blejchar reflects on the times when not so long ago his dream of making his hobby, his job could not have been possible because of the communist government in power. After 20 years of a successful business, Blejchar reflects on the times before he would have been able to start his chain of stores, Yogi Bike Shops.

As he admires the selection of bicycles and accessories that cover the walls and fill every nook and cranny of his shop, Jaromir can still remember the trouble he had to go through to get a good racing bike for his cycling competitions. Without proof of being an athlete and participating in an upcoming event, any bike fit to race with was nearly impossible to come by.



Owner of Yogi Bike Shop, Jaromir Blejchar : Photo: Andrew Codd

“When I would race in cycling, I would get a paper for a bike in the factory. There was only one factory that would make my favorite bike. After the revolution there was a boom, after 10 to 20 years it stabilized but there is now a big market and customers can choose,” said Blejchar.

A lot has changed for the previously communistic states in the region, and the people in the area are excited to get involved in many sports that, for the most part, were previously unavailable to them.

Despite the growing popularity of cycling, spending roughly €3,000,000 on a series of bicycling paths doesn't necessarily seem to be a sound investment.

However, leaders in the area have lofty goals for the new bicycle paths. Besides expanding tourism in the region, local governments are working to ensure the conservation of the environment they share.

### Increasing popularity of cycling in Czech Republic and Poland

Cycling is quickly becoming one of the favorite hobbies of many people throughout Czech Republic and Poland. Since the fall of the USSR and the move away from communistic governments, citizens in this region are able to go to a host of different bike shops and buy many products that were previously unavailable to them.

“Its very popular after the revolution 22 years ago, because in Czech Republic there wasn't biking shops, only 1 make from Czech Republic, and it wasn't for normal people, only VIP,” said Jaromir Blejchar, owner of Yogi Bike Shops.

Cycling as a hobby rather than merely a means of transportation has only been available to the mass public since the early 90s. It was nearly impossible to get a good bike if you weren't someone of importance, or experienced in the sport and competitively cycling. With the opening of markets, the public was able to choose from a wide variety of equipment which in turn made the sport flourish in these countries.

“We know from the region that cycling is a very popular sport. Especially here, the population density is very high and people relax in short periods of time,” said Valosek, “For a couple hours or half a day for people from Karvina from Bohumin from Havirov Take their bicycle and it is excellent for everyday exercise.”

Through making the area more useful, they hope to maintain the natural beauty and save it from other forms of development. Furthermore, it is believed that through building the means for inhabitants to be more active, they can promote a healthier way of life for the community.

The project has been chosen especially with the aim to help improve the environment in the region and strengthen a healthy lifestyles,” said Jan Pochly, the secretary for the community of Detmarovice, a town near the bicycle path that has been involved with implementing these plans.

“At the same time it gives the inhabitants a better possibility to get to know each other and to discover interesting places and monuments on both sides of the common border,” said Pochly.

If plans are fully realized, the price of bringing a community together, in a healthy and environmentally sustainable manner is hardly quantifiable.

### The project begins

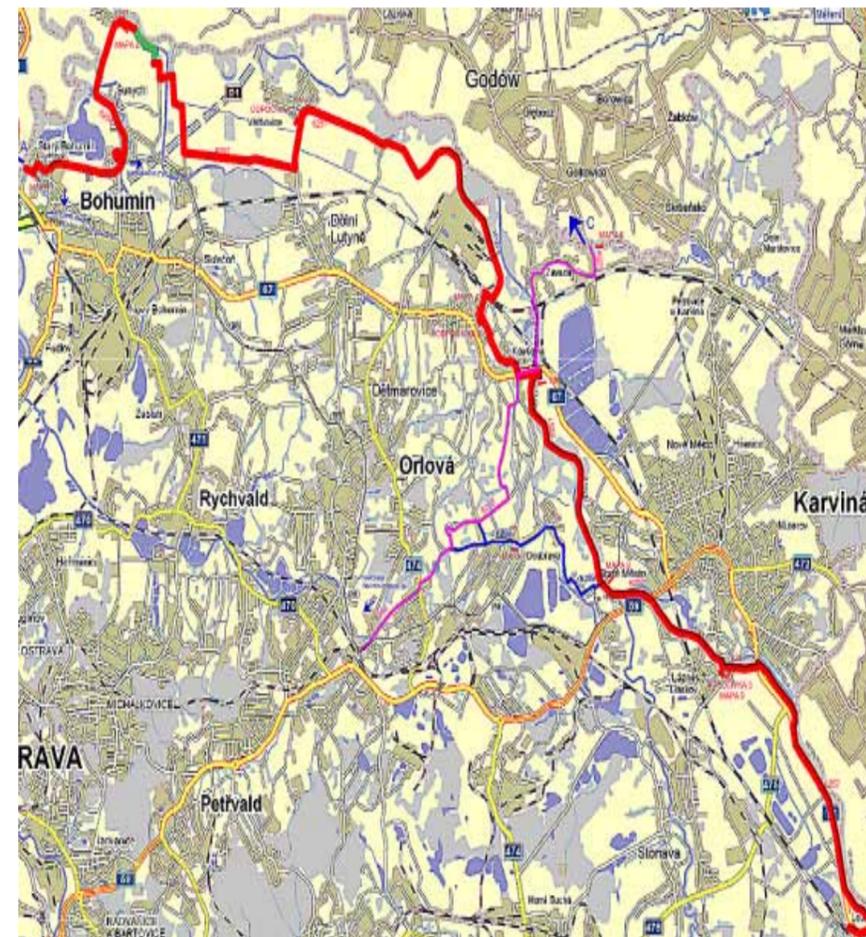
After months of work by organizations from both sides of the border, the legislative and logistical side of the project has finally come to an end. On March 30th, work has been handed over to the construction companies that are now taking the first steps in creating this huge expanse of paths.

“It gives the inhabitants a better possibility to get to know each other”



Ceslav Valosek, manager for the bike path project Photo: Andrew Codd

The project will link many already existing bike paths that used to stop just shy of the border. It will connect the areas of Raciborz and Krzyżanowice in Poland before crossing the border near Bohumin and continuing to Karvina and Chotebuz. After that, the route will once again head back towards Poland where it meets with other bike paths near the border area near Cieszyn. Much of the path follows the Rivers Olza and Oder, which have long been part of the natural border between the



Map for the route of the cycle path Source: Regional and Engineering Office of Karvina

two countries, and provide some added beauty to the bicycle route.

“The signs on the path will make it much easier for people to find their way and cycle, so I think it will be very helpful for tourists and other cyclists,” said Valosek.

### Help from the EU

Being a part of the European Union has been a large reason for finally making these projects feasible. With 90% of the cost of these projects covered by the EU, more than merely increased mobility due to the Schengen Area has helped these projects get started.

“A project like this is very expensive for each of the partners, as well as for both partners together. We can't do it without grants from the EU - it is a generous subsidy and we are grateful. Our towns are then able to finance the rest of the project's budget,” said Věra Vzatková, the project manager for the city of Bohumin.

One of the primary ways this has been accomplished is by the ease at which money is transferred from one country and government or organization to another. What used to be

an arduous process can now be done with nearly the same ease as transferring money inside a country due to less restrictions and the standardization of banking rules. “I think its much more easier now, funding is without any difficulties,” said Valosek, “there are a lot of agreements so there are no difficulties with the transfers between banks so its much easier that we are members of the EU.”

Despite being merely a few kilometers apart, because they were serving governments in separate countries there was very little communication between local leaders in the area. The EU has brought these towns closer together through making these projects by pushing local governments to collaborate across borders. As a result, local governments in Czech Republic now have a stronger relationship with their Polish counterparts. Neighboring districts can now cooperate more and aren't held back merely because of the fact that there is a national border separating them.

“Relationships between Bohumin and Krzyzanowice governments is very solid and we can say friendly,” said Vzatková.

### Problems still unsolved

However, working with the EU hasn't streamlined the process entirely. The application, and the process of acquiring building permits in cross-border regions is hardly easier than it was before Poland and Czech Republic were a part of the EU.

Due to different building codes and separate organizations granting building permits, both countries must file paperwork independently as they have to abide by different regulations. Therefore the applications are different and must be done in both countries before being submitted to the organization in charge of the region.

“There is no difference after the last ten years. The building law is different on both sides of the border,” said Valosek, “Its not influenced by being an EU member. The building law is different and we work separately.”

Despite making strides in other levels of cooperation, implementing projects in these borders regions has been slowed by a lack of unification in the realm of building permits and applications.



Cyclist on a path that will soon connect to the new route Photo: Andrew Codd

### Larger plan for the region

The larger scheme of the efforts in this border region include a host of other projects, with the general goals of making it a nicer place to live for inhabitants of the region and new sites and attractions to draw tourists to the area.

The general goals for the development of more outdoor infrastructure, according to Vera Vzatková the Secretary of the city of Bohumin, include:

- Increase the attractiveness of our industrial area
- Expand menu of leisure and sports activities, show to common people how they can pleasantly spend time although they are not active
- Increase knowledge of local residents and tourists about interesting places on Czech Republic-Polish border
- Tourism development

There are a number of projects in the region directed towards these goals through a variety of means including: work for nature conservation, the building of tourism centers in the area, making the Oder River area a better and more accessible place for kayaking as well as reinvigorating the art of glass blowing for a tourist attraction.

The next step for the region is to organize events to ensure community involvement in these projects.

In the future we expect further development of the cooperation among communities and their inhabitants from neighboring border areas. Said Pochyly, “We want to develop particularly activities aimed at the cooperation of clubs, which have similar activities including the participation in cultural, sports and events of the other party.”

€3,000,000 on a series of bicycling paths doesn't necessarily seem to be a sound investment.

Name of Project	Budget (€)	Location
-The River Joins, The River Divides, canoeing on the river Alder and Odre	380393	Bohumin (CZ) Krzyzanowice (PL)
-Summer in Krzyzanowicah / Winter in Smilovicoe, recreation infrastructure in the border region	1538908	Krzyzanowicah (PL) Smilovicoe (CZ)
-Karkonoski National Park Joint Nature Conservation through geographic information systems	1079020	Karkonoski National Park
-Revival of glassmaking craft for tourism	1139690	Novy Bor (CR)
-Protection and promotion of folk arts and crafts Polish-Czech border	97353	Prudnik (CR) Krnov (PL)

Projects contributing to increasing outdoor recreation and tourism. Source: Cross-border Cooperation Operational Programme



Entrance to the River Oder on the Czech Side of the border Photo: Andrew Codd

However, leaders in the area have lofty goals for the new bicycle paths. Besides expanding tourism in the region, local governments are working to ensure the conservation of the environment they share. Through making the area more useful, they hope to maintain the natural beauty and save it from other forms of development. Furthermore, it is believed that through building the means for inhabitants to be more active, they can promote a healthier way of life for the community.

“The project has been chosen especially with the aim to help improve the environment in the region and strengthen a healthy lifestyles,” said Jan Pochyly, the secretary for the community of Detmarovice, a town near the bicycle path that has been involved with implementing these plans.

“At the same time it gives the inhabitants a better possibility to get to know each other and to discover interesting places and monuments on both sides of the common border,” Pochyly said. ■



Regional leaders have big hopes for these cycle paths when they are finishes. Photo: Michael Huguenin

### Kayaking on the River Oder

With a river as a border between Czech Republic and Poland, it is only logical that this natural feature should be worked into the plan for outdoor recreation in the region. Therefore the project called, The rivers divide, the rivers join, is working to make canoeing and kayaking more readily available to the public. This is merely another step towards making the border region of these two countries a place to draw tourists and people from the nearby community.

Along the Rivers Oder and Alder there will now be five new entrance points to make it easier for water lovers to launch their kayaks and canoes. To keep in the spirit of cross-border development, three of these entrances will be on the Czech side and two will

be on the Polish side of the river.

Though watermen have been using this river for years, much of its course can only be navigated by those more experienced in the sport. When the work is completed, there will be marked paths for those less experienced as well as information panels to explain the routes, and other facts about the area.

“The river Odra was chosen because it is a natural border between Bohumin and Krzyzanowice. Both towns have been cooperating for many years in tourism, culture and sports,” said Vzatková, “More than ten years exists traditional events for watermen on the polish side on border and Czech people have been participating for five years.”

With significant levels of cooperation existing between these two countries even before they became a part of the Schengen Area, this project was a natural choice. Keeping and adding to the tradition of the past, the project will also organize atleast two events a year on the river to further increase the level of participation in the sport and use of the new facilities.

The majority of the projects roughly €380,000 budget is going to the procurement of kayaking and canoeing equipment. Then, first time or occasional watermen can rent the necessary equipment and experience the sport without having to buy everything they would need for a day kayaking or canoeing on the river.

However, not all the work is focused on getting people into the river. Plans also include the construction of wooden pavilions along the river, for participants to enjoy when they get out of the water for a break, and new landscaping around popular areas.

This project follows the Silesian-Venice project that created a path designed for beginners or children to try the sport. Building on the success of this smaller seventeen kilometer route, local government leaders and associations believe they can find the same success through the new project.

# The South Tyrolean Mix

The touristic heart of Italy is in the North, close to the Austrian border. It seems like tourist organization on both sides of the border have a lot to gain by working closer together. However, South Tyrol might be too Mediterranean for successful cross-border cooperation with Austrian North Tyrol.

Kai Heijneman

The marketing organization for tourism in South Tyrol (SMG) points out that the differences between south Tyrol and the Austrian neighbours in North Tyrol are bigger than one might expect.



Eberhardt Eugen with his wife at the Walter von der Vogelweide Platz in Bolzano.  
Photo: Kai Heijneman

## Extreme sports vs. Italian atmosphere

“Tyrol and South Tyrol promote themselves quite differently. Tyrol focuses mostly on winter sports, especially extreme sports. Our (South Tyrol, red.) unique selling aspect is the combination of the alpine sports combined with the Mediterranean feel of South Tyrol,” says the head of the market management department for SMG, Greti Ladurner. Because of its geographical location, South Tyrol has a much warmer climate than Tyrol. Add the influence of the Italian culture and it is easy to understand why South Tyrol feels so different from the Austrian Tyrol just across the border. In South Tyrol, the Apfelstrudel meets the Italian espresso and traditional Tyrol clothes blend with Italian fashion.

## Where the Alps and a mild climate merge

Tourism in South Tyrol is still promoted at the lowest regional level, because of the homogeneous background of the tourists. A stunning 89% of all tourists that visit South Tyrol are from either Italy or Germany. “Germans and Italians know about Tyrol, its mild climate and its history. If they come to South Tyrol, they choose it deliberate above (North) Tyrol. The regions really are quite different,” says Ladurner. German pensioner Eberhardt Eugen illustrates this. “The landscape is beautiful, just like in Southern Germany. My wife and I come here for the mild Mediterranean climate. Even in April the weather is already nice here,” he says. ■

## Differentiated strategies

It is clear that for SMG, promoting South Tyrol as a part of Tyrol or the Alps does not make much sense, at least not for the German and Italian market, which is almost the entire market. SMG, however, tries to expand to other markets including the Netherlands, Belgium and Poland. “Our approach is really different in every country. For example in Switzerland we will not promote the beautiful mountainous area, because they have Alps back home too. In the new markets such as the Netherlands and Poland we need to start from scratch. People will often not even know where South Tyrol is located. So we need maps to explain that too”, says Ladurner.

## Luis Durnwalder, President of the Italian Province of Bolzano

### How important is the cross border cooperation between Italy and Austria on the field of tourism?

It is clear that we promote ourselves as the Dolomites, as Tyrol in a bigger perspective. People in America don't know what Tyrol or South Tyrol is. We have to think bigger perspective, because they do know what the Alps are. But of course there is also competition. In North Tyrol they see they have a more beautiful nature and it's a better area to ski. We say we are more Southern and are of course better because of this.

### How important is the co-financing by the European Union for cross border cooperation on the field of tourism?

The financing is not that big, but it's good that we have the so called Interreg projects. Of course they have to be partially funded by the state (Italy) and the region (South Tyrol) too. However, the money is not the crucial factor. The will and conviction of the people on both sides of the border is needed to establish good cooperation. And in that field there is still some work to be done.

# European Start Up Injections

Removing internal borders has almost been a key ambition of the European Union. By promoting cross border cooperation through subsidized Interreg (inter-regional) projects, the EU tries to tear down the borders between Austria and Italy. Interreg tries to stimulate cross border cooperation by co-financing cross border projects, but the desired continuity is not evident.

Kai Heijneman

For Interreg Italy-Austria, tourism is one of the key areas. Cross-border tourism is the second biggest area, just behind cultural projects that in some cases can be linked to tourism as well. Former coordinator of the Interreg project, Arno Schuster explains the importance of continuity for Interreg. “Our philosophy is to get the cooperation started. The aim is to start a cooperation that will last and go on after the subsidies end.”

So the EU subsidy is just a financial injection to get started. Projects cannot run on European money alone, but with an European injection of up to half a million euro per partner it gets easier. Schuster, who is currently the substitute director of the Interreg office in Bolzano, says Interreg is very keen on keeping out applicants that just want to shop for some EU funds, without aiming for any real cooperation.

## After the subsidies

“A plan for further cooperation after the project ends, is a requirement for receiving financial support,” Schuster explains. Interreg does not actively follow up, but according to Schuster most cooperation will continue.

Asked for an example of a successful follow up he remembers from his time as a coordinator, he had to come up short however. “The cross cycling paths that were established between Italy and Austria, are still there,” Schuster tries. Then realizing it is only logical that they did not break them down after the project finished, he admits, “but that is not really a good example.”

## From competing to cooperating

Schuster thinks cross-border cooperation in the area is still in the early start up phase. “I think the amount of cooperation will increase. We have always more applicants for projects than we can finance,” he continues.

President of the Province of Bolzano, Luis Durnwalder thinks it has to do with mentality of seeing your neighbours as competitors. “The will and belief of the people on both sides of the border is needed for this. And there is some room for some improvement in that sense,” explains the governor of the past 22 years.

Schuster agrees there could be more cooperation. “It is important that the cooperation comes from bottom up. It should not be a project for intellectuals, but something that actually comes from the public.” ■

## Levels of tourism promotion

### 1 Provincial level: South Tyrol

First of all there is the promotion every region/province does themselves. For South Tyrol the marketing is done by the South Tyrol Marketing organization (SMG) through their site [suedtirol.info](http://suedtirol.info). The promotion at this very regional level is by far the most important one.

### 2 Euroregion: Tyrol, South Tyrol and Trentino

The second layer is the promotion of the Euroregion South Tyrol, Tyrol and Trentino. According to the head of the market management department of SMG, Greti Ladurner of SMG, cooperation on the field of tourism is not as logical as it seems. For Trentino, the most Southern province of the Euroregion the importance of tourism is too small to be an interesting partner for the other two. For Tyrol and South Tyrol there seem to be too many differences for a common strategy.

### 3 Transnational level: The Alps

Just recently cooperation has become more serious on the macro level of the Alps as a transnational region. France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany and Slovenia joined forces in the Alps project. President of the Province of Bolzano (South Tyrol), Luis Durnwalder can see the advantage of promotion on a macro level. “It is clear that we promote ourselves as Tyrol in a bigger perspective. People in America don't know what Tyrol or South Tyrol is, but they know what the Alps are.”

# Welcome to Gossensass

Right before the border next to the famous Brenner pass that connects Italy to Austria, there is the municipality of Brenner (just over 2000 inhabitants). Gossensass is the main village. Both the success and the failures of cross border cooperation on the field of tourism can be found here at a micro level.

**Kai Heijneman**

At the end of March the village looks deserted at daytime. Most winter tourists have already left, the quiet interval period between summer and winter has begun. The last winter tourists are at the nearby ski-resort Ladurns, skiing, cross-country-skiing or snowboarding. Soon they will be replaced by bikers and hikers. High above the valley of the city cars and trucks drive on the motorway that leads to Austria, the Brenner pass.

The station of the village is deserted. One train per hour stops at the station. One person departs at Gossensass and one person arrives. The clear alpine water running down the rocks is the only sound one hears while standing in front of the church. A farmer with a typical green Tyrolean hat waves friendly at the seldom event of tourist passing by.

## The very local tourism office

Just 200 meters from the station, Andrea Wieser works at the local tourist information office. Since there are few tourists in the village, it is a quiet working day for her. Cross border cooperation is hardly a daily issue for Wieser. The tourist office of Gossensass does not work together with tourist offices on the other sides of the border. "There is no real concrete cooperation going on in that sense," says Wieser. Wieser does remember a failed initiative a couple of years ago. "There was the idea of introducing a common ski pass that would be valid on both side of the border, but it did not make it." The tourism organizations at both side of the border thought the added value of a common ski pass was too small. From her daily routine she also knows that the demand among tourists for such a ski pass would have been low. "Tourists never asked me for a ski pass that is also valid in Tyrol. They only ask for a South-Tyrol pass," continues Wieser.



The view on the Alps from the village  
Photo: Kai Heijneman



Clear Alpine water flowing from the mountain  
Photo: Kai Heijneman



Tyrolean houses near the railway station of Gossensass  
Photo: Kai Heijneman



Wolfenhof, one of the accommodation for rent in Gossensass.  
Photo: Kai Heijneman

## Promoting a common culture

The Mayor of Brenner, Franz Kompatscher has a more positive look at cross border cooperation.

"I think people here are interested in getting together with the people on the side of Tyrol."

Tourism and agriculture are vital for the villagers of Gossensass. Most people own some cattle. Kompatscher: "However most families here have only a dozen cows, that is not enough to live from, you need at least 35-45 cows to make a living. So most people here depend on income from tourism. For example letting their guesthouses."

It comes as no surprise that projects in this village are always closely related to culture, agriculture, tourism or a combination of those three.

As an example he mentions a project that took place last year, Culture on the Brenner Road. The aim of the project was to lure passing tourists to visit the small villages alongside the motorway. Along the road, cultural events were held and local products were sold. "Local cheese, Tyrolean Speck, wine and grappa were sold there. We wanted to inform people and get them interested in our common culture," says Kompatscher.

## The financial struggle on the other side

However, Kompatscher has also experienced that some projects fail as cross border cooperation comes with some difficulties. Especially getting the finances approved at both sides of the border can be a problem.

The construction of a common bike path illustrates this problem. Cycling from Munich to Verona is interesting, but the amount of traffic on the road is scary sometimes. Therefore a bike path at both sides of the Brenner pass was needed to make the route more attractive. "The cycling path at our side of the border is finished, but the Austrians are still struggling to get the finances and paperwork done," he continues.

When the biking path is finished, it would give a boost to tourism, thinks the mayor. Especially the local Sporthotel, would benefit. Most bikers sleep in this hotel if they stay in Gossensass overnight, tells Andrea Wieser from the Tourist Office.

According to Kompatscher it is the community's intellectuals that are driving force. The cultural minded see the benefits of cooperating the most. Among the common people there is still the tendency "to see our neighbours as competitors first and potential cooperation partners second," he thinks. ■

# Tourist for Six Months

Half a year of holiday, sounds too good to be true. Still this is how ice hockey player Olegs Sorokins looks back on his six months stay in South Tyrol. The Latvian professional chose to play this year in the North Italian city of Sterzing, because he felt like leaving the cold Northern leagues.

Kai Heijneman



Olegs and Inga Sorokins with their daughter (3)  
Photo: Kai Heijneman

The last couple of years the Latvian professional ice hockey player had played for clubs in cold countries like Finland, Denmark and Latvia. The reason he wanted to play in the Italian Lega A is not related to sport at all. "The Italian league is not better than the leagues I come from." Certainly it must be money then? "No, the money is okay, but not the reason. I chose Italy because of the nice weather," says the defender of the Vipiteno (Sterzing) Broncos. Sorokins' wife Inga was really excited to go to Italy and was in favour of the Mediterranean adventure from the start. "Actually this six months are like a prolonged vacation to us," she explains.

## Where ice cream and winter sports meet

Sorokins moved to South Tyrol for a week just before the competition started to check if Italy was as good in real life



Advertisement for the final game of the Broncos in the city center of Sterzing at the day of the game 31-03-2011.  
Photo: Kai Heijneman

as he had imagined to be. "I soon found out that this region is more Austrian than I expected. The main language in this region is German and also the architecture is not typical Italian," says the Broncos player. Besides the nice climate there were two other upsides that made moving to South Tyrol an easy choice. First of all the central location between cities like Milano, Innsbruck and Munich, meant the family could go for some city trips. Secondly the wide range of available winter sports appealed greatly to his two 15-year old sons. The twins are skiing at the ski resort while their parents and their three year old sister went for a walk and an ice cream. Sorokins would have liked to do some skiing himself, but was not allowed due to risks of injuries.

## From hockey player to full-time tourist

Unfortunately, even without raging down mountains Sorokins got injured during the last decisive weeks of the competition. "It is quite hard to not be able to play in these final games. My team made it to the play-off final and if they win tonight they will be champion. It is really hard to miss such a big game," wails the Latvian pro.

At least the injury gave Sorokins the opportunity to enjoy the beauty of South Tyrol as a full time tourist. The Sorokins never regretted moving to Italy and enjoyed the combination of Alpine landscape and Mediterranean atmosphere to the maximum. However, Olegs and Inga have no clue yet where they will be in a years' time. If another club comes up for Olegs, the Sorokins are likely to move again. ■

At the night of the interview (31-03-2011), Olegs Sorokins watched from the sideline as his team won their match against Gröden 4-3 and were crowned Champions of Italy.

# The Land Where Knödel and Parmesan Meet

Surrounded by grapevine-covered mountains and apple trees: Castle Katzenstein in Meran, South Tyrol  
Photo: Anna Buch

The Italian region South Tyrol at the Austrian border is the intersection point between between Alpine and Mediterranean, between Germanic and Latin culture. Although people try to preserve their Tyrolean traditions, the merger with the Italian culture is obvious and nowhere more visible and tastable than in the regional cuisine.

Anna Buch

Pans rattle, mixers hum, knives clatter. It sizzles and fizzes in the kitchen. Six men in white clothes scurry around to prepare the ingredients for the dinner. Bread sticks are formed, cream is whipped, hard-boiled eggs are chopped. Chef Herbert Hintner keeps an eye on every wave of his cooks' hands. What is not seen by him, is seen by the deputy kitchen chef, Raimund Brunner. He is the one who assigns tasks to the other cooks, answers questions, keeps an eye on the clock. The restaurant opens at 7 pm, in one hour. By then, all the ingredients have to be ready. The six men will take their positions then. Everyone has his own sphere of action: pasta, supplements, dessert.

Raimund Brunner is looking for the salt now. "Dov'è il sale? Wo ist das Salz?" he shouts in Italian and German. For him, it is normal to switch offhand from one language to the other. Two of the six cooks do not speak German as most South Tyroleans do. South Tyrol, the former Austrian region, has evidently merged with its new governing state Italy. At least in Herbert Hintner's kitchen. In his restaurant *Zur Rose* in Eppan, 90 km south of the Italian border to Austria, Italian speakers and German speakers create dishes together that mirror the cultural merger in this region: Grey cheese meets risotto. South Tyrolean cuisine meets Mediterranean cuisine.

For chef Herbert Hintner, the fusion of traditional South Tyrolean elements with Mediterranean components has always been crucial for his creations. He even published a cook book with the title *My South Tyrolean cuisine, Alpine-Mediterranean delights*. „The local food is, first of all, alpine and pretty sparse,” explains Herbert Hintner. “So, what is more obvious than refining it with olive oil, herbs and other Italian elements, since Italy is just around the corner?” He does not want to distort but to enrich the traditional local food. “It is clear that we rather look towards the south,” he says. “That adds more warmth and taste to our dishes. In the north, dishes tend to be too sweet and rather sterile.”

## Old-style preparation & southern flavours

Hintner has held one Michelin star for sixteen years and has gained two of three toques in the gourmet guides *Guide de L'Espresso* and *Gault Millau*. He likes to play with the contrast of traditional preparations and southern flavours. “To serve a steak tartare in an old-fashioned way, I could mince the meat just roughly because back in time, mincing machines could not hash the meat finely,” he explains. “And then I could serve it in a Mediterranean way: with salsa verde, lemon, capers, and olives.”

Hintner admits, though, that the coexistence of Italian and South Tyrolean culture is not always as harmonious as on his plates. "People can agree faster at the table than in politics," he says and smiles.

### Harmonious fusion on the plate

After the First World War, the historic region of Tyrol, mainly German-speaking and a part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, was split up into North and South Tyrol. North Tyrol stayed with Austria, South Tyrol was annexed by Italy. In politics, discussions about autonomy rights, the affinity to the neighbour country Austria, and differences with Italy are omnipresent.

In daily life, however, South Tyrol became an example of a bilingual and bicultural region. Street signs are in German and Italian. Most people speak both languages fluently. Official documents, newspapers, theatre plays, and menus exist in German and Italian. In cuisine, the biculturalism is even more visible. On restaurant tables, grissini, Italian bread sticks, stand next to schüttelbrot, the crispy South Tyrolean flat bread. Traditional dumplings, knödel, are served with parmesan cheese or as carpaccio, in very thin slices. Olive oil replaces butter or lard in South Tyrolean households.

### Italian tourists cause "quiet revolution"

According to Dr Paul Rösch, director of the South Tyrolean museum of tourism in Meran, mainly travellers are responsible for the fusion of Alpine and Mediterranean cuisine in the region. "Diplomats, artists, pilgrims, traders, and aristocrats have already travelled over the Brenner pass for a long, long time," he explains. That is how in former times, dumplings, doughnuts, and pasta pockets came from Southern Germany to South Tyrol and became what is now known as the traditional

cuisine. Fruit, wine, polenta, and crops came from Italy. The remarkable turning point for the fusion in cuisine, however, took place in the first half of the 20th century: After the annexation of South Tyrol, Italian tourists travelled to the new edge of their country.

Restaurants adapted to the needs of their new customers, so South Tyrol moved closer to Italy culinarily. True to the motto: The customer is king. Dr Rösch calls that the "quiet revolution". Spaghetti, risotto and other Italian dishes were adopted and became an essential part of the South Tyrolean

“ As soon as the South Tyrolean crosses the border to Austria he misses his cappuccino ”

menu. Additionally, South Tyroleans started to travel more to other countries and regions with the advent of individual travelling in the 1950s. As a consequence, South Tyroleans got new ideas for enriching their own cuisine and noticed its advantages. "The South Tyrolean likes to emphasize his shared identity with the Austrians. But as soon as he crosses the border to Austria he misses his cappuccino and complains about the greasy food," comments Dr Rösch and laughs.

So eventually, South Tyrolean cuisine became lighter because of the Italian influence. Olive oil replaced butter, vegetables like eggplant and courgette became a natural part of South Tyrolean nutrition. "Music and food are two points cultures can



Works where others go to holiday: Dr Paul Rösch, director of the Touriseum Meran  
Photo: Anna Buch

easily meet at", says Dr Rösch. "They have a bridging function in societies, and that is also the case here in South Tyrol."

### Creative and down-to-earth cuisine

The South Tyrolean cuisine became popular also beyond the regional border because of its recognition by gourmet guides like *Michelin*, *Gault Millau* or the wine and restaurant guide of the Italian magazine *L'Espresso*, *Le guide de L'Espresso*. "We actually have the highest density of toques in Italy. Star cuisine is very well established," explains Greti Ladurner, head of the market management department of the South Tyrolean Marketing Corporation (SMG). This year, *Gault Millau* and *L'Espresso* published their ninth editions of South Tyrolean gourmet guides. "To be present in these guides does not just make us more credible as a gourmet region," says Ladurner, "But it enhances also the quality level of the gastronomy because restaurants are more motivated to improve."

Fresh quality products, creativity, and a harmonious and distinctive style of preparation: These are the key points for a high ranking in these guides. What makes the South Tyrolean cuisine special is "that it is creative and at the same time distinctively reliable and down-to-earth," explains Martina Hohenlohe, chief-editor of the *Gault Millau* in Austria and in charge of the South Tyrolean edition. South Tyrolean cooks set great value upon top-quality products and prefer to use as many regional ones as possible. "It recently seems that cooks became less brave, though. In some locations, testers even got the same dishes. Cuisine risks to become uniform," says Hohenlohe.

### Experimental cuisine with local touch

This surely does not apply to Martin Obermarzoner, shooting star among the Michelin starred cooks in South Tyrol. That afternoon, he stands in his kitchen in Klausen, 55 km south of the Austrian Italian border, and roasts peppers with a gas burner. "That gives kind of a coffee flavour to the peppers," he explains. Besides the coffee smell, the sweet scent of raspberries hovers in the air. A dark pink sauce is steaming quietly on the stoves. Raspberry vinegar. He is about to prepare red mullet on a bed of roasted peppers and courgette, crowned with raspberry foam.

His slim fingers grab a little oxygen pump, usually used for aquariums. He switches it on and puts the end of a tube into



Tourists influence the local cuisine: Sculptures in the garden of the Touriseum Meran  
Photo: Anna Buch



More than salty & sweet: Martin Obermarzoner, restaurant Jasmin in Klausen, South Tyrol  
Photo: Anna Buch



In the Michelin starred restaurant Zur Rose in Eppan, South Tyrol: Chef Herbert Hintner (l.) keeps an eye on every wave of his cooks' hands (r.)  
Photos: Anna Buch



Beetroot knödel, filled with gorgonzola on leeks sauce: The *Rauthof* in Meran, South Tyrol, serves traditional food  
Photo: Anna Buch

the pink sauce. After some minutes, foam rises from the pot. Fluffy and light like candy floss in an amusement park. Martin Obermarzoner raises the right corner of his mouth. While smiling, he crowns a fish tower with the pink raspberry foam. At the age of 20, he opened his restaurant *Jasmin* in Klausen, half an hour's drive away from the regional capital Bozen. He got his first Michelin star at the age of 24, as the youngest cook in Italy ever.

“People come here not for spaghetti but for knödel”

This year, the 29-year-old even gained a second star. Now he belongs to the three highest rated cooks in whole South Tyrol and feels relieved: “There is not the pressure anymore that I felt before,” tells Martin Obermarzoner. “I don't have to prove to anyone anymore how well I cook, I can just concentrate on being creative.”

### Knödel and schlutzkräpfen go global

Obermarzoner wants to open barriers in the people's minds. “There is more than the classical way of salty and sweet,” he explains. So he takes traditional food and spices it up with new elements, for instance, his version of the South Tyrolean ravioli schlutzkräpfen: Celery slices replace the classical pasta dough. Obermarzoner's sesame ravioli are served with red prawns on a pumpkin cream and green apple. South Tyrolean fruits meet the big wide world. Of course, creativity comes at a price: A menu, consisting of four to six courses, costs up to 85 Euros.

Undoubtedly, Martin Obermarzoner's creations are probably the most experimental ones in the South Tyrolean gastronomy.

But his way of designing dishes – taking South Tyrolean, Mediterranean and other elements and mixing them up to turn them into something new – is somehow quintessential for this region which formerly offered nothing but caloric food, consisting mainly of potatoes and white flour. “South Tyrolean food is honest, simple but also pretty poor,” explains Obermarzoner. “Italian cuisine is known and loved everywhere. In my kitchen I even go a step further, but many cooks combine the traditional food with Italian components because it is a simple way to refine it and make it more popular.”

### Haute cuisine as provocation

Danilo Gramegna loves good regional food. And he sees it as his task to give more value to local products and dishes, to sensitize people for what they eat, where it comes from, and how it is served.

Gramegna is the leader of the South Tyrolean department of Slow Food, a non-profit association, founded in 1989, to counter the rise of fast food and link the pleasure of good food with sustainable production. “The creativity in the Michelin awarded restaurants is meant to astonish or even provoke people, but these tendencies are not at all mainstream. It is more important to not forget the typical style of cooking,” he says.

Slow Food publishes every year its own guide *Osterie d'Italia*. It labels restaurants with their symbol, the snail, if they meet special criteria, for instance, the strict commitment to regional cuisine. Danilo Gramegna understands that South Tyrolean cooks jazz up the rather caloric local dishes with Mediterranean elements. “But people do not come here to eat spaghetti,” says Gramegna. “They come here to eat knödel, the typical and original dumplings.”

A place where original local cuisine can be found is Johanna Fieg's kitchen. She and her husband Josef conduct a rustic

country tavern high above the city of Meran, the second biggest city in South Tyrol with almost 38,000 inhabitants. The tavern is included in a farm, the *Rauthof*, located in the middle of grapevine-covered mountains. Just a stone's throw away, the medieval castle Katzenstein waits for bikers, hikers, and history fans, and some of them climb up the last metres to enjoy the nice view from the tavern's terrace while having some of the wine that grows just next to the table. The restaurant is equipped with rustic wooden tables and chairs. Big windows permit to the customer to see the impressive mountain panorama in all weathers. Mainly on the weekends, visitors come to eat Johanna Fieg's self-made products and dishes.

Outside on the terrace, the only sound derives from a little fountain that burbles in the sun. “I use the same recipes as my grandmother,” tells Johanna Fieg. “In the past, women just cooked with what the farm offered, and I try to stick as much as possible to this motto, too.” Johanna Fieg and her husband Josef produce five different wines, several fruit juices, sausages, and speck on their farm. The cooling chamber is hewn in rock. Between huge silver wine barrels hangs home-made salami. Vegetables, herbs and flowers grow on a small steep field behind the house.

### Fusion cuisine also in country taverns

At the *Rauthof*, the basic element of most dishes is knödel, a dumpling, in different variations: with bacon, stinging nettle or other herbs, or with beetroot – and filled with gorgonzola cheese. “I also refine stale dishes with Italian elements,” explains Johanna Fieg. “I put parmesan cheese on the dumplings or gorgonzola into them, I use olive oil, garlic, and basil.” Nevertheless, changing time-proven recipes has limits for her. “I would probably not go farther than creating just a new sauce for an old recipe,” says Johanna Fieg. Her guests, she says, appreciate this authentic but on the same time refined farm food. Guests like that to see where their salad comes from and, according to Johanna Fieg, the desire for more originality is typical for people who come to eat at her place.

No matter if rustic country tavern or haute cuisine, culinary matters have always been used to a huge extent for tourism

### Where to find the good food

#### The regional-oriented creative

Herbert Hintner, Eppan (Italy)  
Restaurant Zur Rose  
Josef Innerhoferstraße 2

#### The experimentalist

Martin Obermarzoner, Klausen (Italy)  
Restaurant Jasmin  
Griesbruck 4

#### The traditionalist

Johanna Fieg, Meran (Italy)  
Buschenschank Rauthof  
Katzensteinstraße 41

promotion in South Tyrol. They are, indeed, together with sports matters, the crucial pillars of the region's marketing concept. “In contrast to other regions, local products such as speck and wines and local dishes are very important for South Tyrol,” explains Greti Ladurner, South Tyrolean Marketing Corporation (SMG). “So we use food aspects with varying severity for every market.”

### “South Tyrol, the other side of Italy”

Not just for gourmet matters but for the general presentation of the region, the intersection of Alpine and Mediterranean culture is the most important characteristic. “It has turned out to be very attractive for the clients,” explains Ladurner. “We are in an Alpine area but the sun shines 300 days a year. You can feel the Mediterranean atmosphere in the streets. People sit outside and have a glass of wine already at the beginning of April.” Greti Ladurner admits that the SMG has to overdraw attributes in order to use them for marketing purposes, “but it does not make any sense to make promotion with features that are not significant for South Tyrol.”

She thinks it is natural that older generations might have negative feelings when it comes to Italy. During the Fascist Era, Italian authorities forbid the South Tyroleans to speak German and practice their culture. “The younger generations, however, are much more open towards Italy and its culture”, says 37-year-old Greti Ladurner. “We have a mixed circle of friends, our lifestyle is rather Italian. Subconsciously, we are probably more Italian than we actually concede us to be.”

Young people do not have problems with being Italian anymore, thinks also Martin Obermarzoner, 29-year-old star cook from Klausen. “Mediterranean elements in the traditional dishes are natural for us anyway,” he says. “And since time passes by, people will become more and more relaxed with the fact that cultures merge, and not just in the kitchen.” ■



Self-made food & wine: Johanna Fieg in her kitchen on the *Rauthof* in Meran, South Tyrol  
Photo: Anna Buch

# Getting Together Through the Big Screen

Uniting Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic can be done in a lot of ways. Doing this by organizing cultural events is really popular. One of the more successful of these types of events is the Cinema on the Border festival which is held in the Czech-Polish border town of Český Tešín/Cieszyn. This year the festival will take place between the 28th of April till the 3rd of May.

Bart de Bruijn

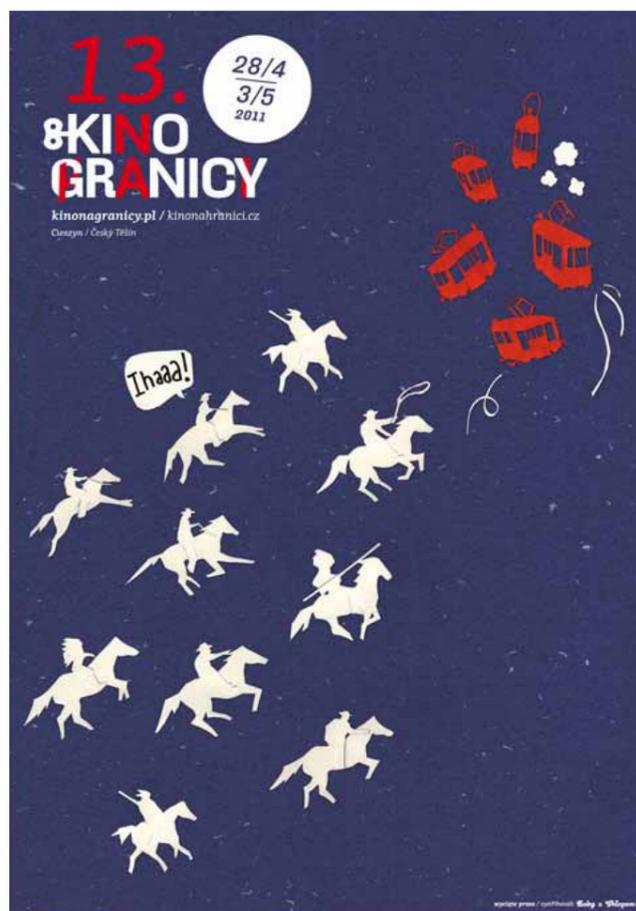
On the border between Poland and the Czech Republic lies a town that's separated but also very much one. Its Czech name is Český Tešín, the Polish one is Cieszyn. The Olza River divides the town. You notice the difference. The pavement of the roads is different, the street signs are different and the Polish side looks much older and more historic compared to the Czech side. Throughout history both sides of the city have belonged to many different countries. Now it seems to be settled and the town is united.

To spread this feeling of unity to the rest of the border region the townspeople wanted to start a cultural event celebrating this close relationship. They decided to organize a film festival, adequately called Cinema on the Border. To unite not just Poland and the Czech Republic, but also Slovakia and Hungary the festival now shows movies from all four of these countries.

## Unlucky Thirteen?

This year is the thirteenth edition year of the festival. An unlucky number the organizers tried to avoid by naming it 12+1, but finally decided to just take a chance. This year's theme is Westerns as is visible on the posters. Real western-named movies like *Stary kowboj* (Old Cowboy) and *Prawo i pięść* (Law and the Fist) are being shown.

A second theme is the tram, like the ones the cowboys are chasing on the poster. This commemorates a tram line that was constructed a hundred years ago. In 1911, Cieszyn launched a nearly two kilometer long tram line, which ran from the local train station to downtown Cieszyn.



This year's poster, with cowboys chasing trams.  
Photo: Kino Na Granicy

Every year important directors or film technicians are celebrated as well and their best movies are shown.

Now in its thirteenth edition, the festival almost looks to be too big of a success. That's what the festival's financial director Petra Slovacek Rypienová, who has been working at the festival since the start in 1999, says. "With 1050 visitors, a hundred movies in six days and three venues we seem to be at our max. It's really difficult to expand right now."

## Working side by side

The organizers of the festival are Czechs and Poles. The committee consists of six members. One director, one financial director, two people responsible for the program and two coordinators (one from the Czech Republic and one from Poland). It's no full-time job. The director is a teacher and Rypienová is a stay at home mum with two kids.

During the festival the number of workers increases. Twenty technicians join to operate the film projectors and prepare the venues for the films. Also seventy volunteers join to make sure the festival is running smoothly. Most of them are Czech.

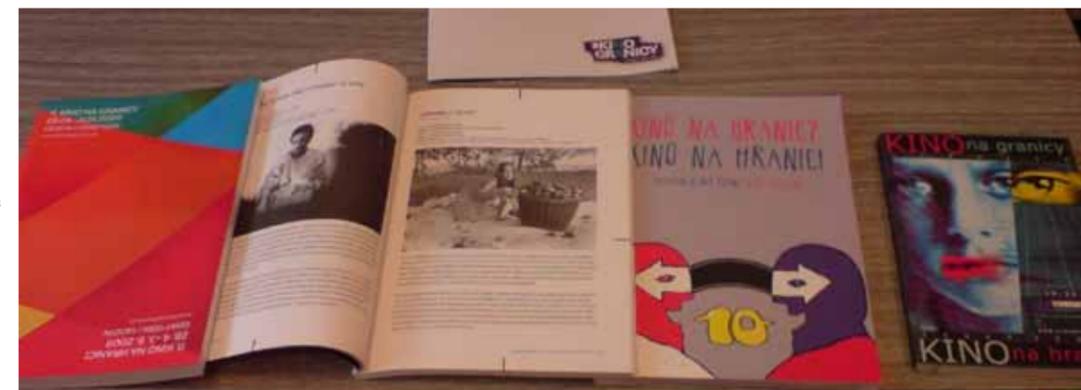
The old theater on the Polish side needs a lot of technical work each year. Installing movie projectors, a big screen and a top-

notch sound system. "We know it is a lot of work each year, but it is such a beautiful old building. It would be a pity not to use it," says Rypienová.

Once the Cinema on the Border festival was literally cinema across the border. Projectors on the Czech side of the river were aimed at a big screen on the wall of a building on the Polish side.

## Language is not an issue

To make sure everybody can understand the movies that are displayed most of them are translated. Between Czech, Polish and Slovak it's not that hard, because the language is pretty common.



Every year the festival issues a book with information about the movies being shown.  
Photo: Bart de Bruijn

"We put a lot of effort in translating movies each year," Rypienová says. "In the beginning it was just a man reading the translations out loud during the film. Now we have subtitles."

Hungarian is very different and that's why translating is more expensive, so Cinema on the Border never really does that.

It doesn't lead to big problems, because Hungarians don't visit the festival that much. Most of all because of the language difference, but also the big distance to Český Tešín/Cieszyn. The biggest group of visitors are Polish students. Rypienová thinks they form 70% of the total amount. "Polish students are accustomed to traveling to festivals. The people from other countries have to learn that."

## Expansion leads to extra funds

When the festival started in 1999 it was just a cooperation between the Czechs and the Slovaks. Only twelve movies were shown in four days. After a while Poland joined in and finally Hungary as well. This completed the so-called Visegrad Four (V4), the name the four countries chose to name their cooperation on a political level.

“We put a lot of effort in translating movies each year. In the beginning it was just a man reading the translations out loud during the film. Now we have subtitles.”

By involving all the four countries the festival qualified for the International Visegrad Fund, a fund that gives money to cross-border projects. The projects are generally cultural, or educational but can be based on just about anything as long as they promote cross-border cooperation. Almost 50% of the money is going into cultural project each year.

The total amount of money put into the fund keeps on rising every year. 4,8 million in 2008, 5,2 million in 2009. Evenly divided among the 4 countries, some as well to Belarus, Serbia and Ukraine (2000-2009). Each country pays the same amount 1,25 million in 2009, 1,5 million in 2010.

In 2009 Cinema on the Border got 17,000 euro, which is 30% of the total budget. The rest of the money is coming from the EU and the ministries of culture of all four countries. Without the Visegrad Fund, it seems there would be no Cinema on the Border.

### Perfect example

Jiri Sykora works in the head office of the Visegrad Fund as Public Relations Coordinator and thinks the festival is a nice example of a good cross-border project. "As for the Cinema on the Border, I think it is a very common type of projects that take place in border areas, but what makes

it special is the fact that the Silesian region is so very specific in the Visegrad region: people are basically bilingual and it is interconnected as most businesses reach across the border."

This year a new element will be added to the Cinema on the Border program. There will be a workshop for young film directors or students aspiring for a career in film. Three to four participants of each of the Visegrad countries will attend and will learn from each other and more experienced directors. A new way for the festival to look beyond the border. ■

“

*Without the Visegrad Fund, it seems there would be no Cinema on the Border.*

”



Two countries, one city.  
Photo: Bart de Bruijn

# The Visegrad Group, Just for Politicians

*The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia are also known as the Visegrad Group countries. They have long shared common ground in history, culture, religion and economics. Over the course of the centuries this shared past has been marked by a striving for unity, but not everybody feels like that.*

**Bart de Bruijn**

When you walk around in Bratislava you don't see much hinting at another country. You might see some signs to Vienna that's just across the border. But no Czech number plates or vans filled with Polish workers. You might spot Hungarian goulash on some menus, but that is as far as it goes. Slovakia seems, on the surface, to be focused just on Slovakia.

Nevertheless Slovakia is part of a bigger whole. Not just the European Union, which it entered in 2004, but also a central European cooperation. Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary join Slovakia in the so-called Visegrad Group. The Visegrad Group was named after Visegrád, a historic fortified town situated in northern Hungary, along the banks of the River Danube.

Visegrád was the site of one of the most important meetings between regional rulers in 1335, between Charles Robert of Hungary, Jan Lucemburský of Bohemia and Poland's Kazimierz III. The three kings decided to form an alliance against restrictive trade practices instituted in Vienna. More recently, Visegrád also hosted a meeting in 1991, between regional leaders from Poland, the former Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

The last decade of the 20th century saw the rise of more cooperation in this region, allowing these nations to catch up with the economically more developed Western European countries. The partnership that has developed among these nations is the backbone of the region's economic competitiveness in the long term.

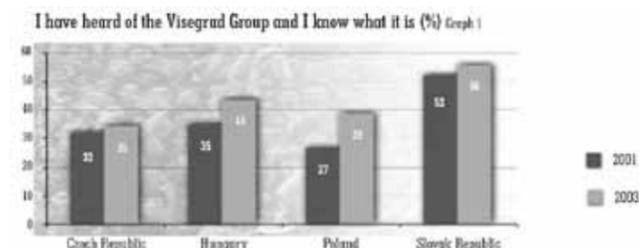
In 2001 and 2003 a sociological survey was conducted by the Institute for Public Affairs in Bratislava asking people about their thoughts about the Visegrad Group and culture. They

found out that how people see foreign topics is influenced by the attention that is paid to it by the country's foreign policy and what opinion makers say about it.

### Slovakia on top

Slovak politicians have always considered Visegrad important. After 1998, regional cooperation became part of their strategy, and Slovakia became the motor of the revitalization of these kinds of platforms. Slovak politicians frequently stated that Slovakia's road to Brussels led through Visegrad.

That's why it's not a surprise that Slovakia topped the charts when people were asked if they had heard of the Visegrad Group and knew what it meant. In 2003, 56% of the Slovaks said they were familiar with the term and knew what it meant; this compares to 44% of Hungarians, 39% of Poles and 35% of Czechs.



source: *The Visegrad Group – A Central European Constellation*

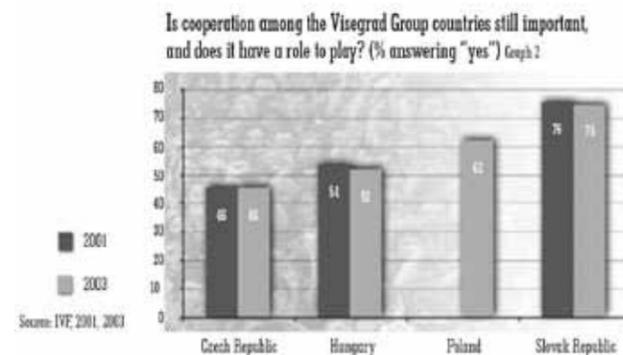
### Is Visegrad useful?

Is the Visegrad cooperation useful? This is a question writers and journalists ask themselves quite often, and most of the time the answer is negative. That's understandable.

Top level meetings are full of formal expressions of mutual understanding but they cannot hide the fact that when push comes to shove each country will always put their own interest first.

Most of the inhabitants of the member countries, however, answer positively when asked if Visegrad has any meaning. The strength of this agreement varies widely, however. Again it was Slovakia that in both surveys exhibited the greatest share of positive responses (over 70%).

The low score of the Czech Republic (46%) can be explained by domestic politics. Czech Prime Minister Václav Klaus on more than one occasion referred to Visegrad cooperation as an outmoded concept. This opinion was mirrored by the public as you can see. ■



source: *The Visegrad Group – A Central European Constellation*

## And in 2011?

In 2011 I asked some of the people in Slovakia, The Czech Republic and Poland about this subject. What do they know about Visegrad? Understandably people who work in organizations working with an international scope are more aware of a constellation like this.

Jiri Sykora, Public Relations Coordinator of the International Visegrad Fund in Bratislava, Slovakia:

"Is there something these countries have in common? I personally think that yes, there is something cultural that makes this region specific and that ties it together. I don't think it's necessarily a culture in the singular, but rather a mixture of different overlapping cultures. The Fund can merely make use of the common cultural values when financing the small projects. I don't think it can really create one."

Veronika Krístková, a teacher of English in the border town of Český Tešín, the Czech Republic:

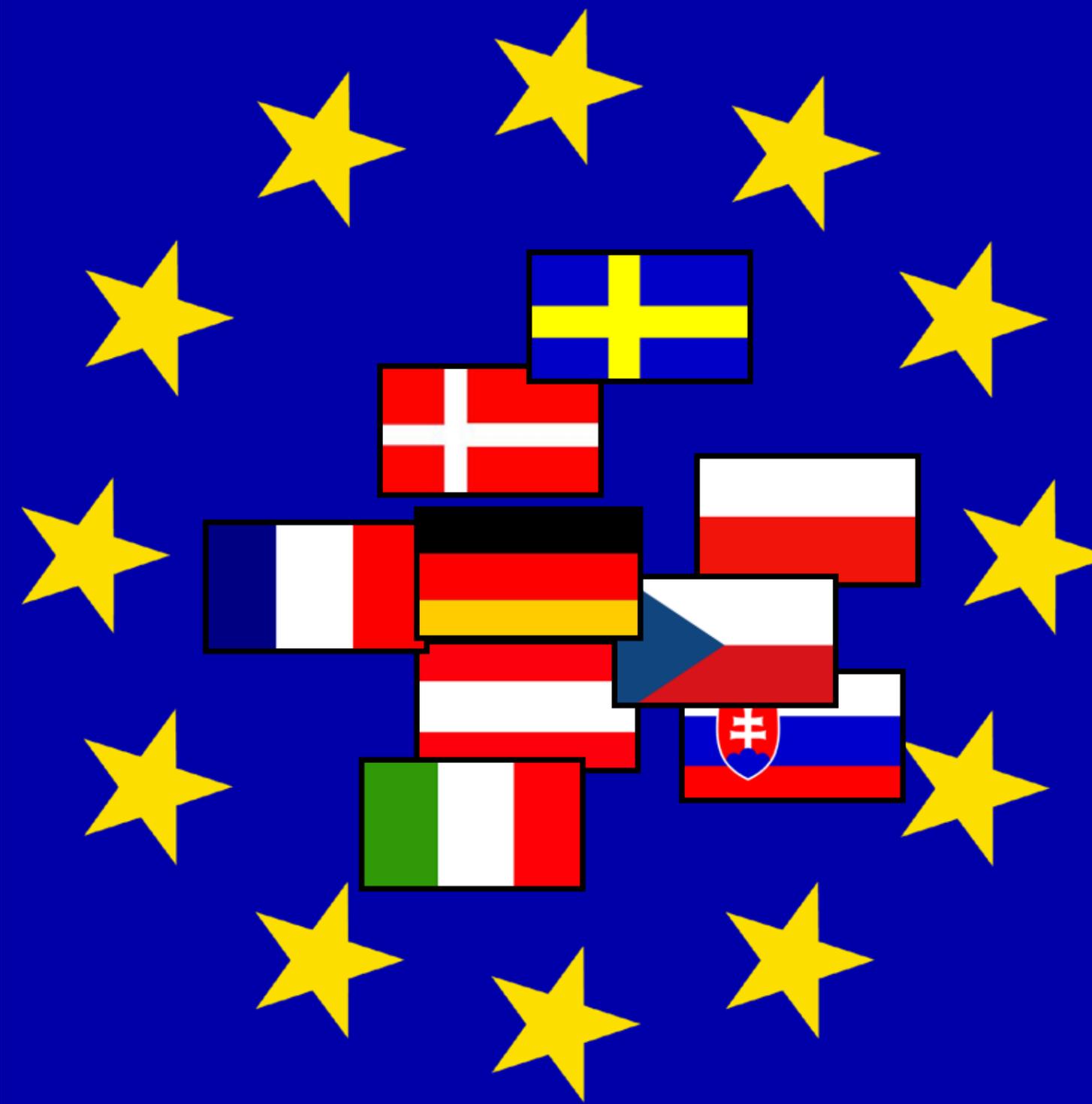
"I think it depends on where you ask this question. Here we obviously feel pretty close to Poland and Slovakia. But Hungary is far away and they speak a different language. That doesn't help feeling together. I would never say we have one culture."

Peter, a student on the bus in the center of Bratislava, Slovakia:

"The what? I have never heard of that."  
After I explained it: "It seems like a political thing. I don't feel that much in common with other countries."

Peter Drozd, Coordinator of EURES-T Beskidy, dealing with cooperation between Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia:

"I think the Visegrad Group is most active in Hungary. To me it seems like a toy for the politicians. From my experience it's not a big thing for the public. You also have to keep in mind that the north of Poland and Hungary are very far apart."



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