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Consequences of Post-War Ethnically Based Population Exchange in the Czech Borderland for the Regional Development

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About 3.1 millions of Germans lived in Czechoslovakia in 1930s forming the biggest ethnical minority. This minority almost completely disappeared as a consequence of the WWII. About 300–500 thousands of them were killed in the war as soldiers of German military forces. Some dozens of thousands were killed by the Nazi regime (anti-Nazi and German Jews), about 300 thousand fled on the base of Hitler's command, about 20–30 thousands were killed or died within "wild displacement". The majority (2.1 million) were transferred³ into individual occupation zones in Germany. Only established anti-Nazis, people from mixed matrimonies and indispensable experts in economic branches were allowed to stay.

Excluding big cities and some inner enclaves, the majority of German population was transferred from the borderland. Before the WWII, almost all the borderland of Bohemia and Moravia was formed by German speaking regions. These regions lost a majority of population which had to be substituted. New settlers came to the Czech borderland not only from the Czechoslovak inland. Relatively big part of them was formed by Czech repatriates from Hungary, Romania, Ukraine (Wolhynien) and other countries, Croatians from southern Moravia, Greeks (in fact often Slavonic people from the Greek Macedonia) who refused from the civil war. By such a way relatively homogenous Slavonic majority was created in the Czech borderland which was culturally heterogeneous.

Original German population has never been completely substituted. Moreover, it has not been the aim because the borderland with less favoured natural conditions was considered to be a peripheral area, often suitable for military purposes. Especially rural population has decreased substantially. Some hundreds of villages totally disappeared, many others were transformed from large settlements to very small ones, lately rather changed for second houses resorts.

Also original job structure was destroyed. Many agricultural co-operatives were not successful and have to be substituted by state farms. Branches of bigger factories from the inland were situated in the borderland to industrialize the territory. The people gained the psychology of employees. The middle class was almost smashed.

The new population (at least the first generations) has hardly any relation neither to the villages nor to the landscape. Many of them perceived they stay in the borderland for a temporary event. Relatively hard conditions due to the natural characteristics and the border impact (a part of the borderland was a constituent part of the Iron Curtain) together with insufficient relation of the people to their localities did not allow to create "normal" conditions for development and often led to the emigration back to the inland. That is why the borderland has to be supported from central sources again and again. The situation in the borderland was so typical that the borderland is often defined in the Czech conditions as the space where preliminary German population lived before the WWII.

The research question is, if and how the mentioned facts impact the regional development at the present time. It was investigated in four case study micro-regions: Vejprty (Saxonian border), Kašperské Hory (Bavarian border), Vranov nad Dyjí (Austrian border) and Králíky (Polish border). Regional geographic and sociological methods were applied.

It was stated in all four cases that the regions under study have worse educational structure of population, higher depopulation tendencies and higher unemployment rate to compare them with rural

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³ The term was used in the Potsdam agreement – the only legal document which contains the problem

population in general. As a result, human and social potentials seem to be limited – although the new generation partly loses the immigration character.

Also the economic situation is not favourable. The branches of industrial enterprises were cancelled shortly after 1989. Landscape protection often does not allow found new factories. The qualification structure of the people is suitable for employment mostly in productive branches only. Tourism is widely recommended branch for development. But insufficient infrastructure, lower ability the people to work in leisure services means that the territory is preferred mostly by low-demanding tourist who do not bring much financial sources. The situation slowly improves but the tourism itself is not able to ensure all the economic development.

The hopes, connected with opening the border, have not been confirmed in a larger extent till now. The mentioned micro-regions (and many times also their partners on the other side of the border) are too weak to establish or keep the collaboration which could bring an important progress. The territory is mostly covered by euroregions. But the collaboration within euroregions concerns larger centres relatively far from the border whereas villages just in the border are not much touched.

The only positive feature is that partly due to military presence in the socialist times, natural values were kept in a relatively high extent. A big part of the territory lies under large-scale landscape protection (natural parks, protected landscape areas). It creates an argument for visiting the areas by certain groups of tourists but limits economic activities.

It is not realistic to want some regional development for peripheral borderland micro-regions in the sense of quantitative growth. Rather ensuring the conditions for life of remaining population and soft tourist should be the aim of efforts of local authorities.

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