

ASSESSMENTS AND DISCUSSIONS

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Peter Ulrich, Norbert Cyrus, Jaroslaw Jańczak (ed.), *Grenzüberschreitende Daseinsvorsorge: Stand und Perspektiven in europäischen Verflechtungsräumen (Cross-border public services: status and perspectives in European interconnected areas)*, Springer VS, Wiesbaden 2025, pp. 469

Since the year 2000, the public perception of border areas within the European Union is definitely mainly focussed on the process of *re-bordering*, since the permeability of borders has been restricted during the pandemic and actually due to the attempt to curb illegal migration. This publication in empirically demonstrating, that – at the same time – a process of *de-bordering* is going on in many border regions, which has significant potential for innovation and improving living conditions by joint public services. This is commendable, as it contributes to a complete, more realistic picture of the ongoing changes in the border regions.

The impressive collected volume with a total of 17 contributions is divided into three main parts. In the first one, the theoretical foundations are established. The conceptual classification and definitional approach are handled by Peter Ulrich. As some other authors in this anthology, he dedicates himself especially to the problem of the legal definition of public cross-border public services within the EU. This is unfortunately complicated, but necessary. In Germany, the legal concept of “Daseinsvorsorge” is crucial in this context. Peter Ulrich characterizes it as a “national multi-level concept with increasingly international-European reference” (p. 17). The imprecise term is in Germany often used in several laws and in public administration practice as well as a subject of multilevel governance. EU law, on the other hand, does not have a corresponding term, it refers instead to the more neutral term “services of general economic interest” (Art. 106 “Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union” 2009). It establishes a regulatory structure primarily oriented towards the internal EU market. For cross-border public services within the EU, the freedom to providing services, and regulations on state aid, procurement and competition important. Additionally, the German EU neighbouring countries have – except Austria and partly Switzerland – a different understanding compared with Germany that is more oriented towards a public service approach. In the practice of cross-border cooperation, these definitional differences led to numerous legal and administrative barriers due to differing national legal, administrative, and planning systems. Peter Ulrich’s contribution concludes with a proposal for defining *cross-border public services* (CPS), which also forms the basis for the other contributions in the volume. A fascinating conceptualization of the category’s “centre” and “periphery” as subjects of study in many scientific disciplines is undertaken by Jarosław Jańczak. Of particular significance here is that a border-adjacent location and the associated characteristics are often equated with a peripheral location, to a certain extent as the opposite of the (national) centre. In this context, the author examines the possible impact of *de-bordering* process on domestic relations between centres and peripheries. Finally, he analyses the centre-periphery-conflicts in Poland and Germany using the example of cross-border cooperation in the fields of education, transportation, and health.

Beate Caesar, Ines Funk, Julia Lenz, Kirsten Mangels, and Karina Pallagst examine specific questions regarding the role of “Daseinsvorsorge” in cross-border spatial development. They focus on the dimensions of spatial planning and development, as well as planning culture. They provide a vivid analysis of the state of public services in the German state planning of Saarland

and Rhineland-Palatinate in comparison to the French region of Grand Est. The analyses finally relate to the spatial development concept of the greater region (abbreviated: REKGR). The conceptual foundations of policy learning and policy transfer in European border regions are the focus of the analysis by Stefanie Thurm and Georg Wenzelburger. They develop an analytical framework to examine the relationship between cross-border cooperation and social learning in more detail. An empirical example forms the cross-border cooperation in health policy in the German-French Eurodistrict Saarmoselle. Norbert Cyrus discusses the importance of information and advisory services as structural components of cross-border public services. Borders serve a limiting and enabling function for people's actions and create order, stable social structures, and thus behaviour security at the level of everyday life through institutional formation. The specific focus of this contribution is on the services and quality criteria of counselling in cross-border contexts. Cross-border counselling centres can positively influence economic, social, and political processes. For the regional decision makers, they are "networking agencies with a 360-degree perspective" (p. 165).

The second part of the anthology consists of reports from the planning and cooperation practice of various areas of cross-border public services in the EU, gathered in the German-Polish border area and especially the Euroregion Pro Europa Viadrina. Sabine Zillmer and Christian Lürer point out in their chapter that "in contrast to the national understanding of public services in Germany, the main targets of CPS in Europe do not always and necessarily have to be the citizens." Some fields of intervention, for example in the environmental sector and spatial planning, "only arise due to different national standards in border areas and primarily refer to the collaboration of public institutions and authorities" (p. 211). According to the ESPON CPS study from 2018, more than 60% of all CPS can be assigned to the areas of environmental protection, civil protection and disaster management, as well as transport. For the German-Polish border region and especially the Euroregion Pro Europa Viadrina, the authors see needs for further intensification of existing and the provision of new CPS in environmental protection, civil protection and disaster management, in transportation, in health services, in education and training, as well as in the labor market (p. 225f.). Dirk Gebhardt, Jens Kurnol, and Maciej Zathy develop a spatial planning vision for the year 2030 in their chapter "From the Border Region to the Interrelationship Area." They point out that "a focus on a narrow border strip cannot meet the demands of integrated spatial development" (p. 229). It should be considered on a larger scale, incorporating major cities such as Berlin, Dresden, or Poznań, as well as regional commuter flows and economic interconnections. However, this vision can only be implemented if it is possible in the future to better develop and implement common German-Polish priorities for this area. However, the existing asymmetries in the assignment of certain public tasks must be taken into account, which can be assigned to different administrative levels in Poland and Germany.

Peter Ulrich emphasizes in his contribution the role of civil society participation in cross-border public services in the Euroregion Pro Europa Viadrina. Corresponding networks exist mainly in the cross-border twin city of Frankfurt (Oder)-Ślubiце. For cross-border urban development, a participatory action plan is adopted every ten years with various stakeholders, including civil society institutions. On the basis cross-border projects are defined, especially in the areas of education, quality of life development, infrastructure and services, the economy, as well as communication and participation. The cross-border cooperation in the areas of transportation and education analysed by Marcin Krzymuski during the COVID-19 pandemic impressively complements this contribution. An analysis of the development of cross-border public passenger transport in the German-Polish interconnection area is provided by Moritz Filter, who addresses both the positive developments as well as obstacles and barriers. The existing services are meeting an increasing demand. This trend could further intensify in the future, "if there is a further intensification of cross-border cooperation in the area of cross-border public

services (e.g., health care or education)” (p. 325). The cross-border scientific cooperation in the Euroregion Pro Europa Viadrina is critically examined by Pawel Kurant. A special role is played by the cooperation between the Europe University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), which was revived in the early 1990s, and the renowned Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań with the Collegium Polonicum in Slubice. Both institutions collaborate very intensively and make a significant contribution to research on German-Polish relations in the border area and beyond.

The concluding third part of the anthology focuses on the experiences of other German border regions beyond the Oder and Neisse rivers, as well as in the Polish-Czech border area. The examples relate to cross-border interconnections in the fields of transport, health, and education at the German-Danish border (Martin Klatt), in the area of health in the Polish-Czech border region (Joanna Kurowska-Pysz), and in the field of education in the German-French Upper Rhine (Clarisse Kauber). On the other hand, the cross-border provision of public services in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine (Martin Unfried) and the Saar-Lor-Lux region (Florian Weber, Alexandra Lampke) is analysed. Possible learning, transfer, diffusion, and innovation impulses for the German-Polish border region and specifically for the Euroregion Pro Europa Viadrina are identified in all of these chapters.

It is important to highlight the helpful graphical representation of the subjects addressed through illustrations and maps. Unfortunately, the anthology lacks a summary in a concluding chapter. Nevertheless, the collected volume offers many suggestions for further discussion among all stakeholders who are committed to strengthening cross-border cooperation all over Europe. It is highly recommended as reading for both social scientists and practitioners.

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