

Wojciech Janicki, M.Sc.
Department of Economic Geography
Maria Curie-Skłodowska University
ul. Akademicka 19
20-033 Lublin
POLAND
Phone: (+48-81) 537 59 27
Fax: (+48-81) 537 50 45
e-mail: wjanicki@biotop.umcs.lublin.pl

“Tatry” Euro-region - a cultural giant and economic dwarf

An idea of trans-border co-operation in Europe was born a few dozen years ago (Majorczyk, Nowak 1999). Since the 50-ties, in the form of euro-regions, it is an important element of uniting the continent (Klima 1999). Euro-region is a special form of trans-border region recognised on international level. The main goal of euro-regions is to develop mutual understanding between people separated by administrative state border and to create multidimensional basis of co-operation between them in order to improve the standard of living of the communities of both sides of the border (Klima 1999). Main means to reach these goals is a formula of cultural and economic integration.

Each of the euro-regions has its own identity, so has “Tatry” Euro-region created in 1994, when in August, 26th an *Agreement between local governments of Poland and Slovakia on founding the trans-border union Euro-region “Tatry”* was signed (Majorczyk, Nowak 1999). This identity and own character is emphasised most visibly by a series of considerable successes in organising cultural and social events like *Days of Slovak culture in Poland*, *Days of Polish culture in Slovakia* or a great gala *Euro-region without borders*, competitions for kids, scientific sessions (Łączą...2000). On one hand, people of both sides of the border are united by cultural heritage, tradition, language similarity, standard of living. Surprisingly, on the other hand there is a shortage of economic successes, not to say lack of economic forms of integration, which is stressed by many of the researchers (Klima 1999, Majorczyk, Nowak 1999, Euroregiony... 1999) and also Euro-region activists (Sprawozdanie... 1999). Very few of questioned inhabitants of Euro-region admit that their economic situation improvement has anything to do with Euro-region (Klima 1999). As standard of living is usually defined with economic criteria (Swianiewicz, Dziemianowicz 1998), so the main goal of “Tatry” Euro-region has not been reached yet. In the further part of my research I will try to recognise main reasons of the present situation.

1. [POLITICS] The first one seems to have political roots. Euro-regions have a formative ‘euro-’ even in its name, not mentioning all the similarities and common genesis of the idea of uniting people visible both in case of Euro-regions and in case of Europe. In Slovakia after the November 1994

election, when HZDS (Movement for Democratic Slovakia) won and its leader - Vladimir Meciar - became Prime Minister, neither the idea of European integration was popular in this country, nor was euro-regional concept. *Trans-border union Euro-region "Tatry"* was registered in Polish judicial associations' record already in December 1994 (Majorczyk, Nowak 1999), while in Slovakia it took over two years to register Association Region "Tatry" – it is an association of corporate bodies registered on July, 23rd 1996 (Euroregiony ... 1999). Nevertheless, even after the next election not much has really changed, at least in the opinion of Euro-region inhabitants, although the expectations were strong (Klima 1999).

Not only Slovak deciding authorities were not favourable to creating "Tatry" Euro-region. For a long time did not Polish central authorities want to bestow this formal shape of international co-operation to the Tatras. Unlike most other euro-regions in Poland, here the reality of life was ahead of the state initiative - existing co-operation seen at bazaars on both sides of the state border was given administrative name (Panorama... 1998). As new local governments act in Slovakia has been worked on, new expectations appear (Euroregiony ... 1999).

2. [INFORMATION] Euro-region activists hold, that '...Euro-region functions in the collective notion of its inhabitants...', what is a merit of '...numerous local government activists' (Majorczyk, Nowak 1999, p.20) [transl. W.J.]. A research conducted by Klima (1999) proved that only about two thirds of Slovaks living on the area of "Tatry" Euro-region have ever heard of it - the ratio for Poland was slightly higher.

When analysing attitudes of Poles and Slovaks conscious of Euro-region existence to potential results of its functioning it is noticeable, that in most categories future is seen through rose-coloured spectacles by a majority of about 63-82% of questioned inhabitants (Klima 1999). The only exceptions to this rule are questions of economic situation improvement of them personally and of the region. Only 30% of Poles and 41% of Slovaks anticipate, that they will live better economically, and adequately 67% and 30% expects better economic condition of the region (Klima 1999).

In the latest report of "Tatry" Euro-region (Sprawozdanie... 1999) one may read a paragraph of what was not a success. The first information concerns plans of Information and Promotion Centre creation, that were not brought into life. Thus it is not reasonable to expect high rates for Euro-region in polls of public opinion, if there is even no such a centre. At the same time in Sprawozdanie... (1999) we can read, that the best of the projects sponsored by PHARE in 1999 - in opinion of Euro-region Council, that is the highest Euro-region authority - was the one named 'Euro-region promotion' presented and conducted by Euro-region Council itself.

I think interesting results would be brought if to query tourists spending their time in the Tatras and surrounding areas of their knowledge of Euro-region existence.

3. [MONEY] The main source of financial means for Euro-region is supposed to be fee paid by communes according to the number of their inhabitants. Polish part of the Euro-region is a shelter for about 245 thousand people (1999). If to multiply it by 0.45 zlotys - the fee per person per year ([http...2000](#)) - we get slightly over 110 thousand zlotys. Slovak part of Euro-region is inhabited by 223 thousand people and the fee is 1 Slovak korona ([http...2000](#)) - it sums up to 223 thousand koronas. Altogether it gives only less than 35 thousand euro, and what's more, this money is managed separately by Polish and Slovak Euro-region authorities. It is hardly enough to cover current office expenses, not saying a word about main fields of activity.

Euro-region was donated first significant money only in 1998 - it was PHARE fund, spent mainly on office equipment ([Łączą...2000](#)). In 1999 PHARE programme offered 120 thousand euro exclusively for Small Euro-region Projects realisation. 26 projects offered from 868 to 14000 euro (23 of them between 2-5 thousand euro) were realised ([Sprawozdanie... 1999](#)). As statutory aim of this fund was limited to small projects, nothing more could be done using this money, like significant trans-border project of sewage in Lipnica (Orawa), that did not reach the phase of realisation ([Sprawozdanie... 1999](#)).

Some authors maintain that shortage of funds is the main reason of Euro-region problems (Majorczyk, Nowak 1999, [http...2000](#)).

4. [BORDER] The mountains covering almost entirely the area of "Tatry" Euro-region were never any difficulty to migrations on this area. The only problems were created by administrative decisions dividing several times the Tatra Mountains area between neighbouring countries, often without paying attention even to villages locations (Klima 1999).

Presently the main goal of the Euro-region activists on the field of administrative decisions is to change impractical situation of border crossings. In the times of communism, on the area of present "Tatry" Euro-region there were over a dozen so called Economic Border Crossings used by Polish farmers owing grounds in Czechoslovakia and inversely. They let transfer crops, agricultural machines and people going to work. After 1981, at the instance of Russian intervention, these border crossings were eliminated. But the situation changed, when Slovakian parliament passed an act obligating to parcel out state and collective farms' grounds and to give back these grounds to their legal owners ([Sprawozdanie... 1999](#)) - such border crossings are again necessary. What's more, farmers would conveniently cross the border if they were let to do it out of the official crossing and without a passport.

At present there are 23 border crossings: 7 international road crossings - one of them is at the same time a railway crossing - 5 small border movement ones and 11 tourist crossings (see Fig.1.). Some small border movement crossings are used mostly by people shopping abroad, which has had nothing to do with Euro-region policy. Polish inhabitants of Euro-region did not treat crossing Slovakian

border as going abroad (Klima 1999). It is an open secret, but this form of trade is half-official smuggling.

HERE Fig.1. Administrative map of Euro-region “Tatry”

Source: Mapa Euroregionu “Tatry” 1999, OPGK, Kraków

Length of Polish-Slovakian border on the analysed area amounts to about 270 km, so one crossing occurs here every 12 km, on average. However, on the most touristically pressed area of the Tatra Mountains, where each year the number of tourists arises (Majorczyk, Nowak 1999), there is only one tourist crossing and one small border movement crossing. It is not enough either for tourists or farmers and Euro-region authorities have set creating new crossings and liberalisation of border-crossing rules as one of the main goals for the nearest future (Majorczyk, Nowak 1999). This has become a reality since August 1999 – it is enough to be a resident of a border zone and have an ID card.

Three times a week Slovaks visit Poland to do shopping at Polish bazaars and Poles also go to Slovakia for the same purpose. Thus capacity of already existing crossings should also be increased not to make it difficult for commodities and people to flow - now it is too low (Majorczyk, Nowak 1999). In July, 1st 1999 an *Agreement between Republic of Poland Government and Republic of Slovakia Government on border crossings, crossing the border on tourist routes crossing state border and rules of crossing the border out of border crossings* was signed (Sprawozdanie... 1999). However, executive regulations are not ready yet.

5. [ENVIRONMENT] Environmental diversity of the Tatra Mountains does not have any competitor either in Poland or in Slovakia. It is protected in 7 national parks (see Fig.2.), along with one landscape park and several quite excessive nature reserves. About 35% of the Euro-region area is protected within these three most effective, main forms of nature protection (Dąbrowski 1999).

HERE Fig.2. National Parks of Euro-region “Tatry”

Source: Mapa Euroregionu “Tatry” 1999, OPGK, Kraków

Although the matter of the environment protection was included into a short list of main aims of “Tatry” Euro-region, it quite often enters into conflict with its inhabitants' interest. Air pollution in some places, including Zakopane, reached the level where a question should be asked if these areas still can play role of health resort, when thick layer of smog clouds covers the valley. Expansive

development of tourism restricts areas of natural or cultural landscape. To keep it, some agreements between private forests and coom owners and National Park authorities were signed. According to them, sheep may be grazed in some specially designated areas of the Park and shepherds must wear regional costumes. Only 1100 sheep and 100 cattle are allowed there. These regulations started to appear in 1960, when regular grazing was forbidden. To create a complete image of the situation it should also be stated that significant part of the Park is still owned by private people, who do not want to sell their grounds and use them as they like to.

Low level of local population environmental consciousness seen in wild dumps in the forest, water pollution, usage of low efficiency coal stoves to heat houses or drying peat bogs in Orava and many other examples are proofs, that economic success is still understood against environment instead of staying in co-operation with it.

Euro-region organised some scientific sessions devoted to environmental problems. One of the first conferences took place in October 1995 and Euro-region Council invited National Parks' representatives to mutual work on sustainable development of the Euro-region area (Dąbrowski 1999). Unfortunately, a lot of Council initiatives proposed in the economic interest of local people contradicted environment requirements. To give just a few examples: increasing the capacity of the border crossings, artificial snowing for skiers, Olympic games organisation, forest economy.

Like in many other areas of Europe and the world, also here environment and economy are at strive with each other, which does not help solve economic problems of the region.

6. [CO-OPERATION] The statute of "Tatry" Euro-region enumerates the main aims of this body. Two most important are environment protection and co-operation on the field of tourism. They should be accomplished by applying mutual action on the fields of culture, art, education, exchange between young people, tourism, leisure, sport, nature conservation, agriculture, fighting criminality, spatial planning, traffic, co-operation in fighting natural disasters and many others (Euroregiony ... 1999).

Unfortunately, sometimes Poland and Slovakia are even competitors on the fields of their declared co-operation, like tourism. The best example was given, when the host for next winter Olympic games had to be decided in Seoul 1999. Both Poland and Slovakia wanted their part of the Tatras to organise the games. Only after both proposals were rejected our two representations reached the point of mutual efforts for the next edition.

What's more, there is a lack of common tourism initiatives like integrated trips to both Poland and Slovakia. It is likely that Slovaks do not want Polish tourists to overflow southern Tatras and to crowd them like it may be observed in Poland.

Nevertheless, on most fields "Tatry" Euro-region has developed strong co-operation based on healthy rivalry aiming to develop parallelly.

CONCLUSION

In 1999 in Łopuszna the 8th Forum of Polish Border Regions took place. One of the three main targets of the Forum was a conclusion about ‘...necessity of treating seriously the motions and proposals of the euro-regions (...) by ministries and central departments...’ (Majorczyk, Nowak 1999, p. 13) [transl. W.J.]. Unfortunately, it proves that the euro-regional idea is not really seriously taken into consideration by the state. That has happened to “Tatry” Euro-region since its beginning. “Tatry” Euro-region ‘...was created a bit in defiance of some politicians from Warsaw and Bratislava and local grumblers’ - wrote Majorczyk and Nowak (1999, p. 5) [transl. W.J.]. That may explain appearing problems, sometimes even with getting any answer to questions asked to Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Ministry of Internal Affairs (Sprawozdanie... 1999).

But the future is not promising. There is no long-term strategy of Euro-region development worked out, impractical duty regulations did not changed radically and influence of Euro-region Council on the government is a mirage.

As in the foreseeable future both Poland and Slovakia are going to become members of European Union, so the same space of living, it should be hoped that our two governments will help euro-regions develop rather than to put a spoke in their wheel. For Poland and Slovakia euro-regions should be understood as advance guard of European Union, as they create especially convenient conditions for trans-border exchange of people. The better we are prepared to such free exchange, the easier we get used to European Union conditions.

References:

- Dąbrowski P. 1999, Wybrane problemy ochrony dziedzictwa przyrodniczego na terenie Euroregionu “Tatry”, in: 5 lat Euroregionu “Tatry” 1994-1999, Text, Nowy Targ, p.23-36
- Euroregiony w nowym podziale terytorialnym Polski 1999, GUS, US Wrocław, Warszawa-Wrocław
<http://www.euroregion-tatry.pl>
- Klima E. 1999, Euro-Region “Tatry” - European integration?, in: Region and Regionalism No. 4, Państwowy Instytut Naukowy - Instytut Śląski w Opolu, Łódź - Opole, p.111-116
- Łączą nas Tatry 2000, Text, Nowy Targ
- Majorczyk A., Nowak A. 1999, Euroregion “Tatry” 1994-1999, in: 5 lat Euroregionu “Tatry” 1994-1999, Text, Nowy Targ, p.6-22
- Mapa Euroregionu “Tatry” 1999, OPGK, Kraków
- Panorama Euroregionów 1998, Urząd Statystyczny, Jelenia Góra
- Sprawozdanie Rady Transgranicznego Związku Euroregion “Tatry” z działalności za rok 1999, VI Kongres Transgranicznego Związku Euroregion “Tatry”, Namestowo 2000

Swianiewicz P., Dziemianowicz W. 1998, Atrakcyjność inwestycyjna miast, Transformacja
Gospodarki nr 95, IBnGR, Warszawa

Keywords: Euro-region, Tatry, the Tatras, border areas