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The Danish-German Border Region: Caught between Systemic Differences and Re-bordering

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Abstract

The Danish-German border region of Schleswig has evolved from a troubled past with military conflicts to an open border within the EU. Politicians and researchers have developed a narrative of successful accommodation of national and cultural diversity through constructive policies of minority inclusion. This article analyses the struggles of local stakeholders to exploit this narrative to achieve sustainable cooperation and economic growth against the background of contemporary EU cohesion policies in border regions. It demonstrates the dilemma of systemic differences inhibiting sustainable integration of cross-border public services. In addition, it examines the limitations of cross-cultural communication and the vulnerability of cross-border social practices faced by re-bordering measures initiated by central governments and national security discourses.

Introduction

The European Union has been built on a narrative of open borders or even a borderless Europe. During the Cold War, this was in opposition to the militarized borders of the Soviet dominated socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Later, the story of European de-bordering was entangled in narratives of globalization, a borderless world and the end of the nation state system.¹ With the collapse of “real existing socialism” and the Soviet Union, the idea of a borderless Europe seemed to come true. While an increased focus on border security and re-militarization of borders has appeared in the United States and other areas of the world following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the EU maintained and extended the Schengen system of open borders without regular passport control. Today, it is applied on the borders between 22 EU member states plus four non-members (i.e., Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein). It has only been challenged recently during the so-called migration crisis or refugee crisis of autumn 2015. The massive and not directly controlled migration of about 1 million refugees from displaced persons’ camps in Turkey and other countries of the Middle East via Greece to Central Europe turned the union into a severe crisis. It demonstrated the lack of a EU migration policy and the insufficiency

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¹ Kenichi Ohmae, *The End of the Nation State: The Rise of Regional Economies* (London: Harper Collins, 1995); *The Borderless World: Power and Strategy in the Interlinked World Economy* (London: Harper Business, 1990).

of the provisions for asylum seeking in the Dublin Regulation.² Since then, “temporary” border controls have been re-introduced on a couple of Schengen borders at key border crossings. Originally, the EU Commission had extended permission for these “temporary” controls until November 2017 but offered a loophole by tolerating “temporary” border controls for other threats to security. At the time of writing, Denmark and Germany, officially because of the general threat of terrorism, have extended border controls on their southern borders.

Border regions can be termed laboratories of European integration. It is in the border region where researchers can study the functioning or non-functioning of European integration based on empirical data. It is also here where politicians as well as European citizens can practice European integration by expanding their daily social practices across the border. In border regions, it can be measured how citizens perceive space and what influence the border exercises on this perception of space.³ Especially since the 1990s, when cross-border Euroregions were formed along virtually all European borders, and when the EU started to co-fund cross-border activities with the Interreg programme, a narrative of continuing European integration in the form of re-invented cross-border regions has spread. This accelerated with the possibility to form European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), using a new legal instrument introduced by the EU in 2006 to enable the institutionalization of cross-border regions as legal corporations in European law. Today, more than 100 Euroregions cross the borders of Europe, and 64 EGTCs have been established throughout the EU.

A wide range of case studies and more general work has been published on this territorial approach to cross-border cooperation in Europe and especially the EU. Anssi Paasi has reflected on the social construction and reconstruction of regions;⁴ James Scott has looked into the territorial and geopolitical aspects of EU cross-border cooperation policies;⁵ and Joachim Blatter has reflected on how Euroregions navigate between territorial governance across borders and the necessities of

² The Dublin Regulation obligates the country of the first landing to process third country refugees’ application for asylum in the EU, which in fact lays the burden of this issue almost exclusively on Italy, Spain, Malta and Greece.

³ Virpi Kaisto, “City Twinning from a Grassroots Perspective: Introducing a Spatial Framework to the Study of Twin Cities,” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 32:4 (2017).

⁴ Anssi Paasi, “The Institutionalization of Regions: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding the Emergence of Regions and the Constitution of Regional Identity,” *Fennia* 164:1 (1986); “Territorial Identities as Social Constructs,” *HAGAR: Studies in Culture, Polity & Identities* 1:2 (2000); “Bounded Spaces in the Mobile World: Deconstructing ‘Regional Identity,’” *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie (Journal of Economic & Social Geography)* 93:2 (2002); “The Resurgence of the ‘Region’ and ‘Regional Identity’: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Observations on Regional Dynamics in Europe,” *Review of International Studies* 35:1 (2009); “Regional Planning and the Mobilization of ‘Regional Identity’: From Bounded Spaces to Relational Complexity,” *Regional Studies* 47:8 (2013).

⁵ James Wesley Scott, “Euroregions, Governance, and Transborder Cooperation within the EU,” in *Borders, Regions and People*, eds. Martin van der Velde and Henk van Houtum (London: Pion, 2000); “A Networked Space of Meaning? Spatial Politics as Geostrategies of European Integration,” *Space & Polity* 6:2 (2002); “Wider Europe: Geopolitics of Inclusion and Exclusion at the EU’s New External Boundaries,” in *EU Enlargement, Region Building and Shifting Borders of Inclusion and Exclusion*, ed. James Wesley Scott (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

functional cross-border governance of flows.⁶ Other narratives have focused on the peace-building and reconciliation effect of cross-border regions, not only in regions with a troubled past,⁷ but also in border regions of the founding countries of the European Community.⁸ Reasons to support the establishment of cross-border regions thus combine economic motives and geopolitical strategies with socially constructed motives of peace-building and people-to-people bottom-up Europeanization.

In political science, cross-border regions are visualized as an element of EU multilevel governance⁹ or as a phenomenon of regional transnationalism,¹⁰ arguing that they have become important players within the EU system of multilevel governance. Other researchers like Michael Keating argue, though, that it is neither in the EU's nor in its member states' interests or political will to implement an effective devolution of powers to regional authorities—be they sub-national or cross-border units of regional government.¹¹

In this article, I will present the case of the Danish-German border region Sønderjylland-Schleswig to demonstrate the imperfectness of the European cross-border region building processes. Against the background of the region's common history, but different historical narratives, I will analyse how regional actors have applied EU incentives to integrate into a cross-border region. It will be shown how systemic differences, different social-constructions of the border region and external influences have complicated local approaches for more cooperation and integration in a pacified, economically balanced, intra EU and intra Schengen border region. The article is based on intensive previous research on the region, as well as current observations of developments by following regional media, and frequent personal interaction with key regional stakeholders.

⁶ Joachim Blatter, "From 'Spaces of Place' to 'Spaces of Flow'? Territorial and Functional Governance in Cross-Border Regions in Europe and North America," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 28:3 (2004).

⁷ Hynek Böhm and Emil Drápela, "Cross-Border Cooperation as a Reconciliation Tool: Example from the East Czech-Polish Borders," *Regional & Federal Studies* 27:3 (2017); Cathal McCall and Xabier Itçaina, "Secondary Foreign Policy Activities in Third Sector Cross-Border Cooperation as Conflict Transformation in the European Union: The Cases of the Basque and Irish Borderscapes," (ibid.); Elżbieta Opiłowska, "Reconciliation through Europeanization: Secondary Foreign Policy in the German-Polish Borderlands," (ibid.)

⁸ Birte Wassenberg, "Secondary Foreign Policy as a Peace-Building Tool: A European Model? The Contribution of Cross-Border Cooperation to Reconciliation and Stability in Europe," (ibid.); Birte Wassenberg and Bernard Reitel, *Territorial Cooperation in Europe: A Historical Perspective* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015).

⁹ Markus Perkmann, "Building Governance Institutions across European Borders," *Regional Studies* 33:7 (1999); "Cross-Border Regions in Europe: Significance and Drivers of Regional Cross-Border Cooperation," *European Urban & Regional Studies* 10:2 (2003).

¹⁰ Peter Schmitt-Egner, "'Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit' in Europa als Gegenstand wissenschaftlicher Forschung und Strategie transnationaler Praxis. Anmerkungen zur Theorie, Empirie und Praxis des transnationalen Regionalismus," in *Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit in Europa. Theorie - Empirie - Praxis*, eds. Gerhard Brunn and Peter Schmitt-Egner (Baden Baden: Nomos, 1998); "'Transnationaler Regionalismus' als Gegenstand der Politikwissenschaft," in *Die gesellschaftliche Basis von Aussenpolitik. Internationale Wirtschaft, Umwelt, Ideologien, Regional- und Entwicklungspolitik*, eds. Jürgen Bellers and Claudius Rosenthal (Münster: Lit-Verlag, 2001).

¹¹ Michael Keating, "A Quarter Century of the Europe of the Regions," *Regional & Federal Studies* 18:5 (2008).

A Common History, or a Troubled Past?

The Danish-German border has a common history of joint political rule and an integrated, strong regional economy. Creating a cross-border region here reflects the dictum of healing “the scars of history,”¹² of re-creating “a potential region, inherent in geography, history, ecology, ethnic groups, economic possibilities and so on, but disrupted by the sovereignty of the governments ruling on each side of the frontier.”¹³ The territory of today’s Euroregion Sønderjylland-Schleswig is more or less identical with the medieval Duchy of Schleswig, carved out of the then rather feeble Danish kingdom in the twelfth century to provide for a minor line of the royal family. In 1232, the Danish king, Valdemar II, gave the territory to his second son, Abel, who married a daughter of the Schauenburg family. The Schauenburgs were counts of Holstein, which, unlike Schleswig, belonged to the Holy Roman Empire. This dynastic connection laid the ground for later national conflict, when Denmark and Germany (as successor of the Holy Roman Empire) strived to become nation states. In 1460, after the last member of the Schauenburg family had died childless, the nobility of Schleswig and Holstein elected the Danish king Christian I as their duke, himself a nephew of the last Schauenburg duke Adolph VIII. The dynastic connection had thus developed into a personal union, but Schleswig and Holstein continued to be separate entities of the Danish conglomerate kingdom with their own jurisdiction and a high degree of self-administration.

This construction proved viable and secured the Duchies a prosperous development, especially in the eighteenth century when there was a long period of peace from the end of the Great Northern War in 1721 until Denmark got involved in the Napoleonic Wars in 1801. In the nineteenth century’s national awakening, though, the construction became problematic as Danish and German national movements delimited the territorial claims to their respective national projects. These movements used mostly legalistic arguments instead of assessing the region’s population’s national identification—not the least because such an identification was far from clear at that time. Political crisis of the monarchy in the face of the French revolution of 1848 resulted in a change of government in Copenhagen, simultaneously in a revolution and declaration of independence in the Schleswig-Holstein capital city of Kiel. The three-year war (1848–1850) that followed did not resolve the issue, as the peace agreement of 1852 affirmed the pre-war status of Danish rule with local self-administration. It left deep scars on the regional population, and the regional elite was not willing to cooperate with the Danish government in constitutional reform. Tensions remained high and a new military conflict was seen as unavoidable. Tired of the constitutional deadlock, the Copenhagen government pressured the king to sign a new constitution in November 1863, which would integrate Schleswig (but not Holstein) into Denmark. Prussian prime minister Bismarck saw this breach of the 1852 peace accord as a pretext to advance his geopolitical plans to annex the duchies to Prussia. He convinced Austria to join forces as executors of the German Confederation and declared war on Denmark. The campaign was hard but short: after the storming of the Dybbøl fortifications in April

¹² As worded in the Charter of the European Association of Border and Cross-Border Regions, 2004 version.

¹³ Definition of a transfrontier region by the Council of Europe, Charles Ricq, *Handbook on Transfrontier Co-Operation for Local and Regional Authorities in Europe*, 1st ed. (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1996).

1864 and the capture of the island Als in June, Denmark sued for peace and lost Schleswig and Holstein, which were annexed into Prussia after the Prussian-Austrian War of 1866.

During the German Kaiserreich (1871–1918), Schleswig experienced harsh policies of linguistic assimilation and oppression of Danish cultural and political activities. The Danish minority, a majority in the northern districts of Schleswig, hoped for a revision of the border by a plebiscite. This had been promised in 1864 but was later repealed. When the Kaiserreich collapsed at the end of World War I, the Danish government put Schleswig on the agenda of the Paris Peace Conference. Two plebiscites were held in February and March 1920, and hereafter the northern part of Schleswig returned to Denmark.¹⁴ Today's border between Denmark and Germany is still the border drawn after the plebiscite.

Even though the people were asked, there was no overall acceptance of the plebiscite and its result. Germany did not mention the Danish border in the Treaty of Locarno, where it accepted the post World War I Western borders. The new German republic perceived the whole Versailles Treaty system as an unjust, dictated peace. The plebiscite terms were criticized for being unjust, as they excluded people from the vote who had moved to the region after 1900. Furthermore, three cities with German majorities were given to Denmark to avoid exclaves. In Denmark, many nationalists rejected the idea of the plebiscite and pleaded for a return of all Schleswig to Denmark, based on the historical right and the annexation by force in 1864.

In the plebiscite, 25 percent of the voters north of the new border had voted for Germany and about 20 percent of the voters south of the new border had voted for Denmark. These dissenters were accommodated as national minorities with a high degree of cultural autonomy. However, the German minority aimed at a border revision.¹⁵ In addition, the core leaders of the Danish minority in South Schleswig also hoped for a revision in the distant future.¹⁶ When the Nazis took power in Germany in 1933, regional attempts to demand a border revision resurfaced with renewed strength. The overwhelming majority of the German minority welcomed the new regime, and the minority's cultural and political organizations were aligned to the Nazi organizations in Germany. *Heim ins Reich* (returning home to the *Reich*) became an ever more open element of the minority's agitation, culminating in the cheery welcoming of the German troops that occupied Denmark on April 9, 1940. During the occupation, the minority encouraged young members to enlist as volunteers in the German army, provided social services for the occupation troops and assistance in guarding German military installations against sabotage from Danish resistance fighters. When Germany surrendered in May 1945, the Danish state confiscated the minority institutions' property, and many members were

¹⁴ Among others, see Nina Jebsen and Martin Klatt, "The Negotiation of National and Regional Identity During the Schleswig-Plebiscite Following the First World War," *First World War Studies* 5:2 (2014).

¹⁵ Henrik Becker-Christensen, *Det tyske mindretal i Nordslesvig 1920–1932*, 2 vols. (Aabenraa: Institut for Grænseregionsforskning, 1990).

¹⁶ Axel Johnsen, *Dannevirke mænd og Ejderfolk. Den grænsepolitiske opposition i Danmark 1920–1940* (Flensburg: Studiefællesheden ved Dansk Centralbibliotek for Sydslesvig, 2005).

interned and later sentenced to prison for collaborating with the enemy.¹⁷ All still in prison were pardoned in an amnesty in 1951. Hereafter, the German minority slowly rebuilt their institutional infrastructure.

In South Schleswig, the war experience resulted in a regional movement to revise the border to the South. A majority in the native population expressed their wish for and expected such a revision in the summer of 1945 and the following years.¹⁸ Nationalist associations and politicians in Denmark supported the idea of a border revision, of “reunifying” all Schleswig with Denmark, but there was neither a political majority for such a step, nor a Danish government supporting it wholeheartedly.¹⁹ Still, hopes for a revision continued. The Danish minority in South Schleswig expanded and built up a solid infrastructure of schools and community houses, helped by generous funding from the Danish state and private supporters.

Narrative: All Is Well

In 1955, Denmark and West Germany agreed to pacify the border and minority issue in two separate but identical government declarations: the so-called Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations. In the declarations, the minorities were guaranteed cultural autonomy, and minority membership was guaranteed as a subjective conscious decision not to be checked or controlled by government authorities.²⁰ Since then, a narrative of reconciliation and appeasement has been spread by Danish and German politicians, and increasingly by key members of the minorities themselves. Different research contributions have also supported this narrative.²¹ The declarations in themselves do not

¹⁷ Sabine Lorek, *Rechtsabrechnung – Retsopgør – Politische Säuberung nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg in Nordschleswig* (Neumünster: Wachholtz, 1998).

¹⁸ The closest estimate on the size of this movement comes from the elections to the Schleswig-Holstein diet in April and May 1947, when the majority in the native population (subtracting the refugees from former Eastern German territories) voted for candidates supporting unification of the region with Denmark.

¹⁹ Johan Peter Noack, *Det sydslesvigske grænsespørgsmål 1945–1947* (Aabenraa: Institut for Grænseregionsforskning, 1991).

²⁰ Jørgen Kühl, “The Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations of 1955: Background, Context and Impact of the Danish-German Minority Regulations,” in *Minority Policy in Action: The Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations in a European Context 1955–2005*, eds. Jørgen Kühl and Marc Weller (Aabenraa: European Centre of Minority Issues, 2005).

²¹ Jørgen Kühl, “Ein europäisches Modell? Die schleswigsche Erfahrung und die nationalen Minderheiten,” in *Ein europäisches Modell? Nationale Minderheiten im deutsch-dänischen Grenzland 1945–2005*, eds. Jørgen Kühl and Robert Bohn (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2005); Martin Klatt, “Minorities as Secondary Foreign Policy Agents in Peace-Building and Reconciliation? The Case of Denmark and Germany,” *Regional & Federal Studies* 27:3 (2017); Thomas Loxtermann, *Das deutsch-dänische Grenzgebiet als Modell nationalstaatlicher Minderheitenpolitik? Die Minderheitenfrage in Schleswig von den Bonn-Kopenhagener Erklärungen von 1955 bis zum Beitritt Dänemarks zur EWG 1973*, eds. Ingeborg Koza and Thomas Stahl (Münster: LIT, 2004); Adrian Schaeffer-Rolffs, “Minority Policies in Practice: Protection and Empowerment in the Danish-German Border Region,” *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 13:2 (2014); Tove Malloy, “Creating New Spaces for Politics? The Role of National Minorities in Building Capacity of Cross-Border Regions,” *Regional & Federal Studies* 20:3 (2010).

really contain extraordinary minority rights. They state clearly that there is a principle of non-discrimination, meaning that citizens belonging to one of the national minorities enjoy the same rights and have the same obligations as every other citizen. Furthermore, the declarations acknowledge the interest of the minorities in close cultural connections with their kin-state, and the right to receive funds from this state to support their cultural activities. The key principle of the declaration is, furthermore, that membership of the minority is an act of subjective will, not to be questioned or controlled by the state. This means that there are no objective criteria for belonging to the minority, not even knowledge of the minority's language. Notably, this criterion is discussed with regular intervals within and outside the minorities. How Danish can you be, if you speak German at home and only have a limited command of the Danish language? The explanation of this peculiarity lies again in the specific history of national affiliation in the region. Historic allegiance to Denmark was not necessarily to the Danish nation state, which did not exist before 1864, but to the monarchy. Cultural affiliation with Germany was not understood as in conflict with being Danish because before 1871 a German nation state did not exist either.²²

Every resident of the border region can thus choose to become a minority member by joining one of its associations, its church, or just identifying with it. The most common expression of belonging to the minority is sending one's children into a minority kindergarten or school. This is, in the end, a decision of the parents. Quite a few parents send their children to minority schools without having attended one themselves: concerning the Danish higher secondary school in the city of Schleswig, headmaster Jørgen Kühl stated that only 3 percent of the school's students had parents who had both attended a minority school, while another 30 percent of the students had one parent having attended a minority school.²³ The attractiveness of minority schools for parents without previous contact with minorities or the neighbouring country's culture and language is based on the schools' bilingual training, limited class sizes (better pupil-teacher ratio) and pedagogy.²⁴

This apparently free choice of schools among border regions' parents, not necessarily based on a family history of cultural affiliation with one nation only, is generally a characteristic reflecting the relaxed situation of minorities and national identification in the border region. The narrative of a development from *Gegeneinander* via *Nebeneinander* to *Miteinander* or even *Füreinander*, from a conflict against each other via peaceful coexistence to community and active cooperation is often used to describe the accommodation of diversity in the Danish-German border region.

In line with this narrative, minorities perceive themselves as key stakeholders and contributors to cross-border cooperation and integration.²⁵ This has not always been the case: key

²² Hans Schultz Hansen, Lars N. Henningsen and Carsten Porskrog Rasmussen, eds., *Sønderjyllands Historie 2. Efter 1815* (Aabenraa: Historisk Samfund for Sønderjylland, 2008).

²³ Based on an internal survey made in January 2017 at AP Møller Skolen, Schleswig, Headmaster Jørgen Kühl at the European Centre for Minority Issues: Annual Minority Roundtable, May 8, 2017.

²⁴ Jørgen Kühl, "Von der Abgrenzung zum Miteinander 1955–2010," in *Zwischen Grenzkonflikt und Grenzfrieden. Die Dänische Minderheit in Schleswig-Holstein in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Lars N. Henningsen (Flensburg: Studiefællesskabet ved Dansk Centralbibliotek for Sydlesvig, 2011).

²⁵ Martin Klatt, "Die Minderheiten im deutsch-dänischen Grenzland in der grenzüberschreitenden Zusammenarbeit seit 1945," in *Ein europäisches Modell? Nationale Minderheiten im deutsch-dänischen*

actors of the Danish minority in Germany were sceptical when Denmark joined the EC in 1973 and when the Euroregion was established in 1997.²⁶ The German minority in Denmark, on the other hand, had already embraced the idea of European integration in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The European integration project became a core element of minority identity after their pan-Germanic ideology of the interwar years, including their embrace of Nazi ideology, had heavily compromised them. Until now, the German minority has been a key inspirer and facilitator of cross-border cooperation, although they have not always been able to convince reluctant regional politicians and other stakeholders. After the millennium the Danish minority also supported the Euroregion and cross-border cooperation unconditionally. Especially from 2012–2017, when the Danish minority party was part of a Schleswig-Holstein government coalition, they functioned as key partners in an increasing dialogue with Danish national and regional politicians on further cross-border cooperation.

A Narrative of Reconciliation and Cooperation

The narrative of positive development of minority-majority relations is today extended to the general development of Danish-German relations. From a phase of tension in the postwar years, political normalization was achieved by the mid-1950s, when the West German Federal Republic joined NATO and became a founding member of the European Economic Community (EEC). Denmark did not join the EEC as a founding member, choosing to remain outside of the core European integration project, and only joining the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). Normalization in the Danish-German case meant normal bilateral relations, but there were no special activities aimed at closer political contact or people-to-people reconciliation. This is contrasted with the case for German-French relations after the conclusion of the Élysée-Treaty in 1963, which included many provisions and measures to ensure German-French reconciliation at a people-to-people level.

This changed only when it became apparent that Denmark would join the European Community, which it did in 1973 together with the UK and Ireland. The general secretary of the German minority convinced politicians in the Schleswig-Holstein state government to approach Danish politicians for closer cooperation, including the establishment of a cross-border spatial planning commission and a Euroregion. This was met with reluctance in Denmark. As a unitary state, Denmark had no tradition for sub-state, secondary foreign policy, and the general attitude to Germany was still suspicious. The Danish foreign ministry as well as the regional government in Southern Jutland County declined any formally institutionalized cooperation. On the other hand, they were willing to negotiate cooperation from case to case. This resulted in a communal Danish-German

Grenzland 1945-2005, eds. Jørgen Kühl and Robert Bohn (Gütersloh: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte 2005), 306–323; “National Minorities as a Model for Cross-Border Integration. Lessons from Schleswig,” in *Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit leben und erforschen. Integration und (trans-)regionale Identität*, eds. Joachim Beck and Birte Wassenberg (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013); Klatt, “Minorities as Secondary Foreign Policy Agents.”

²⁶ Martin Klatt, *Fra modspil til medspil? Grænseoverskridende samarbejde i Sønderjylland/Schleswig 1945–2005* (Aabenraa: Institut for Grænseregionsforskning, 2006).

forum meeting about once a year from 1977. Here, politicians had a chance to talk together, to inform themselves about concrete solutions to regional political administration and regional policy problems, and to develop joint projects for cooperation. While the first two aspects worked satisfactorily, the forum did not really manage to launch concrete cooperation projects. This was only possible from the 1990s, when the EC started the Interreg programme.²⁷

Now, the establishment of a Euroregion was returned to the agenda by regional politicians from Schleswig-Holstein. This time, they could convince their regional counterparts in Southern Jutland County that it could be an advantage for the whole cross-border region to create a joint secretariat for joint action at the European level. When the plans for this project were made public in early 1997, they aroused public resistance in Denmark. This was not coincidental, as Denmark had a rather strong, mostly left-wing opposition against the EU in general, and was debating to join the Schengen agreement on the abolishment of regular passport control at the borders at the same time. The main arguments against the establishment of a Euroregion were the fear of loss of sovereignty and of uncontrollable German influence on internal Danish matters. The opposition forces established a local political party which received 5.5 percent of the local vote at the county elections in November 1997. This success was not repeated in the successive elections four years later and the party dissolved. Other elements of protest were a large demonstration on the border in May 1997, and physical vandalism against the property of some county politicians who openly supported the establishment of the Euroregion.

The Euroregion was established as Region Sønderjylland/Schleswig in September 1997. The reduction to “region” was a concession to Danish ambiguities with the term “Euro,” and the original plan to name it Euroregion Schleswig was changed to add the old and nineteenth century Danish and nationalistic term for the territory, “Sønderjylland” (Southern Jutland). Historically, both terms were used for the same space. The Euroregion thus had a clear territorial and historic reference to the previous Duchy of Schleswig, albeit the naming procedure already demonstrated that the common history included the potential for conflict. In the following years, the Euroregion set up a small secretariat and convened a regional assembly of politicians and other stakeholders in cross-border cooperation twice a year. It started initiatives of cross-border cultural projects, and became increasingly active in servicing a cross-border labour market from the 2000s. The fears of Danish opposition to the project, such as a loss of sovereignty or German interference into domestic Danish affairs, did not emerge. On the plus side, there were agreements on cross-border ambulance and helicopter cooperation, post cancer radiation treatment, increasing cooperation of voluntary fire brigades and many small projects at the people-to-people level. On the otherhand, business cooperation stalled and many issues of cross-border commuters could not be resolved easily. Also, the semi-annual political meetings in the assembly were criticized for being ineffective and members’

²⁷ Ibid., 177–194.

attendance dropped, especially on the Danish side.²⁸ One leading politician commented that the Euroregion could be fined a parking ticket rather than a speeding ticket.

Cross-border contacts increased substantially after the implementation of the Schengen agreement on the Danish-German border in March 2001. This was coupled with, or even caused by, a tremendous boom in the Danish economy in the 2000s that lasted until the financial crisis of 2008. After a first programme started in 1993, the universities of Flensburg and Sønderborg increased their cross-border study programmes in the 2000s. Interreg gave start-up finances to many interesting cross-border projects. Southern Jutland County concluded a cooperation agreement with Schleswig-Holstein in 2001 and a cross-border municipal network of the cities Flensburg, Sønderborg and Aabenraa followed in 2008.

Interreg and Other Cooperation in the Danish-German Border Region

Interreg, or its present official name European Territorial Cooperation, is a European Union Community Initiative within the EU's cohesion policy. It started in 1990 with a budget of 1 billion euros for the first four-year programming period. For the present 2014–2020 funding period, the programme's budget has increased to 10.1 billion euros.²⁹ Its overarching objective is “to promote a harmonious economic, social and territorial development of the Union as a whole. Interreg is built around three strands of cooperation: cross-border (Interreg A), transnational (Interreg B) and interregional (Interreg C).”³⁰ The core of Interreg is the 60 Interreg A Operational Programmes along 38 internal EU borders. These programmes fund cross-border cooperation projects in EU border regions. In these operational programmes, which are jointly elaborated by the EU Commission along with the member states and the respective regions, strategies are implemented to link regional development to the EU 2020 strategy for the present 2014–2020 funding period (Interreg V).

Interreg has been a key motivator and instigator for institutionalizing cooperation in the Danish-German border region, albeit not the only one.³¹ Sønderjylland-Schleswig formed a separate Interreg operational programme from 1991–2006 (Interreg I–III), to be united with the KERN-FYN programme area from 2007–2013 (Interreg IV). In the present funding period (2014–2020), there is only one Danish-German Interreg programme area, which includes the Danish regions Syddanmark and Sjælland, the German counties Nordfriesland, Schleswig-Flensburg, Rendsburg-Eckernförde, Plön and Ostholstein, and the German cities Flensburg, Kiel, Neumünster and Lübeck. The focus of the early Interreg programmes was culture, environmental protection, tourism and people-to-people interaction.³² Later, the focus shifted to regional development, smart specialisation and growth,

²⁸ Anne-Mette Hjalager, “Evaluierung der Arbeit in der Region Sønderjylland-Schleswig 2000–2004” (Aarhus: Advance/1, 2004); “Evalueringen 2009 af Region Sønderjylland-Schleswig” (Aarhus: Advance/1, 2009).

²⁹ Accessed August 16, 2017: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/da/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/

³⁰ Accessed August 16, 2017: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/da/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/

³¹ Klatt, *Fra modspil til medspil?*

³² Ibid.

which was in line with the strategic development of Interreg designed by the European Commission.³³

The best practices of Interreg-projects were joint cross-border study programmes of the University of Flensburg and University of Southern Denmark, the establishment of the European Centre of Minority Issues, a regional cross-border monthly TV show (“Hier – her”), and a language campaign aimed at kindergarten children (“Professor ABC”). Furthermore, the general spirit of cooperation triggered other best practices for cooperation in the health sector. Southern Jutland County made agreements with German authorities on using a hospital in Flensburg for cancer treatment of Danish patients, as well as using Flensburg’s ambulance services and a helicopter stationed on the North Sea Coast in Germany. These agreements resulted mainly out of an economic calculation to share public infrastructure. The hospital agreement ended at the end of 2016, as Region South Denmark now provided for the necessary facilities. For a similar reason, the use of German ambulances and the helicopter have been reduced significantly.

The cross-border study programmes faced a similar fate. Started by two small, peripherally located universities to share resources and create synergy, they faced bureaucratic challenges, as the dual degree programmes had to comply with Danish and German university legislation and financing. Some flexibility characterized the actual implementation of state directives and decrees.³⁴ Changes in Danish policies of higher education as well as a more rigid interpretation of the rules on financing Danish university programmes resulted in a divorce or closure of all but one of these programmes by 2017. The TV show Hier-her, as well as the language campaign Professor ABC, received the European Language Label. This is regularly awarded by the European Commission to best-practice projects encouraging language learning. Nevertheless, neither of the projects became permanent.

In the following, I will examine two projects in-depth to demonstrate the dilemma of committed project makers versus the apparent lack of long-term, cross-border impact of the numerous initiatives. The projects presented in the following, “Dybbøl 2014” and “Young Together,” unite a social-constructivist idea of cross-border region building based on a shared heritage and shared future, combining it with the idea of cross-border regional development. Unfortunately, the web domain of the Dybbøl 2014 project has been closed. Now it is operated by a dubious merchandise firm, so documentation of the activities of the project is not available online anymore.³⁵ This is, unfortunately, an indicator of the lack of sustainability of many Interreg funded projects, where activities peter out after the funding period ends. “Young Together”, which was a sub-project under Dybbøl 2014, was continued in 2015 and 2016 under the auspices of the Danish Border Association,

³³ Wassenberg and Reitel, *Territorial Cooperation in Europe*.

³⁴ See for example Martin Klatt, “Grenzüberschreitende deutsch-dänische Studiengänge: Die Kooperation der Süddänischen Universität mit der Universität Flensburg,” in *Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit mit deutscher Beteiligung: Ein Erfahrungsaustausch*, ed. Joachim Beck (Berlin/Kehl: Bundesministerium des Innern/Euro Institut, 2014). Accessed August 17, 2017: http://www.euroinstitut.org/pdf/Download-Unterlagen/2014-Newsletterdateien/Grenzuberschreitende_Zsarbeit_dt_Beteiligung.pdf

³⁵ Accessed August 17, 2017: <http://www.dybboel2014.dk/>

Grænseforeningen, supported by Region South Denmark and the state of Schleswig-Holstein. In 2017, only a reduced, four-day camp for young people was organized.³⁶

Dybbøl 2014³⁷

Dybbøl 2014 commemorates the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Dybbøl on April 18, 1864, when the Prussian army stormed Danish fortifications of Dybbøl near Sønderborg after a two month siege with continuous shelling by Prussian artillery. The Battle of Dybbøl is a very important, if not the most important *lieux de memoire* of modern Danish history, even though it was a military defeat. It reflects a narrative of heroic resistance to save the country against a perfidious, militarily superior enemy. This narrative has only recently been challenged in popular history writing by Danish journalist and historian Tom Buk-Swienty in two widely read books,³⁸ and by a 10-hour TV series “1864” directed by Ole Bornedal, an internationally renowned director. Buk-Swienty’s books and Bornedal’s TV series primarily blame Danish nationalist politicians for being responsible for the war of 1864, the Danish defeat and the subsequent loss of Schleswig-Holstein to Prussia/Germany. For Germany, Dybbøl served as a *lieux de memoire* during the *Kaiserreich* (1871–1918) as the first of three wars of unification unleashed by Bismarck in his struggle to secure Prussia’s position as the dominant power in German national unification. This culminated with the 50th anniversary festivities in April 1914, months before the outbreak of the First World War. Hereafter, and especially after the Second World War, Dybbøl receded into the shadow of history in German historical memory.

When the battlefield site returned to Denmark in 1920, regular commemorations were held there, which were attended by leading politicians and members of the royal family. It may seem astonishing from an international perspective to commemorate a military defeat, but Dybbøl has been very successful as *lieux de memoire* in the social construction of Denmark as a homogeneous nation state, delimited from the larger German cultural sphere it had belonged to since the middle ages, and characterizing Denmark as a small nation ‘for the people.’³⁹ At the 100th year anniversary of the battle in 1964, Danish prime minister Jens Otto Kragh challenged this style of historic commemoration by giving a speech accentuating increasing European cooperation and acknowledging a democratic West Germany, which had become an ally of Denmark in NATO.⁴⁰ Apparently annoyed by this speech, King Frederik IX spoke outside the programme, maintaining the continuous importance of commemorating the Danish soldiers who gave their lives to guard the Danish-ness of Southern

³⁶ Accessed August 17, 2017: <http://www.jungzusammen.dk/tak-for-i-aar/>

³⁷ For this section, see also Martin Klatt, “Dybbøl 2014. Constructing Familiarity by Remembrance?” in *European Borderlands: Living with Bridges and Barriers*, eds. Elisabeth Boesen and Gregor Schnuer (Milton Park: Routledge, 2017).

³⁸ Tom Buk-Swienty, *Slagtebænk Dybbøl. 18. April 1864* (København: Gyldendal, 2008); *Dommedag Als. 29. Juni 1864* (København: Gyldendal, 2011).

³⁹ Ole Feldbæk, ed. *Dansk Identitetshistorie 3: Folkets Danmark 1848–1940* (København: C.A. Reitzels Forlag, 1992).

⁴⁰ The speech is quoted in the Danish national monthly journal *Grænsevagten* 46:4 (1964): 182–184.

Jutland, and to remind all Danes of their national responsibility to continue doing this.⁴¹ The king, whose speech was acclaimed in Grænsevagten and Flensborg Avis, chose not to comment on the prime minister's speech at all.⁴² This demonstrated clearly that the nationally minded mainstream in Denmark was not ready yet to adopt a more reconciled narrative on Dybbøl and the relation to Germany.

It took another 31 years before the chairman of the German minority in Denmark was invited as a speaker at the festivities in 1995. In 2001, for the first time, German soldiers were present alongside their Danish NATO allies at the commemoration. Initially controversial, German soldiers' attendance has since become a normal scenario. Alongside a general positive development of German-Danish relations and increased cooperation in the border region, the time seemed ripe to mark the 150th anniversary of the battle in 2014 as a final turning point toward a post-national history of cooperation, people-to-people reconciliation and regional cross-border economic development. Perhaps there might even be the possibility of returning to the 400 years of happy union of the pre-national conglomerate Danish monarchy. This was expressed in the charter of the Dybbøl 2014 Interreg project.⁴³

Die neue deutsch-dänische Geschichte hat bereits begonnen und wird 2014 ihren ersten Höhepunkt erleben, wenn die deutsch-dänische Jugend, Kultur und Wirtschaft sich grenzüberschreitend begegnen, um die gegenwärtige Zusammenarbeit zu feiern – und sie für die Zukunft weiter auszubauen. Denn nur zusammen können wir unser gemeinsames Ziel erreichen: unsere Grenzregion zu einer Wachstumsregion werden zu lassen.⁴⁴

This charter set the commemorations into a new narrative: youth (not particularly present at the previous celebrations), culture (meaning actors and stakeholders within the fine arts) and businesses should celebrate the cooperation and further develop it to transform the border region into a growth region. Thus, there clearly were planned synergy effects with another simultaneous project called “Growth Centre.” This is not coincidental because regional actors have defined the strategic aims of the overall Interreg Operational Programme and there has been a large personal overlap in the projects' planning and steering committees.

Region South Denmark was the lead partner of the Dybbøl 2014 project, while other partners were the German State of Schleswig-Holstein, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Flensburg and the Southern Jutland Development Council (*Udviklingsråd Sønderjylland*). Cultural activities with a background in the events of 1864 should bind the Danish-German border region

⁴¹ Speech quoted in the Danish daily newspaper *Jyllands Posten*, April 19, 1964.

⁴² *Grænsevagten* 46:4 (1964): 181; *Flensborg Avis*, April 20, 1964.

⁴³ <http://www.dueppel2014.de/ueber-das-projekt> [Accessed January 19, 2015]. Webpage is now defunct.

⁴⁴ “The new German-Danish history has already begun, and it will experience its first climax in 2014 when the German-Danish youth, culture and economy will meet across the border to celebrate the current cooperation – and further increase it for the future. We can achieve our common goal only together – to turn our border region into a region of growth.” [author's translation]

further together. They should attract tourists and show the region as an attractive place with growth prospects for both residents and businesses. Activities were to be focused on the change of attitudes since 1864 and especially the role of the minorities for increased cross-border understanding.⁴⁵

The activities implemented by the project ranged from a bicycle race, an elementary school summer school, two large business conferences and a two-week long summer school bringing young people (18–25) together to discuss and develop future scenarios for the border region (jUNGzuSAMMEN, see below in the next section of this article). These scenarios aimed to encourage young people to stay instead of moving to larger metropolitan areas after high school graduation.⁴⁶

jUNGzuSAMMEN – “Young Together”

jUNGzuSAMMEN is a wordplay with the Danish and German translation of “young together”, the Danish *ung sammen* being capitalized in the German *jung zusammen*. The basic idea of this project is that young people, being the future residents of the border region, should jointly develop ideas about how to make the region more attractive as a place of residence and business investment. This idea originated within the Danish Border Association *Grænseforeningen*, an organization founded in 1920 to support Danish language and Danish culture in the border region, both north and south of the border. *Grænseforeningen* is still the most important Danish NGO in channelling funds to support the Danish minority in South Schleswig. To attract new, younger members, a specific strategy has been adopted to increase awareness in the border region and its minorities with young people in Denmark. This new focus gave birth to the idea to use the borderland minority experience in national policies of integration for ethnic minorities. It also gave birth to the idea of letting young people meet to discuss the border region’s future.

Grænseforeningen’s isolated earlier attempt to organize a border region youth summer school had failed because of a lack of participants. In 2014, however, 80 young people aged 18–26 attended two parallel two-week long summer schools in northern Germany and southern Denmark, including some joint events. They discussed border region issues among themselves as well as with local experts. The groups developed a catalogue of measures to increase the attractiveness of the border region in a cross-border perspective, which was presented to regional politicians at a meeting in the Schleswig-Holstein State Parliament, the *Landtag*, at the end of the summer school. The 2014 event was co-funded by the EU and free of charge for the participants. Encouraged by the participants’ positive evaluations of the event, the organizers perceived it as a success and continued with similar events in 2015 and 2016. Recruitment of interested young people to the follow-ups proved to be difficult as attendance dropped to 56 people in 2015 and 36 people in 2016. As a consequence, the organizers decided to stop Young Together, only arranging a short, four-day youth

⁴⁵ Region Syddanmark, 2014. Udvalget for dansk-tysk samarbejde, minutes of the meeting of January 21, 2015. Accessed June 23, 2015: <http://www.regionsyddanmark.dk/wm460353>

⁴⁶ For a more encompassing list of activities see Klatt, “Dybbøl 2014. Constructing Familiarity by Remembrance?” 38.

camp with 20 participants in 2017. The organizers' difficulties to recruit for the event were mentioned in each year's evaluation of the project.⁴⁷ Especially in the second and third year, the novelty aspect of the summer school had gone. The project manager confirmed that it been difficult to recruit young people, as especially the German youth was not familiar with the Danish summer school concept. Furthermore, young people did not want to commit themselves to a two-week project during the summer holidays. Nevertheless, after attending once, quite a few participants joined again the following year. And while many had a cross-border background, there were also participants with no previous connection to the neighbouring country who indicated that they had profited from the event, which opened their eyes to cross-border opportunities.⁴⁸ Other sources indicate that it was especially difficult to recruit young people from the majority populations, unless they had previous cross-border contacts.⁴⁹ This indicates indifference from border region youths outside the group Oscar Martinez described as transnational borderlanders.⁵⁰ Earlier studies on youth in the border region have also indicated a high degree of indifference on matters on the other side of the border, as well as a tendency to choose central metropolitan regions of the home country for higher education.⁵¹

Conclusion: Border as Opportunity

It has been demonstrated how the Danish-German border region has developed from having a troubled past into a pacified, pragmatic border region exploiting the benefits of European integration and EU funding. At the same time, the border continues to be a factor in daily social practices as well as economic interaction. There has been an increase of cross-border activities since the implementation of Interreg in 1991 and the establishment of Region Sønderjylland-Schleswig in 1997, but there are still challenges in establishing viable cross-border structures. Interreg's project-style character, where partners apply for a joint project with a time frame of 2 to 4 years, implies a risk of discontinuity. The recent discontinuation of several other so-called best practice cooperation fields bears witness to the weak structures and low degree of cross-border institutionalisation.

Despite open borders and the EU aim of European integration, cooperation in the Danish-German border region reflects the border and is based on two pillars. Pillar one is social-constructivist and normative, and is driven by the idea that borders are bad and should be overcome.

⁴⁷ The self-evaluation documents are available at *Grænseforeningen*.

⁴⁸ Interview with project manager Merlin Christophersen, August 30, 2017.

⁴⁹ The final evaluation of Dybbøl 2014 indicates that it was especially through the minority associations that students were recruited, Lene Borregaard, "Slutrapport Dybbøl 2014," (Vejle: Region Syddanmark, 2015) 15. One of the hosts explained the same to the author in an interview in the summer of 2014, see Klatt, "Dybbøl 2014. Constructing Familiarity by Remembrance?" 40.

⁵⁰ Oscar J. Martinez, *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994).

⁵¹ Carsten Yndigegn, "Life Planning in the Periphery: Life Chances and Life Perspectives for Young People in the Danish-German Border Region," *Young: Nordic Journal of Youth Research* 11:3 (2003); *Unges valg af videregående uddannelse* (Aabenraa: Institut for Grænseregionsforskning, 2003); Carsten Yndigegn, Karen Margrethe Pedersen and Michael Schack, *Unges holdninger til nabolandet - en forundersøgelse* (Aabenraa: Institut for Grænseregionsforskning, 2002).

Sometimes it uses the region's common history and rather late political division (1920) as an argument to reverse history, de-border and reintegrate the region. German politicians especially, both regional and national, have played with a narrative to reunite a divided region. In practice this approach is implemented by predominantly EU funded projects (Interreg), and it is reiterated by politicians employing the narrative of a successful majority-minority settlement, which has functioned as a catalyst for further reconciliation, understanding and cooperation.

Pillar two is a rational choice model. Here, especially Danish agents look across the border for solutions to current political and economic policy challenges. Flexible solutions are applied to satisfy concrete but often temporary demands. This approach has been adopted by social constructivist politicians in a narrative on successful reconciliation and cross-border integration. These politicians are then surprised and challenged in their approach to cooperation when agreements are cancelled and cooperation structures dismantled after satisfaction of the immediate demand. Irritation has been increased by the current challenges to the Schengen system with the reintroduction of border controls on the Danish side of the border. Regional German and Danish politicians have especially spoken out against the renewed border control, calling it a danger to the spirit of cooperation and de-bordering, but so far without success. This again demonstrates the dominance of national political agendas and decisions in this intra-EU and intra-Schengen border region (and others as well).

The multilevel governance of cross-border cooperation is visible in the broad network of actors and stakeholders connected at numerous levels. Political hierarchies and institutionalisation are decisive for the success of cooperation. Beyond the cluster of Interreg project partners, successful cooperation depends on the willingness and power of a stakeholder to have a cross-border perspective and competency to engage in cross-border activities and resource sharing. The surprising result is that centralist Denmark has become better at navigating between the border as a barrier and as a resource/opportunity than federal Germany. This is probably because there is a clearer division of power and competency in Denmark and because of the change to a more liberal, public management oriented design of public services in the recent decades. In Germany, on the other hand, the social-constructivist approach of cross-border integration was met with the harsh realities of an intertwined, legalistic bureaucracy and joint competency of different levels of government making cross-border solutions to improve regional public services difficult.