

Talents, Creativity and Innovation in Austria and the Czech Republic: A Cross-Border Empirical Investigation

Barbara Ehrenstorfer

Tanja Peherstorfer

Jan Nový

A comprehensive cross-border empirical investigation has been carried out in the framework of an intercultural European Union Project (The Czech Republic/Austria) in the border regions of South Bohemia and Northern Austria. The aim was to gain knowledge in terms of the status-quo of creativity and innovation, as well as the situation and requirements in terms of working and living in the region. Thereby, emphasis is placed on the needs and requirements of young people (talents) in order to see who would be willing and able to stay in the region and promote creativity, and social/regional innovation and transformation.

Key Words: regional management and development; cross-border cooperation; quality of life and living; creativity and cooperation of talents; regional and social innovation

JEL Classification: A11; R11

Introduction

The proposed qualitative cross-border fieldwork study was conducted in the framework of an intercultural European Union Project (the Czech Republic/Austria) in the border regions of South Bohemia and Northern Austria. The aim of the project 'RegioTalent' is to gain knowledge of the regional requirements in terms of Working & Living in the region. In this context, we consider the key success factors of regional, respectively cross-border development in talent, technology and tolerance (Florida 2008). We regard 'technology' in the context of work, which means to identify new regional job opportunities to use new technologies or to

Barbara Ehrenstorfer is Project Coordinator at the University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria, Austria.

Tanja Peherstorfer is Project Coordinator at the University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria, Austria.

Dr Jan Nový is Professor at the Faculty of Management, University of Economics Prague, Czech Republic.

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even develop new technologies in the region. ‘Tolerance’ refers to learning to ignore any kind of borders, especially theoretical borders, which limit our imagination of alternative ways of cross-border cooperation. ‘Talent’ concerns the terms of qualified people, who enable regional innovation and development. Those talents are the source of regional innovation and development. Innovation can be induced, where individual talents aspire to create something new and are open-minded to meet and therefore get involved. A supporting factor for generating creative potential is the geographical closeness of talents (Florida 2008), which is realized in the research by the cross-border region of Northern Austria and South Bohemia.

In fact, the human capital (*Talent*) influences, to a large extent, the value or worth of a region. Thus, successful regions are those, which are able to attract qualified people not only to live in the region, but also to work there and to invest their talent into the development of new products or services. The correlation between the degree of *Belonging* to the region, the willingness to work in the region (*Working*), and subsequently to consume (*Consuming*) in the region, are the things we are focusing on in this field research. ‘RegioTalent’ focuses on the human capital as the most important resource of the region. Moreover, individual talents are in the centre of attention – their needs, their creativity and their innovation potential, being the main resource of the region. The matching of the individual innovative potential of several talents differs from traditional forms of cooperation. The project develops several approaches to support the individual creativity and to implement talent networks.

We are speaking of ‘talents’ in terms of qualified employees or graduates, high potentials with creative minds, who are motivated to make efforts for the region and seek for advancements and transformation. We suppose that focusing on the human factor (talent) is a condition precedent to develop the region further. Therefore we aim at defining the qualification requirements of the cross-border regions and finding ways to promote joint qualification and training facilities.

Purpose and Aim of Research

The purpose of the research is to:

- gain knowledge of the human capital in the border region – development of a talent map,
- gain knowledge of the individual requirements in terms of working and living in the region – development of a life quality index,

- gain knowledge of the innovation potential of regional companies and resulting qualification needs,
- gain insight into the innovation potential of regional small and medium-sized enterprises SMEs,
- gain knowledge of the (pre)conditions for cross-border cooperation,
- initiate pilot projects that illustrate the potential of the region in terms of regional working and living,
- communicate those pilot projects in order to raise awareness concerning working and living in the region.

AIM OF RESEARCH

Accordingly, we aimed to explore the perception of the status-quo of the quality of living and quality of working in the border region of North Austria and South Bohemia, including research questions concerning the needs and requirements of young people (talents) in particular, in order for them to be willing and able to stay in the region and to promote creativity and innovation.

Furthermore, with the research we wanted to find out the starting points for cross-border cooperation and want to generate awareness with respect to the acceptance of certain values (e. g. health, solidarity, cross-border cooperation and especially lifelong learning).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions derived from the aim of research are:

1. What makes life livable (factors of the quality of living and subjective well-being)?
2. What makes people stay in a specific region?
3. What are the requirements of people in the future regarding living and working?
4. Which kind of human creative potential (talents, creative minds) is available in the region?
5. What are approaches for cross-border cooperation of regional units/ areas?

Methodology and Empirical Research Design

The overall aim of the investigation was to gain insight into the personal experience and subjective perception of the interviewees in terms of the working and living conditions in Northern Austria and South Bohemia.

According to Brymann ‘qualitative research stresses on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants’ (Brymann 2012, 380). To enable us to meet the requirement of examining the social world of the interviewees, a qualitative research design fits best.

In order to answer the research questions seeking a holistic in-depth understanding of social reality of the explorative-descriptive nature of the investigated issue, a qualitative approach as a first step of a comprehensive research design, including a quantitative study, has been chosen (Patton 2002). As a qualitative research approach is theory elaborating/evolving, inductive, interpretative and holistic (Lamnek 2010), the aim was to build propositions and hypotheses, which will be tested in a quantitative investigation in order to gain representativeness.

METHODOLOGICAL MIX AND TRIANGULATION

The methodology and empirical research design is characterized by a methodological mix and triangulation, namely data triangulation (use of a variety of sources: data is derived from face to face interviews and focus groups), investigator triangulation (involvement of different researchers in data collection, analysis and interpretation) and methodological triangulation (mixed methods approach using *MAXQDA* and in the next step combining the qualitative study with a broad quantitative study in Austria and the Czech Republic).

DATA COLLECTION

All in all, 58 in-depth semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted in the cross-border region of Northern Austria and South Bohemia. The target groups were the same in Austria and the Czech Republic, namely inhabitants of the regions, companies in the regions, young people (talents) and representatives of the regions (mayors) in order to combine different perspectives/views on the cross-border region.

The personal in-depth interviews have been conducted in accordance with an interview guideline consisting of the main topics and some constitutional questions. As the approach is explorative and open, there is the possibility to alternate the sequence of the topics/questions and to add questions in order to enhance the opportunity of genuinely revealing the perspectives of the interviewees (Brymann 2012).

Moreover, two focus groups (each one in Austria and the Czech Republic) with pupils and students (talents) were conducted to emphasize

TABLE 1 Description of target groups in Austria and the Czech Republic

	Austria		The Czech Republic	
<i>Face-to-face interviews</i>	Entrepreneurs (SME's up to large-scale, sectors involved: information systems and engineering, metal, handcraft, production of textile, windows)	12	Entrepreneurs (SME's, sectors involved: trade, production, services, marketing, personnel management, agriculture, construction)	10
	Talents (pupils, students, apprentices, employees, artists)	12	Talents (pupils, artists)	4
	Inhabitants of Northern Austria	7	Inhabitants of South Bohemia	9
	Representatives of the region Northern Austria (Mayors)	3	Representatives of the region South Bohemia (Mayors, social welfare)	5
<i>Focus group</i>	Young people (pupils, students, employees aged from 17–28 years)	12	Pupils (from a secondary school)	16
	Total Respondents	46	Total Respondents	44
Cross-border investigation with 90 respondents altogether				

the needs and requirements of young people in both countries. Methods used with the focus groups were the World-Café-Technique Fish-Bowl-Technique, the Walt Disney Strategy, the Q-method and intensive discussions.

The benefit of the focus group method is the interaction with the group. Besides the specific topic of the focus group that is explored in depth, 'the researcher will be interested in such things as how people respond to each other's views and build up a view out of the interaction that takes place within the group' (Brymann 2012, 501).

The research design of the qualitative investigation was two-tiered. First, face-to-face interviews were conducted in both border regions (Northern Austria and South Bohemia) with the target groups of entrepreneurs, talents, inhabitants and representatives of the regions. All in all, there were 58 face-to-face interviews, whereby 27 interviews were on the Czech side and 31 on the Austrian side. The number of respondents is not exactly the same as the number of interviews due to the fact, that some of the interviews were performed in pairs or small groups. Therefore, there were 28 respondents from South Bohemia with 27 interviews (1 interview was performed with 2 persons) and in Northern Austria there were 34 respondents with 31 interviews (2 interviews were made with groups of pupils at the same time).

In the second step, 2 focus groups with a facilitator were conducted – one in Austria and one in The Czech Republic – with a new participant sample consisting of young people (pupils, students and employees).

SAMPLE DETERMINATION AND SELECTION OF RESPONDENTS

The participants of the face-to face interviews were selected by using a purposeful sampling strategy (Yin 2003; Patton 2002). Selection criteria were mainly the regional condition, meaning that the respondents are either living or working in the rural region of Northern Austria or South Bohemia or living in the rural region, but working in urban areas, commuting there. In any case, there had to be a certain factor of bonding to the rural areas. To maximize information-richness, the selection was done with regard to a best possible plurality regarding age, gender and occupational categories. The interviewees were selected with personal references of peers and according to their regional belonging to the analysed region. Therefore, the snowball sampling method (Brymann 2012) was applied to a moderate extent, particularly within the target groups of talents and inhabitants.

The interviews were conducted in a personal face-to-face setting following an interview guideline covering the core issues:

- General information (demographic information including education and profession).
- Assessment of the quality of living and factors of subjective well-being (quality of life index).
- Infrastructure, transport and mobility requirements.
- Characteristics of the region (strengths and challenges).
- Social cohesion, social capital and belonging.
- Values regarding working and living.
- Assessment of working conditions.
- Working and living in the future – wishes and visions, new forms of working.
- Innovation potential and talents, competencies, skills.
- Regional economy and consuming patterns – sustainability.
- Status quo of the cross-border cooperation Austria–Czech Republic.

The sampling strategy used in the recruiting of the participants of the focus groups with young people in Northern Austria and South Bohemia is called ‘researcher-driven recruitment,’ whereby the researcher with the

support of an organization with interest in the research uses email, letters, flyers, and telephone calls to solicit interest in participation' (Brymann 2012, 511). In Northern Austria, participants were selected from a regional youth association and in South Bohemia a group of people from a secondary school were involved. The approach for the recruiting of the group participants was 'natural groupings' – these are people who know each other, a kind of a 'pre-existing group' (Brymann 2012, 510). The reason being, that structures of the pre-existing natural groups enable the discussions and interactions to be as natural and realistic as possible.

DATA PROCESSING AND DATA ANALYSIS

The data processing was supported with the software MAXQDA for qualitative data and content analysis (Kuckartz 2007; Flick 2006). Data analysis was based on the written transcriptions from the interviews and the transcripts/extracts, audio recordings, written material and field notes of the focus groups and followed the methodological approach of the qualitative content analysis introduced by Mayring (2008). Transcripts and field notes were coded in line with qualitative research guidelines according to Mayring (2008). Besides, due to the large number of respondents for a qualitative survey, the mixed methods approach within the MAXQDA software analysis tool was used. Therefore, the results and findings gain a higher explanatory power and value.

In terms of investigator triangulation, the research team performed data analysis and interpretation jointly. Furthermore, the strategic partners of the project 'RegioTalent' (labour market services, regional management agencies and economic chambers in Austria and the Czech Republic) project have been involved for interpreting and verifying the data for each of the cross-border regions.

The goal of the qualitative data processing was to develop propositions, which will be advanced and tested in the following quantitative step of the whole comprehensive empirical investigation. The process of generating propositions presented in this paper is graphically represented in figure 2.

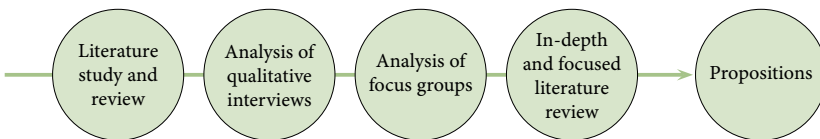


FIGURE 1 Development of propositions

Results and Main Findings

This section presents and discusses the findings of the fieldwork study and the derived propositions.

TALENTS, INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY

The research revealed that there is a high potential of creativity and innovation in the cross-border region of Northern Austria and South Bohemia. Interests, skills and competencies are manifold and are in the wide range of the areas of sport, music and culture, language skills, agriculture, science, engineering and entrepreneurship.

PROPOSITION 1 *There is a high potential of creativity and innovation in the cross-border region of Northern Austria and South Bohemia.*

One more finding is that creativity requires a climate of appreciation, respect and acceptance. Thus, talents need a climate of tolerance, openness and acceptance and also structures (infrastructure and education) to foster them in order to unfold their potential and use it in and for the region. In comparison to Austrian young talents, there is the tendency, deriving from the study, that Czech young talents, especially in the cross-border region, face more difficulties and lack certain requirements regarding new forms of cooperation and entrepreneurship.

Therefore, the most crucial challenge for the border regions of Northern Austria and South Bohemia is to hold and bond with the future creative and innovative minds because they are able to foster social and regional innovation. In order to do so, on the one hand the region has to offer basic needs like adequate habitation and childcare possibility, infrastructure concerning high quality public transport systems, high-speed internet, cultural events and a broad range of gastronomy and meeting locations which enable young people to establish contacts and networks. On the other hand, the region has to meet the requirements of the talents in terms of mobility, education and training in the region in particular, because these have been detected as major factors for bonding young and qualified people as well as talents to the region.

THE QUALITY OF LIVING

The findings of the fieldwork study concerning the quality of living in Austria show a positive picture, meaning that people like to live in their region and assess their quality of living as high.

PROPOSITION 2 *The quality of living benefits strongly when related to the quality of the environment, the working situation and the social net (family, friends, associations).*

PROPOSITION 3 *The most influencing factors of the quality of living in Austria are: (1) nature and peacefulness in the countryside, (2) family and social contacts and networks, (3) (regional) working situation and (4) infrastructure and habitation.*

The results show the most important factors of the perception of the quality of living, mainly the living conditions (quality of direct surroundings), the working conditions (with a relation to regional working opportunities), the social net and the infrastructure and habitation possibilities. The assessment of the quality of living in the Czech Republic is slightly lower than in Austria due to certain aspects of the quality of living conditions, such as housing regulations, infrastructure, a high rate of unemployment, in particular affecting young people, and a lack of cooperation of educational institutions and the labor market policy.

The respondents of the investigation in Austria and the Czech Republic underlined the significance of the social net in the region. This is on the one hand their family, friends and neighbors and on the other hand, contacts from involvement in associations and clubs. In rural regions, such as the border region of Northern Austria and South Bohemia, people know each other personally in their place of residence, hence having social contacts, experiencing a strong feeling of belonging and social support influencing their perception of the quality of living in a positive way.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Certain aspects of the concept of Social Capital have been investigated, namely belonging to social groups and networks, voluntary involvement, social contacts and trust. Theories state that the amount of social capital has an impact on the perception of the quality of living.

A remarkable finding is the strong feeling of belonging of inhabitants and a high identification with the region as well as a high level of voluntary engagement in regional associations. The social capital is a distinctive factor in Northern Austria as well as in South Bohemia, where the people also reported that living together works very well. Social cohesion, solidarity and activities in regional associations or clubs are essential parts of their quality of living.

The results concerning Austria and the Czech Republic highlight that the participation of inhabitants in social groups is high. Most inhabitants

are part of at least one social group as for example, associations or clubs in different areas (relief organizations, music and culture, health and care, religion, etc.).

Oxoby (2009, 1136) presents the following definitions of social capital and social cohesion:

Social capital is an individual's sacrifices (time, effort, consumption) made in an effort to promote cooperation with others' and social cohesion is a characteristic of society which depends on the accumulated social capital.

Therefore, the proposition based on the definitions of Oxoby (2009) and the insights of the empirical survey in Austria and the Czech Republic, is stated:

PROPOSITION 4 *The more people take an active part in social groups, the more cohesion and identity the society features and thus the perception of the quality of living is effected in a positive way.*

The study showed a high level of trust, voluntary engagement, participation in regional social groups and neighbourly help in Northern Austria and South Bohemia. Social contacts are established and a feeling of belonging develops leading to a positive perception of the quality of living. Therefore, the 'bonding' aspect of social capital pointed out by Wallis, Killerby, and Dollery (2004) 'bonding social capital refers to the intra-community ties that members can depend on in situations of need' is addressed.

A former empirical study conducted in Austria regarding social capital and voluntary engagement found a significant correlation between voluntary engagement and social capital. People engaged voluntarily, thus taking on responsibility and being able to cooperate, mainly contribute to strengthening social cohesion. In addition, the researchers stated that the more voluntary engagement and social capital in a region, the better the quality of life and the economic power of a region is (Fredersdorf 2010). Within our investigation in Northern Austria and South Bohemia, this relation also has been identified.

EMPLOYMENT AND WORK

PROPOSITION 5 *Regional work is a major factor of the subjective perception of the quality of living and thereby the quality of work is important.*

The main result from the Austrian data is that regional work is a major factor of the subjective perception of the quality of living and thereby the quality of work (that is to say challenging content, career opportunities, training and qualification and remuneration) is important.

Regional working opportunities and jobs enhance the quality of living and enable people living there to stay in the region. According to many respondents, there is a direct connection between the quality of living and having a job in the region. It has to be considered that, besides the regional aspect, the requirements regarding working conditions are multilayer and therefore the survey investigated the main values of employees. The most frequently mentioned answers are in the categories of:

- having sole responsibility, working independently,
- room to manoeuvre and scope for development,
- advancement in one's position and career perspectives,
- flexibility concerning working time and scheduling,
- flexibility concerning work content (interesting and challenging),
- working atmosphere (relation to colleagues, seniors, working environment),
- creativity, challenge, manifoldness, job variation,
- continuing education and lifelong learning,
- pleasure and enjoyment with work.

Respondents stressed that values, such as creativity and room to manoeuvre contribute to their individual fulfillment. This finding is in line with a statement of Bergmann, that 'the spirit and sense of one's activities, a job which we absolutely want to have, is better than any kind of therapy' (Bergmann 2004, 119). According to the respondents, the main point is the mixture between the adequate content of work, the working atmosphere and appropriate reward.

Regional work is the key for regional and economic development and innovation of sustainable regions. Therefore, in order to attract and hold regional workforce, it is crucial for local entrepreneurs and employers to focus on meeting the expectations of the employees regarding the values of career advancement possibilities, flexibility, continuing education, working atmosphere and reward.

PROPOSITION 6 New forms and concepts of work will be required in order to meet the challenges of the future.

Another important result is that the term ‘work’ has to be reconsidered and new concepts and forms of work will be required in order to meet the challenges of the future, e. g. tele-working, qualification in firms, life-cycle-oriented work models allow more flexibility and self-determination. Flexibility in working time will become more important in the future and there is also a need for more flexibility in terms of working forms, especially considering the situation of families with a duty of childcare and well-established employees. There is a huge potential of creativity drowsing in women, who stay at home due to childcare. Overall, new models of work should be considered as for instance life-cycle-oriented work models for women as well as for men taking into account the private, family situation and the age.

The working situation in Northern Austria is characterized by certain issues discussed intensively during the fieldwork. Challenges are the lack of skilled workers and apprentices and a lack of adequate working possibilities for young and qualified persons and a high rate of commuters. From the South Bohemian point of view, the above-mentioned issues are also true as well as a low wage level and reduction of public and social services affecting the people in the region. Additionally, the necessary construction of infrastructure and buildings is an issue in the Czech border region.

PROPOSITION 7 In addition to regional work, regional education and training, infrastructure and habitation are essential in order to bond and keep skilled workforce and in particular, young talents.

Supplementary to regional job opportunities increasing the quality of living, regional education and training is one more factor making life interesting for people in Northern Austria and South Bohemia. Especially young respondents highlight that sufficient infrastructure and appropriate habitation is essential for their quality of life. Infrastructure pertains to adequate public transport in order to guarantee mobility and notably different locations for young people to meet each other, entertainment opportunities, cultural events and sport options. In addition, for the respondents, adequate and affordable habitation possibilities in rural regions are fundamental for the decision of the place of residence, especially for young people.

PROPOSITION 8 Employer branding is of high importance for regional and local entrepreneurs in order to be visible in the labour market and to attract (regional) workforce.

Derived from the qualitative data, talent management and employer branding is of high importance in particular in remote rural areas. There are special conditions for entrepreneurship in rural regions as they seek for skilled and specialized labor force. One main advantage of firms in rural areas is that they use small and medium sized structures and thereby foster trust in their customers. A point is, enterprises in urban areas can learn from enterprises in rural areas in the framework of the information society, where anonymity in business is common.

According to Mandhanya and Shah 'Talent Management refers to the process of developing and integrating new workers, developing and keeping current workers and attracting highly skilled workers for the company' (Mandhanya and Shah 2010, 43). According to Backhaus and Tikoo 'employer branding represents a firm's effort to promote, both within and outside the firm, a clear view of what makes it different and desirable as an employer' (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, 501). Overall, employer branding is the effort of attracting potential employees, retaining current employees and communicating the employer brand internally as well as externally. Employer branding makes it possible to differentiate from competitors and to win the war for the scarce resource called talent.

To sum up, according to the results of our study, regional work is regarded as crucial when it comes to the perception and assessment of the quality of living. Indeed, regional work (meaning that people work within a small radius of the place where they live) is one of the three main factors of the quality of living observed in our study. Moreover, commuting is regarded as a negative criterion concerning the perception of the quality of living. Thus, commuting rates can be decreased by fostering regional work opportunities. New forms of working and innovative approaches towards work and entrepreneurship have to be considered in both rural and urban regions in the future.

CROSS-BORDER AND INTERCULTURAL COOPERATION

There is a good cooperation in the fields of tourism, culture and communities/municipalities and cross-border project activities between Austria and the Czech Republic. The challenge is to foster cross-border cooperation in the business area.

Generally speaking, there is a strong willingness from both sides of the border for cooperation and networking, yet there are still some barriers, stereotypes and cultural differences which are challenges, showing us the need for a climate of learning, openness and understanding.

Cross-border cooperation should be fostered with common activities (projects, events, marketing) – as this is the only way to gain deep understanding and tolerance for the mentality, culture and values of both countries. Some of the effects of the transformation process, which happened in 1989 in the Czech Republic, are noticeable in terms of regional, social and technical innovation management.

SUGGESTIONS FOR MEASURES AND SOLUTIONS

The high potential of creativity and talents in the regions of Northern Austria and South Bohemia need to be fostered in order to be able to induce social and regional innovation. The project ‘RegioTalent’ and the proposed research raise sustainable awareness of the challenges and chances of regional, as well as cross-border cooperation.

The survey revealed the importance of fostering consciousness in terms of cross-border cooperation and cultural understanding in the business sector as well as considering private human relations between the Austrian and Czech people. Intercultural competence and appreciation can be reached by active exchange and cooperation in different forms, e. g. projects, exchange programmes and language training addressing people of all ages. The process of releasing ‘borders in our minds’ is long-lasting and demands tolerance. Intensive awareness and marketing play important roles. One measure considered is to raise awareness in the cross-border region regarding the existence of interesting enterprises and firms offering promising jobs. For entrepreneurs in a rural region, employer branding measures are recommended. Moreover, a change in attitudes in the direction of values such as closeness to nature, sustainability and regionalization can be a possibility for improving the situation in the cross-border region.

Regional work opportunities are the decisive factor for bonding people, especially young talented people, to the region. The settlement of companies and entrepreneurship has to be fostered, also taking into account the regional requirements and the support of small and traditional structures. New forms of work and the cooperation of local companies and schools in order to merge employers and employees will contribute to enhance the situation in the cross-border region. In addition to work opportunities, education and training specifically in the region is required.

One more pre-condition for attracting and bonding creative minds and fostering regional and social innovation and cooperation is social security and a well-organized social economy (including childcare and welfare).

Furthermore, measures in the areas of infrastructure and environment are essential to meet the requirements of young talents in Austria and the Czech Republic.

Main Conclusion and Prospects

The regions of Northern Austria and South Bohemia are characterized by a high degree of commuters (up to 65%), people who leave their home every day in order to work somewhere outside their hometown. According to the results of this empirical investigation, the commuting behaviour results not only from missing regional job opportunities but also from the ignorance of actually having available job options. Ignorance is on both sides, employees as well as employers. Asking graduates, they often do not even think about searching for regional job opportunities. Besides, employers do not see any need to be present on the regional job market. They think it is sufficient to announce the job as the need arises but do not invest in anything in advance. Employer branding in terms of presenting on the regional job market, cooperating with local education facilities, and gaining a good reputation, is not always considered to be important. These companies are more likely to be affected by skills shortages than those who invest in employer branding measures.

CREATIVITY AND INNOVATIVE POTENTIAL

The success of a creative economy depends on the people and their ability to be aware of available talents, and to offer them the kind of environment they need in order to develop (Gatterer 2010). According to the empirical investigation, there are some enterprises which are indeed aware of the innovative potential of the region, in terms of skilled, creative, and motivated people, and which invest resources to attract those people. They establish their own employer branding strategies, especially focusing on regional reputation and early involvement of future employees. Skills shortages is not a problem they have to deal with, as they are known as valuable employers who invest in their innovative potential, in terms of personnel development.

Nevertheless, the company structure in the investigated regions consists mainly of small and medium sized enterprises, which cannot supply the demand for regional work. Thus, commuting seems to be the most obvious alternative. According to Florida (2008, 151), commuting is the one thing which makes us most unhappy in life. Interpersonal relationships (family, friends), a high quality of living (nature, infrastructure),

and regional job opportunities are those things which raise our feeling of well-being, trusting the results of the available qualitative survey.

TALENT-2-TALENT COOPERATION & INNOVATION

With the objective of raising the quality of life in the border regions of Northern Austria and South Bohemia, this research aimed at developing approaches, which support the well-being component 'regional work.' Besides enhancing regional employer branding, the research thinks about new forms of cooperation between individual talents. 'Innovations are in most cases less the product of individual firms than of assembled resources, knowledge, and other inputs and capabilities that concentrate in specific places.' (Experience the Creative Economy Delegation 2008 2009, 4)

Considering the situation in the region, a concentration of skilled people already exists. Talents, who need support to realize their ideas and to get together, build a kind of clustering force (Florida 2008, 66). In this context, we have to consider that regions almost act like companies. Creativity, innovation, the combination of different ideas and people as well as the willingness to learn and develop further each day, are the success factors of companies and regions (figure 2).

According to Belussi and Staber (2012, 7), 'creativity, in fact, involves novelties related to nonlinear and often illogical personal expression, innovation represents a calculated (and measurable) creation of new knowledge.' Focus of this research was to connect regional talents in order to use the creative potential of individuals, in terms of novelties and personal ideas/beliefs, and to establish a cooperative innovation process. The main challenge in this context is not to connect those talents but to go beyond formal cooperation and to enable an exchange of ideas and experiences. In order to support successful cooperation within groups, a

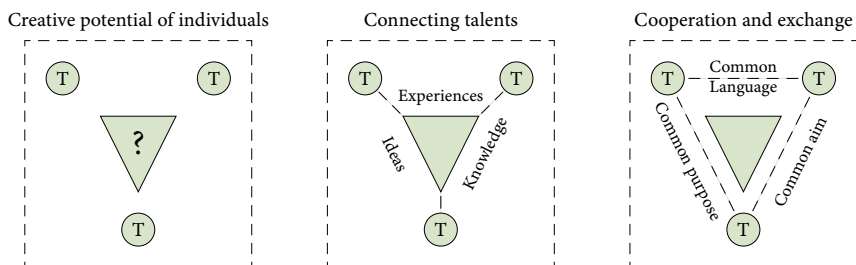


FIGURE 2 Preconditions for Talent-2-Talent cooperation and innovation

common language (expression, wording, vocabulary of concepts) as well as a common purpose and aim are the main preconditions. Applying methods of cooperation, communication and innovation are necessary to support this exchange process and to keep it alive, despite local distance.

SOCIAL COHESION (BONDING) AS PRE-CONDITION FOR COOPERATION

This project assumes that the potential of a region, rural as well as urban, is not only defined by the number of talented people (inhabitants) but their willingness to cooperate and to establish the necessary social relationships, thus a high social capital. In this context, we mainly refer to the ‘bonding’ aspect, in terms of linking individuals or groups and establishing a kind of cohesiveness in order to achieve a collective goal (Adler and Known 2002). The small and flexible structures in rural regions (small enterprises) support the development of such tight connections between individuals and groups. The establishment of this kind of social cohesion is something urban areas can learn from rural ones (figure 3).

TALENT MAP

In this research, the representation of the creative potential of the border region of Northern Austria and South Bohemia is supported by a talent map. This map includes skilled people (talents) of the region as well as existing projects, initiatives, networks or social businesses. It contains talents’ representations, i. e. visions, ideas, projects – built upon experiences, and serves as a platform to externalize knowledge/experiences and talents accordingly with their individual skills. Thus, it helps towards establishing an exchange of talents (experiences), focusing on the externalization

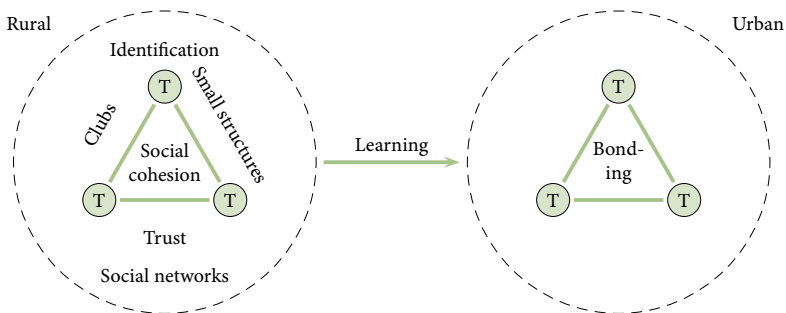


FIGURE 3 Social cohesion (bonding) as pre-condition for cooperation

process as one of the four basic steps to create knowledge (Nonaka 1991), and further enhance the innovation processes in the region.

PILOT PROJECT – TRAINING

The design of a training course which provides a certain creative space and supports the exchange of individual ideas and the creation of new knowledge, thus innovation (talent-to-talent, T2T), is a further measure to be developed within this research project. According to Schumacher (2001), the main duty of work is to help people reduce egotism and to offer them a possibility to connect and exchange with each other. The above mentioned training course focuses on people who are searching for possibilities to realize their ideas, to exchange experiences and concepts with others and to conjointly generate new working opportunities and in the best of cases, to build up one's own small business. In cooperation with coaches, mentors, and like-minded people, not only professional skills, like project management, marketing or financing are supported, but the personal-/self-development is in the primary focus. Precondition to participate in this training is a creative project idea, which aims at developing the border region (Northern Austria and South Bohemia) further.

According to Simon (1986, 68), 'Acts are judged to be creative when they produce something that is novel and that is thought to be interesting or to have social value.' Both aspects 'to be interesting' and 'to have social value' are considered in this training concept. Thus, sustainable economic development initiatives in the field of social entrepreneurship, meaning to focus on social problems, are supported. The innovative potential, clustered in this training initiative, should also be a good possibility for regional enterprises or organisations, to benefit from this pool of creative ideas and to exchange knowledge and experience with the participants. Those external partners can act as mentors, coaches, current or future customers, or even project partners. The integration of regional partners is a further possibility to intensify the cross-border cooperation and to make a contribution to enhance openness as well as tolerance on both sides.

Limitation and Further Research

The research findings are restricted to a certain kind of region, namely the middle European area of Northern Austria and the Czech Republic. Obviously, the results from the qualitative research are not representative of a population. According to Brymann 2012 instead, the findings of qual-

itative research are to generalize the theory rather than the populations. It is the quality of the theoretical inferences that are made out of qualitative data that is crucial to the assessment of generalization (Brymann 2012). This view of generalization is called ‘analytical generalisation’ by Yin (2009).

Further research concerning the assessment of the quality of life is applied at the moment in the form of a quantitative investigation in the region of Northern Austria and South Bohemia. Furthermore, a life quality index will be developed, which is created to apply for more regions. In fact, the results of the survey are relevant only to a specific differentiated geographical area. Despite this, similarities to other border regions in Europe have been found and these same regional issues, challenges and trends have also been uncovered and discussed. In order to enhance the utility of the findings and derived conclusions to a broader audience, a further regional expansion and application is aimed. Directions for future research topics could be for example comparative studies concerning the investigation of ‘Talent-2-Talent Cooperation and Innovation’ in different interregional European border regions as well border triangles.

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