

Evolution of Employment in a German-Czech border region – Effects of transition and effects of borders in an enlargement perspective

As it is often the case in geography, the main task of my research work is to observe and understand a region, and using theories as tool, and not to build a theory or a model that one could illustrate or demonstrate with a case study. Actually, the Dreiländerck is not a case study, but the core of my research. However, I will try to follow, more or less the ideal model of proposal.

The Dreiländereck

At the border between Bavaria, Saxony and the Czech Republic, the Euroregion Egrensis is a mountainous, industrial region, which was divided by the Iron Curtain. Since 1989-90, this region constitutes a framework of comparison between the evolutions of two former socialist areas (Western Saxony and Western Bohemia) which have chosen different ways of transition, and a framework of observation for the reaction of a western region (Northern Bavaria) to the opening of borders and to the new, actual proximity of the neighbours. All three areas of that region are directly concerned by the enlargement of the European Union, with all the economical, social opportunities and risks it will bring.

My empirical questions

I intend to analyse in a systemic way the interactions between employment and territories in different historical and national contexts, considering three main inputs: enterprises, local authorities and active population, in order to understand how this territory (anhand the several temporalities) reacts, adapts and influences the consequences of ruptures (historical rupture: the transition; spatial rupture: boundaries).

Theoretical framework

Three main theoretical, geographical themes will be a support for this research:

1. Borders ; the theories about nature and functions of borders (Minghi, Raffestin,...) are very usefull to draw the evolution of the borders – and implication- in that region.
2. Spatial discontinuities (Brunet, Grasland,...), which is a quite new topic in geography, actually at the cross between theory and methodology.
3. Time and space. That topic has inspired much more geographers, in two main directions:

- economic geography / spatial economy, especially the rich literature on industrial districts and sustainable development ; even if the significance of time in territorial development is not always the core of those works, it is a background of almost each work on that question.
- spatial, systemic analysis : the themes of a) ruptures, bifurcation, innovation,... and b) continuities, inertia, spatial resistance, permanences etc, have been a theme of research for many geographers working in a systemic approach (Sanders, Durand-Dastès, Pumain...). Recently, the concept of resilience* has been adapted to geography (Aschan, 1998), and, together with the notion of spatial transition (Elissalde), it is a first step to overshoot the opposition between spatial resistances and spatial continuities and to integrate both of them in one concept.

Historical relevance

An analysis of the resiliency of the three areas of the *Dreiländereck* will probably/maybe lead to draft possible local reactions on the E.U. enlargement and the deregulations it will involve.

Approach and methods

This research combines a comparative approach (comparison between the three areas), both a synchronic and a diachronic approach (evolution of employment since the sixties and focus on the nineties), and a multiscalar approach (from local level to Europe).

However, a border-related topic collides to strong methodological difficulties. Indeed, a traditional statistical and cartographic approach is not appropriate, because social and spatial categories are mostly not comparable – especially in the case of labour market and employment (i.e. definition of unemployment or size of administrative units). Nevertheless, these methodological problems lead to theoretical questions about the framework of observation. The discontinuities one can observe along a border often are *artefacts*, due to different social and spatial categories, but they also highlight actual differences in social, economic and political facts, because they are first of all frameworks of action and even of identification ; this is the same for temporal ruptures in statistical categories.

* This concept comes from ecological sciences and has been recently adapted, by a Swedish geographer, to spatial systems in human geography: it implies the capacity of a spatial system to integrate a disruption to its operation, without changing its qualitative structure (Aschan C., 2000. *Analysing the resilience of spatial systems*. Espace géographique 1, 2000, pp.64-77).

In that case, the analysis of statistical problems and their origin can be very helpful to understand spatial and historical discontinuities but they have to be completed by empirical research. Nevertheless, fieldwork –especially semi-directed interviews with local and regional actors- will be the main source of information for this work.

Resumee

A geographical, comparative and middle-term approach attempts not only to show the deep and rough changes due to the transition and to the opening of the borders, but also to highlight the role the geographical space plays in the great perturbation of Labour Markets and employment since 1990.