

Twin Towns on the Border as Laboratories of European integration

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Abstract: *The article is concerned with a particular type of border towns: twin towns. After sketching a general European historical framework within which twin towns developed, the article looks at disequilibrium, resource scarcity and marginalisation, institutionalisation and identity building as key variables to understand the phenomenon.*

Keywords: *Twin towns, European border, cross-border cooperation, urban cooperation.*

Sommario: *L'articolo riguarda un particolare tipo di città di confine: le città gemelle. Dopo aver abbozzato un quadro storico europeo generale all'interno del quale si sono sviluppate le città gemelle. L'articolo considera lo squilibrio, la scarsità delle risorse e l'emarginazione, l'istituzionalizzazione e la creazione dell'identità come variabili chiave per comprendere il fenomeno.*

Parole chiave: *Città gemelle, confine europeo, cooperazione trans-confinaria, cooperazione urbana.*

Definition and hypothesis

The 1st of May 2004, the day of the Eastern extension of the European Union, was the day of the twin towns. From Frankfurt (Oder) and Slubice to Gorizia and Nova Gorica at the Italian-Slovene border came State Presidents and Ministers, and even Romano Prodi as the President of the European Union, to celebrate

the night of European unification and fraternity. Narva and Ivangorod (EE-RUS) and Brest and Terespol (BY-RUS) were not among these celebration places, because not all Europe was unified. And after this bright day, everyday problems came back to the new borders of Europe, especially to the twin towns. However, twin towns on borders are laboratories of European integration, because they are junctions of problems and have to become pioneers of cooperation.

Cities grew often on both riverbanks, because from the earliest times, rivers have functioned as trade routes, sources of energy and water supplies. Unlike twin towns inside countries, like Buda and Pest in Hungary or Mannheim and Ludwigshafen in Germany, most twin towns at borders have a history of war and separation. For the young nation-state of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the idea of natural borders was fascinating, drawn by mountains and rivers. Therefore, twin towns usually are located on rivers. Town, border and river became a triad. As the sample shows (table 3), rivers separate 24 of the 30 town couples, and Helsingfors and Elsinore have the Oresund between them. Twin cities in the narrower sense of this paper are city pairs that are located immediately on a border, opposite to each other, with only the river between. Therefore, Vienna and Bratislava, situated 65 kilometres apart on the Danube, newly connected by the ferry “Twin City Liner,” do not form part of this category. Twin towns have a common history, often as one institutional community for long time. The name, similar or different, is no secure marker for common history. For instance, the German Rheinfelden and the Slovene Nova Gorica are new foundations opposite the old towns with the same name; meanwhile Slubice was an old suburb of Frankfurt (Oder) which got a new Slav name when it passed to Poland.

This study is based mainly on student research work at the European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder). The students stay for a term or more at the investigated twin town, usually working on a master’s thesis. They show how every twin town got its own history and appearance, while some general characteristics are obvious. Some hypotheses will be given:

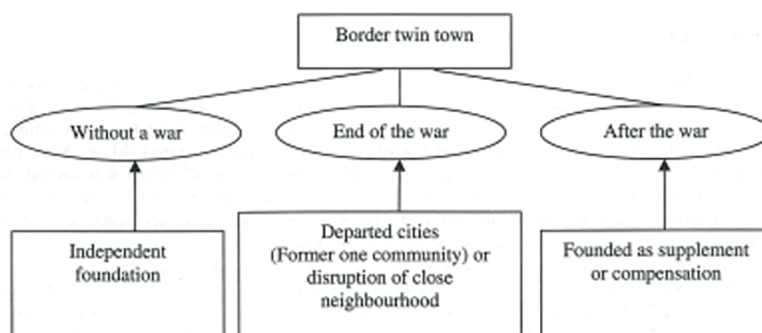
- Twin towns are established especially after wars, when the winners draw new borders. Demarcation and nationalism are more prevalent and make cooperation more difficult where the legacy of the past is more strongly felt and entry to the European Union occurred later.
- The disequilibrium of size, resources, and quality of life between twin

- towns puts partnership under strain. At the same time, even such an imbalance, as in an inequality of resources, requires cooperation.
- Since the 1990s, twin town cooperation has enjoyed a boom of agreements, common projects and institutions. The agency of this institutionalisation is the urban elite who are enthusiastic about the European idea, but not so successful in sharing the benefit of cross-border cooperation with the public.
 - Where both twins have been in the European integration process for decades, a joint identity can grow. European rhetoric coins this identity; meanwhile the essentials of a former common regionality vanish.

Legacy of history

Most twin towns are the outcome of a war. There are three different situations (Figure 1). The oldest town couples are independent foundations, like Tui and Valença or Narva and Ivangorod. However, the Teutonic Knights and the Russian Czar erected the fortresses Narva and Ivangorod against each other. When nation-states fortified themselves with passport controls, customs line and frontier guards, the rivers became borders. Then the city couples lost the links which formerly connected the economy and urban life.

Figure 1. Origin of twin towns on the border



There were four waves of border twins in Europe: after the Napoleonic wars, after the First World War, after the Second World War, and after the Cold War, when the multi-ethnic Soviet Union and Yugoslavia broke up. As the years of border drawing demonstrate, each of these waves produced at least five city couples in the sample. Real separated towns exist on the Olza, the Danube, the Oder and Neisse, and the Sava, where new borders divided old communities. Examples are the Czech-Polish Teschen, the Slovak-Hungarian Komárom, the German-Polish Görlitz, and lastly the former Yugoslav Brod and Kostajnica. All these are located in Eastern Europe. This physical partition of an urban unit meant destruction and violence, and in extreme cases the expulsion of inhabitants. The third kind of origin is rather modest. Sometimes a new town grew across from the lost city on the other bank of the border river. Thus the Swedes built the trade base Haparanda as compensation for Tornio that was under Russian rule after the Swedish-Russian War of 1809. Likewise, the Slovenes founded the new city Nova Gorica, when the old town Görz became the Italian Gorizia after the First World War.

During the age of nationalism, border towns were frontier towns, used as fortified symbols of national self-assertion. This was not to the same degree as in Belfast, Jerusalem and Nicosia, the frontier cities described by Joël Kotek (1999). However, nationalism shaped everyday life at all borders. After war and partition, bridges were blown up, cross-border railways demolished, common public services disrupted. The ethnically segregated populations of the border twin towns became the spearhead of prejudices and hostile stereotypes against their neighbours, living with their backs to each other. Only where the majority of the populations in both twins were from the same nationality, like the Hungarians in Komárno-Komárom or the Russians in Narva-Ivangorod, did the feeling of common ground continue. Therefore, such communities have had to suffer the suspicion of irredentism.

The way from frontier cities to laboratories of European integration is long and hard. It started in Western Europe in the 1950s with the foundation of the European Community. Nationalistic rhetoric and policies had to be overcome by peaceful rhetoric and cooperation. The change succeeded mostly where the cross-border “Euregions” shaped the pioneer twin town Eurode from the Dutch Kerkrade and the German Herzogenrath. On the Scandi-

navian peninsula, the traditional Northern commonality has promoted the mutuality of Haparanda and Tornio since the 1970s. Even inside the Soviet bloc the rhetoric of internationalism forced similar openness and cooperation between twins, powered by mobilisation of people and modest, though rising, tourism (Jajeśniak-Quast/Stoklosa). But that remained an isolated episode during the 1970s, and the attempt broke down when the Polish Solidarity movement became a threat to the rulers. At the borders of the Soviet Union, such openness was always absent.

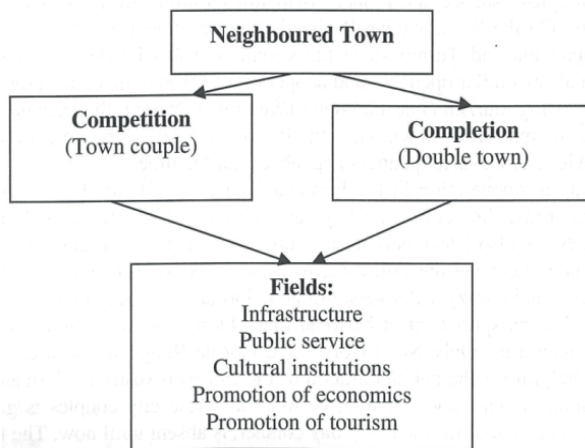
Obviously, the way to cooperation in the European sense is particularly hard for the twin cities in Eastern Europe, in the former Soviet block. They have not only to bear the most lasting past, often until the youngest days, they are also latecomers in the European Union. As recently at the 1st of May 2004, the custom control ended between the Polish-German twins, between Gorizia and Nova Gorica, Valga and Valka, Český Těšín and Cieszyn, Radkersburg and Gornja Radgona, Gmünd and České Velenice or Komárno-Komárom. The passport control between these twins continued until December 2007, when they joined the Schengen area. Only Nova Gorica and Gornja Radgona got already the European currency, which was so helpful for the neighbourhood of the German-Austrian, German-Dutch and French-Spain border town couples. The labour market between all these city couples is generally closed, and therefore commuting, so essential for the every day contact, is absent until now. The twin cities alongside the external frontier of the European Union sustain tightened border controls and visa regulations, to protect the Schengen Europe against smuggle and unwelcome migrants. That means, only inside the European Union we can speak about twin towns as laboratories and protagonists of European integration.

Disequilibrium

The title of this paper could be understood in an enthusiastic way. The above overview of the communities with a special history has already dampened the optimism. Border twins are weak and fragile agents of the European idea and practices, burdened with a history of particular handicaps and problems. However, they are fated to be pioneers, and to be successful.

An essential problem is the disequilibrium between partners. First of all there is the language problem. Bilingualism is not as widespread as is often assumed. Even urban dignitaries mostly have no command of their neighbour's language, and use the European lingua franca English instead, as is usual between Valga and Valka since the use of colloquial Russian has receded. In most cases, the the neighbouring languages are not equivalent: one is the "greater," spoken by many millions of people around the world, the other is "smaller," limited to its own nation. That means only citizens with the smaller mother tongue will learn the language of their neighbour. This imbalance is the result of investigations everywhere in the twin towns. Even the wonderful school project "Eurobabel" in the German-Dutch Kerkrade and Herzogenrath has recently failed (Ehlers 2007: 154-159). Possibly, bilingualism remains a privilege of minorities, despite all the efforts of such European Union programmes as "Learning the neighbour's language."

Figure 2 .Levels of neighbourhood (after Buursink and Waack 1998)



The gravest imbalance between twin cities exists at the level of welfare. Especially the newly joined town couples in the European Union and twins outside have such remarkable gap between the neighbours, although they all have to struggle with serious economic problems after the transformation. The feeling is often stronger when there is a smaller gap between two poorer parts than a wide gap between two rich ones. Negative prejudices could become the result. In twin towns on the German-Polish border, the welfare gap is remarkably lower than between Germany and Poland in general, but it is the source of fear and mistrust on the German side. Therefore, the hope for improvement of the mutuality between the town couples is based on the optimism to overcome the welfare gap. Varied prices and wages and different levels of social services and health care are the real outcome of the gap.

However, this imbalance leads not only to illegal work and smuggling, but also to welcome com-muting and cross-border trade. Entrepreneurs' associations advocate the opening of labour markets for skilled personnel. Mayors look for new inhabitants for their shrinking towns and the property owners for new tenants from the other side. Cross-border trade is the most important branch where old industry has declined. It is always central for border crossings in twin cities, and therefore the lifting of custom controls and tariffs is fundamental for a blooming economy there. Strangely, sociologists sometimes seem ashamed of this trade in bazaars and booths as "pathologies of the border." Economists know that even smuggling is an income supplement for ordinary people, and for many of them it is the only income. Legalisation of cross-border trade means decriminalisation of the people along the border.

Because of such manifold differences in social and economic life, in tradition and environment, all social and economic activities are imbalanced, going only in one or the other direction between the twins. Even a manifold imbalance is a good reason to complete one another, not to be rivals. Moving from competition to completion seems to be the precondition to become a double town in the sense of Buursink (Figure 2). Obviously, our border twins have less opportunity to be rivals because the differences are too deep. At first, especially in the East of Europe, they have to progress to become a town couple.

Marginalisation and scarce resources

Further problems of border twins are marginalisation and scarce resources. Only three from these 60 cities have more than 100,000 inhabitants, and 27 have less than 20,000 (table 3). Twin cities on the border are mostly small or just middle-sized. The three exceptions play a special international role: the Bulgarian town of Ruse has the (so far) only – highly frequented – passage over the Danube; the Belarusian Brest is the gateway for Western trade to Eastern Europe, because the railway gauge changes there, and the French Strasbourg is a capital of Europe. Usually border towns are marginal to international trade. They have rather a passive position as the eye of a needle rather than hubs of international trade. These are the metropolises: not Frankfurt (Oder), but Hamburg; not Kerkrade, but Rotterdam; not Terespol, but Warsaw. Above all, border towns are marginal to national Economies, with a much smaller hinterland. Unemployment is higher than the average of the country, higher in Gorizia than in Italy as a whole, in Český Těšín twice as high as in the rest of the Czech Republic, higher in Haparanda than in Sweden, higher in Görlitz than in Germany overall and even than in Saxony (Wiatr 2005: 90, 91; Höhn 2005: 52).

Especially in Eastern Europe, where a dramatic breakdown of the old heavy industries followed the transformation, unemployment rates increased and young people left the border towns for work in national boom centres or abroad. Therefore, these twin towns are shrinking faster than communities inside states. For instance, the twin towns on the Oder-Neisse border have lost one fourth to one third of their inhabitants since 1990 through migration and a decline in the birth rate (Table 1).

Table 1. Population of the towns
at the German-Polish-border

Jahr	Frankfurt (Oder)	Guben	Görlitz
1990	86,131	30,791	72,237
1994	82,323	28,000	67,755
1998	75,710	25,245 (2000)	62,076
2002	68,351	21,568 (2004)	59,284
2006	62,594	20,568	57,111

Source: Statistic offices

Therefore, the elimination of border barriers sharing the scarce resources of both twins is essential for an improvement of the economy and quality of life. That seems the only way to compensate for the disadvantages of marginalisation and lack of resources. The first step is to open the traffic bottlenecks. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, European traffic from West to East has exploded. For instance, in the Austrian Gmünd, the twin of Česka Velenice, where before 1990 around 60,000 people crossed the border, this figure had multiplied to 3.5 million in 2001 (Schultz 2004). As estimated in 1993 for Ruse and Giurgiu, their contribution to border-crossing traffic was only five percent (Waack 1998: 145). Lorries and tourists, commuters and shoppers have also overcrowded twin towns at the old internal EU borders, like Irún and Hendaye or both Laufenburgs. The growth in long-distance haulage has burdened the twin cities and created a need for new bridges and bypasses. The division of long-distance haulage from local cross-border traffic is part of the solution. Bridges and highways are not the responsibility of towns but of the state governments. Nearly all twin towns inside the European Union have new bridges and highways outside the towns.

It is no surprise that new bridges outside what is now the Schengen area took longer, and are dedicated only for heavy loads and long-distance traffic. The needs of the local population are neglected, as is the case in Brest and Terespol, where visas, railway tickets and a one-hour-journey are necessary to get to the twin town immediately on the opposite bank of the Bug. The inhabitants of Ruse and Giurgiu have a similar situation. The famous Bridge of Friendship some kilometres outside the city centres are mainly used for the railway, lorries and cars. The only alternative is a very expensive ferryboat. There are not only physical barriers, but also institutional ones. Between Narva and Invangorod, where a new bridge will be built during the next year, the local population seldom crosses the bridge, once overcrowded by the workers of the Krenholm textile mill. Only around 5,000 inhabitants have a special permit for border crossing to visit their relatives or graveyards. The Estonians keep a close guard on their frontier of the European Union with Russia (Waack 2000: 179). Outside the Schengen area, the essential preconditions for good neighbourhood and cross border cooperation are missing.

River locations cause characteristic projects of twin cities. They have to cooperate for water pollution control, flood control, sewage, and water supply.

There is literally no twin town where connected services in this field are not under discussion at least. Common waterworks often have become the first projects for permanent cross-border cooperation. The main reason is obviously “simply to save money,” as the mayor from Haparanda said. Nevertheless, the gap between proposals and realisation is especially high in this field. Sewage plants and water supply need high investment and financial support, which cannot come from the towns themselves. It seems to be an exception when twins can finance such projects in private-public partnerships, as in both Laufenburgs, in the Swedish-Finnish Tornio Haparanda, and the Spanish-Portuguese Valença-Tui. More often, both governments have to decide and contribute. Like bridges, sewage plants have become a preferred subject of sponsoring by the European Union. As an example, the joint sewage plant of the German-Polish Guben-Gubin was proudly presented at Expo 2000 in Hannover (Jaješniak-Quast 2001: 288-289). Planned for a population of 90,000 people, the plant is much too big. European sponsoring seems not the way to save money, but to waste it, unlike to public-private partnerships by the twin towns themselves. Otherwise, the most expensive solution is the detachment of formerly common water supply and sewage. This happened in Narva and Ivangorod. Enormous conflicts arose, which had to be solved at state level (Waack 2000: 187).

There are many other projects to save money: common libraries, ice rinks and indoor swimming pools, hospitals and fire brigades for the use of both sides. However, the most striking example of success and failure are found with respect to crossing, using and safeguarding rivers. We could take the hypothesis that cooperation is never so essential as in the triad city-border-river.

Institutionalisation

As in all fields of policy, institutionalisation is indispensable for sustainable cooperation. The border cities need agreements and regulations more than partners in the internal state do, because two systems of law, cultures, and governance responsibilities are touched. During the 1990s, institutionalisation jumped to a new quality. Between the twenty border twins we asked in 2001, the number of agreements accelerated: five in the 1970s, eight in the 1980s,

and 26 in the 1990s. Some twin towns concluded more than one agreement.

No doubt the European Union drove this progress. When the European Union opened itself to new members in the East, it had the Schengen agreement already drawn up in 1985. Therefore borders and border region came in the focus of the “extension and consolidation policy.” Never before had so many programmes been established specifically for border regions. The sequence of Interreg is the most important. Interreg II to III and Phare CBC as exclusive programmes for the former Soviet bloc improved cross-border cooperation there. As a precondition, the European Union spent the finances only for cross-border projects and on the basis of formal agreements. That should strengthen the sustainability of cooperation, and the responsibility of municipalities. All twin towns have benefited from this promotion, and therefore they draw up projects and agreements. We can observe three steps or levels of institutionalisation.

The first is project cooperation, for instance a common water plant, common use of indoor swimming pools or concert halls, or cooperation in a special branch of health care. This early step was claimed “simply to save money” in the interests the citizens. This rather spontaneous mutuality dominated at the internal borders of the European Community during the 1970s and 1980s.

The second level is an agreement for permanent cooperation with meetings of mayors and councils, and committees for all relevant fields. Meanwhile all twin towns on internal EU-borders, old and new, have reached this level. Then the twin towns began to feel a new barrier, produced by institutionalisation itself. To get finances from the European Union needs great effort, and has become harder. Elaboration of projects takes a lot of money and staff. All twin cities except Haparanda and Tornio complain about this.

The third level is the joined twin city. There the twins establish not only permanent commissions and continuous meetings, they arrange also a common body of public law beyond the both municipalities. The joint body has to be endowed with own responsibilities and legitimised in a democratic way. Nicole Ehlers, who investigated the “binational city Eurode” (Kerkrade-Herzogernrath) as a prototype, gives the definition: “A binational city is a pair of neighbouring border towns whose local authorities aim at achieving the economic, political-administrative and cultural integration of both towns” (Ehlers 2007: 52). She describes the establishment of Eurode, rooted in the everyday

problems of cooperation caused by different law and governance: the national legislations hung around the neck of the twin cities “like a millstone”. A joint body seemed to be the best solution, acting in the framework of both states (*ibidem*: 16). For the same reason, the Basque cities Irún, Hondarribia and Hendaye established their own consortium, against resistance from Paris and based on Spanish public law (Grünert 2005: 182-195). The binational city seems not only to be the way to overcome the difficulties of national legislation; it is also a vision of integration, as the definition says. The Provincia Bothniensis came in this way to the planning of a new common city centre “Pà gränsen-Rajalla” (Höhn 2005: 52-55). So the unified town became a reality.

Table 2. Joint binational cities

Twin City	Joint Body	Year of agreement
Tornio-Haparanda	Provincia Bothniensis	1987
Irún/Hondarribia-Hendaye	Consortio Bidasoa-Txingudi	1993
Herzogenrath-Kerkrade	Eurode	1997
Baarle-Hertog-Baarle-Nassau	Joint administrative Body	1998
Görlitz/Zgorzelec	Europastadt Görlitz/Zgorzelec	1998

No doubt, with the step from level two to three, municipalities enter a difficult field, in many respects a *terra incognita*. The pioneer Provincia Bothniensis seems the most successful so far. It arose under the umbrella of the Northern Community, one decade before Sweden and Finland joined the European Union. Eurode claimed to be the first inside the European Union, while the Bidasoa Consortium started under the regional flag. The so-called Europastadt Görlitz-Zgorzelec began with high élan and received some European rewards for successful cooperation. Nevertheless, after its failed application for the “European capital of culture” in 2006, and under the stress of the crisis in Polish-German relations, great projects and successes are lacking. There was never a real joint body “Europastadt”. Backlashes and a lack of competence and finances discourage even the pioneers. Insufficient authorisation reduces even the council meetings of Eurode to “ritual dances” (Ehlers 2007: 230).

Another way of future institutionalisation seems to lie in networking. The process started when Tornio and Haparanda adopted the twins at the Es-

tonian borders Valga-Valka and Narva-Ivangorod. Meanwhile, around this relation rose the City Twin network, managed from the Finnish Imatra, and amplified by Frankfurt (Oder)-Slubice, Görlitz-Zgorzelec, and the Polish-Czech Cieszyn-Český Těšín. Such networks can spread best practices and support application for finances from European programmes.

Beyond European programmes, there are two other driving forces behind accelerating institutionalisation. One is the institutionalisation itself. For instance, a strategic concept for Gorizia-Nova Gorica recommends establishing new networks, institutes and public offices. One may suppose that these new institutions will in turn elaborate new concepts, projects and institutions. But the benefit of institutionalisation for the welfare of towns and citizens seems not evident at all. Another force is the interest and enthusiasm of the urban dignitaries (Buursink). During a long period of cooperation, the members of the municipalities become close and familiar with each other. That is a necessary, effective basic for success. Therefore, the mayor of Kerkrade pictured the cooperation story with Herzogenrath as a love affair: “Kerkrade and Herzogenrath first got acquainted with each other, then they sniffed at each other, later they got engaged, and finally they married” (Ehlers 2007: 16). Similar to this, the officials of the Basque consortium spoke about cooperation as a “poetic idea”, which is more important than the economy (Grünert 2005: 190). Undoubtedly, the urban elites advanced on the way to cross-border integration faster and farther than the inhabitants of their towns, who did not have the same experiences. Even the third level of the joint city seems rather the project of urban dignitaries than of citizens. From the Bothnian Arch to the Bay of Biscay and to the Oder River, there are examples of citizens not following the visions of their municipalities (Schultz 2005: 24-25). That mirrors problems at the European level, where also the officials at Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg cannot always communicate their visions to the European people.

Identity building

Common cross-border identity is the vision for twin towns, as is the unique European people for the Union overall. The creation of new names like “Eu-

rode” or “Slubfurt” – for Frankfurt (Oder) and Slubice – express this vision. Common identity is bound to the democratic legitimacy of the joint body, and the weakness of both remains a problem for the dream of the transnational twin town. Transnational rhetoric plays a special role.

Table 3. European Twin towns on borders (author’s research)

City		Inhabitants (~ 2000)		Country		Border River	Border since
A	B	A	B	A	B		
Buchs	Schaan/ Vaduz	32,600	32,500	CH	FL	Rhine	medieval
Irún/ Hondarribia	Hendaye	57,000/15,000	13,000	E	F	Bidasoa	medieval
Tui	Valença	15,900	13,800	P	E	Minho	medieval
Strasbourg	Kehl	273,000	34,700	F	D	Rhine	1697
Helsingborg	Elsinore	91,500	35,100	S	DK	Oresund	1719
First wave							
Laufenburg	Laufenburg	8,300	2,060	D	CH	Rhine	1801
Rheinfelden	Rheinfelden	32,000	10,600	D	CH	Rhine	1803
Tornio	Haparanda	22,700	10,400	FIN	S	Torne	1809
Ungheni	Ungheni, Iași	35,200	4,200	MD	RO	Pрут	1812
Kerkrade	Herzogenrath	51,500	46,500	NL	D	-	1816
Laufen	Oberndorf	6,500	5,500	D	A	Salzach	1816
Baarle-Nassau	Baarle-Hertog	6,100	2,200	NL	B	-	1831
Widin	Calafat	52,500	18,900	BG	RO	Danube	1878
Rousse	Giurgiu	169,800	74,200	BG	RO	Danube	1878
Second wave							
Imatra	Svetogorsk	30,000	15,700	FIN	RUS	-	1917
Gmünd	České Velenice	5,800	3,400	A	CZ	Lainsitz	1918
Komárno	Komárom	38,000	22,000	SK	H	Danube	1919
Cieszyn	Český Těšín	36,000	26,000	PL	CZ	Olza	1920
Gornja Radgona	Radkersburg	3,300	1,600	SLO	A	Mur	1920
Third wave							
Brest	Terespol	285,000	6,000	BY	PL	Bug	1944
Frankfurt (Oder)	Slubice	72,000	16,900	D	PL	Oder	1945
Görlitz	Zgorzelec	60,000	33,000	D	PL	Neisse	1945
Guben	Gubin	24,000	17,200	D	PL	Neisse	1945
Gorizia	Nova Gorica	38,500	36,401	I	SLO	-	1947
Nicosia, north	Nicosia, south	49,300	47,900	TR	GR	-	1974
Fourth wave							
Brod, Slavonski	Brod	65,000	34,000	SLO	BiH	Save	1991
Gradiška, Bosanska	Nova Gradiška	18,000	15,900	BiH	HR	Save	1991
Kostajnica, Bosanska	Kostajnica, Hrvatska	5,300	2,000	BiH	HR	Una	1991
Narva	Ivangorod	73,300	11,900	EE	RUS	Narva	1991
Valga	Valka	15,300	7,100	EE	LV	-	1991

The metaphor of bridge-building labels all twin towns, pictured by the actual bridges there. Obviously, the bridge metaphor matches reality more than the gate metaphor. In addition, the names of the bridges are symbolic: “Bridge of friendship” or “Bridge of Peace”. Such names are preferred especially in the East of the continent where friendship and peace were rare during the last century. Nowadays, European rhetoric advances: Nowhere can we find so many places, gardens, schools and other institutions called “European” as in border twins. Could we take it as sign of burgeoning European identity, and are the inhabitants of border twins really the pioneers on this path, as Gasparini supposed?

Common identity is based on more than one pillar, and cannot be shaped artificially. An open border and mutuality to overcome marginalisation are only one condition. Also important is common history, without hard conflicts and traumas that the twin towns can celebrate together. As we have seen, the legacy of history is the easier the more it vanishes beyond the horizon of time. Ethnic kinship and a common mother tongue, as we find in some twin towns, function as constant ground of common identity. The basis is regional. Some twin towns have kept common regionality despite their different nationalities. The most impressive example is the Basque identity of Irùn, Hondarribia and Hendaye. This triplet town proclaimed the preservation of Basque culture and language as its first mutual goal. Therefore, the Bidasoa-Txingudi Consortium arranges Basque festivals and supports Basque language teaching (Grünert 2005: 164-169). In the Torne valley around Tornio and Haparanda the Meänkieli dialect survives and is nowadays accepted as an official regional language by the state (Höhn 2005: 39-41). The Romance Friulano as regional dialect around Gorizia and Nova Gorica is used by the local Italians as by the indigenous Slovene people. The people of Český Těšín and Cieszyn no longer use the old dialect, called “Water-Polish,” but in festivals and official rhetoric the municipalities create a common Silesian identity as a Slav identity, cleansed of German reminiscences (Wiatr 2005: 106-108).

Indeed, regionalism is a double-edged sword. Regionalism can lead to separatism, as the Basque example has shown in the past. It can also serve as vehicle of nationalism. We can observe the establishment of two regional museums: one Silesian at Görlitz, and one Lusatian at Zgorzelec. Indeed, since 1945 Silesia has been part of Poland while Lusatia was always an area

in Saxony. Therefore, both neighbours can see such foundations as an act of occupation in the name of regional history, like German revisionism and the Polish Piast myth. Moreover, regionalism here is too weak to bear transnational identity. It was lost when the inhabitants of border towns were expelled and exchanged. It disappeared above all through industrial migration, so the Basques are a minority in Irún now. It vanished through national integration that meant forced assimilation of ethnic border populations, which happened at all borders at the beginning of the last century. Nowadays, only a minority of mostly older people keep a command of regional languages. Even in the Basque Consorcio Bidasoa-Txingudi the municipalities use Spanish for communication. Regional identity becomes folkloristic, or artificial.

Therefore, a transnational European identity will be the future, as the official rhetoric still has it. Where twin towns have been in the European Union for decades, the reality of common life develops this consciousness, as has happened in Kerkrade and Herzogenrath. In twin towns on a border there is a more transnational neighbourhood than anywhere else, because that is the closest space of contact and conflict. On the 21st of December 2007, when the celebration of European enlargement was repeated because of the expansion of the Schengen area, we could experience the whole scale of emotions: enthusiasm on the Polish, Czech, Hungarian and Slovene side; scepticism on the German and Austrian side, depression in the border regions of the Ukraine, Russia and Croatia. For the twin cities along the internal borders of the European Union we can look forward to the future of successful laboratories of European integration.

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