

Contact, conflict and geography: What factors shape cross-border citizen relations?

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Abstract

Political geographers frequently argue that European borderlands, due to geographical proximity and cross-border contact, are sites of particularly good citizen relations. However, they have not put forward any general theory of the effect of cross-border contact on perceptions. This paper shows that social psychological contact theory, if applied to borderlands studies, can uncover the factors that influence citizen relations across national borders and under what conditions.

Using opinion poll data from the Czech-German border region as an example, this paper shows that the Saxon and Bavarian regions bordering the Czech Republic are areas of high interaction density. Mediator analysis is used to decompose the direct and indirect effects of geographical proximity and contact on attitudes towards the Czech neighbours.

Contact in the Saxon border region produces more favourable attitudes than elsewhere in Germany. However, contact does not have the same effect in the Bavarian border region: Bavarian attitudes are less favourable than elsewhere in Germany. The paper shows that Bavarian-Czech relations are weighed down by historical stumbling blocks, notably the influence of the post-World War II expellees from Czechoslovakia who are an important

political force in Bavaria. The expellees issue demonstrates the need to take into account cultural factors when applying contact theory to the borderlands context.

INTRODUCTION

Borders, and especially international borders, have long been a prominent theme in political geography: on the one hand, borders between states demarcate the territory and jurisdiction of states (Newman and Paasi, 1998). On the other, there is talk of the disappearance of borders or, at the very least, their declining significance in an era of globalisation (Ohmae, 1994; Anderson, 1996; Shapiro and Alker, 1996).

The role that physical boundaries play in defining territorial identity is a key theme in border studies. A growing number of political geographers analyse borders not so much as lines on the ground but rather as socially constructed distinctions between 'us and them' (Leimgruber, 1991; Berg, 2000). Others are increasingly interested in processes of 'bordering', specifically how borders are formed in social terms (Newman, 2006).

A key issue that is not often approached empirically is how borders shape the relations between citizens of neighbouring countries. The question that this paper seeks to answer is what makes people connect across national borders and what factors hinder friendly relations. Political geographers have touched upon this key question, but no coherent theory of cross-border social integration has been developed so far (van Houtum, 2000). Suitable theories from alternative disciplines, social psychology in particular, are largely ignored. This article approaches the question by taking perceptions of the neighbours in the German border region with the Czech Republic as an empirical test case. The next section introduces the context of European

integration and the difficulties of bringing together Western Europe and post-communist Europe. The second section introduces social psychological ‘contact theory’ which is then applied to the Czech-German border region. Mediator analysis is carried out in the fourth section in order to test four hypotheses about the effect of geographical proximity on attitudes towards the neighbours.

BORDERS IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

A border’s degree of openness to cross-border flows of goods, people and ideas is one of its defining characteristics. In an oft-quoted article, Oscar Martinez (1994) proposed a typology of four types of borderlands based on the border’s permeability and on the intensity of cross-border interaction: in alienated borderlands, borders are closed and cross-border contact is negligible. Co-existent and interdependent borderlands are characterised by higher degrees of cross-border contact. Finally, peaceful relations, economic interdependence and ample cross-border interaction prevail in integrated borderlands.

Martinez points out that integrated borderlands are extremely rare and can only be found in Western Europe. Indeed, West European borders tend to be more stable and open than borders anywhere else in the world (Scott, 1999; Blatter, 2001). Long-standing experts in border studies such as Malcolm Anderson (1996) or Liam O'Dowd (2002a) have shown that these borders have undergone a functional transformation during the past two decades:

dividing lines that were once closed and heavily policed have now been redefined as zones of exchange and interdependence. This transformation occurred as a result of two interlinked processes. First, much of the European integration process involved breaking down barriers: contracts like the Single European Act or the Schengen Agreement made movement across national borders much easier (Grabbe, 2000; O'Dowd, 2002a; 2002b). Secondly, organisations such as the Euroregions were established in order to promote cross-border networking. These are voluntary associations of municipalities across national boundaries that aim to improve living standards in the border regions and foster good cross-border relations. The number of Euroregions increased rapidly in Western Europe in the 1970s and 1980s (Perkmann, 1999). By 2010, hardly any border in the EU was not part of a cross-border agreement.

As a result of these twin developments, many West European border regions have been characterised as bridging zones that encourage citizen interaction and exchange. Cross-border contacts between border populations are presented as an avenue towards improved perceptions and good neighbourly relations (Henrikson, 2000; Newman, 2003). Examples include the Dutch-Belgian-German Euroregion Meuse-Rhin (Kepka and Murphy, 2002), the Upper Rhine Valley (Eder and Sandtner, 2002) and the Franco-Spanish border region (Häkli, 2002), to name but a few. Cooperation experiences in these regions suggest that cross-border interaction improves citizen relations across borders. The Dutch-German border region is, however, the showcase of this literature. The first 'Euregio' has reputedly achieved the impossible by

promoting good neighbourly relations between Germany, the wartime aggressor, and the Netherlands. Thus, Dutch-German cross-border cooperation ‘has not only brought economic development to the region, but has gone some way to “deepen” integration between the states, thereby breaking down the distrust between the two nations’ (Grix and Knowles, 2002: 155).

As West European countries were opening their borders and initiating cross-border cooperation, the border regime in Central and Eastern Europe was the polar opposite. During the Cold War, Central and East European countries were separated from Western Europe by the Iron Curtain, an all but insurmountable obstacle to cooperation and to post-war reconciliation of the sort witnessed in Western Europe (e.g. Schmidt-Schweizer, 1997). Certain borders within the eastern bloc, such as the Czechoslovak-East German border, were relatively open to cross-border traffic, and there was some infrastructural cooperation across the Romanian-Bulgarian border (Kowalke, 1997; Ianoş et al., 1999/2000). But despite such instances of cooperation and openness, borders were mostly closed to tourist traffic (Batt, 2002). Sub-state cross-border cooperation was almost unheard of.

After the end of the Cold War at the beginning of the 1990s, the legacy of the Iron Curtain continued to divide the continent and its people. Historically motivated suspicions, particularly of Germany, dated back to the Second World War but the ideological divisions of the Cold War had also left a mark. Mutual distrust was rooted in the massive gap in living standards between the

western nations and members of the former communist bloc. Many young Central and East European states were anxious about economic domination by richer western states and about a possible westward brain drain (European University Institute, 1999). West Europeans, by contrast, feared that illegal immigration and crime would spill from Central and Eastern into Western Europe. Moreover, they worried about cheaper competition for jobs and industries from eastern countries (Geddes, 2005; European University Institute, 1999).

From 1990 to 2004, with the exception of East Germany, the former Iron Curtain coincided with the external border of the EU. As this was also the border of the customs union, bottlenecks at the border frequently produced long queues of lorries and other vehicles (Komornicki, 2005). The external border of the Schengen zone of passport-free travel was even more disruptive to cross-border exchanges. Due to a perception that the Schengen area needed to be protected from external security threats, the border was policed meticulously (Grabbe, 2000; Geddes, 2005). The EU appeared to isolate itself from the post-communist states during the pre-accession period and to expect that this strict border regime would be extended eastward with the enlargement of the Schengen zone. To take the example of the Italian-Slovene border, implementing the security regime caused a great deal of anxiety in Slovenia concerning the balance between the country's links with Italy on the one hand and the ex-Yugoslav states on the other (Mlinar, 1996). This sparked criticism that the EU was, in effect, building a 'fortress Europe' (Christiansen, Petito and Tonra, 2000: 389-90).

The end of the Cold War brought concerted efforts to extend European integration processes eastward. Among other innovations, structures for cross-border cooperation were created along Central and East European borders in the hope that developments would mirror western experiences and facilitate integration across and beyond the former Iron Curtain (Kepka, 2004). Thus, between 1990 and 1999, no less than twenty cross-border regions were established with the participation of one or more post-communist countries (Perkmann, 2003). These all share the same main aims of facilitating policy coordination and bringing together citizens from both sides of the border. The so-called small projects fund was one of the main innovations of the Central and East European Euroregions (Jałowiecki and Smętkowski, 2004). This is a financial instrument that sponsors cross-border contacts through cultural and educational events for the inhabitants of border regions. Frequent small projects tailored to different interests encourage participants to engage thoroughly with one another. There is an expectation that cross-border cooperation and cross-border contacts will thus facilitate citizen understanding and reconciliation, particularly across historically difficult borders such as the Polish-German or the Hungarian-Slovak border (Grix and Knowles, 2002).

However, scholars have so far failed to specify the precise reasons why such contact should lead to improved relations between border communities and under what conditions. Political geographers have not yet put forward any consistent theories of cross-border citizen integration. This is despite the fact that a suitable body of research into the effect of contact on attitudes towards

other people exists in the shape of social psychological ‘contact theory’. Originating in a separate discipline, this long-standing theory has so far been largely ignored in borderlands studies. However, as the next section will show, contact theory offers a suitable theoretical framework for examining citizen relations across borders.

THE EFFECT OF CONTACT ON ATTITUDES

The notion that encounters between members of different social groups improve the relations between these groups lies at the heart of contact theory. One of its earliest articulations can be found in Gordon Allport’s seminal study on *The Nature of Prejudice*, first published in 1954. The American psychologist noted humans’ inclination to form homogeneous groups and to avoid contact with non-members.

People who stay separate have few channels of communication. They easily exaggerate the degree of difference between groups and readily misunderstand the grounds for it. And, perhaps most important of all, the separateness may lead to genuine conflicts of interest, as well as to many imaginary conflicts. (Allport, 1979: 19)

If lack of contact is the root cause of the problem of inter-group prejudice and hostility, then communication would seem a plausible remedy. Take, for example, two groups, such as ethnic or linguistic communities that are prejudiced against one another. When members of these different groups get

together, they can gather first-hand information about each other. If they find that their prejudices were unfounded, then contacts can gradually bring about more favourable and tolerant attitudes.

Thus, it is stipulated that information can have a beneficial influence on people's perceptions: two societies may differ in their cultures, norms and ways of looking at the world, but they can learn to live with these differences. A rival theory maintains instead that familiarity breeds contempt. In this view, isolation from other groups – far from causing misunderstanding and resentment – acts 'as a safe haven for liberal tolerance.' Kinder and Mendelberg (1995: 404) have termed this 'Limousine liberalism': people who are undisturbed by the often-difficult realities of group tension find it easier to embrace tolerance and multiculturalism. Conversely, for all those who experience conflict day after day, tolerance may be a luxury they cannot afford.

It would be naïve to regard inter-group contact as a universal remedy for conflict. Allport devoted a whole chapter to different types of contact and their influence on attitudes. He found that superficial contact 'does *not* dispel prejudice; it seems more likely to increase it' (Allport, 1979: 263). Much has been written about the variety of situations where contact might or might not be expected to improve group relations. According to contact theory, there are three favourable conditions for attitude change:

- 1) Authority: the first condition concerns the human tendency to conform to majority opinion and to follow the leadership of authority figures. Thus,

attitudes tend to improve when an authority promotes contacts or when the prevailing social and political climate is conducive to such contacts. They tend to deteriorate when contact is actively discouraged (Deutsch and Collins, 1951; Pettigrew, 1971).

- 2) Goals: a second condition was derived from experiments that Muzafer Sherif conducted in summer camps for young boys. Sherif was able to design scenarios that involved very clear cooperative or competitive relationships (Sherif, 1967). They showed that interdependence or important shared goals promote good relations between two groups, whereas competitive relationships hinder them (Sherif, 1967; Pettigrew, 1971).
- 3) Status: it is beneficial when two groups have an equal or comparable social status (Allport, 1979; Amir, 1969; Pettigrew, 1971). This condition was derived by researchers who studied race relations in the United States. From this research into the after-effects of racial segregation derived the truism that, in the face of persistent cleavages, white prejudice would only diminish through contact between a black and a white surgeon but not between a white surgeon and a black butcher.

Authority, goals and status tend to shape the relationship between groups as such, but there are also two factors that influence encounters between individual members of different groups. First, the shape that encounters take is crucial. Whether contact is casual or intimate or whether it is short-lived or recurrent can make all the difference (Allport, 1979; Cook, 1962). Most importantly, contact must be perceived as pleasant in order to have a positive

impact on attitudes. The personality of the people who are engaged in contact is a second important factor. People's general disposition towards strangers will no doubt have an effect on attitudes towards other groups. Some people are more open-minded and welcoming, whereas others are unreceptive or incline towards xenophobia. It is unlikely that contact would improve the attitudes of chauvinists.

The initial attitude – before contact was first established – has also proven to affect subsequent opinions (Robinson, 1980), a point that raises the question of causal direction. If some people are more open to different cultures than others, they would also seem more likely to engage in inter-cultural contact. If this were the case, then contact would be a facilitating factor but not a cause of attitude change. This is a problem that nearly all observational research faces. It has been shown in one instance that the influence of attitudes on contact need not distort a study into the effects of contact on attitudes (Powers and Ellison, 1995). More importantly, experimental research has suggested that a reduction in prejudices follows contact rather than vice versa (Barnard and Benn, 1988; Lance, 1992). Accordingly, it is generally accepted that contact, if it fulfils certain conditions, tends to improve individual attitudes (Amir, 1969; Forbes, 1997).

To be sure, contact can take place anywhere and in many different settings. The contact experience will be different, depending on whether it is a cross-border shopping trip, an educational journey to another country or friendship with a foreign national who lives in one's country. Nevertheless, according to

contact theory, the actual type of contact is less important than its geniality, the people involved in it and whether it fulfils the conditions of normative support, shared goals and equal status.

If applied to the borderlands setting, contact theory yields three hypotheses. First, not surprisingly, one would assume that border regions, because they are geographically close to neighbouring countries, are sites of particularly dense personal contact.

H1: Contact with members of other nations is particularly likely in the regions bordering on these nations.

Based on the idea that such contact brings about more favourable attitudes, one can hypothesise that people who live close to other nations are more likely to hold positive attitudes towards these nations than are their compatriots:

H2: Those people living in the regions bordering on another country express more favourable opinions of that country than do people who live elsewhere, due higher personal contact.

The history of contact should be taken into account given that social attitudes take time to change (Carlsson, 1965). In other words, border regions that can look back on a long history of openness and cross-border contact can be

expected to harbour more favourable attitudes than regions where cross-border contact is a more recent phenomenon.

H3: Opinions of other nations are more favourable in border regions that have a long history of contact than in border regions that have a shorter history of contact.

Using the Czech-German border as an example, the next section shows how contact theory can be adapted to the border regional context. This region is a suitable test case for applying contact theory to a border regional setting because, as an area of high interaction density, it fulfils some of the crucial framework conditions stipulated by contact theory, while the two different segments of the border region differ with regard to other conditions.

CITIZEN RELATIONS IN THE CZECH-GERMAN BORDER REGION

Czech-German relations are an excellent example of the difficulties in bringing together people from Western and Central and Eastern European countries. These relations have historically been very difficult. The lead-up to World War II and the war itself were undoubtedly the low point of the relationship: in September 1938, against the will of the Czechoslovak government, Nazi Germany annexed the so-called Sudetenland, those north-western parts of Czechoslovakia that were inhabited mainly by German speakers. Less than six months later, German troops invaded what remained of the country and

commenced a brutal occupation period that left deep scars on the Czech national psyche (Panek, 2009).

After being defeated in 1945, Germany was divided into two separate states. East Germany, together with newly reconstituted Czechoslovakia, became a member of the communist bloc, while West Germany became part of the western bloc. As a result of the Beneš Decrees passed by the Czechoslovak President in 1945, most Germans who lived on Czechoslovak territory were expelled in retaliation for German aggression (Burcher, 1996, Tampke, 2003). These expellees settled mostly in neighbouring Bavaria that was part of West Germany.

Opportunities for Czech-German reconciliation were limited during the Cold War. Cross-border citizen contact was particularly difficult across the Czechoslovak-West German border. As a result of the post-war expulsions, the socio-cultural links across this border were severed (Tampke, 2003; Süssner, 2004). There was hardly any opportunity for contact between Czechs and Bavarians during the Cold War because the border coincided with the Iron Curtain and was closed almost entirely to citizen interaction (Kowalke, 1997).

Conversely, Czechs and Saxons were able to retain some of their long-standing connections across the border between the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Czechoslovakia. To be sure, relations in the borderlands strongly reflected the often-strained relations between the GDR and

Czechoslovakia. However, after visa-free travel was introduced in 1972, the border between Czechoslovakia and East Germany was one of the most open in the communist bloc where there was lively cross-border traffic (Kowalke, 1997).

The bilateral climate improved markedly after the end of communism. Czechoslovakia and unified Germany signed a Treaty on Good Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation in 1992. This treaty pledged cooperation in a number of areas such as economics, education and cross-border cooperation. Bilateral relations proceeded smoothly, but the topic of the post-war expulsions occasionally caused fierce disputes, especially between Czechs and Bavarians (Burcher, 1996; Tampke, 2003; Cordell and Wolff, 2005). The post-war expellee community, the so-called Sudeten Germans, are a powerful political force in Bavaria. Following the end of communism, they demanded property restitution from Czechoslovakia and its successor, the Czech Republic (Burcher, 1996; Bazin, 2003; Süssner, 2004). The Czech public has reacted very defensively to the Sudeten Germans' claims (Cordell and Wolff, 2005).

Besides the occasional resurfacing of the expellee issue, however, bilateral relations and especially citizen relations proceeded amicably (Cordell and Wolff, 2005). The Czech-German border was opened for visa-free travel in 1990. Traffic across the border increased massively over the years that followed (Bort, 1998). Countless cross-border initiatives soon emerged. Many of them are designed to engage citizens from both sides of the border. Youth

education programmes and cultural events make up the bulk of these initiatives (Kirchner, 2003). Moreover, links exist between churches, museums, the media, trade unions and many more. Of particular importance, four Euroregions were founded between 1991 and 1994 along the Czech-German borders. These Euroregions were modelled on West European Euroregions that provided a template for institutional design, the objectives of cooperation and their realisation. One of the main aims of the Czech-German Euroregions is to promote citizen contacts through small projects such as concerts, exhibitions or youth exchanges. As a result of these changes, some claimed that the ensuing cross-border citizen contacts would improve the relations between the previously estranged sides (e.g. Houžvička, 1999; Illner, 1999).

Insert Fig. 1 about here

Figure 1 highlights those German districts (*Kreise*) that, in 2003, were members of a Saxon-Czech Euroregion and those that were members of a Bavarian-Czech Euroregion. In line with Hypotheses 1 and 2, the analysis will assess whether there is more contact in the German border region with the Czech Republic than elsewhere in Germany, and whether such contact leads to improved attitudes. The analysis must focus on the German side because this is where suitable opinion poll data are available.

The condition that an authority should promote contacts, as specified by contact theory, is fulfilled in the Czech-German border region. As we have

seen, occasional spats sprang from Czech and German sensitivities about the post-war expulsions. Nonetheless, this is largely a regional issue that shapes Czech-Bavarian relations much more than it shapes Czech-German relations. Apart from this difficult topic, there have been no serious disturbances in relations (Pauer, 1998; Cordell and Wolff, 2005). Besides, as the sheer number of cross-border initiatives shows, the borderlands are home to special sub-national efforts to bring people together (Kirchner, 2003). Elite support can be treated as a constant.

As the previous section has also shown, goals that can only be achieved jointly tend to promote good relations. Conversely, competition or fundamental disagreements tend to hinder them. This condition is difficult to adapt to the geographical context. Even fairly affable relations between two neighbouring countries in the EU involve elements of both cooperation and competition. On the one hand, for example, levels of trade are high between Germany – especially Bavaria and Saxony – and the Czech Republic, indicating a cooperative relationship (Bundesamt für Statistik, n.d.). On the other hand, border populations often view relations with the neighbours as a competition for housing, business or jobs (Bazin, 2003). In the face of such contradictory trends, it is not feasible to determine *a priori* whether the condition of cooperative relations is fulfilled. It would be more appropriate to modify this indicator in order to incorporate a greater sensitivity to the cultural factors that distinguish individual regions. In particular, it is necessary to identify stumbling blocks in mutual relations that do not sit easily with the competition-cooperation distinction but that potentially represent structural obstacles to

improved relations. In this context, the special case of Bavaria must be mentioned. Here, history is a major obstacle to friendly cross-border relations. The property claims of the Sudeten Germans cause many fears and resentments among Czechs (Bazin, 2003). Bavarian perceptions of Czechs are tainted by regional expellee politics and most Czechs' perceived insensitivity concerning the expellees' distress (Cordell and Wolff, 2005). It is therefore possible that this strained relationship hinders any improvement in Bavarians' perception of Czechs, even if all other conditions of attitude change are fulfilled. For this reason, a hypothesis that reflects Bavaria's special status must be included:

H4: Opinions of Czechs are less favourable in Bavaria than elsewhere in Germany.

There is thus a possible conflict between the beneficial effect of cross-border contact and the negative effect of the Czech-Bavarian expellee dispute. Hypothesis 5 is at odds with Hypothesis 2, which holds that Germans living in the Bavarian border region with the Czech Republic hold more favourable attitudes towards Czechs than those living elsewhere in Germany. But while Hypothesis 2 applies only to the Bavarian (and Saxon) borderlands, Hypothesis 5 applies in all of Bavaria. Only comparison between Bavaria as a whole and the Bavarian region bordering on the Czech Republic will reveal which explanation is more plausible.

DATA AND METHODS

In 2003, a German research team conducted a poll that explored various aspects of Germans' relations with Czechs (Rippl and Boehnke, 2003). A random cross-section of 1,521 Germans aged fourteen or older was interviewed. The survey was concerned with opinions in the region bordering the Czech Republic; residents of this area were oversampled.

The dependent variable is defined as responses to the following question: 'People sometimes like members of different nations to varying degrees. Please tell me how likeable you find [Czechs] – very dislikeable, dislikeable, likeable or very likeable.'¹ Answers to this question are crude indicators of German attitudes but they represent a simple measure of affinity. Such a measure is ideal in order to identify the factors that improve a respondent's opinion of Czechs. 174 people did not answer the question or said they did not know; they were excluded from the analysis.² To correct for a small number of cases in the first two response categories, categories 1 and 2 of the dependent variable were collapsed. Table 1 displays the distribution of responses over the remaining response categories.

Insert Table 1 about here

The data reveal for each respondent whether he or she lives in a Saxon or Bavarian Euroregion bordering on the Czech Republic, as indicated by two dichotomous variables (see Figure 1). This geographical information is analysed together with an actual measure of contact. Respondents were

asked how often they had personal contact with Czechs: often, occasionally or never. If they had contact often or occasionally, they were asked whether they found it pleasant or unpleasant. The measure used here is a dichotomous variable that indicates whether people had contact with Czechs and found this contact pleasant: code 1 means that a respondent had pleasant contact, while the code 0 means that a respondent either had no contact or found contact with Czechs unpleasant.

The condition that the different groups must be equals or that the individuals involved should have a comparable social status can be operationalised at the individual level. Respondents were asked to imagine an encounter with Czech citizens and how superior they would feel in such a situation on a scale from 1 to 7 where 1 means that they would not feel superior at all and 7 means they would absolutely feel superior.

The data set permits constructing a measure of people's general attitudes towards foreigners. Respondents were invited to express their agreement or disagreement with four statements on a four-point scale between 1 (disagree completely) to 4 (agree completely):

- 'I try to stay away from foreigners.'
- 'I would not want to move into an area where there are many foreigners.'
- 'When jobs get scarce, we should send the foreigners who live in Germany back to where they came from.'

- ‘Foreigners who live in Germany should choose a spouse among their own country fellows.’

These four statements all express negative attitudes towards foreigners and a reluctance to mingle with them. For this reason, a scale based on these statements represents an acceptable measure of xenophobia ($\alpha = 0.78$). After subtracting three, the scale ranges from 1 to 13, where 1 is the lowest degree of xenophobia and 13 the highest. The indicator is similar to the variable that measures contact with Czechs, not least because the first two statements imply that a respondent might consciously avoid any contact with non-Germans. However, the correlation between contact with Czechs and xenophobia is too weak to be significant and raises no problems of multicollinearity ($r_{pb} = -0.05$).

Mediator analysis is used to determine how geographical proximity to a neighbouring country affects attitudes towards that country. Mediator analysis is appropriate for examining causal mechanisms, where the mediator, or intervening, variable explains how two variables are related (MacKinnon, 2008). The mediator, in other words, ‘represents the generative mechanism through which the focal independent variable is able to influence the dependent variable of interest’ (Baron and Kenny, 1986: 1173). Figure 2 illustrates the mediated and unmediated relationships between an independent variable X and a dependent variable Y.

Insert Fig. 2 about here

Reuben Baron and David Kenny (1986) suggest a four-step procedure to test for mediation:

- 1) Show that the independent variable influences the dependent variable (path c). In the present context, this entails ascertaining whether residence in a region bordering on the Czech Republic leads to more favourable attitudes towards Czechs.
- 2) Show that the independent variable influences the mediator variable (path a). This entails determining whether people who live in the borderlands are more likely to have pleasant contact with Czechs.
- 3) Show that the mediator variable influences the dependent variable, controlling for the independent variable (path b). This step determines whether favourable attitudes are more likely among those who have pleasant contact with Czechs.
- 4) Confirm whether mediation is complete or partial. If path c' equals zero, the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is fully mediated by the mediator variable. If the effect of geographical proximity on attitudes is merely reduced once the mediator is taken into account, mediation is partial. This would suggest that living in the border region with the Czech Republic influences attitudes in ways that cannot be explained simply through contact.

Mediator analysis can thus be represented in three regression equations, where the first equation represents the first part of Figure 2 and c is the relationship between geographical proximity and attitudes towards Czechs. In the second and third equations, a is the effect of geographical proximity on

contact. b is the effect of contact on attitudes while controlling for geographical proximity, and c' is the direct effect of geographical proximity once contact is taken into account (MacKinnon, 2008: 49-50):

$$Y = i_1 + cX + e_1$$

$$M = i_2 = aX + e_2$$

$$Y = i_3 + c'X + bM + e_3$$

Mediator analysis separates the direct effect of the independent variable on the mediator and the dependent variable from the indirect effect through the mediator. This process determines the extent to which geographical proximity influences attitudes in its own right and how much of this effect takes place through contact.

After performing the four-step procedure to establish whether mediation is present, the full model must also control for the two additional independent variables: xenophobia and sense of superiority as well as three socio-demographic control variables (Cohen and Cohen, 1983; Tacq 1997). Path analysis is used to take account of the control variables. This is suitable because, unlike multiple regression, it allows for the mediator model to be tested while simultaneously controlling for other independent variables and interrelationships between them (Iacobucci, 2008). The full causal model is shown in Figure 3.

Insert Fig. 3 about here

The figure represents attitudes towards Czechs (labelled ‘Czechs’) as the dependent variable. The arrows represent different causal paths that can be direct, as in most cases, or indirect, such as the effect of residence in the Saxon border region through contact or the effect of xenophobia through superiority on attitudes towards Czechs. Xenophobia and feelings of superiority are hypothesised to have a negative influence on attitudes towards Czechs. Xenophobia is a continuous variable. Superiority with its seven response categories is likewise treated as continuous.

Finally, three socio-demographic control variables are included, namely age in years, income measured in 22 categories in ascending order and education, which is measured on a nine-point scale ranging from no qualification to a university degree. Contact theory does not stipulate any relationships between people’s socio-demographic attributes and their attitudes, and these controls are primarily included to identify any possible confounding influences. However, one would perhaps expect highly educated and affluent Germans to hold more favourable attitudes towards Czechs. Moreover, younger Germans might be less burdened by historical baggage than older ones.

The dependent variable – affinity for Czechs – is ordinal, while border region and contact are dichotomous. There are three error terms for the three endogenous variables: one for superiority (e3), one for contact (e2) and one for affinity for Czechs (e1). Moreover, to make the model identified, three

constraints were placed on it: the variance of residence in the Saxon or Bavarian border region and the error variance of contact were set to one.

In addition to the mediated effect of residence in the border region on attitudes towards Czechs through contact, one arrow has been added to indicate that xenophobia influences feelings of superiority. The reason why the arrow points in this direction is that xenophobia is measured as a generally negative attitude towards foreigners, whereas feelings of superiority are measured only with regard to Czechs. It seems likely that the general feeling influences the specific point of view and not vice versa. No other influences or covariances were derived from theory. The models are estimated using Amos.³

FINDINGS

In previous sections, it was hypothesised that contact with Czechs is more likely to take place in the German border regions with the Czech Republic than in other parts of Germany. Opinion poll data confirm this. Table 2 shows data that illustrate the geographical pattern of contact. The table presents responses to the question of how often respondents had contact with Czechs broken down by region. Table 2 shows that people from the borderlands are much more likely than their compatriots to have personal contact.

Insert Table 2 about here

Of those respondents who had contact, nearly 90% described it as pleasant.

Logistic regression shows that the odds that a respondent had pleasant contact with Czechs are more than twice as high in the Saxon-Czech and Bavarian-Czech borderlands as in the rest of Germany.⁴

Moreover, it was hypothesised that Germans living in the regions bordering on the Czech Republic, due to contact with Czechs, hold more favourable opinions of Czechs than do those living elsewhere in Germany. This effect is expected to be stronger in the Saxon than in the Bavarian border region. This was tested using Baron's and Kenny's (1986) four-step procedure by first regressing border region on opinions of Czechs and then repeating while controlling for contact. The results are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Insert Table 3 about here

Insert Table 4 about here

The first rows of Tables 3 and 4 show that the c-paths are significant for both border regions, meaning that geographical proximity is a significant predictor of affinity for Czechs. The table also shows that residence in the Saxon and in the Bavarian border region with the Czech Republic is associated with greater contact than elsewhere in Germany, although the association is stronger in the Saxon borderlands (0.35 compared to 0.22). The indirect effect of residence in the borderlands through contact amounts to roughly 0.08 for the Saxon borderlands and 0.05 for the Bavarian borderlands. Thus, respondents

score 0.08 or 0.05 points higher on the three-point scale measuring affinity for Czechs if they live in the Saxon or Bavarian borderlands respectively. These effects may appear small but they are significant at 5%.

In the Saxon border region, Hypothesis 2, which stipulates that people on the borders express more favourable opinions of Czechs than do people elsewhere, cannot be rejected. Contact mediates the relationship between geographical proximity and attitude completely: c' is not significantly different from zero. In other words, contact accounts for all the differences between the Saxon border region and the rest of Germany as regards affinity for Czechs.

For the Bavarian case, the estimate of c is negative (-0.09), refuting Hypothesis 2 in the Bavarian borderlands. In other words, even without controlling for contact, the residents of the Bavarian border region with the Czech Republic are more likely to express negative attitudes towards their Czech neighbours than are Germans who live elsewhere. This trend is counteracted to some extent by the positive effect of contact in the Bavarian border region. The indirect effect and the residual effect on attitudes towards Czechs (c') have different signs, meaning that contact suppresses the negative effect of geographical proximity (MacKinnon et al., 2000). In other words, were it not for contact, Bavarian borderlanders' attitudes towards Czechs would look even less favourable, a fact that will be explored in greater depth below.

The full model, which also controls for xenophobia and superiority, has been presented in Figure 3. The results are shown in Table 5. The table disaggregates the direct, indirect and total effect of all explanatory variables on the dependent variable. The total effect is different from the direct effect only for those three relationships that include an indirect effect, namely the effect of residence in the Saxon or Bavarian border region on affinity for Czechs through contact and the effect of xenophobia on affinity for Czechs through superiority. In all other cases, the direct and total effects are identical. For each estimate, the table shows the unstandardised effect, the standard deviation and a 95% credible interval.

Insert Table 5 about here

The table confirms that contact and positive attitudes go hand in hand, as respondents who have had pleasant contact score on average 0.21 points higher on the three-point scale that measures affinity for Czechs than respondents who have not had such contact. The standardised estimates are not shown here, but they indicate that contact has the strongest effect on attitudes towards Czechs. Moreover, pleasant contact is more likely in the Saxon and Bavarian border regions with the Czech Republic than elsewhere in Germany. Thus, residents of the Saxon border region have 35 per cent more contact and residents of the Bavarian border region 21 per cent more than people who live elsewhere in Germany.

Table 5 shows that the effects of xenophobia and superiority have the anticipated direction. Xenophobia has a negative effect on affinity: the more resentment respondents feel towards foreigners, the less likely they are to express favourable opinions of Czechs. Likewise, xenophobia has a fairly large positive effect on feelings of superiority to Czechs. For every additional point on the thirteen-point xenophobia scale, respondents' scores on the seven-point superiority scale rise by nearly 0.17.

As for the three socio-demographic control variables, education does not have a statistically significant influence on attitudes towards Czechs. Both income and age have a small but statistically significant influence. Contrary to expectation, age has a positive effect while income has a negative effect. In other words, older and poorer Germans are more likely than younger or wealthier Germans to express affinity for Czechs. The reasons for this are not clear. Possibly younger and wealthier Germans prefer nations from farther afield such as Americans. At any rate, the three controls do not affect the relationships between the other variables.

Table 5 also shows the direct effects of residence in the border region after contact has been taken into account and controlling for other variables. The table shows that the total effect of residence in the Saxon border region is positive (0.07), while the direct effect is not significantly different from zero. This confirms that contact accounts for all the differences between the Saxon border region and the rest of Germany as regards affinity for Czechs.

As for the Bavarian border region, not only are the Bavarian border population's opinions of Czechs worse than in Saxony, as stipulated by Hypothesis 3. What is more, the estimates of the total and direct paths are negative, confirming that the residents of the Bavarian border region with the Czech Republic are more likely to express negative attitudes towards their Czech neighbours than are Germans who live elsewhere in Germany. This trend is counteracted to some extent by the positive effect of contact in the Bavarian border region, meaning that contact suppresses the negative effect of geographical proximity (MacKinnon et al., 2000).

As mentioned in the third section, Bavaria is set apart by a geographically concentrated and very vocal community of expellees from post-war Czechoslovakia. The Sudeten German organisations constitute an important political force and have been very active in campaigning for a right to return or at the very least for compensation from Prague. While not all expellees from Czechoslovakia stir up resentment against the Czech neighbours, it is safe to say that, on the whole, the effect of expellee politics on Bavarian perceptions of Czechs has been negative. Hence, it was hypothesised that historical relations constitute an obstacle to Bavarian-Czech rapprochement that cannot be overcome by contact. As also mentioned above, these historical and political dynamics affect all of Bavaria and not just the borderlands. In other words, if this were the reason for the negative attitudes in the Bavarian border region, one would expect to observe them in all of Bavaria rather than just the border region.

Insert Table 6 about here

Table 6 shows the results of the analysis after residence in the Bavarian border region has been replaced with residence in Bavaria as a whole. The direct effect of residence in Bavaria on affinity for Czechs is more negative than before, intensifying from -0.116 to -0.133. This would seem to support Hypothesis 5, which predicted less favourable opinions of Czechs in Bavaria than elsewhere in Germany due to historical obstacles in Bavarian-Czech relations. All other effects are essentially unaffected. The only exception is the effect of residence in the Saxon border region on contact, which increases by 0.024 points as a result of contact in Bavaria being slightly higher here than contact in the Bavarian border region. On the whole, these changes are too small to change the findings but they seem to support the view that Bavarian peculiarities explain the findings from this region. The effect of contact is not strong enough to counteract the negative effects of historical stumbling blocks.

CONCLUSION

It was claimed at the outset that contact theory can be applied to borderlands studies. The example of the Czech-German border region has shown that the theory is broadly suitable for the study of borders. It has indicated that interaction density is high in the Czech-German borderlands and that cross-border contact, together with a number of background conditions, has a strong influence on perceptions of the neighbours. It has been shown that

contact mediates the positive effect of geographical proximity on attitudes towards Czechs in the Saxon borderlands. But while contact explains all the influence of residence in the Saxon border region on attitudes, it suppresses the negative effect of residence in Bavaria on attitudes towards Czechs: were it not for contact, Bavarian borderlanders' attitudes towards Czechs would look even less favourable.

Other hypothesised causal relationships appeared plausible. In particular, the model showed the importance of additional variables such as xenophobia or feelings of superiority. Three control variables were included for completeness' sake, but their influence was either insignificant, as in the case of education, or quite small, as for age and income.

The findings also suggest that contact theory must be adapted in order to better take account of idiosyncrasies in the relationships between groups. In the Czech-Bavarian case, it was shown that the impact of historical and political disputes between the Sudeten German expellees and Czechs on attitudes towards Czechs is stronger than the impact of cross-border contact itself. For this reason, opinions of Czechs are less favourable in Bavaria than elsewhere in Germany, and the higher rate of contact only counteracts this trend to a small degree. This demonstrates the continued relevance of distinctive factors on the ground in addition to general association such as the influence of cross-border contact on attitudes towards the neighbours.

There are other areas where contact theory may need to be adapted to the study of borders. For instance, there may be asymmetries between the two sides of the border. Here, it was only possible to treat German attitudes towards Czechs. However, given asymmetries in the Czech-German relationship, Czech attitudes towards Germans may follow a different logic from the German side. Moreover, it would be particularly worthwhile to follow the development of attitudes over time. The time factor has been taken into account to some extent by comparing the Bavarian borderlands with the Saxon borderlands, which have a longer history of contact with Czechs. However, there is no sure way of knowing to what extent the more positive results in the Saxon borderlands are due to longer experiences of cross-border contact and how much they have been shaped by other factors that are unique to the Saxon borderlands. Thus, in order to gain deeper insights into whether and why attitudes improve, it would be worthwhile to trace mutual perceptions over time after borders are opened to visa-free cross-border traffic.

One major limitation of contact theory is that it can apply only to relatively permeable borders where there is a good deal of cross-border interaction. In alienated borderlands, to come back to Martinez' (1994) typology, other factors take the place of contact in shaping attitudes, and it would be worth to finding out exactly what these factors are. Apart from that, contact theory offers a coherent theory of citizen interaction and integration that can easily be adapted to the borderlands context and that gives new insights into the

interplay of different driving forces of integration. As such, it has much to offer to the discipline of political geography.

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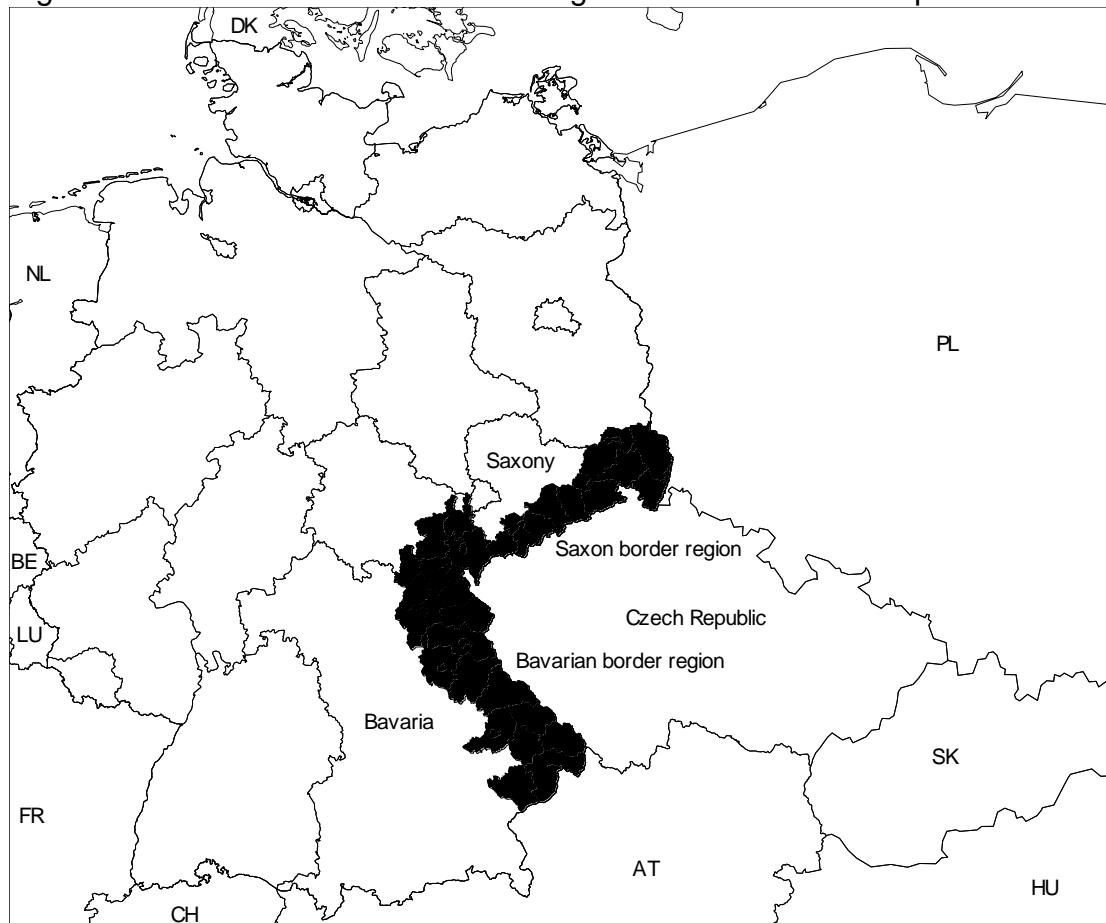
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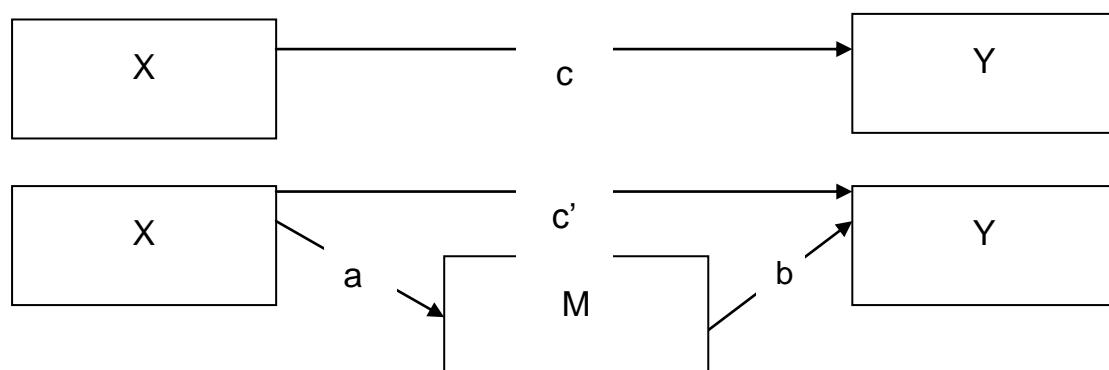
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Figure 1: German *Länder* and border regions with the Czech Republic



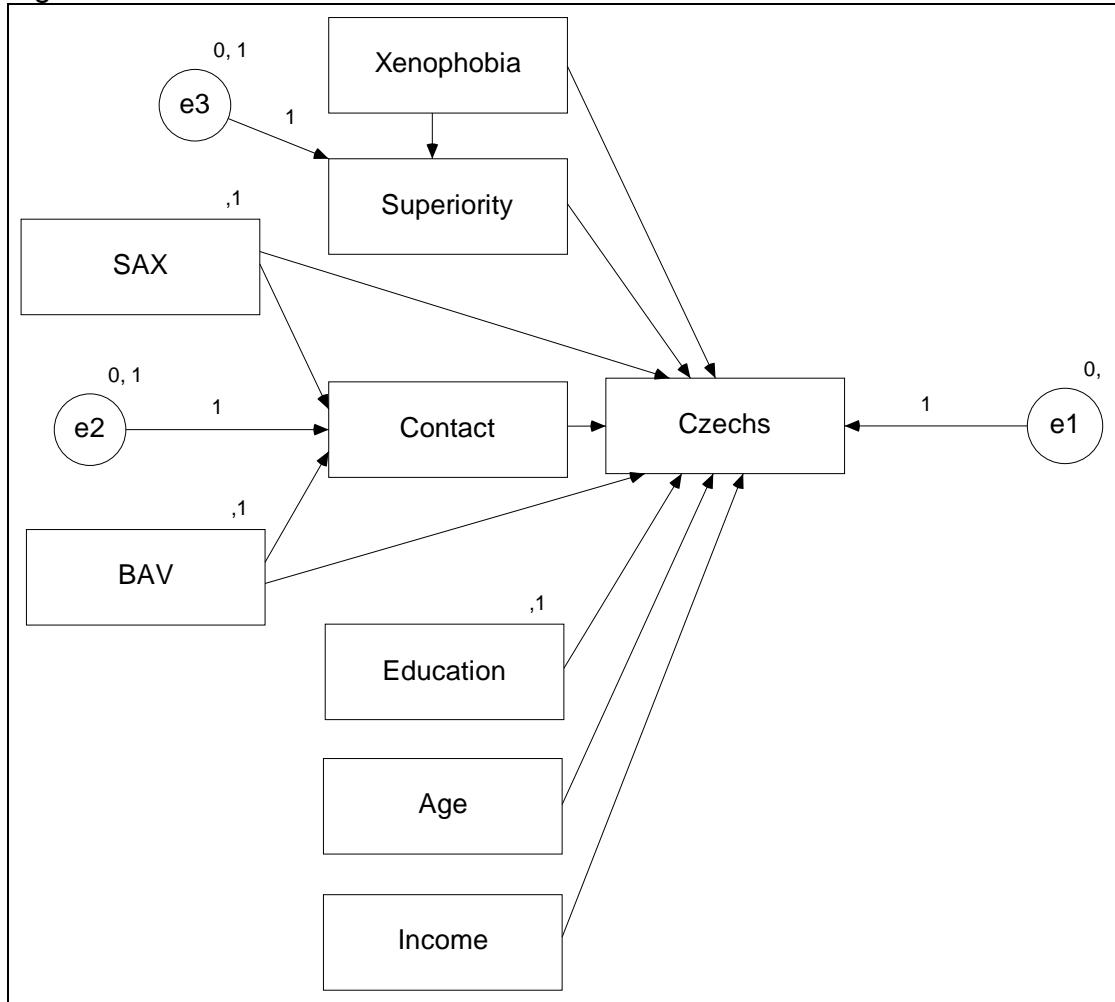
Source: Own development, using MapInfo.

Figure 2: Unmediated and mediated relationships



Source: Adapted from Baron and Kenny (1986).

Figure 3: The full model



Source: Own development, using Amos Graphics.

Table 1: Distribution of affinity for Czechs

	1-2 '(very) dislikeable'	3 'likeable'	4 'very likeable'	Total
% of respondents	18.0	68.7	13.3	100
Total N	227	864	167	1,258

Source: Rippl and Boehnke (2003), own calculation.

Table 2: Contact with Czechs by region (in per cent)

	Czech-Saxon border region	Czech-Bavarian border region	Elsewhere in Germany
Often	29.2	36.1	10.6
Sometimes	41.2	41	35
Never	29.6	23	54.3
Total N	277	122	1119

Source: Rippl and Boehnke (2003), own calculation.

Table 3: Mediated effect of residence in the Saxon border region on affinity for Czechs

Effect	Estimate	SE	95% CI	
Sax → Cze	0.054*	0.024	0.009	0.102
Sax → Con	0.351*	0.058	0.239	0.466
Con → Cze	0.232*	0.022	0.188	0.275
Sax → Cze (controlling for Con)	-0.026	0.026	-0.076	0.025
Indirect	0.081*	0.015	0.053	0.112

* significant at 5%.

Source: Rippl and Boehnke (2003), own calculation.

Table 4: Mediated effect of residence in the Bavarian border region on affinity for Czechs

Effect	Estimate	SE	95% CI	
Bav → Cze	-0.089*	0.028	-0.144	-0.033
Bav → Con	0.215*	0.070	0.080	0.352
Con → Cze	0.232*	0.022	0.188	0.275
Bav → Cze (controlling for Con)	-0.139*	0.030	-0.200	-0.082
Indirect	0.050*	0.018	0.017	0.087

* significant at 5%.

Source: Rippl and Boehnke (2003), own calculation.

Table 5: Unstandardised effects

	Direct effect	95% CI of direct effect		Indirect effect	95% CI of indirect effect		Total effect	95% CI of total effect	
Sax→Con	0.346*						0.346*	0.235	0.466
Bav→Con	0.211*						0.211*	0.075	0.360
Cont→Cze	0.210*						0.210*	0.169	0.250
Sax→Cze	-0.002	-0.054	0.046	0.073*	0.047	0.104	0.071*	0.024	0.115
Bav→Cze	-0.116*	-0.171	-0.064	0.045*	0.014	0.081	-0.071*	-0.127	-0.020
Xen→Cze	-0.051*	-0.062	-0.040	-0.003	-0.006	0.000	-0.054*	-0.065	-0.044
Sup→Cze	-0.019						-0.019	-0.039	0.000
Xen→Sup	0.167*						0.167*	0.148	0.186
Edu→Cze	-0.003						-0.003	-0.019	0.012
Age→Cze	0.004*						0.004*	0.002	0.006
Inc→Cze	-0.008*						-0.008*	-0.015	-0.001

* significant at 5%.

Source: Rippl and Boehnke (2003), own calculation.

Table 6: Unstandardised effects with Bavaria instead of Bavarian border region

	Direct effect	95% CI of direct effect		Indirect effect	95% CI of indirect effect		Total effect	95% CI of total effect	
Sax→Con	0.370*						0.370*	0.257	0.493
Bav→Con	0.224*						0.224*	0.115	0.336
Cont→Cze	0.215*						0.215*	0.173	0.255
Sax→Cze	-0.018	-0.070	0.033	0.080*	0.052	0.109	0.062*	0.016	0.107
Bav→Cze	-0.133*	-0.179	-0.087	0.048*	0.023	0.077	-0.084*	-0.129	-0.041
Xen→Cze	-0.052*	-0.064	-0.041	-0.003	-0.006	0.000	-0.055*	-0.066	-0.044
Sup→Cze	-0.018						-0.018	-0.037	0.001
Xen→Sup	0.167*						0.167*	0.148	0.186
Edu→Cze	-0.003						-0.003	-0.018	0.012
Age→Cze	0.004*						0.004*	0.002	0.006
Inc→Cze	-0.008*						-0.008*	-0.015	-0.001

* significant at 5%.

Source: Rippl and Bohnke (2003), own calculation.

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NOTES

¹ In German, asking how likeable respondents find Czechs is semantically the same as asking how much they like Czechs: 'Angehörige unterschiedlicher Nationen können einem ja in verschiedener Weise sympathisch sein. Sagen Sie mir bitte, ob Ihnen die folgenden Menschen sehr unsympathisch, eher unsympathisch, eher sympathisch, sehr sympathisch sind: Tschechen.'

² All cases that had missing information were excluded from the subsequent analysis, reducing the number of remaining cases from 1,347 to 1,258.

³ In Amos, models that include categorical variables as outcome variables require Bayesian estimation (Arbuckle n.d.).

⁴ The odds ratio equals 2.82 for the Saxon and 2.26 for the Bavarian border region with the Czech Republic and is significant at 1%. This means that the odds that a Saxon from the borderlands has had pleasant contact with Czechs is 182% higher than in the rest of Germany except for the Bavarian borderlands, where the odds are 126% higher than in the rest of Germany (Rippl and Boehnke 2003, own calculation).