

### Border areas in Eastern Bavaria: Once structurally weak, always structurally weak?

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Sammelwerksbeitrag / collection article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

Akademie für Raumforschung und Landesplanung (ARL)

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Koch, R. (2022). Border areas in Eastern Bavaria: Once structurally weak, always structurally weak? In T. Chilla, & F. Sielker (Eds.), *Cross-border spatial development in Bavaria: Dynamics in cooperation - Potentials of integration* (pp. 108-126). Hannover: Verlag der ARL. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0156-41580659>

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## **Border areas in eastern Bavaria – once structurally weak, always structurally weak?**

<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0156-41580659>

In:

Chilla, Tobias; Sielker, Franziska (Eds.) (2022): Cross-border spatial development in Bavaria – Dynamics in Cooperation – Potentials of Integration. Hanover, 108 - 126. = Arbeitsberichte der ARL 34.

<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0156-415869>



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Reinhold Koch

## BORDER AREAS IN EASTERN BAVARIA – ONCE STRUCTURALLY WEAK, ALWAYS STRUCTURALLY WEAK?

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### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to determine whether since 2000 the areas along the border with the Czech Republic have developed in such a way that a location on the border is no longer practically synonymous with structural weakness or whether this is at least less pronounced than it was. Living and working conditions in Bavarian border areas have improved significantly since the turn of the millennium. By 2015 two of the eight districts had reached Bavarian standards. In the two border areas with the lowest rankings the economic situation and conditions on the labour market have also improved, more strongly than the federal average but not to the same extent as the Bavarian average. The analysis was carried out on the basis of a structural indicator, which was used to determine the regions with a particular need for action for the 2013 Bavarian Federal State Development Programme.

### Keywords

Federal state development – border areas – structural weakness – regions with a particular need for action – assisted areas – living and working conditions – indicators

## 1 Preliminary remarks

In the last few decades, municipal and federal state policy has not considered border areas (cf. Fig. 1) simply as corridors of a certain width along the borders of the federal state. The areas along the borders with Baden-Württemberg and Hesse, and also along the border with Austria are generally not viewed or treated as ‘border regions’ as such. The Border Areas Report, more precisely the ‘Report on the economic, social and cultural development of the Bavarian border areas and the structurally weak areas of Bavaria’ provided detailed information about development in the districts and urban districts in the ‘first and second ranks’ on the border between the Czech Republic and the former German Democratic Republic between 1972 and 1990 (cf. Bavarian State Government [*Bayerische Staatsregierung*] 1974). Publication of the report was halted with reunification in 1990 and the opening of the border with the Czech Republic.

The reference to ‘structurally weak areas’ in the title of the report indicates that the areas bordered by the Iron Curtain were viewed as structurally weak per se. Ultimately they were an extension of the ‘border zone’.

The territorial category ‘border area and predominantly structurally weak regions’ was for decades used as shorthand to describe the situation, development and subsidies in the more peripheral regions of Bavaria. This phrase implies that there are also non-structurally weak areas and that structural weakness is measured at a level below that of the regions. This territorial category remained unchanged from the third to the 16th Spatial Planning Report (*Raumordnungsbericht*) (Bavarian State Government 2009). In the 17th Spatial Planning Report (Bavarian State Government 2016) the term was changed to ‘predominantly structurally weak regions’.

Since the 1970s, the identification of structurally weak areas, or in more recent times of comparable territorial categories described in more positive terms, has been part of the Bavarian State Development Programme. The processes and criteria used have changed considerably over time. It is astonishing that after almost 50 years of successful federal state development there are areas that are (and must still be) designated as such.

Fig. 1: Border areas in Bavaria

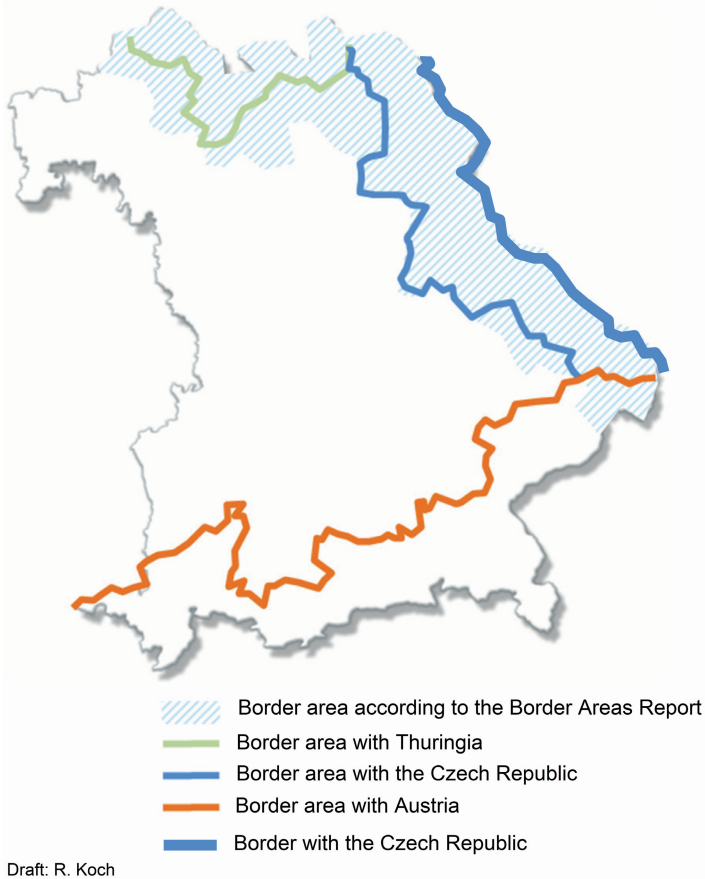


Fig. 1: Border areas in Bavaria

This begs the question: border areas in Bavaria – once structurally weak, always structurally weak? The aim of this paper is to determine whether since 2000 the border areas, in the sense of the Border Areas Report, along the remaining external borders of Bavaria – that is, along the border with the Czech Republic – have developed in such a way that a location on the border is no longer practically synonymous with structural weakness or whether this is at least less pronounced than it was. To this end the methodology used for the indicator-based designation of structurally weak areas in the 2006 and 2013 updates of the Bavarian Federal State Development Programme is presented. The indicators from the 2013 designation are then used to analyse structural weakness over the time period from 2001 to 2015.

## 2 Designation of structurally weak areas in the 2006 and 2013 updates of the Federal State Development Programme

The 2006 update of the Federal State Development Programme used the criteria and processes from previous versions for the designation of ‘rural sub-areas whose development should be particularly strengthened’. Only the indicator values were updated. It was significant that in these versions the only areas that could be designated as structurally weak were those categorised as ‘rural areas’ or in 2006 as ‘rural sub-areas whose development should be particularly strengthened’. The following criteria were used for the intermediate areas<sup>1</sup>:

- > In 1997 the proportion of agriculture<sup>2</sup> was higher than the average for rural areas.
- > In 1997 the proportion of the tertiary sector<sup>3</sup> was lower than the average for rural areas.
- > The employment trend for the period from 1987 to 1998 was lower than the average for rural areas.
- > In 1995 the income per taxpayer was lower than the average for rural areas.
- > The unemployment rate for winter 1997 was higher than the average for rural areas.
- > In 1997 the proportion of long-distance commuters was greater than the average for rural areas.
- > The net migration from 1997 to 1999 was lower than the average for rural areas.

This procedure proved laborious and cumbersome in a number of ways. First, the rural area needed to be delimited on the municipal level, then the average values for the rural area determined, and finally the data prepared for the intermediate area.

The delimitation resulted in rural sub-areas – by definition densely populated areas cannot be structurally weak – which included about 47% of the national territory and 27% of the population. Almost all of the border area with the Czech Republic was designated as a rural sub-area whose development should be particularly strengthened.

It seemed advisable to simplify this designation and reduce the spatial extent of the delimitation, not least due to the limited financial resources that were available for

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1 Intermediate areas are planning areas in federal state and regional planning located between the administrative levels of the municipalities and the districts, which are also used for requirements planning by the Association of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians (*Kassenärztliche Vereinigung*).

2 The ratio of employees in agriculture liable for social security contributions to the total employees liable for social security contributions.

3 The ratio of employees in the service sector liable for social security contributions to the total employees liable for social security contributions.

funding. Bearing in mind the efforts made in past decades it also did not seem appropriate to describe half of Bavaria as structurally weak. For the 2013 update, a focus on areas in real need was called for, challenging the previous blanket approach. The procedure for delimiting the areas should be simple and comprehensible.

The first approach towards a new procedure to determine the ‘regions with a particular need for action’ involved the new delimitation of areas used for the Joint Task for the Improvement of Regional Economic Structures (*Gemeinschaftsaufgabe Regionale Wirtschaftsförderung, GRW*) in 2007 on the level of labour market regions. The dimensions that played a role were the labour market situation, employment opportunities, income and life satisfaction. These dimensions were captured using the indicators of unemployment rate, employment rate, income per taxpayer and net migration of 18–30 age group.

Due to the importance of demographic change as a policy issue in border areas, the indicators describing current status were supplemented by a change component: forecast population change for 2009–2029 (*Bayerisches Landesamt für Statistik und Datenverarbeitung* [Bavarian State Office for Statistics and Data Processing] 2010). This allowed the structural indicator used to identify the regions with a particular need for action to be calculated from five sub-indicators after standardisation and weighting through an additive operation and subsequent standardisation using the Bavarian averages. The individual sub-indicators were assigned the following weights:

- > Population forecast 30%
- > Unemployment 30%
- > Employment density 10%
- > Household income 20%
- > Migration of young people 10%

The values were designated according to districts, which means that urban districts with less than 100,000 inhabitants are amalgamated with the rural district surrounding them.<sup>4</sup> The districts for which the structural indicator did not reach 80% were categorised as ‘regions with a particular need for action’. This meant that in 2011 there was a new delimitation of ‘regions with a particular need for action’ which corresponded with the notions of economic development in the update of the Federal State Development Programme in 2013. According to this delimitation around 24% of the national territory and 14% of the population were categorised as ‘structurally weak’.

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4 Cf. Also the continuous spatial observation – spatial delimitations by the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (*Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung*); [http://www.bbsr.bund.de/cln\\_032/nn\\_1067638/BBSR/DE/Raumbeobachtung/Raumabgrenzungen/Kreistypen4/kreistypen.html](http://www.bbsr.bund.de/cln_032/nn_1067638/BBSR/DE/Raumbeobachtung/Raumabgrenzungen/Kreistypen4/kreistypen.html) (28 March 2018).

Sensitised by the way in which the categories of regions were used during the extension of broadband, during the hearing many politicians from rural areas pushed for an extension of the regions with a particular need for action. The district of Passau brought particular pressure to bear, which finally led to the entire Passau district being included in the regions with a particular need for action. The systematics behind the designation then made it necessary to also include the districts of Miltenberg, Schweinfurt and Rottal-Inn.

The regions with a particular need for action in the 2013 Federal State Development Programme correspond well with the areas of the 2013 Joint Task for the Improvement of Regional Economic Structures and with the 2013 Prognos Future Atlas (Prognos 2013). The ‘regions with a particular need for action’ largely correspond here to the ‘balanced opportunities and risks’ category. However, the goal of focusing on the areas ‘in real need’ was not fully achieved. In comparison with the draft version, the area and population included in the regions with a particular need for action had again increased to cover a third of the national territory and a fifth of the total population (cf. Table 1).

	Population (proportion of Bavarian population in %)			Area (proportion of Bavarian territory in %)		
	LEP 2013	LEP 2014	LEP-E 2016	LEP 2013	LEP 2014	LEP-E 2016
Regions with a particular need for action*	20	26	29	32	42	47

\* without individual municipalities

*Table 1: Regions with a particular need for action – Proportions of population and area in Bavaria according to the Federal State Development Programmes / Source: the author's own calculations based on Bavarian State Government (2013), Council of Ministers decision of August 2014 and Federal State Development Programme consultation draft July 2016*

The Federal State Development Programme transposes into concrete terms the ‘Vision for the spatial development and organisation of Bavaria in a comprehensive strategy for the medium term’. ‘The implementation of the Federal State Development Programme is subject to its financial feasibility. The time and magnitude of the public expenditure necessary to implement the stipulations should be finalised, taking into consideration a sustainable budgetary policy in the individual budget plans. In so doing, medium-term financial planning, the overall economic situation and actual funding options should be considered. Through the spatial and temporal coordination of the various spatially relevant plans and measures, the Federal State Development Programme makes an important contribution towards ensuring the most efficient use of scarce public financial resources’ (Bavarian State Government 2013: 7).



With the decision of the Council of Ministers in August 2014 the districts of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Mühldorf, Forchheim, Ansbach, Neustadt an der Donau, Aisch-Bad Windsheim, Main-Spessart and the urban districts of Ansbach and Kaufbeuren were added to the regions with a particular need for action. The consultation draft of the Federal State Development Programme of 12 July 2016 again included further regions: the districts of Roth, Aschaffenburg, Kitzingen and Dillingen. This meant that 47% of the national territory was categorised as structurally weak. Almost 30% of the Bavarian population lives in these areas.<sup>5</sup> The relative position of the border regions was significantly weakened by this extension (cf. Table 1).

Ironically, after the transfer of the Department for Federal State Development to the Bavarian State Ministry of Finance and Regional Identity (*Staatsministerium der Finanzen, für Landesentwicklung und Heimat*) a kind of paradigm shift occurred. Of most significance for the designation of regions with a particular need for action was now no longer the scarcity of financial resources and the need to focus on needy areas, but rather the inclusion of the largest possible territory which involved as many municipal decision makers as possible.

The State Spatial Planning Act of 2012 states: ‘From 2008, the federal state government has reported to the state parliament every five years on the status of spatial planning in Bavaria, the realisation of the Federal State Development Programme and new planning projects of general importance.’<sup>6</sup> At the start of 2019 the 18th spatial planning report thus has to be presented, including information about whether the distribution of funding according to this strategy is efficient and how the border regions have performed. Problematic in this context is that no evidence has been gathered about the deployment of spatially focused funding by the federal state, the country or the EU since 2003.

### 3 Structurally weak Bavarian districts over time, 2001–2015

A longer term evaluation of the distribution of funding and/or its effectiveness has not been carried out in recent decades. This would, however, be possible with the help of the structural indicator that was used to delimit the regions with a particular need for action in the 2013 Federal State Development Programme.

5 Without individual municipalities: ‘In addition, in cases of particular hardship, individual municipalities, even those outside the region with a particular need for action, can be supported in the same way. The highest federal state spatial planning authority decides whether the conditions are met by individual municipalities’ (Ordinance on the Bavarian State Development Programme [*Verordnung über das Landesentwicklungsprogramm Bayern, LEP*] of 22 August 2013, page 29).

6 Article 32, Bavarian State Spatial Planning Act (*Bayerisches Landesplanungsgesetz*) of 25 June 2012.

### 3.1 Methodological notes

The structural indicator and its sub-indicators can, with one exception, be depicted over time for all urban districts and districts. It is not useful to retrospectively include the ‘population forecast’ sub-indicator in the monitoring. This means that the weights of the remaining sub-indicators must be re-evaluated. They were set for the monitoring of the border areas so that the structure of the remaining weights was retained (cf. Table 2). This gives unemployment great significance in the structural indicator.<sup>7</sup>

	Weight in %	
Sub-indicators	Designation of regions with a particular need for action in the 2013 Federal State Development Programme	Monitoring 2001–2015
Population forecast	30	
Unemployment	30	43
Employment density	10	14
Household income	20	29
Migration of young people	10	14
Structural indicator	100	100

Table 2: Weights of sub-indicators

Thus the preconditions for monitoring the development of the districts of Bavaria and the classification of border regions are met. In the following, border regions are the districts situated on the Czech border. First, the effects of excluding the ‘population forecast’ sub-indicator are checked. To this end the designations of ‘regions with a particular need for action’ using data from 2011 are compared with and without the ‘population forecast’ sub-indicator.

Figure 2a shows the ‘regions with a particular need for action’ according to the designation for the 2013 draft of the Federal State Development Programme **with** the ‘population forecast’ sub-indicator. According to this, 16 districts count as structurally weak if the threshold of 80% is used. Most of these districts are situated in the northern part of Upper Palatinate and in the northern parts of Upper and Lower Franconia. Six regions lie on the border with the Czech Republic. If the threshold is raised to 90%, 13 more districts are included, two of them on the border with the Czech Republic.

Figure 2b shows the ‘regions with a particular need for action’ according to a designation **without** the ‘population forecast’ sub-indicator using the dataset and the weight-

<sup>7</sup> The data for the calculation of the sub-indicators for Bavaria was taken from the Genesis databank of the Bavarian State Office for Statistics and Data Processing.

ing of the monitoring. According to this, only eight districts count as structurally weak if the threshold of 80% is used. Most of these districts are situated in the northern part of Upper Palatinate and in the north-eastern part of Upper Franconia. In Lower Franconia only the district of Bad Kissingen now belongs to this category. All regions except this one lie on the border with the Czech Republic. If the threshold is raised to 90%, ten more districts are included, none of which are on the border with the Czech Republic.

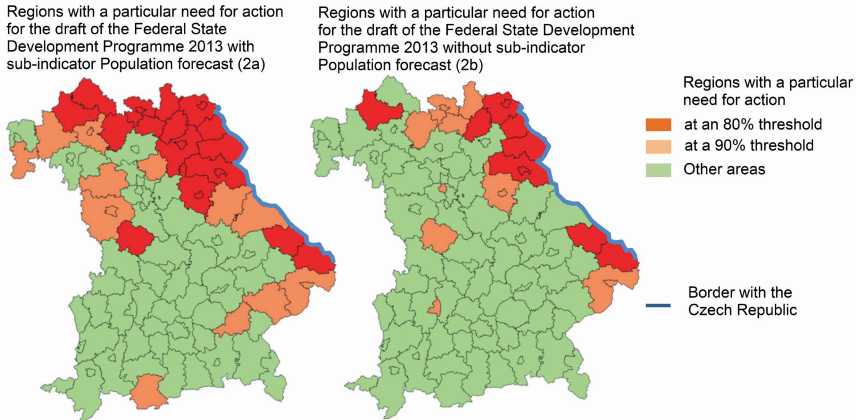


Fig. 2: Regions with a particular need for action with and without the sub-indicator 'population forecast' /Source: the author's own calculations based on data from the Bavarian State Office for Statistics and Data Processing

The comparison shows that in the northern areas of Upper and Lower Franconia the unfavourable population forecast is largely responsible for the structural weakness. When this sub-indicator is excluded the structural weakness is concentrated on the border region with the Czech Republic, although without the districts of Cham and Schwandorf. With the 90% threshold the district of Garmisch-Partenkirchen appears among the regions with a particular need for action. This is also linked to the unfavourable population forecast, which arises from the age structure of the existing population.

### 3.2 Comparison over time: Regions with a particular need for action 2001 and 2015

A designation of regions with a particular need for action according to data from 2001 and with an 80% threshold would have led to eight structurally weak districts, six of them on the border with the Czech Republic. With a 90% threshold nine more regions would have been added, two of them on the border with the Czech Republic (cf. Fig. 3a).

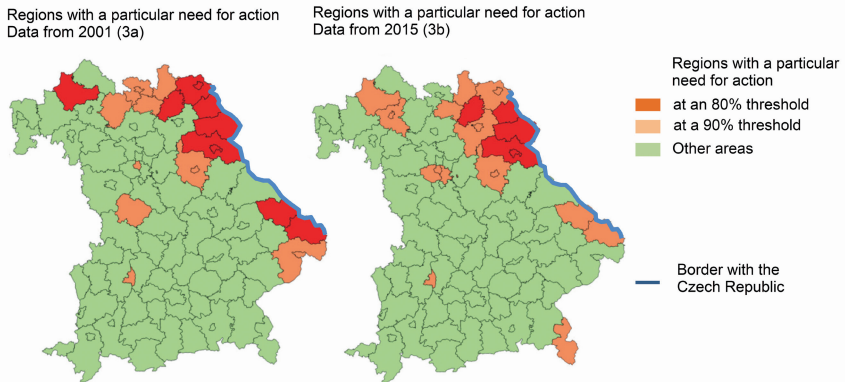


Fig. 3: Regions with a particular need for action (data from 2001 and 2015) /Source: the author's own calculations based on data from the Bavarian State Office for Statistics and Data Processing

With an 80% threshold the data from 2015<sup>8</sup> leads to four regions with a particular need for action, three of them on the border with the Czech Republic. With a 90% threshold 12 more districts are included, three of them on the border with the Czech Republic (cf. Fig. 3b). Viewed overall, a slight decline in the number of structurally weak districts can be observed, including on the border with the Czech Republic. Here the Wunsiedel/Weiden area displays continued structural weakness, while the Schwandorf/Regen area can be seen to be approaching the state average.

### 3.3 Structural indicator: Comparison over time 2001 to 2015 standardised using the 2001 figures for Bavaria

In comparison to the starting year 2001 the structural indicator for Bavaria improved from 100 to 131 index points (cf. Fig. 4). The fluctuations over the course of time reflect the economic development of recent years. The lowest value for Bavaria was 84 points in 2005. From this time on the structure of the federal state improved continuously with the exception of 2009.

Starting with 108 points, the district of Eichstätt in the proximity of the higher-order centre Ingolstadt achieved the greatest increase of 234 points. Other districts which displayed considerable structural improvements were Pfaffenhofen an der Ilm, Freising and Munich. The City of Munich, on the other hand, showed a slight deterioration (cf. Fig. 4). The range of values increased enormously between 2001 and 2015. However, this was not because the structurally weak regions lagged behind the Bavarian development trend, but rather because the 'leading regions' pulled away from the Bavarian average.

8 For the 'migration of young people' sub-indicator, data from 2014 were used again because of the high immigration from abroad in 2015.

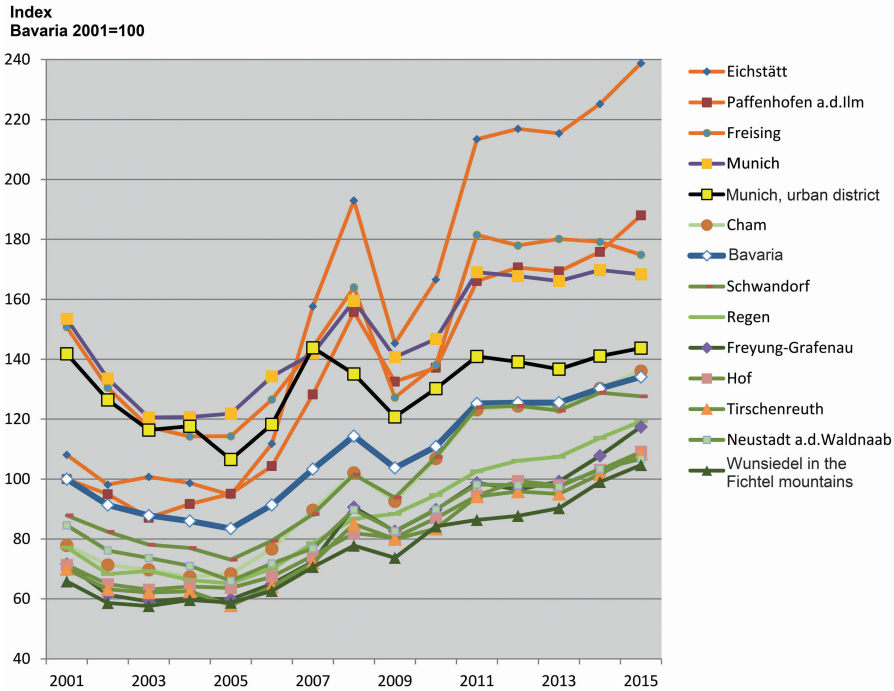


Fig. 4: Structural indicator 2001 to 2015 for Bavaria and selected districts / Source: the author's own calculations based on data from the Bavarian State Office for Statistics and Data Processing

It is striking that the values of the areas on the border with the Czech Republic are subject to fewer fluctuations than the 'leading regions'. Of the border regions the districts of Schwandorf and Cham have developed the best. They caught up particularly in the period from 2009 to 2011. In 2015 the district of Cham even achieved the same level as Bavaria. The district of Regen experienced clear positive development between 2011 and 2015.

### 3.4 Sub-indicators: Comparison over time from 2001 to 2015

The 'unemployment rate' sub-indicator strongly influenced the structural indicator. While in 2001 the highest unemployment rates with values of around 10% were still found in border regions like Wunsiedel or Hof, in the period up to 2005 these rates rose less quickly than in the cities of Nuremberg and Augsburg (cf. Fig. 5). The decline of these rates up to 2015 was also more pronounced in the border regions than in the aforementioned cities. In 2015 the unemployment rate in the border regions of Cham and Schwandorf was under the Bavarian average of 3.6%. In the cities of Nuremberg and Augsburg the figures were 7.2% and 6.5%, respectively. High unemployment is thus no longer characteristic of the border regions. Demographic change, which has progressed further in the border regions than in densely populated areas, has also

contributed to a reduction in unemployment. In the border area above-average numbers of people have entered retirement age, taking pressure off the labour market.

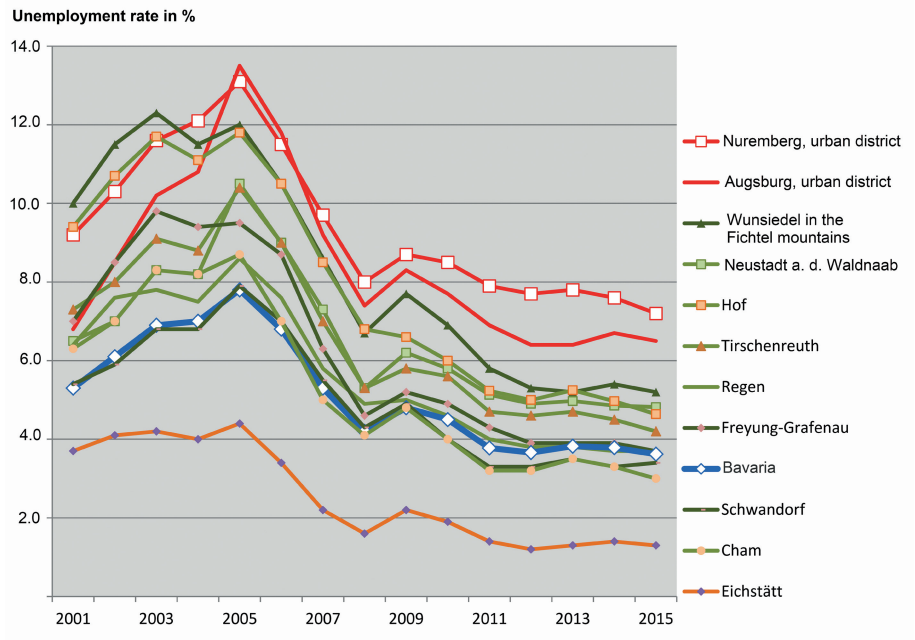


Fig. 5: Development of unemployment rates from 2001 to 2015 in Bavaria and in selected districts / Source: the author's own calculations based on data from the Bavarian State Office for Statistics and Data Processing

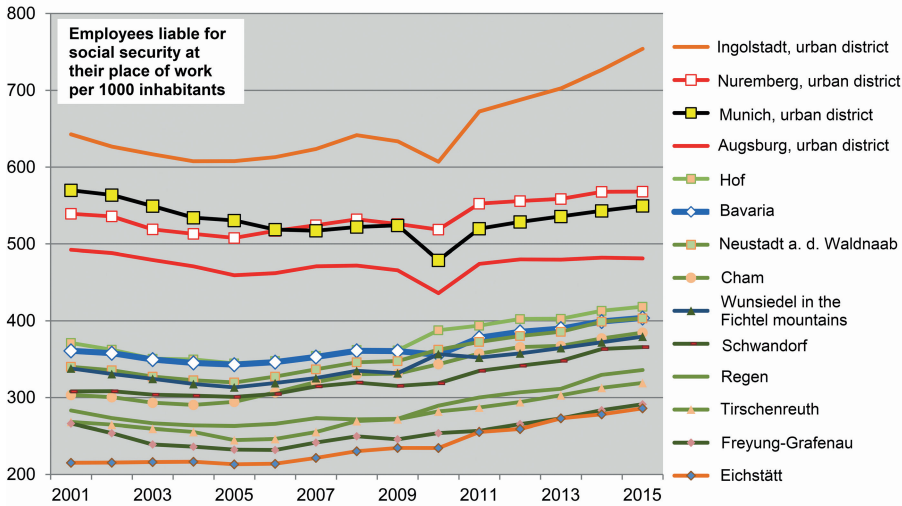


Fig. 6: Development of employment density from 2001 to 2015 in Bavaria and in selected districts / Source: the author's own calculations based on data from the Bavarian State Office for Statistics and Data Processing

The 'employment density' sub-indicator, which represents the jobs available in a region, also reflects the development of the economy in recent years (cf. Fig. 6). From 2001 to 2015 in Bavaria the number of employees liable for social security at their place of work per 1000 inhabitants rose from 368 to 404. The number of jobs available grew especially strongly in areas where the automotive industry is strongly represented, thus from 726 to 796 in Regensburg, from 643 to 754 in Ingolstadt and from 467 to 526 in Dingolfing-Landau. Such jobs are naturally also taken by neighbouring districts.

Due to the many commuters, the district of Eichstätt profits more from the large number of jobs available in Ingolstadt than the city itself, as revealed by the extremely low unemployment in Eichstätt. Similar constellations are not found in the border area with the Czech Republic. Here the number of jobs available has increased continuously since 2005 thanks to the automotive supply industry. The district of Hof had actually been above the value for Bavaria since 2010.

The regional earning potential is captured in the 'household income' sub-indicator, which relates the disposable income of the private households to the number of inhabitants (cf. Fig. 7). In Bavaria this figure rose from € 17,868 in 2001 to € 24,147. The districts in the lead here are Starnberg and Miesbach with € 35,011 and € 28,754. The border areas have been able to keep pace with the growth in income. The gap with the values for Bavaria has shrunk almost continuously, although it continues to be considerable in some cases, e.g. in 2015, the figure for Freyung-Grafenau stood at € 20,579, some € 3,568 lower than the value for Bavaria. The trend for household income in the city of Augsburg was much more negative: € 19,697 in 2015.

The ‘net migration of young people’ sub-indicator represents the satisfaction of the younger generation with the working and living conditions in a region (cf. Fig. 8). Over time the migration of 18- to under-30-year-olds, related to 1,000 people of the same age group, was affected by two significant, exceptional developments:

- > the imposition of taxation on second homes in cities introduced between 2005 and 2007 encouraged people to officially register their first homes in the cities, which official figures then captured as migration to these urban areas;
- > the immigration of young refugees who were then redistributed to the various regions of Bavaria in 2015. This meant that the sub-indicator had little meaning for this year. Data from 2014 were thus used for calculations of this structural indicator.

Between 2002 and 2009 the net migration of young people in Bavaria fell in the wake of economic development from 28.3 to 8.5, before rising again to reach 23.4 in 2014. Migration from abroad was mainly responsible for the increase to 38.2 in 2015.

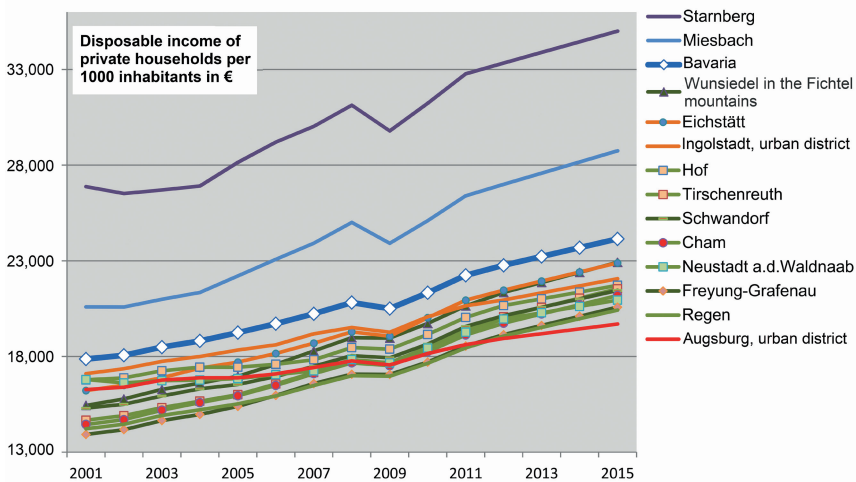


Fig. 7: Development of household income 2001 to 2015 in Bavaria and selected districts / Source: the author's own calculations based on data from the Bavarian State Office for Statistics and Data Processing



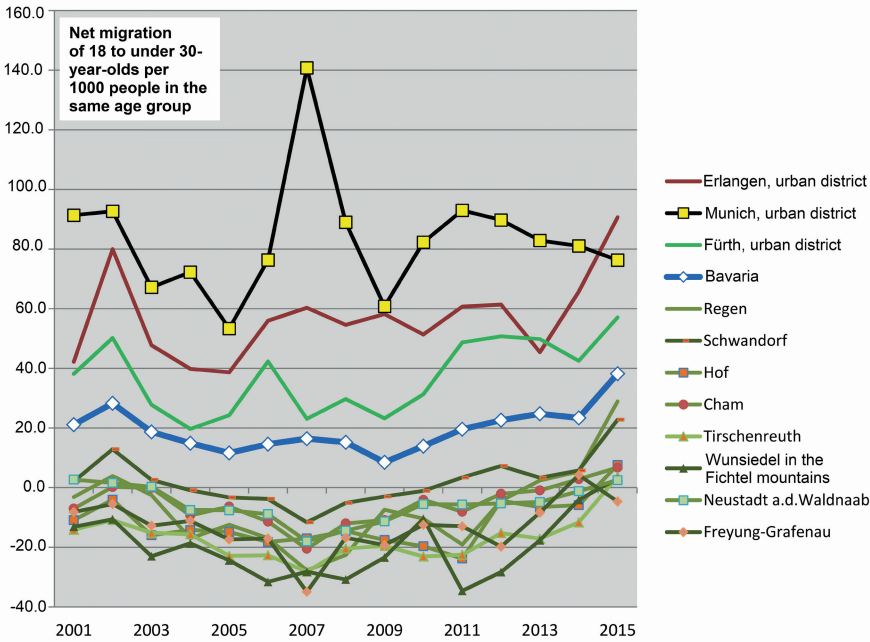


Fig. 8: Development of migration of young people from 2001 to 2015 in Bavaria and selected districts / Source: the author's own calculations based on data from the Bavarian State Office for Statistics and Data Processing

Areas with large net migration were the university towns of Munich and Erlangen, which also offered job opportunities for those starting out on a career after completing a degree. The majority of the border areas, on the other hand, were areas of outward migration throughout the entire period. Only the district of Schwandorf showed slight gains between 2011 and 2015, although the district of Cham followed in 2014 and 2015. The district of Fürth was characterised by a distinctive trend thanks to the presence of a reception centre for refugees in Zirndorf.

### 3.5 Structural indicator: Comparison over time 2001 to 2015 standardised using the figures for Bavaria

The standardisation of the structural indicator using the figures for Bavaria shows that between 2001 and 2015 the position of the areas on the border with the Czech Republic improved within the group of Bavarian districts (cf. Fig. 9). In 2001 the gap between Schwandorf as the district with the strongest economic structure and Bavaria was 12.1 index points. In 2015 the district of Cham reached the figure for Bavaria. The gap between Wunsiedel as the district with the weakest structure and Bavaria fell from 34.2 to 21.7 points. The range between the weakest and the strongest border areas thus fell slightly from 22.1 to 21.6 points.

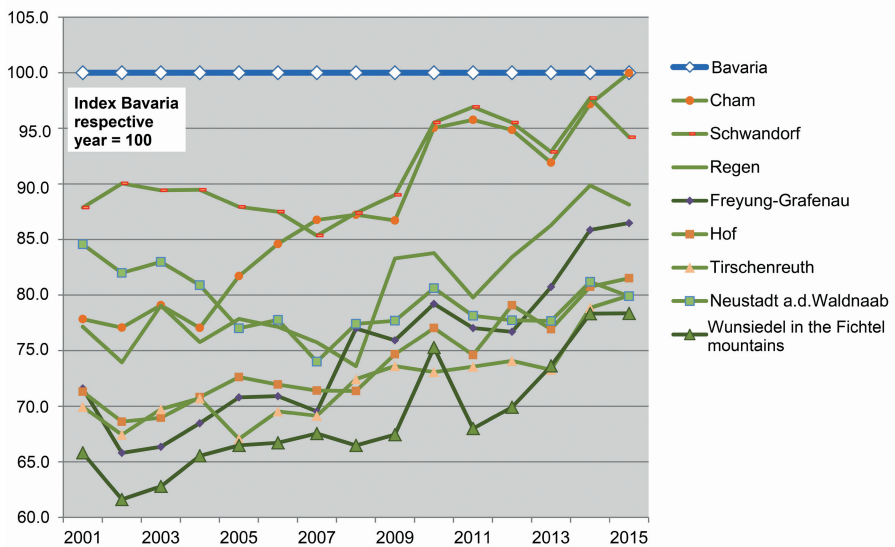


Fig. 9: Structural indicator for the areas on the border with the Czech Republic standardised using the figures for Bavaria / Source: the author's own calculations based on data from the Bavarian State Office for Statistics and Data Processing

The question raised at the beginning 'Border areas – once structurally weak, always structurally weak?' can thus be answered with a 'no' for the sum of the areas on the border with the Czech Republic.

The districts of Schwandorf and Cham reached the 90% threshold in 2009 and have since even closed the gap with Bavaria. The districts of Freyung-Grafenau and Regen are moving towards the 90% threshold. The district of Hof was also considerably above the 80% threshold in 2015. Only the districts of Tirschenreuth and Wunsiedel could be termed structurally weak throughout the entire period.

The district of Neustadt an der Waldnaab (Weiden) was characterised by an unfavourable development trend. This is the only area where the structural indicator for 2015 (79.9) was worse than that of 2001 (84.6).

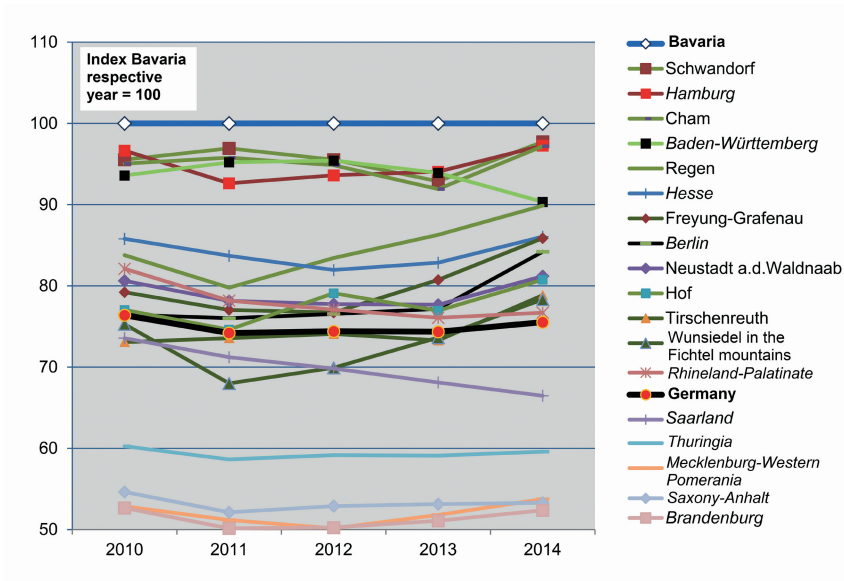


Fig. 10: Structural indicators for the Bavarian border areas, Bavaria, Germany and selected federal states standardised using the figures for Bavaria /Source: the author's own calculations based on data from the Bavarian State Office for Statistics and Data Processing

The structural indicator is made up of comparatively simple sub-indicators that enable a designation of regions with a particular need for action for the 2013 Federal State Development Programme. It is also suitable for determining the structural strength or weakness of regions and federal states outside of Bavaria and can thus be used as a basis for assessing the areas on the border with the Czech Republic in the context of Germany as a whole.<sup>9</sup> Relevant data are available here for 2010 to 2014 (cf. Fig. 10). It can be seen that the values for the district of Tirschenreuth and Wunsiedel were below that of the structural indicator for Germany in 2010 to 2013. In 2014 the figures for all border regions were higher than that of Germany. In 2012 to 2014 the values for the districts of Cham, Schwandorf and Regen exceeded the structural indicator for Hesse, and with values of between 50 and 70 index points left the federal states in eastern Germany far behind. The value for Saarland fell from 74 index points in 2010 to 67 in 2014.

## 4 Conclusions

Neither the hypothesis that border areas are per se structurally weak and will thus always remain assisted areas nor the hypothesis that **all** border areas can be brought up to the average of the federal state through subsidies and promotion have been verified. The first hypothesis appears to be a self-serving declaration by border region

<sup>9</sup> A similar analysis for the border regions of the Czech Republic failed due to a lack of data and the delimitations of the relevant territories (NUTS III).

politicians keen to retain access to the various funding pools despite infrastructural and economic progress. Revealing here are, on the one hand, the positive representations of economic structure and development that can be found online (cf. for example *Landkreis Passau* [district of Passau] 2017) and in marketing brochures, and, on the other hand, conflicts surrounding the thresholds and methods of calculation used to identify structural weakness.

In the two border areas with the lowest rankings it is clear that, first, the economic situation and conditions on the labour market have improved, more strongly than the federal average but not to the same extent as the Bavarian average. Second, it is open to doubt whether the location on border, which has now been open for almost 30 years, can alone explain why such regions lag behind or fail to sufficiently catch up. Another reason could be related to the large area of continuous natural landscape with low population density and occupational density on both sides of the border. It is in any case clear that the massive expansion of funding in the 2016 update of the Federal State Development Programme will not benefit these areas.

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