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## The importance of Swedish–Norwegian border residents' perspectives for bottom-up cross-border planning strategies

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### ABSTRACT

There is political interest in Sweden's proximity to Norway, which is reflected in the regional policy focusing on developing business needs. As such, proximity at the regional level is simply expected to generate economic growth. The authors propose a holistic approach to spatial planning in a Swedish–Norwegian border region in place of the simplistic economic perspective. The aim of the article is to highlight the importance of adopting a bottom-up cross-border planning perspective that is based on the perceptions of the border region residents by showing that the proximity of Norway is important to communities in Värmland Province, on the border with Norway, in a different way from how regional authorities and policymakers perceive it. The authors used a qualitative method in their study. They found that residents were more interested in the individual, social, and cultural opportunities of the border, while authorities stressed traditional growth strategies. In conclusion, the authors recommend that policymakers should implement a bottom-up cross-border planning strategy (CBPS) in Värmland that includes the residents' perspective, as a reinforcement of place-based policy approaches.



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## Introduction

### Cross-border cooperation and planning

European border regions cover a significant part of the European territory.<sup>1</sup> However, border regions generally perform less well economically than other regions (European Commission 2017). In much the same way, the presence of an administrative borderline creates all types of barriers in daily lives, such as legal-administrative, cultural, socio-economic, and accessibility-related ones (Medeiros 2014a). The presence of border barriers calls for the implementation of adequate cross-border planning strategies (hereafter abbreviated as CBPS in this article) (Herzog 2000; Medeiros 2014b) as a means of strengthening potential synergies, mobilising territorial capital potentials, and reducing persistent border obstacles. However, CBPS continue to be largely absent

in Europe, as nations intend to retain considerable control and autonomy over spatial planning procedures (Dühr et al. 2010).

In this article, we examine a peripheral border region, located along the Sweden–Norway border area: Värmland Province (Sweden) and the counties of Hedmark, Akershus, and Østfold (Norway) (Fig. 1). To some extent, cross-border development strategies have been implemented there since 1995 through the subprogramme INTERREG-A Inner Scandinavia (Ørbeck & Braunerhielm 2013; Medeiros 2017a). As a result, development strategies along the border area have been moulded by a mix of rather unstable European Union (EU), national, and sometimes regional development strategies for the periods 1994–1999, 2000–2006, 2007–2013, and 2014–2020, with rather limited input from the border region residents. In previous studies of border research (Berger

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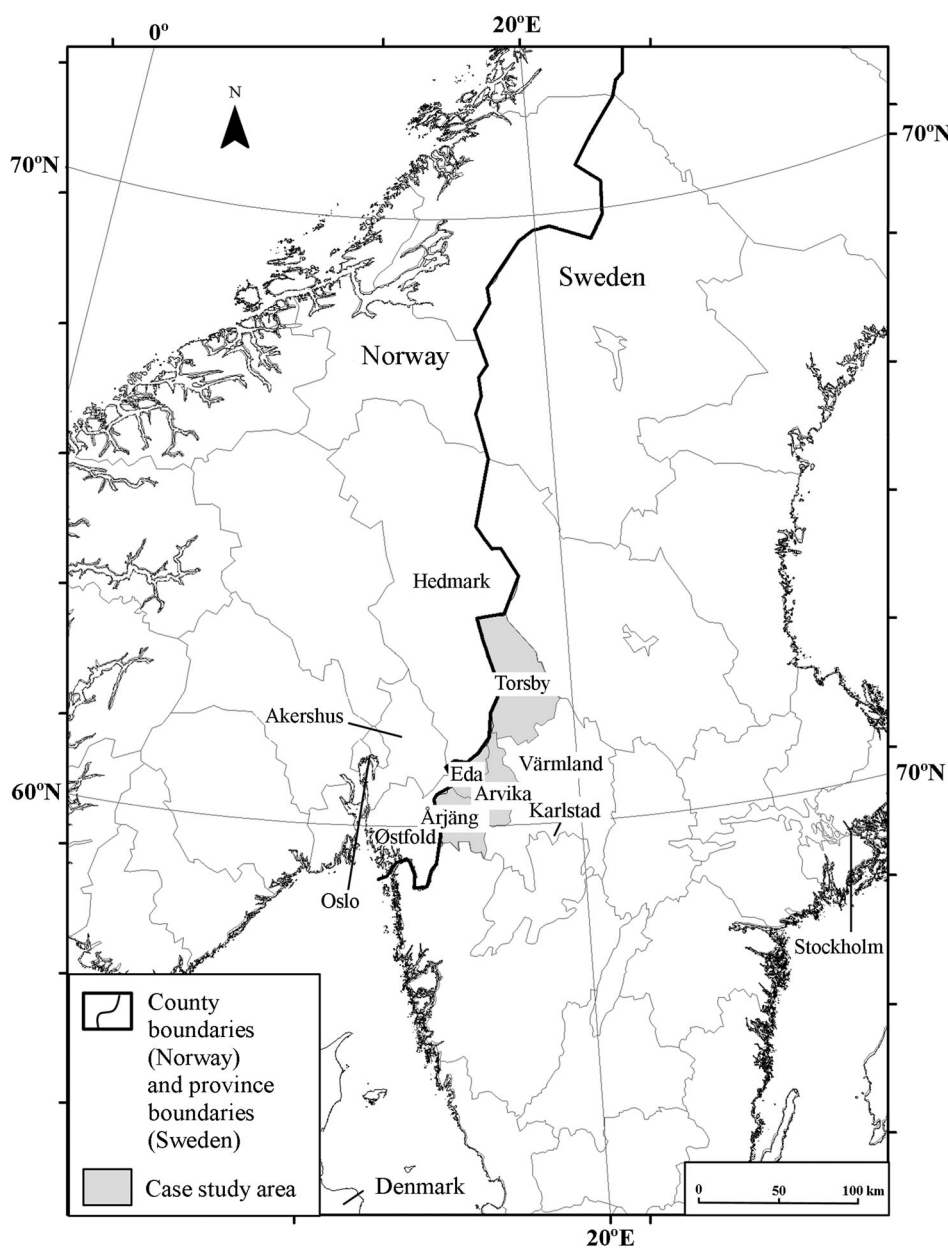


Fig. 1. Case-study border municipalities

et al. 2004; Olsson et al. 2011; Ørbeck & Braunerhielm 2013), we identified a knowledge gap in research on CBPS, in which residents' views are significantly absent, specifically regarding the identification of the positive and negative effects of the proximity of the border on their lives.

Thus, to be effective, as alluded to by Morphet (2010, 3), spatial planning procedures require a holistic approach in which 'public policy and service delivery should be shaped around individuals and places rather than organisational or administrative principles'. Such a bottom-up approach to spatial planning requires the recognition of the intersection between people and place, while embracing measures to co-ordinate municipal, regional, and national territorial development

visions and interests, in a common decision-making process based on joint efforts in which common policies and guidelines are adopted (European Commission 1997, 75). Moreover, political will is needed to combat the 'nation-state mentality' in which spatial planning is deeply rooted (Dühr et al. 2010, 17). In this regard, the knowledge obtained from border region residents is essential for designing a sound and effective bottom-up CBPS.

#### *Värmland–Norway cross-border relations*

The province of Värmland has always had a special relationship with their Norwegian neighbours. There has been exchange across the border at all times,

although with changes and different paths over time. In the 1960s and 1970s, when the Swedish currency had more value, Värmlanders crossed the Norwegian border for shopping for economic reasons. Currently, Norwegians buy goods that are significantly cheaper in Sweden, while Swedes go to Norway to work. The price situation in Norway looks completely different compared to within Sweden, and cross-border commuting is facilitated by the fact that the demand for employees cannot be met domestically in Norway (Olsson et al. 2012; Region Värmland 2014).

Politically, there has been co-operation across the entire length of the border between Norway and Sweden (Svensson & Öjehag 2012). For example, currently there are several active border committees managing various common issues. For some years, vigorous efforts have been made in Värmland to focus on opportunities that the proximity to Norway offered, which has resulted in the Norway strategy (Norgestrategi) (Region Värmland 2014). Norway has great importance for Sweden in terms of development and cultural exchange. Especially for Värmland, the proximity to Oslo, which is the closest big city and one of Europe's fastest growing economies, is very important. The Norway strategy is a document describing planned economic cooperation and exchange between Värmland and Oslo and Norway (Region Värmland 2014). Hörnström et al. (2012) and Medeiros (2014a; 2014c) note that EU and its Interreg programmes (European Commission 2017) have highlighted efforts to stimulate an increased interaction within different cross-border co-operation arenas.

In addition to components related to economic competitiveness, border areas offer social, environmental, and other types of territorial capital that can be utilised and optimised. They also offer experience-based knowledge and recreational value. Social relationships are often close and often there are tight-knit communities with a strong sense of place. In turn, this may be a basis for creativity and for social and economic innovation (Aronsson & Braunerhielm 2011). Aronsson & Braunerhielm's rationale highlights not only economic growth as a concept, but also other less-recognised perspectives. We address these perspectives in this article by identifying the differences in the residents' views and the policy-makers' views on regional development issues in general, and issues relating to the proximity of Norway that have warranted the special regional Norway strategy in particular. According to Jeffery (2015) and Farrel (2009), grass-roots consultations within the EU are also important when designing development strategies.

In 2014, the administrative authorities in Värmland Province proposed the Norway strategy, which primarily aims to strengthen strategic Sweden–Norway relations on

the basis of business needs (Region Värmland 2014). As a result, the Norway strategy primarily focuses on supporting companies and, by extension, economic growth. Much emphasis is put on the proximity of Oslo and on the growing Oslo region, a growth that is expected to create jobs of importance to areas beyond the region itself. The Norway strategy highlights the importance of Norway and the Oslo region and puts the focus on the role of Värmland in the Norway–Sweden relationship, especially with the Oslo region. One important aim of the strategy is to complement official statistics, which usually only relate to a specific country and documentation ends at the border, such as statistics on commuting, Norwegian companies in Värmland, border trade, goods export, and Norwegian tourists in Värmland. Thus, the strategy is fundamental for the border region and its importance to Sweden and the development in Värmland. In one report, policy-makers describe Norway as being the export market and the Norwegian labour market is of major importance to employment in Sweden. Sweden also has the largest proportion of employed persons across the Norwegian border (Region Värmland 2014). However, Sweden and Norway are mutually dependent on each other.

### Research questions

The aim of this article is to highlight the potential gains of implementing a bottom-up CBPS that includes the border region residents' perspectives in relation to mainstream strategic economic growth rationales. Our analysis is important because it provides a platform for debating the potential advantages of implementing CBPS. It has a potential solution to invert common less-positive socio-economic development trends in most European cross-border regions compared with trends in larger metropolitan areas. Furthermore, our focus on a European cross-border area is important in a context in which such areas have been taking centre stage within EU policymaking (i.e. the elevation of the Interreg community initiative into a main goal of the EU's cohesion policy, namely European territorial cooperation (European Commission 2017)). This context provides a framework for thinking about how cross-border processes can operate more efficiently between governance levels that mediate and interconnect urban, local, regional, and national territorial planning processes. Our empirical case study investigates the Värmlanders' positive and negative views on their proximity to Norway. The following research questions sum up our focus:

1. Which territorial development domains were identified as crucial concerns to border region residents in Värmland Province?

2. What are the main advantages of implementing a bottom-up CBPS in Värmland Province?

## Theoretical considerations

### *Border regions: barriers, development potentials and the resident's role*

In a recent article, Lundén debates crucial aspects related with the concept of border (Lundén 2018). To improve the understanding of the border problem, he sheds light on the meaning of a few concepts, such as the notion of 'frontier', normally with a connotation of periphery. The notion of 'boundary' is important too, and signifies the following:

a territorial line, and in American English a broader concept including non-territorial interpretations; and 'border', originally a zone along a boundary (the Scottish border), but in American English a territorial line dividing (independent) states. In recent times, the American concept has gained dominance. With this interpretation, a boundary is thus a line indicating any difference between two co-lateral delimitations, e.g. between states, regions, disciplines, ethnicities, or religions. (Lundén 2018, 98)

From a political and institutional perspective, the border issue in Europe has increasingly come to represent specific cases of regionalisation within the European territory (Scott 2009), mainly since the EU began financing cross-border co-operation processes in the early 1990s (Medeiros 2018; Reitel et al. 2018). Crucially, since then, hundreds of cross-border entities and structures have emerged within the European territory, including the 'Euroregions', 'binational cities', and 'Eurocities' (Lange & Pires 2018) and, more recently, the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) (Evrard & Engl 2018).

Sohn & Licheron (2015) define borders in four ways: borders as barriers, borders as interfaces, borders as markers of difference, and borders as symbols. They highlight that in classic location theories borders are depicted as obstacles and as having a negative effect on the development of border regions. Such obstacles and negative effects might lead to negative impacts or barriers, notably for companies searching for a location, which would lead to disadvantages for border regions (Lösch 1954). Such effects are seen as marginalisation for rural areas (Hansen 1983). Despite the generation of such negative effects, there are theories and cases that highlight the opportunities offered by cities and regions located close to borderlines (Hansen 1983).

Decoville et al. (2013) emphasise three forms of integration in their theoretical model of *metropolitan*

*integration*. One form is integration through specialisation, which is relevant for our analysis. Integration through specialisation entails that the countries involved make use of their specific situations. An example would be when mobility is manifested in people commuting in one direction and immigrating in the reverse direction. Those specific characteristics become 'pull-factors' that attract a workforce or new inhabitants. Both regions can thus be 'winners'. In both cases, it is a matter of economic differences generating mobility.

There are examples of *border barriers* and *facilitators* in some regions. There are obstacles in the forms of bureaucracy (e.g. legislation) and mental barriers. Facilitators could be shared language and culture and also a border that is a driving force for economic development, specifically, in both countries. However, it should be kept in mind that territorial development cannot be reduced to economic issues. This holistic and territorial development vision should extend beyond an economic competitiveness perspective and argue for the inclusion of socially related variables, such as knowledge and/or education, employment rate and poverty, environmental sustainability, territorial governance, and territorial articulation-related variables (Medeiros 2017c). In the studied and analysed border region, the holistic and territorial perspective is particularly apparent, as the region's proximity to the Swedish–Norwegian border is a driving force for social and cultural exchanges and for development. Berger et al. (2004) have demonstrated the role of social and cultural development with examples such as music, theatre, and dance.

van Houtum & van der Velde (2004) emphasise the importance of an open mind and of perceiving border residents as having a 'social boundary'. In this respect, the national border is the line between 'us' and 'them', where the inability to identify with 'the others' is an important reason *not* to move. In the case of the Swedish–Norwegian border area, there may be a notion that Swedes and Norwegians are very similar, which facilitates both migration and commuting. This also supports the importance of including social aspects when discussing the elaboration of a CBPS.

According to Sohn (2014), it appears that functional interaction (i.e. economic motivation for activities of various types) does not necessarily lead to social and spatial similarities or to territorial community on both sides of the border. He argues that important flows arise through uneven development, which can contribute to reinforcing different developments. In other words, functional interaction means that differences are included and accepted. Understanding similarities and differences across borders is therefore necessary for raising awareness and strengthening interaction.

van Houtum & van der Velde (2004) argue that interaction that does not take place can be explained in terms of the concept of, which means that there may be difficulties in initiating activities because of mental obstacles. If people imagine there are greater differences than there really are, it leads to a lack of interest in or indifference to 'it/them on the other side' (van Houtum & van der Velde 2004). Despite all the advances in incrementing and reinforcing cross-border institutional arrangements and collaborations, the implementation of formal cross-border planning processes in Europe 'remains a field of action that faces many obstacles and whose definition varies greatly depending on the context' (Decoville & Durand 2018, 229). Moreover, according to Decoville & Durand, 'since cross-border spatial planning is not organised around a legal framework, it is not considered as a binding practice, legally anchored in a territorial system governed by planning rules' (Decoville & Durand 2018, 229–242).

In the context in which 'border constructions, border crossings and the identities that are formed and dissolved in such acts, seldom make for simple geographies of identity, belonging, or state control' (Winder 2009, 330), the forging of CBPS can provide a more timely and institutionally stable and sound platform for cross-border development. In this light, a CBPS should be elaborated with a location-based approach, in which the border region's development potentials and needs that are to be managed are clearly identified. Developing a better planning approach requires an understanding of a border region's idiosyncrasies, in which cultural and attitudinal differences can lead to significant border-related obstacles. Sohn & Licheron (2015) denote such borders as markers of differences. The term is also used when national borders are clearly indicated by legal and institutional differences, and when additional costs are created as a consequence of customs controls and checkpoints.

Cross-border commuting is affected by the proximity of the border – the distance from the home country residence to the workplace on the other side of the border. The closer individuals live to the border, the greater the chance or risk that they will settle on the other side of the border (Gottholmseder & Theurl 2007, 109). Commuting to work across borders often seems to work in one direction only (Decoville et al. 2013) and can often be related to economic differences. Even in cases when there are economic advantages to commuting across borders to work, factors such as language, differences in taxation, insurance systems, and work permits can be obstacles to commuting (Mathä & Wintr 2009). Understandably, cross-border commuters tend to experience directly, almost a daily basis, fundamental

barriers posed by the presence of border barriers, which make them a crucial pillar in support of the implementation of CBPS.

### *Participant or bottom-up spatial planning*

Far from signalling the end of European borders, the EU has been instrumental in promoting territorial integration within the EU territory and between the EU and external territories (Medeiros 2011). The European territorial cooperation (Interreg) programmes have played a crucial role in the territorial integration process by augmenting transnational and interregional co-operation processes (European Commission 1997). The Interreg programmes have therefore positively affected transnational planning practices and policies across the EU (European Commission 1997, 74). Additionally, they have helped to reduce the number of border barriers across Europe in almost every way imaginable (Wassenberg et al. 2015; Medeiros 2017b).

However, the complex interplay between national sovereignty logic and territorial co-operation has prevented the implementation of formal spatial planning visions that support a strategic implementation of programmes and projects. In this context, cross-border planning can be understood as follows:

a systematic preparation and implementation of a spatial-oriented policy or plan, in a border region, with a view to anticipating spatial changes, and in order to have direct or indirect positive effects on spatial activities, with the ultimate goal of reducing the barrier effect and enhancing territorial capital (Medeiros 2014a, 368)

As such, cross-border planning presents several advantages over the common implementation of Interreg programmes. It presents a longer term strategic planning perspective, it reinforces the subsidiarity principle, it paves the way for additional sources of income for border areas, and it enhances the multilevel governance process and institutional networking (Medeiros 2017b).

Tewdwr-Jones (2012, 1) notes that 'spatial planning is owed by everyone who has a vested interest in the land and what happens to it'. Clearly, this is the case for border region residents. As a result, we propose using their concerns to design better CBPS (Fig. 2). In this stance, the upshot of using the resident capability approach (Nussbaum 2003; Alkire 2015) is crucial for implementing sound and effective CBPS.

### **Methodology**

Our approach was partly inspired by Perrons (2011; 2012) and her alternative territorial development models in which she challenges the traditional, quantitative

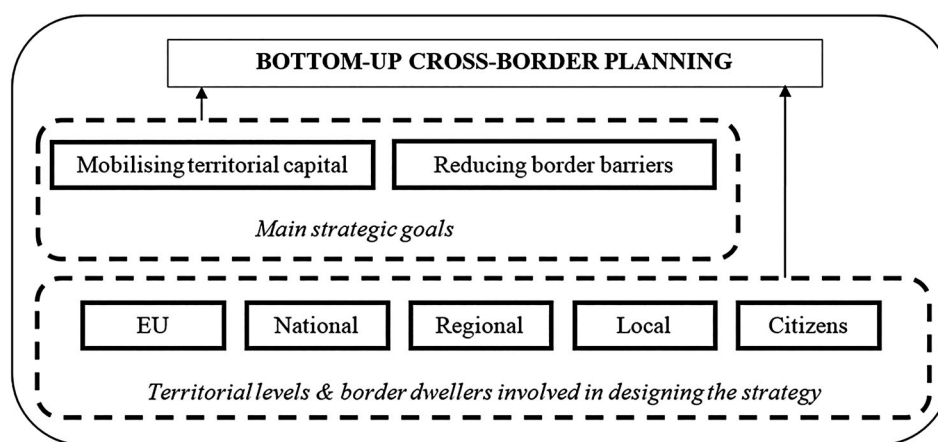


Fig. 2. Bottom-up cross-border planning elements

economic growth concept by proposing a capability perspective, for which she drew inspiration from Sen (1980; 1987; 2010). According to Sen's capability approach, income and resources do not provide a sufficient or satisfactory indicator of well-being because they measure means rather than ends. Sen states:

resources (GDP or income) only have value to the extent that they enhance human life, that is, they have conditional rather than intrinsic value; their value is inextricably based upon 'what they help people to achieve—including good and worthwhile lives' (Sen 2010, 226)

Our study draws on previous research on the Värmland–Hedmark and Akershus–Østfold border area (Berger et al. 2004; Olsson 2011b; Olsson et al. 2011; 2012; Ørbeck & Braunerhielm 2013). Because our principal goal is to increase the understanding of the grass-roots level, and to understand better the need to implement a bottom-up CBPS in Värmland Province, additional empirical data were collected through a resident survey in the region. More precisely, our research draws on the input of residents of four border municipalities: Årjäng, Torsby, Eda, and Arvika (Fig. 1).

Our study was part of the SOM survey that was conducted in co-operation with the SOM Institute at the University of Gothenburg and Karlstad University, and a questionnaire was sent to 3000 residents in the age range 16–85 years, in Värmland in December 2014. The response rate was 47% (1420 residents). It was lowest among men (49%) and within the age group 20–29 years (29%). Geographically, the response rate was highest in the northern parts of Värmland (53%), followed by the Karlstad area (50%), which includes Karlstad, the main city in the region (Fig. 1). Of the 1420 who responded to the questionnaire, 283 were resident in the four border municipalities. The remaining 1137 respondents were categorised as non-border residents.

In the failure analysis of the SOM study, the main reasons for lack of participation were registered as follows: some claimed not to participate on principle because of the type of study, some claimed that they did not have the time, and some claimed there were too many questions (Bové 2016).

The questionnaire included questions on views on politics, regional development, culture, media usage, and health, and had fixed-response options. We supplemented the quantitative survey with two open qualitative questions that had not been used previously in resident surveys and therefore comparison with surveys in other regions was not possible:

1. What do you think is the most positive aspect of proximity to Norway?
2. What do you think is the most negative aspect of proximity to Norway?

Of the 1420 residents who responded to the questionnaire, 290 (20%) did not answer the qualitative questions, meaning that they did not answer what was the most positive aspect or the most negative aspect of proximity to Norway. Regarding the response rate for both questions, a larger proportion of residents responded only to what was positive about proximity to Norway, but chose not to answer the question about what was negative (Table 1). The two open questions were analysed using a qualitative analysis method. The analysis was made in relation to the Norway strategy (Region Värmland 2014).

The analysis of the open answers was conducted as a traditional qualitative thematic analysis (Huberman & Miles 2002). All open answers to the two questions, as well as other data, were processed by SPSS ver. 22. The answers were printed out and then read without coding or

**Table 1.** Overview of the replies to the open questions

Open questions	Number of responses to the open questions
Number of replies to both questions	1130
Number of replies to the positive questions	1122
Number of replies to the negative questions	932
Response rate (%)	80
Response rate for the positive question (%)	79
Response rate for the negative question (%)	67

thematising. The printouts were then read again and coded into themes, at first simply in the two categories of being positive or negative regarding the proximity to Norway. The two categories were then organised into subthemes.

The next step was to compare municipalities in relation to the themes and their proximity to Norway. We also calculated the correlation between the number of positive answers to the statement ‘Nothing negative about the proximity to Norway’ and the number of respondents per municipality to see whether any municipality stood out in any way, or whether their proximity to the border could be assumed to play a role. It should be noted in this context that there was no optional answer such as ‘There is nothing positive.’ In response to the question about most positive aspect of proximity to Norway, almost all respondents gave examples. The answers in the survey reflected the dual experience of living close to the Norwegian border and confirmed the results and findings of earlier research, but the analysis of the comments on the positive and negative experiences and on the challenges facing the municipalities close to the Norwegian border revealed the need for a bottom-up cross-border planning strategy. The results of the analysis indicate that the challenges on the Swedish side of the border could be met by a stronger regional policy and more adequate planning regulations.

Our overall impression was that the answers were very similar, irrespective of the respondents’ place of residence. When checking the answers from each of the 16 municipalities manually, we also considered the differences between border region residents (i.e. in Eda, Årjäng, Torsby, and Arvika, Sweden) and residents in other municipalities, non-border residents, and any impact of differences in gender and age. It is important to point out that although a survey serves as a quantitative research method, our survey included two open questions, to which we applied standard qualitative content analysis and concepts to analyse and describe themes that emerged from the answers to the open questions (cf. Huberman & Miles 2002).

## Värmlanders’ perspectives on Norway

### *The border region*

Our case study region can be characterised as a rural area with traditional rural problems, such as depopulation and an aging population. Low educational levels are a further serious problem. There is no distinct tradition of investing in higher education and fewer jobs and career opportunities are available in rural areas than in the large cities (Ørbeck & Braunerhielm 2013).

The proximity of Norway creates special conditions for the province of Värmland. At the strategic level, proximity is considered to generate development opportunities. Previous research has identified opportunities as well as challenges, such as border barriers that create difficulties for residents and business owners (Berger et al. 2004; Olsson et al. 2012; Ørbeck & Gløtvold-Solbu 2012; Ørbeck & Braunerhielm 2013; Medeiros 2014c). In short, the borderland between Norway and Sweden is characterised by a state of ‘permanent mobility’, which includes both opportunities and challenges in the development of employment and skills (Ørbeck & Braunerhielm 2013; Medeiros 2014a). Often-cited positive effects of mobility include the creation of larger labour market regions, more jobs, and better access to labour, such as in Värmland (Ørbeck & Braunerhielm 2013). However, labour mobility can also create challenges, such as difficulties for cross-border commuters in the form of bureaucratic and legal obstacles to social insurance and tax regulations (Olsson et al. 2012). There are also challenges in the form of ‘brain drain’ (e.g. well-educated Swedes choosing to work in Norway because of better pay or working conditions).

The prevailing ‘service mentality’ in combination with the chance to work across the border (especially for young people who choose to work in the service sector) is important for a cross-border region. Historically, service mentality is described as a special ‘local culture’ (Bergdahl et al. 1997; Braunerhielm 2006) that often characterised former industrial communities in which local people expected the communities to provide work. It is suggested that Norwegian employers have replaced the role of ‘the mill’ in the previous mill communities at the border (Blom & Braunerhielm 2011).

The labour market in the border area between Sweden and Norway is unilateral and vulnerable, while being characterised by having traditional career choices in terms of gender (Ørbeck & Braunerhielm 2013, 67). Labour mobility is a ‘one-way’ phenomenon that mainly involves Swedes seeking jobs in Norway. Oslo, the Norwegian capital, has become a metropolis for Swedish visitors and commuters (Ørbeck & Gløtvold-Solbu 2012, 32). Young Swedes who live close to the border go to Oslo to



work and earn money, if not permanently, then at least for a period. They do this instead of opting for higher education or work in Sweden (Olsson et al. 2012). The proximity to the border has contributed to lower unemployment in Sweden and higher employment in Norway, and thus has had positive effects for both countries (Ørbeck & Gløtvold-Solbu 2012).

Development has led to ‘little brother’ Norway becoming ‘big brother’ (Olsson et al. 2012). Currently, border trade is characteristic of Värmland, and has economic, cultural, and social aspects (Olsson 2011a; 2011b). The economic development, based on Norwegian customers and Norwegian-owned shopping malls, has had a positive impact on the four case municipalities. There are more job opportunities and a broader basis for tourism and service industries than previously, but this has resulted in young people opting out of higher education. The effects of the economic development have not only been positive, as pointed out by Olsson in earlier studies (2011a; 2011b).

In addition to negative effects on the environment, there is a risk of depletion in local cultures, such as positive cultural traits of looking after each other and helping the neighbours when in distress, since economic gain is regarded by Värmland Municipality administrative authorities as too important in relation to relational and social values. Relationships between groups of people living in different areas are affected in the rapid process of economic progress. In the Norwegian–Swedish case, the local residents in Sweden are very annoyed with Norwegian customers, who are perceived as hoards of invaders who shop at a lower cost in Sweden than in Norway (Olsson 2011a; Olsson et al. 2012). An important aspect in this context is that mobility across the Sweden–Norway border is not static. The border is a driving force for mobility, but the direction of the flows of trade and commuting for work has varied over time (Lundén 2002). According to Lundén (2018), there is now a tentative downward trend in the Norwegian economy and currency, which may affect Swedish border municipalities in some ways. The economic conditions and the value of the respective currencies, which have created opportunities for both border trade and an extended employment market for Swedes, may change quickly, as has happened in the past (Lundén 2002).

### *What Värmlanders think about Norway*

Two recurrent themes among the respondents’ views regarding the positive effects of proximity to Norway were the employment opportunities in the Norwegian labour market and border trade. The most common view expressed by the respondents who answered the

question regarding the benefits of the proximity to Norway relates to available job opportunities. The respondents’ comments on the labour market primarily focused on Swedes obtaining jobs in Norway. In particular, it was stated that it was easier for the young people to get a job in Norway than in Sweden. Several respondents mentioned that Norwegian salaries were a positive factor, while others commented on better working hours, better terms, and better working environments. Interestingly, many respondents thought job opportunities in Norway were the most positive aspect of the proximity to Norway, although relatively few (20 respondents) stated that they actually worked in Norway.

The reasons for commuting from Sweden to Norway have previously been researched by Olsson et al. (2011; 2012), and the main reason stated by our respondents was a better salary. Since the commuters to Norway were few in our survey, we cannot draw any conclusions from their answers, but it is of interest to pay attention to the trend in their responses. One reason stated in the open answers was ‘the opportunity to work in Norway & remain in Värmland. Necessary for many to be able to stay in the north of Värmland’ and the same respondent added ‘I have worked in Norway myself for the past 15 years so, it’s positive’. The commuters to Norway stated that the most important reason for commuting was better pay, followed by wanting to stay where they lived, and the chance to have a more interesting job. Additionally, the lack of jobs at their place of residence in Sweden was mentioned as a reason for commuting to Norway.

Furthermore, the respondents’ stated benefits of their proximity to Norway focused on the border trade, which was described as positive on the grounds that job opportunities were created in Sweden, that capital entered Sweden, and that it was particularly beneficial to border municipalities. There were comments such as ‘we have got a huge choice of products’ and ‘we have got better shops’. Border trade apparently generates tourism beyond shopping tourism, as one respondent wrote ‘the Norwegians have discovered Värmland, the landscape, trade, etc.’. The respondent’s quotation reflects the two themes of employment opportunities and border trade and summarises what many other respondents expressed, namely that many Swedes worked in Norway and the Norwegians shopped in Sweden, which suited everyone.

There were no major geographical differences in the positive aspects of the proximity to the border, regardless of where the respondents lived. The positive effects seemed to be experienced similarly among the respondents. There were no answers stating that a positive effect of the proximity to the border did not exist; all

answers to the question about the most positive aspect of proximity to Norway, almost all respondents included an example.

*Negative effects.* The themes of the negative aspects of the proximity to Norway, particularly employment opportunities and border trade, corresponded fairly closely with the perceived positive aspects. What was seen as positive also had negative sides. However, a relatively large number of respondents answered that there was nothing negative about their proximity to Norway. Although distance from the border might have affected their responses to the question about most negative aspect of proximity to Norway, but no clear conclusions could be drawn in this respect.

When commenting on negative aspects of commuting to Norway, the respondents stated that Sweden was losing skilled workers, and that this was contributing to the 'regional brain drain'. The most affected professional groups worked in health care (nurses and doctors). Some respondents saw negative sides to young people working in Norway, as they left the small communities, while other respondents saw possible lock-in effects: 'there is a risk that young people [will] get stuck in simple but well-paid jobs in Norway'. Another negative theme was the higher prices and costs of living in Norway than in Sweden. This theme included comments that prices were inflated in Sweden and that there were 'higher prices on houses in areas where Norwegians want to buy'. A common view among the respondents was that prices were going up for both the year-round accommodation and second homes as a result of Norwegians' interest in acquiring houses in Sweden.

Some respondents commented that both commuting and border trade could be problematic for specific reasons. The taxation of border commuters was mentioned and the concentration of trade in border shopping centres. Another comment was that some commuters did not pay taxes to their municipality of residence and that commuters could face problems in case of illness. The shopping centres were accused of 'killing town centres' and only being there for the Norwegian customers. Thus, there were both positive and negative views on the same phenomenon.

However, there were geographical differences regarding negative aspects of job opportunities in Norway as well as border trade on the Swedish side. For example, the respondents in three of the border municipalities (Årjäng, Arvika, and Eda) did not mention any negative aspects regarding the opportunity to work in Norway, but mentioned negative aspects related to cross-border trade. In contrast to respondents who lived in the municipalities of Årjäng, Arvika and Eda and had negative views, respondents who lived farther from the border

did not have any negative views on the border trade. The exception was residents in the provincial capital, Karlstad, in the southern part of the region. The residents in some municipalities might have had a negative view of the border trade expansion (Blom & Braunerhielm 2011; Möller et al. 2012) because the trade was 'too adapted to the Norwegians' (Möller et al. 2012, 88). Comments such as 'the border trade eliminates all small shops, road wear and tear' and '[there are] higher prices because of higher salaries', as well as the following quote may indicate both a negative view and negative aspects of the positive effects of proximity to the border:

The downside of the positive aspect [of border trade] ... is that everything is adapted to the Norwegians, who are expected to come and spend money. It is, for example, difficult to buy a book locally, but there is a bookstore for books exclusively in Norwegian. It's weird, since we are in Sweden.

*EU, co-operation, and politics.* Some of the respondents' random comments were related to the fact that Norway is not an EU member state, that the two countries should co-operate more than they do, and that Värmland and Oslo are too distant from Stockholm to be of interest for national politics: 'Värmland is far away from the Stockholm/political powers'. The respondents' viewpoints were justified because researchers have long noted an error in Swedish income statistics at the municipal level, in which Swedish border municipalities with a high rate of border commuters are not allowed to include all residents' income because many commuters pay taxes in Norway. This means that municipalities such as Eda and Årjäng in western Värmland have been mistakenly reported by Rädde Barnen as municipalities with a high proportion of 'poor children' (e.g. Rädde Barnen 2018). However, the aforementioned statistics have never been corrected (Ørbeck & Braunerhielm 2013). This is a very strong argument for claiming that a focus on economic competitiveness alone is reductive. The statistics are incorrect and do not include factors that are of importance to residents in, for example, peripheral borderlands.

Regarding EU membership, there were positive views on Norway's non-membership. A number of respondents believed that Värmland and Sweden in general should co-operate more with Norway and, as one respondent commented, 'feel a kinship with Norwegians! Had hoped for an alliance with them' or as another pointed out: 'Should be more cross-boundary measures and co-operation with [them], but [cooperation] still works OK'. Another respondent emphasised that the Norwegians were 'A Scandinavian people with whom we have a common history'.

Previous studies have shown that the residents in Nordic countries have limited knowledge of the ongoing cross-border co-operation, but that there is a positive attitude to this process and a wish for further developments (Wetterberg 2010; Nilsson 2011). More effort should have been made to disseminate these findings to the wider public and they should have been included in policymaking. A policy for Värmland that relates to Norway should therefore take into account co-operation activities and situations beyond those favouring commerce and industry. An example of failure to address an actual situation is the earlier bureaucratic problems that affected commuters, despite efforts to solve those problems (Olsson et al. 2012).

*Summary of the border residents' potential contribution to a bottom-up CBPS strategy.* When comparing the relation between residents who were closer to the border than other residents, we did not identify any significant differences between the respondents' views on the positive and negative aspects of proximity to Norway. Irrespective of place of residence, the most positive aspects were considered the job opportunities in Norway and the border trade, yet those also included negative aspects. Norwegians travel to Sweden to buy diverse products that are considerably cheaper there. The negative aspects of working in Norway and of Norwegian border trade in Sweden differed somewhat between respondents in different municipalities, according to their proximity to the border. Residents from border municipalities who commuted to Norway were subject to a special type of taxation. Both Swedish commuters and Norwegian commuters paid taxes in their respective home municipalities, while other commuters from Sweden paid taxes where they worked in Norway. An interesting observation was that most of the border commuters lived near the border. Our data showed that the number of border commuters dropped the farther they lived from the border.

In the studied context, a CBPS should take into consideration proactive measures to simplify further the legal and administrative barriers (i.e. taxation, excess of bureaucracy, and social security-related issues). From a negative standpoint, commuting to a job in Norway drains Sweden of certain professionals, such as nurses, and our study revealed that this was particularly noticeable near the border. For border commuters, problems may arise because of differences in tax and insurance systems in Norway and Sweden, which can lead to economic hardships in cases of illness, unemployment, or parental leave. This means that residents in borderland regions dealing with other issues in life and at work, which require increasing cross-border collaboration in all thematic areas of territorial development.

Furthermore, the results from the survey point to the need for proactive measures in the potential CBPS in order to regulate better the rising prices of housing and products, and the negative effects of the presence of large shopping centres at the border, as they affect small businesses. The results further accentuate the fact that policymakers need a better understanding of soft values and the border residents' perspectives to design a more adequate CBPS. This, in turn, requires not only collecting updated border statistics for calculations of cross-border indicators for cross-border planning strategies (Table 2), but also including border regions' concerns in the policy agendas of national governments.

Policymakers need to demonstrate awareness of cross-border ambivalences. For example, cross-border shopping often outcompetes trade in the city centres of smaller cities close to the border (Olsson et al. 2011). Shops and boutiques in the large cities go bankrupt and have to close down, which makes the city centre more impoverished and desolate. The negative effects also cause the local residents to resent Norwegians who live in the border districts in Sweden. According to the respondents, the Norwegians were 'everywhere', and in a sense, they were 'pushing the locals out', which suggests that proximity and similarity can be problematic.

In addition to differences in language, culture and history, for some Swedish border residents, Norwegians were 'also different from us'. In this respect, geographical

**Table 2.** Cross-border indicators for cross-border planning strategies

Barrier-effect dimension	Indicators
Cultural-social	1.1 – Number of shared social services (hospitals, schools)
	1.2 – Number of students receiving border language courses
	1.3 – Number of students on courses supported by cross-border university networks
	1.4 – Number of cross-border culture events
Institutional-legal	2.1 – Number of cross-border entities
	2.2 – Number of cross-border urban networks
	2.3 – Number of agreements on legal standardizations
	2.4 – Number of cross-border assistance and information posts
Economy-technology	3.1 – Number of cross-border commuters
	3.2 – Number of companies from the other side of the border
	3.3 – Value of trading between the border areas
	3.4 – Number of cross-border entrepreneurship courses
Environmental-heritage	4.1 – Number of agreements on protected areas
	4.2 – Amount of renewable energy produced on each side of the border
	4.3 – Number of heritage protection agreements
Accessibility	5.1 – Number of cross-border vehicles
	5.2 – Number of cross-border public transportation carriers (bus, tram, and train)
	5.3 – Number of cross-border road trips
	5.4 – Number of cross-border rail trips
	5.5 – Number of cross-border highways

residence made no difference to them, and the positive effects also had negative aspects. The proximity to Norway generated an ambivalent effect, which may be an example of the border as a ‘marker of difference’ (Sohn & Licheron 2015), a creator of a ‘national habitus’, or a ‘threshold of indifference’ (van Houtum & van der Velde 2004; Gottholmseder & Theurl 2007). The results from our survey indicate that regardless of where the residents of Värmland lived, they knew that there was an opportunity to work in Norway but did not necessarily recognise it as one for themselves. They stated that they would not consider looking for a job in Norway if they lost their job in Sweden, because Norway was too far away and a bit too different, despite its proximity. In general, they seemed to have the idea to be that working in Norway is fine for others but not them.

In short, the analysed survey responses provided insights into border region residents’ concrete concerns, which may be useful for improving the effectiveness of CBPS. The survey respondents highlighted a few policy arenas that were critical to their daily lives, including the uneven job market, regional brain drain, lock-in effects, tourism attraction, additional taxation, road wear and tear, institutional distance, cross-border commitment-related excessive bureaucracy, and pricing.

Thus, it is possible to conclude that the border region residents who participated in our study highlighted widespread concerns, not only about economy-related aspects as the main problematic issues in their daily lives, but also about governance and/or institutional areas, legal and/or administrative areas, and social and/or physical areas. This finding strongly suggests that existing border and cross-border plans that put primary emphasis on the ‘economic growth’ rationale should be amended to adopt a bottom-up approach that takes border region residents’ concerns into account. The results of our analysis indicate the need for a stronger regional policy and the implementation of cross-border planning processes on the Swedish side of the border. Such a step would ensure a more holistic and complete development perspective on cross-border planning. A bottom-up based CBPS rationale can serve as a mechanism to implement an effective multilevel governance process, while combating persistent nation-state mentalities and border barriers.

In summary, the main advantages of a bottom-up CBPS are that it takes into consideration the position of the residents in the border region. The residents can express the concrete needs they face in their daily lives when crossing the border or experiencing flows from the other side of the border. For example, either the lack of or inadequate presence of cross-border public transport can only be fully understood by cross-border commuters (Olsson et al. 2012). This is equally true of

all the legal and administrative barriers that residents face when working on the other side of the border.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, and as a result of the border region residents’ perspective obtained in the survey, we can present a case in which an effective bottom-up CBPS has an added value to the simple implementation of stronger regional development strategies on each side of the border. First, the cross-border barriers facing cross-border commuters and border inhabitants in general have, for the most part, a cross-border character. Second, a CBPS requires institutional collaboration from both sides of the border, unlike the design and implementation of regional development strategies, which allow increasing institutional building and approximation. Third, and finally, the implementation of CBPS can be viewed as a powerful tool to instil a desired integrated approach to territorial development and territorial cohesion, in line with the EU policy goals.

## Conclusions

The Sweden–Norway INTERREG-A subprogramme has assisted in boosting the cross-border collaboration process between Värmland Province and the Norwegian side of the border area since the mid-1990s, which has produced a positive effect on the territory in most of its development domains. However, beyond the Interreg programmes, the main policy agenda regarding current cross-border collaboration strategies has mainly centred on promoting economic growth (Region Värmland). Instead, the implementation of a broader cross-border policy development vision, based on a CBPS, takes into consideration all domains of territorial development and the participation of the border residents – a bottom-up CBPS. The need for a CBPS makes even more sense in cross-border areas with long and strong historical collaboration ties, such as the border area comprising Värmland, Hedmark, Akershus, and Østfold.

Our analysis highlights several key opinions on the importance of the Norwegian proximity held by the residents in the four border municipalities of the Swedish province of Värmland. One result of the conducted survey was the presence of both positive and negative aspects related to a relatively high number of cross-border contacts in our case study. The Värmlanders knew there were jobs in Norway, and this was presented as an economic opportunity to the younger generations and for those in pursuit of higher salaries. Furthermore, the presence of commercial activities, which have been attracted to the border area because of its economic idiosyncrasies, has given rise to many jobs and cross-border shopping tourism on the Swedish side of the border, which is the weaker side in terms of economy.

Conversely, the tourist waves are often seen as unwanted invasions, and the presence of large commercial units close to the Norwegian border tends to have a negative affect on commerce in nearby border localities.

Solutions to regulate some of the negative external influences caused by the openness of border passages are needed, and should come from the development of a bottom-up CBPS that takes into account the border region residents' concerns. Their concerns include not only economy-related issues (job market, tourism attraction) but also issues related to social (brain drain, young workforce drain), institutional (institutional distance), legal and administrative (taxation, bureaucracy, pricing), and physical areas (local municipalities). There are several advantages to including border region residents' concerns in the development of a CBPS. Such residents have direct experiences of the presence or absence of adequate cross-border infrastructures, of significant legal and administrative barriers, and of the impact of large border commercial centres on the small commerce of border localities.

Although some of the above-mentioned issues can only be solved at the national level through taxation, an effective implementation of a bottom-up CBPS at the regional level is one possible policy recommendation for (1) alerting the national and regional authorities to the need to reduce bureaucracy and legal and administrative barriers, (2) attracting business to the small and medium-size towns on the Swedish side of the border, (3) collecting better evidence on border flows, and (4) regulating cross-border commerce and pricing.

Economic problems have arisen in connection with the Norwegian migration, as house prices near the border have become inflated, making it hard for domestic inhabitants to buy them. An important insight is that Norwegians are mainly interested in consumption in the form of weekend cottages or shopping. Their interest does not primarily lie in economic growth. At the individual level, residents in Värmland Province are interested in anything that affects their daily lives, such as border commuting, job opportunities, border trade with Norwegian-owned shopping centres, the influx of Norwegians, and the rising housing prices.

Overall, the proximity of the Norwegian border is important to the Värmländers on an individual level, and they see both advantages and disadvantages. Conversely, authorities and policymakers are more interested in developing business needs. An important conclusion of our study is that the existing regional policy is not comprehensive because it does not include the individual perspective or a holistic development vision. Hence, a

bottom-up CBPS is required for the border region. Above all, it is essential that the administrative and bureaucratic problems connected to systems for taxation and both unemployment and sick leave insurance are addressed, since they create barriers and obstacles for residents and companies.

According to Perrons (2011), increased knowledge and an extended territorial development perspective will raise awareness and understanding of the resident perspective and sociocultural values other than traditional quantitative economic values. Policy planning should include awareness of economic fluctuations such as increasing unemployment in Norway, falling demand for oil, and falling oil prices, which could reduce job opportunities for Swedes in Norway. This in turn would raise the question as to whether labour migration from Norway to Sweden in the future would be likely.

By drawing attention to regional imbalances in peripheral border regions, specifically in the Sweden–Norway border province of Värmland, where there is an imbalance between educational level and unemployment, other resources such as knowledge and social capital can be considered. We look forward to further research opportunities in which we can widen the population and territorial scope of our analysis. In the meantime, we suggest that border regions have the potential for many innovative cross-border policy interventions, vis-à-vis the traditional economic growth perspective. An interesting question for further research is how, through experience-based knowledge, social relations, living environments, and life satisfaction at a regional policy level, we can develop the current INTERREG-A subprogramme and complementary cross-border cooperation development approaches into a more robust and stable bottom-up CBPS.

## Notes

1. Around 40% of the EU territory and 30% of the population and GDP, when using the border NUTS3 delimitation (European Commission 2017).
2. Unpublished report titled 'Analysis of the results of DG REGIO's online public consultation on 'Overcoming Obstacles in Border Regions'', produced in 2016 by Eduardo Medeiros and downloadable from Dropbox at [https://www.dropbox.com/s/je3q5rtz0jiqk67/REP\\_Border\\_Obstacles\\_DGREGIO.pdf?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/je3q5rtz0jiqk67/REP_Border_Obstacles_DGREGIO.pdf?dl=0) (accessed March 2019).

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