

# CROSS-BORDER SKI RESORTS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THEIR POSSIBLE EMERGENCE IN THE VISEGRAD GROUP REGION

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## Abstract

This article focuses on exploring the specific topic of cross-border ski resorts. Firstly, it seeks to identify the existing resorts and describe the advantages and challenges of these ski areas both from the point of view of ski area operators and from the point of view of skiers. A valuable finding of the research directly in an existing cross-border ski area offers an argument that many skiers and employees using the chairlifts and slopes on both sides of the border do not view the resort only as a sport or entertainment area, but also as a meeting point of two different nations and a place of cultural exchange. Secondly, the author selects the most plausible location for the creation of a cross-border ski area in the Visegrad Group region.

Keywords: Cross-Border Cooperation, Border Regions, Ski Resorts, Tourism, Regional Development

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## Introduction

European integration enabled cross-border movement of goods and services. The so-called Schengen Area also allowed for the free movement of people. In the Alpine region, mountains have always formed a natural barrier. I would like to argue that cable cars and ski slopes undoubtedly connect not only skiers, but also nations. Cross-border ski resorts exist only in Europe and so far only in the Alpine region. Since this article concentrates on the Visegrad Group region, I would like to gather information about the topic and use the example as a potential for cooperation between the Czech Republic and Poland.

What is the evolution of cross-border ski resorts in the process of European integration? These specific centers offer very interesting case studies. They can reveal new insights about the current meaning of borderlands and regional development that have not been sufficiently discussed in the past. Skiing in Europe is at a turning point. Some resorts are closing due to a lack of natural snow. Smaller ski resorts are disappearing. Other centers are merging and creating huge interconnected ski areas. Especially in Germany, media dissatisfaction with skiing in general is growing (MDR, 2023). Yet, many ski resorts are expanding and investing in new technologies. Among them is a small niche of international cooperation: cross-border ski resorts (Ischgl, 2024).

The creation of this article was preceded by carefully defining cross-border resorts and listing all existing areas of this type. The aim of this article is not to describe all cross-border ski resorts. I would prepare such a list with detailed descriptions for ski industry trade magazines. My aim is to briefly list the centers, choose one as a best practice example, and find a potential location for this type of cooperation in the V4 region.

Europe is a good geographical location for researching this topic. In my research, I was unable to find any cross-border ski resorts outside of Europe. For example, in North America, there are ski resorts near the border between Canada and the USA, but it is not so easy to cross the border between these jurisdictions without being checked. A similar situation exists between Chile and Argentina in South America. Borders are also well controlled in Asia.

Crossing borders in Europe has not always been so easy. According to Florian Brandtner (2024), before 1990, customs clearance was very difficult for a cross-border ski resort. Currently, the Schengen Area is the only region in the world where sovereign states demonstrate close cooperation. This article focuses on the application in the Visegrad Group region.

Of all the sports that can be studied in the area of cross-border cooperation, skiing is perhaps one of the most logical candidates. Borders, not only in Europe, were very often drawn on mountain ridges. In many European countries, skiing is a sport, a business, and a leisure activity in border regions. Numerous national and EU funds were allocated for the development of ski resorts in border regions to strengthen the economic situation of these often neglected areas. Infrastructure has always played an important role

in connecting nations. When we say we are building a bridge, we can actually also mean connecting two cultures. In the ski business, we can also say the same about cable cars.

## Literature Overview

Ski areas in general have, of course, been researched from various perspectives. But in my search for scientific articles about cross-border ski resorts, I checked a wide variety of databases in various languages and I did not find anything. So far, this topic has only been covered in tourist brochures or skiing magazines.

However, the linking of ski areas within countries has already been researched by Dr. Martin Falk of the Austrian Institute of Economic Research. His article, "Gains from horizontal collaboration among ski areas," was published in the journal *Tourism Management* in 2017. This article describes horizontal collaboration between ski areas, focusing specifically on the connection of resorts with ski lifts and chairlifts. Mr. Falk's work focuses on the general connection between, for example, neighbouring valleys within a country. It is probably the most relevant source for this topic, as the same relationship will occur in cross-border ski resorts. In cross-border areas, it is necessary to add an international dimension to the geographical, economic, technical, and marketing aspects. This article was written in 2017, but the concept is still very relevant today.

The author argues that by establishing a lift connection between formerly separate ski resorts, ski lift companies enter into long-term strategic cooperations (Falk, 2017). This type of cooperation is understandably also important for cross-border resorts. Based on long-term observation within the Austrian ski industry, the author found a positive correlation between the construction of a new lift connection and increased visitor numbers at the ski resorts (Falk, 2017). This research was very demanding. Through complicated calculations, the author attempted to estimate the difference in visitor numbers at the ski resorts before and after the connection was established. The calculation is based on accommodation booking records publicly available in Austria. In my opinion, however, it would be appropriate to also include day visitors. Especially around major cities like Graz, Linz, Salzburg, Innsbruck, and even Vienna, there are many ski resorts that are easily accessible by car or train for a day.

Data on other forms of cross-border cooperation are more common. Due to the fact that borders in Alpine countries often lie on mountain ridges, this topic is closely linked to the mountain issue. The Austrian Academy of Sciences hosts the Institute for Interdisciplinary Mountain Research. This institute deals with various mountain topics that are often interdisciplinary. Their research investigates the challenges facing mountain societies in light of climate change, globalization, and the economic and demographic crisis (Mountain Research, 2024).

An interesting source on this topic is an article by Oliver Bender in the journal *Geographische Rundschau*. The article describes how the Alps became more of a place to earn money (Bender, 2023). This finding could be well suited also for the mountain border regions of the V4 countries. Lastly, the topic of Schengen is also a much-discussed topic in academia. For example, Johanna Pettersson Fürst argues in her article "Differentiated Implementation of Controls: The Internal Border Regimes of Schengen" that the recent COVID-related changes could lead to the disintegration of the Schengen Area rather than its integration (Fürst, 2023).

## Methodology

One of the founders of modern geography, Paul Vidal de la Blache (1926), views geography as a complex scientific discipline and sees regions as the result of the interplay of physical-geographical and social-geographical phenomena. The study of ski resorts on national borders is certainly an example of these mutual interactions. We must consider the physical-geographical aspects, as the locations of all the cross-border resorts are in the mountains, mostly on border ridges. These places were often difficult to access, and communication between the respective populations was limited. Cross-border ski centres not only overcome physical barriers but also create social connections.

If we were to use only quantitative methods, we could, for example, find that people from Munich visit cross-border ski resorts significantly more often than skiers from Dresden. From Munich, it is possible to visit three cross-border ski resorts in a day trip. From Dresden, the nearest functioning cross-border centre is on the border with Austria, about six hours away by car. If there were a cross-border ski centre in the Ore Mountains, skiers from Dresden would certainly have more experience with cross-border skiing. Therefore, it makes no sense to examine the topic only quantitatively. We must also add the aspect of geography. My research took place directly in the cross-border ski areas. For this article, I decided to focus on a ski resort that, due to its size, altitude, and target audience, could serve as a model for potential cross-border ski areas in other Central European countries.

After a general analysis of cross-border ski resorts, I evaluated the Steinplatte ski resort on the border between Austria and Germany as the best example. With 42 km of slopes, the ski resort is relatively smaller and has only one owner. The maximum elevation is 1,850 m. The vertical drop of the main slopes is comparable to that of lower mountain ranges. Steinplatte is therefore an ideal example of a potential centre in the Eagle Mountains that are discussed further in this article. We can find similar geographical

conditions there. A significant part of the research involved telephone and email conversations with the ski resort managers. From these sources, I obtained information that was not available online. It was also important to me to visit a selected ski resort and talk to skiers directly on site. I paid particular attention to the social and cultural aspects of the linked resorts. During my visit, I conducted conversations with skiers, as well as with ski resort and restaurant workers on every cable car or chairlift ride. After skiing, I also stayed longer at the ski resort and met bus tour participants who were barbecuing and celebrating in the parking lot. The Steinplatte visitors were very approachable, immediately understood my research, and were very open to answering my questions. During my visit, I also had the opportunity to speak with ski resort and restaurant staff. I did not ask the questions in a prescribed format; I conducted the interviews spontaneously. The skiers and snowboarders were very diverse. There were students, families, and retirees. Some enjoyed carving on the slopes, while others preferred the snow park, practising tricks all day long. The Steinplatte Snowpark is very popular.

My other visit was to the ski resort of Zieleniec in Poland. It is one of the largest ski resorts in the country with 23 kilometres of slopes. I also visited the smaller area called Šerlišský Mlýn on the other side of the border in the Czech Republic. The distance between them is only about one kilometre, and it is one of the best places in Central Europe for the creation of a new cross-border ski area.

## European Ski Market

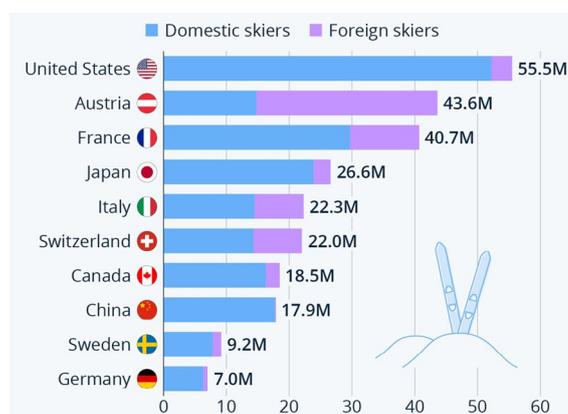
The European Union now has 27 member states and a population of 493 million citizens (Europe, 2024). Very important for our topic is the Schengen Area, which allows its citizens to travel freely without border controls (BMI, 2024). European integration, and especially the Schengen Area, play a key role in the emergence of cross-border ski resorts.

The Alps are the centre of the global ski market. However, only 15% of all the world's skiers live in the Alpine countries. Nevertheless, 43% of skiers from around the world visit ski resorts in Austria, Italy, France, Switzerland, Slovenia, or Liechtenstein. Worldwide, there are 51 large ski resorts with more than one million skier visitors per year. Of these major resorts, 80% are located in the Alps (Vanat, 2018). From the above information, it is clear that skiing is an important economic sector for Europe, and especially for the Alpine countries.

## Promoting Tourism in Border Regions

Border regions are often considered economically underdeveloped. This can be due to historical development, physical-geographical barriers, or simply their distance from a core area. Any territorial unit that is less developed due to one or more characteristics can receive support through both national and European funds. Many ski resorts in the EU have been newly built or expanded with the support of state or EU funds (EPRS, 2024). The so-called Euroregions are major promoters of peripheral and cross-border tourism. These administrative-territorial structures support cross-border cooperation between neighbouring local and regional authorities in different countries along common borders (Lepik, 2009).

According to renowned ski industry researcher Laurent Vanat (2021), the United States is currently the country with the most ski visitors per year. On average, more than 55 million days of skiing were done in the United States per year. Austria ranks second with more than 40 million ski days. Calculating the number of ski days per capita of a country, it becomes clear that skiing is of central importance, especially for Austria. See Fig. 1 below. Since I have chosen a cross-border resort with Austrian ownership, let us take



1: Average ski days in selected markets  
Source: Vanat (2021)

a closer look at Austria. The country has 1,118 cable cars and 1,530 ski lifts, as well as 23,700 hectares of ski slopes. Its snowmaking capacity is also enormous. More than 70% of these slopes can have artificial snow. The industry generates annual cash revenue of around 1.4 billion euros (Federal Ministry, 2024).

### Definition of Cross-Border Ski Resorts

Have you ever crossed an international border on skis? Every cross-country skier who crosses a mountain ridge has certainly passed a border marker. However, my research was not about cross-country skiing, but about alpine skiing. In this section, I would like to introduce the ski resorts where you, as a skier or snowboarder, can cross an international border within a contiguous ski area. There are ski resorts that operate with a single ski pass but are not physically connected. Between these resorts, it is possible to travel by ski bus. Examples include places like Nauders and Reschen on the Italian–Austrian border (Nauders, 2024) or Klínovec and Fichtelberg on the border of Germany and the Czech Republic (Klínovec, 2024). These resorts share a ski pass and offer ski bus transportation between the lifts. This collaboration is promoted by both the resorts themselves and the surrounding tourist associations in the Reschenpass holiday region. The ski bus is free for all guests who hold the Vinschgau Card (Vinschgau, 2024).

There are even more such collaborations in Europe. However, the scope of this paper does not allow for a detailed discussion of these examples, and I do not consider the above-mentioned centers to be part of a physical cross-border collaboration. Perhaps there will be a physical connection between these ski areas via cable cars in the future, but this paper examines the current situation.

### Reasons for Cross-Border Ski Resort Cooperation

In the area of skiing, cooperation has existed for decades, particularly between ski resorts in Europe. Resorts are connected either virtually through shared ski passes or directly physically through the construction of transport facilities. These ski lifts, chairlifts, or cable cars can connect two resorts with different owners. According to studies in Austria, new lift connections can lead to an increase in tourism demand (Falk, 2017).

In terms of sports and tourism, proximity to borders can be both an advantage and a disadvantage. Most ski resorts are at least several hours away from major urban centers. A cross-border connection allows customers from another country access to the resort's facilities. Driving across the mountains would be a difficult obstacle. In addition, many mountain passes are often closed in winter. If a ski resort builds a connection from the other side of the mountain, it can access a new market. "Our customers appreciate the shorter journey to Reit im Winkl from the surrounding Chiemgau region," says Florian Brandtner (2024) from the Steinplatte ski resort.

Size is an important factor for ski resorts. Previous studies have shown that larger ski resorts are generally more attractive to skiers (Unbehaun *et al.*, 2008). From my personal experience, a large ski resort can create a snowball effect. Big resorts can simply attract disproportionately more visitors than the sum of smaller ski resorts. This can result in skiing actually being better in a smaller, less well-known resort. However, this is especially appreciated by skiing enthusiasts. For most, a larger ski resort means a better-known and perceivably better-quality vacation destination. From the perspective of lift operators, however, the queues at the bottom station are good for the bottom line.

According to a study conducted in the Tatra Mountains, 77 percent of respondents in Poland and 66 percent of respondents in Slovakia called for the construction of more cable cars and chairlifts. This study also showed that ski resort diversification is one of the most important factors for skiers (Hibner *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, Gilbert and Hudson (2000) emphasize that crowded slopes deter visitors. Most relevant to my article are research findings that show that skiers positively evaluate interconnected ski resorts (Pröbstl-Haider *et al.*, 2016).

### True Cross-Border Ski Resorts

As already mentioned, there are currently no cross-border ski resorts outside of Europe. Before listing the true cross-border resorts, please allow me to mention a few special cases. There are ski resorts whose infrastructure, such as cable cars or slopes, crosses national borders, but there is no international cooperation between two economic entities. These include, for example, ski resorts that are all located in one country but only cross the border on a specific slope and return to their country of origin.

There is no space in this article for a detailed description of these centers, but they include, for example, Riksgränsen (Sweden and Norway), Candanchú (Spain and France), Chamonix and Courmayeur (France and Italy), the Zugspitze (Germany and Austria), Sella Nevea and Kanin (Italy and Slovenia). The latter used to be a true cross-border ski area. Both sides of the mountain functioned this way for many years, but unfortunately, the Slovenian section is currently out of service (Turismo FVG, 2024).

Below is a map of those resorts that have recognized the benefits of international cooperation and managed to build their infrastructure across borders.



2: True cross-border ski resorts  
Source: Own processing (2025)

### Detailed Example of an Existing Cross-Border Ski Resort. Steinplatte and Winklmoosalm (AUSTRIA and GERMANY)

The Steinplatte ski resort is especially known to residents of Munich and Salzburg. Its Austrian part is located in the municipality of Waidring in Tyrol. The Bavarian connection is from the town of Reit im Winkl (Steinplatte, 2024). This ski resort was chosen as a model center for possible or planned cross-border ski resorts. The reasons for this choice are explained in detail in the methodology section, but primarily relate to size, altitude, ownership, and distance from major cities. The skiing here is not particularly high, but in the upper parts of the ski area, the slopes mostly lead over mountain meadows and offer magnificent views of the Alpine peaks. Skiing on the Steinplatte is more popular than its size suggests. The resort's proximity to major cities makes it an attractive destination for one-day skiing, primarily for skiers from Munich and Salzburg.

In 1972, new ski lifts were built on the Waidring high-altitude road. The first double chairlift was built in 1975. A milestone was reached in 1985 with the construction of Austria's first detachable quad chairlift. The border is crossed on the Scheibelberg. The German side was finally better connected in 2009 with the construction of the Winklmoosalmbahn cable car from Seegatterl to the Winklmoosalm (Steinplatte, 2024).

The company remains a family business. Florian Brandtner, the third generation of the family, serves on the management team. I interviewed Mr. Brandtner in my research. In March 2024, I visited the ski resort to conduct field research and interview skiers and staff. This center is an excellent example of cross-border cooperation. A major advantage is that the ski resort has a local owner on the Austrian side. The proximity to major population centers allows the resort to enjoy high visitor numbers and sufficient funds for investment (Steinplatte, 2024).

We must begin the virtual tour of the ski area with the infrastructure. During my years of competitive skiing, my passion for travel, and my work in the ski industry, I visited many ski resorts around the world. I had the opportunity to ski and snowboard from Alaska to Argentina, from Norway to New Zealand. However, I must admit that I have not seen so many state-of-the-art chairlifts in such a small space. The ski area is reinvesting heavily in its infrastructure. On the Steinplatte, for example, there are several eight-seater chairlifts. The lifts on the Steinplatte, including the gondola to the Winklmoosalm, belong to the Austrian company. The two drag lifts and the two chairlifts in Bavaria are operated by a German operator. As with any collaboration, it is important to coordinate with the partner, something Florian Brandtner also emphasizes (Brandtner, 2024).

Another reason why the Steinplatte center can serve as an ideal example of a potential cross-border ski resort in the Visegrad Group region is its number of visitors. Seventy percent are day visitors, thirty percent are weekly visitors (Brandtner, 2024). For example, large urban centers such as Wrocław or Hradec Králové and Pardubice are located less than two hours away from Zieloniec in the Eagle Mountains. These can certainly be a source of customers, at least for day visitors or short stays of a few days.

During my personal visit to Steinplatte, I focused on two areas. First, I wanted to capture a geographical sense. Second, I wanted to meet as many skiers as possible and have informal conversations with them. The main part of the resort is located on a mountain pasture. It is accessible from the town of Waidring via a cable car up a steep rocky slope and also via an alpine road. From the German side, from Reit im Winkl, the cable car crossing is not as steep. Between Austria and Germany, there are two ski trails right next to

each other, each leading downhill in one direction. You can buy a lift ticket for each resort or a combined one. When you enter Austria from Germany, you will see a gate indicating that you are entering Austria. Then you will be surprised by a gate with turnstiles. Unless you have a ski pass valid for Austria, you will not be able to continue your journey.

This gate is there because the modern cable cars directly at Steinplatte do not have turnstiles. They are only located at the bottom of the gondola entrance and at the chairlifts, where there is access from the parking lot. This way skiers can board the chairlifts faster.

The chairlifts on the Steinplatte are detachable and have a very high capacity. Some allow eight skiers to ride on one chair. Several common themes emerged from the interviews. First, all interviewees found the opportunity to ski on both sides of the border and the possibility of traveling from both Austria and Germany very positive. Second, it did not matter to them whether the ski resort was located within a country or on the border. It should be noted here that Austria has been a member of the Schengen Area since 1997 (Wirtschaftskammer, 2024). For this reason, it can be assumed that the freedom of movement across the border is not unusual for the residents of Austria and Germany. Even though the dialects in Tyrol and Bavaria differ somewhat, there is virtually no language barrier.

Third, respondents rated the cultural aspects of the region's connectivity very positively. One retired skier illustrated this finding by folding his hands with interlaced fingers and saying: "That's what Tyroleans and Bavarians are like. We're actually like cousins. We speak a similar language and understand each other on a human level." He also described how the ski area allows these two peoples from both sides of the border to meet. "The mountains separate us, but the cable cars bring us here, where we can have a beer together in one of the cozy mountain restaurants."

From a geographical perspective, meeting points are very important. For example, for Bavarians and Tyroleans, the Steinplatte ski resort is a meeting point. Between Austria and Germany, the mountains form a physical geographical barrier. A cross-border ski resort transforms a remote border area into a hub for encounters. A ski resort becomes a meeting point for cultural exchange between two border regions of separate countries.

When speaking with the restaurant staff, I was very pleasantly surprised by their loyalty and enthusiasm. Near the top station of the gondola lift is a new wooden restaurant. The bartenders there work as carpenters in the summer. Most of them also built the restaurant. Many ski resort operators, for whom external companies built catering establishments, could envy this loyalty. Just a few meters from the border, I saw a mountain hut. Apart from the gate for ski pass holders, there are hardly any border signs here. It was not a public restaurant, but the owner invited me for a drink. The hut was on the Austrian side of the border, and the owners were from Germany. For these skiers, it is impossible to get there by road. Thanks to the cable cars from both sides of the border, this area is a popular spot and social hub in winter.

### Potential Cross-Border Ski Resorts in the Visegrad Group Region

As European countries become closer, it is necessary to connect their border regions. This process is important not only from the perspective of economic growth, but also in the interest of integrating people and preventing displacement from border areas. As part of my research, I identified and described in detail several ski resorts whose cross-border development would bring positive impulses to their regions. I will reserve a detailed description of all locations for ski industry magazines, but allow me to mention several and describe in detail one as an example.

Even though Hungary actually does have a few ski resorts, they are located further from the border. International cooperation could be quite easily started at the Pilsko resort of Poland, where ski lifts end right at the border with Slovakia. I have personally visited this resort and witnessed the growing popularity of skiing in Poland. An expansion into Slovakia would definitely broaden the offerings of the resort. A similar situation is in the Czech Republic at the resort Kohútka. In this resort, I used to ski race in my childhood. The chairlift, restaurant, and accommodation are located right on the mountain crest border with Slovakia. Within Czechoslovakia, it was only an internal border. This center was also suggested by many respondents of my questionnaire.

However, both of the above-mentioned locations would require substantial investments into new resorts on the other side of the border. The most obvious candidate for connection lies in the Eagle Mountains between Poland and the Czech Republic. I chose the Eagle Mountains for two main reasons. Firstly, larger ski resorts in the Alps are easily accessible from the south of Moravia and also from the southwest of Slovakia. Secondly, the fastest-growing ski market in Central Europe is Poland, where many new resorts have been recently built and older resorts have been expanded. The number of ski slopes has also increased many times over (Ślusarz *et al.*, 2019).

The growth of Polish ski resorts began later than in the neighboring Czech Republic. But Polish resorts have caught up in both size and capacity. For example, ski resorts in the Eagle Mountains of the Czech Republic used to have one-third of the clientele from Poland and there was little reason to fear competition

from the Polish side of the border. But now these ski resorts face new competition from the Polish side of the border, where entrepreneurs are investing millions in modern ski facilities (Maková, 2015).

From my personal experience in the ski tourism industry, I can confirm that in recent years there has even been an increase in travel from the Czech Republic to Poland for the purpose of skiing. For example, the ski resort of Zieleniec in the Orlické Mountains is very popular, and it is located right on the border with the Czech Republic.

However, the Czech Republic can be an important exporter of skiing to the Polish market, and the country has a geographical advantage for this. While a skier from Prague or Brno can reach a large Alpine ski resort in five hours by car, a Polish skier has to travel twice as long to get to the Alps. Researchers predict the strongest growth of skiers for Poland among all the countries in Central and Eastern Europe. By 2050, there will be up to eight million skiers in Poland (Vanat and Li, 2023).

The strength of the Polish ski market is recognized not only by local investors but also by strong international players. Tatra Mountain Resorts, the largest Central European investment group focusing on ski resorts and amusement parks, has invested more than €60 million in Szczyrk, Poland (TMR, 2017). Between 2016 and 2019, the company built a gondola, several six-seat cable cars, a modern snowmaking system, parking lots, two restaurants, and three après-ski bars in Szczyrk (TMR, 2017). This ski resort is currently the largest in Poland, but from our organized tour experience it is almost always full.

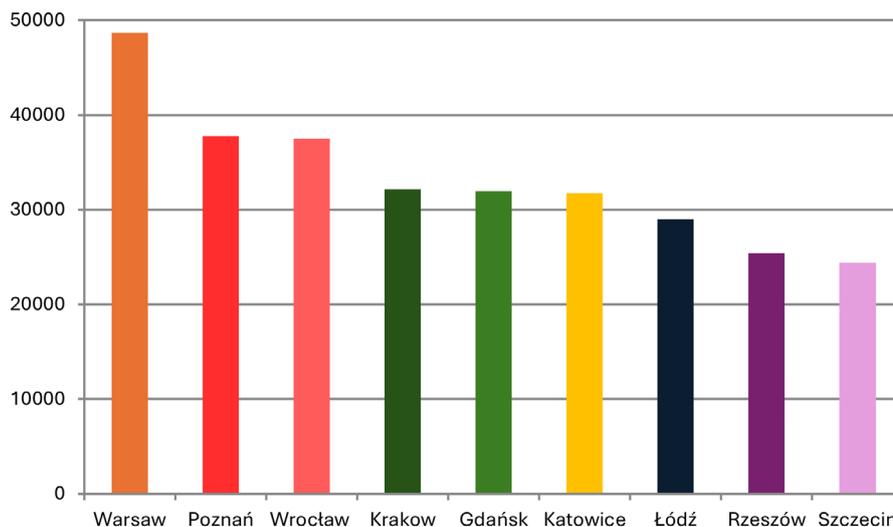
Cooperation between Polish and Czech ski resorts in the Eagle Mountains could be beneficial for both sides. The Zieleniec ski resort has invested heavily in the development of its ski infrastructure in recent years. It currently offers 23 kilometers of slopes of varying lengths and difficulty levels. The resort stretches across relatively gentle and wide mountain meadows. However, there are also a few steeper slopes. Therefore, it is suitable for all family members, regardless of skiing ability.

The resort has 31 ski lifts and chairlifts. Most slopes also have artificial lighting. During the season, the ski area is open daily from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. According to the resort's website, Zieleniec offers a specific microclimate similar to the Alpine region (Zieleniec, 2024).

The ski resort's clientele comes predominantly from the Wrocław metropolitan area with a population of almost 500 000 people and the third-largest estimated per capita GDP among Polish cities (Harvard, 2024). See Fig. 3 below. Warsaw, as the capital, has the highest per capita GDP in Poland. This is typical of most Central European capitals. However, the graph shows that the cities of Poznań and Wrocław rank second and third in Poland. And these two cities are closest to the Eagle Mountains.

I know the ski situation in Wrocław quite well. For several years, I've been trying to establish a Polish version of my business here. I have even managed to organize trips from Wrocław to ski resorts in the Czech Republic. For Bohemian cities such as Prague or Hradec Králové, or for Moravian cities such as Brno or Olomouc, a connection with Poland would also be attractive. The Zieleniec center is already a popular destination for tourists from the Czech Republic (Karlík, 2012).

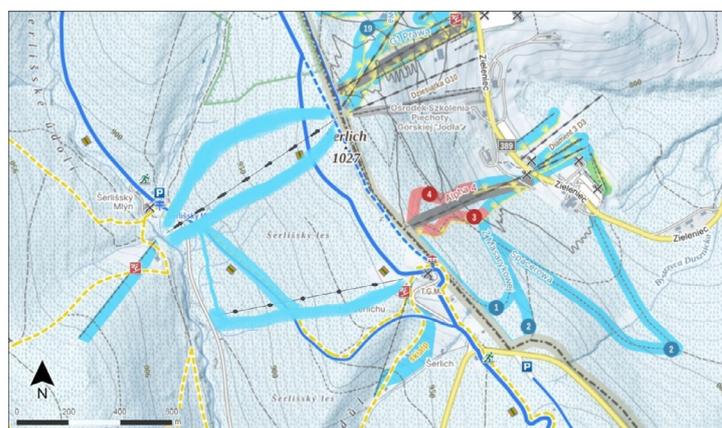
Skiers from Bohemia and Moravia were able to experience the ski area during the pandemic. Ski resorts in the Czech Republic were closed, but those in Poland operated without restrictions (Happy, 2023). Skiers from the Czech Republic also noticed that skiing on the Polish side became cheaper thanks to the exchange rate and increased competition in Poland. See a ski group from Prague and Brno.



3: Estimated GDP per capita in selected Polish cities in EUR  
Source: Harvard (2024)



4: Ski slopes in the Zieniec and Šerlich ski areas  
Source: Own processing of MAPY (2024)



5: The proposed slopes of the potential cross-border ski area  
Source: Own processing of MAPY (2024)

This ski area shown in Fig. 4 was chosen primarily because of its truly realistic connection from the Czech Republic. The Karkonosze Mountains (Giant Mountains) or the Śnieżnik (Snow Mountain) do not offer such easy international connections. From both an economic and geographical perspective, this location could be ideal for a cross-border resort.

The possibility of cross-border skiing already practically exists. From the Polish lifts it is only about a hundred meters to the ski lift at the Masaryk Hut in the Czech Republic. There is no joint ski pass package, as the ski lift below the Masaryk Hut is seldom in operation. This small lift is not the reason why I chose this location. The real advantage of this place lies in the possibility of connecting two operational resorts. From the summit of Šerlich (1027 m) it would be possible to create a ski slope to Šerlišký Mlýn. This is where the ski lift leading to the opposite ridge begins. There are also restaurants and accommodations in the valley. These could serve as the basis for skiers from the Czech Republic.

The resulting slopes in Fig. 5 would be oriented southwest. While this is not entirely ideal from the perspective of maintaining snow cover, this would not be a major issue due to the elevation and microclimate. The planned connection would be entirely within the Eagle Mountains Protected Landscape Area. However, all the ski resorts in the Eagle Mountains are located within this protected area. The road that currently leads to Šerlišký Mlýn is paved, but narrow and in very poor condition. The road would need to be repaired and widened to accommodate more traffic. In such a case, a partnership would be required between the investor and the municipality of Deštné, or even the Hradec Králové Region. This could cause friction, as the village of Deštné already has a ski resort.

Investors would argue that expanding the ski offering in the region would increase demand for accommodation. Recently, there have been significant changes in the ownership structure of the Deštné ski resort (Hejtmánek, 2020). This can also be seen as a positive stimulus for the development of the proposed

cross-border area. The modernized Deštné resort will attract new tourists, who would have a truly large international ski resort just a few kilometers away. Deštné itself has only 566 inhabitants but more than 2,000 beds in group accommodations (Královéhradecký, 2024). Therefore, the development of the cross-border center would also entail the development of the village of Deštné. It would also be possible to extend the ski area all the way to Deštné. This would significantly simplify access from the Czech Republic. I carried out interviews on both sides of the border, and the responses were enthusiastic, especially on the Polish side.

## Conclusion

Without any arrogance, I allow myself a humble guess that I have probably offered the world's first list of all cross-border ski resorts. However, in this article the list was not as important as the selection of an example resort and a potential location of such a resort in the Visegrad Group region. With ski lifts and chairlifts right on the border, people come together as if it were an international social event. A cross-border ski resort functions like a sports tournament held right on the border. However, this tournament will not involve two opposing fan bases. Skiers come there to meet new friends. But a ski resort is not a concert stage that you set up for one day a year. Building and operating a ski resort is a complicated undertaking, and the border location presents further challenges. The advantages include improved transport links, increased resort popularity, and increased visitor numbers. A crucial aspect is the creation of jobs in the often left-behind border regions.

The fieldwork itself led me to evaluate a cross-border ski resort not only from an economic and geographical perspective, but also as a meeting point for two peoples. This phenomenon cannot really be considered new, as borders have long served as centers. In most parts of the European Union, the Schengen Agreement has made borders to a certain extent merely formal. In other parts of the world, borders can actually be a center of exchange. In Asia, for example, you can find large shopping bazaars right on the border between countries, as certain goods may be cheaper or of better quality on the other side. We no longer experience this in Europe, but before Schengen, we had the same phenomenon at the borders between the old and new member states. The infamous duty-free shops became a popular destination not only for shopping but also for illegal or semi-legal activities. With ubiquitous shopping malls and similar prices for goods across Europe, our borders are no longer centers of trade. But they could be centers of sport and leisure activities.

The mostly mountainous Sudetenland regions of the Czech Republic deserve every boost of economic development. These areas have often not been fully integrated into the economy of the Czech Republic even after eighty years since WWII. Young people are fleeing the mountain villages due to the lack of work opportunities, social life, and poor infrastructure. A proposed cross-border ski area could serve as a tool for regional development on both sides of the border, which could once again become a center – a center of cultural exchange on the slopes.

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