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Universidade de Santa Cruz do Sul

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Kurowska-Pysz, Joanna

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## ***Selected aspects of the development of cross-border partnerships based on projects co-financed by the European Union***

**Joanna Kurowska-Pysz**  
WSB University - Poland

### **Abstract**

This paper concerns the conditions for the development of cross-border partnerships based on cross-border projects, co-financed by the European Union. It also describes the role of structural funds as an instrument to support the integration and development of borderlands, and discusses the key conditions for the development of an effective partnership based on such projects. Furthermore, the paper presents the key stages of implementation of the cross-border projects and the criteria for effective management of cross-border projects, co-financed by the European Union.

**Keywords:** Territorial development. Cross-border partnerships. Management of cross-border projects. European Union.

### **Aspectos selecionados do desenvolvimento de parcerias transfronteiriças com base em projetos co-financiados pela União Europeia**

### **Resumo**

Este artigo apresenta as condições para o desenvolvimento de parcerias transfronteiriças com base em projetos transfronteiriços, cofinanciados pela União Europeia. Também descreve o papel dos fundos estruturais como instrumento de apoio à integração e desenvolvimento das fronteiras, e discute as principais condições para o desenvolvimento de uma eficaz parceria com base nesses projetos. Além disso, apresenta as principais etapas da implementação dos projetos transfronteiriços e os critérios para uma gestão eficaz dos projetos transfronteiriços, cofinanciados pela União Europeia.

**Palavras-Chave:** Desenvolvimento territorial. Parcerias Transfronteiriças. Gestão de projetos transfronteiriços. União Europeia.

## Aspectos seleccionados del desarrollo de asociaciones transfronterizas sobre la base de proyectos cofinanciados por la Unión Europea

### Resumen

El artículo trata de las condiciones para el desarrollo de asociaciones transfronterizas basadas en proyectos transfronterizos, cofinanciados por la Unión Europea. También describe el papel de los fondos estructurales como instrumento de apoyo a la integración y el desarrollo de las fronteras, y discute las principales condiciones para el desarrollo de una eficaz asociación basada en estos proyectos. Además, presenta las principales etapas de la implementación de los proyectos transfronterizos y los criterios para una gestión eficaz de los proyectos transfronterizos, cofinanciados por la Unión Europea.

**Palabras-Clave:** Desarrollo Territorial. Asociaciones transfronterizas. Gestión de proyectos transfronterizos. Unión Europea.

### 1 Introduction

The management of cross-border projects is of a great importance for the development of territorial cooperation, and thus for the implementation of the objectives of the European Union's structural policy. Cross-border projects implemented within the European Union are highly complex projects implemented in partnership with at least two entities from two neighbouring countries in the borderland of these countries, whereas it is often the case that their special funding comes from the European Union. These funds support territorial cooperation and integrate borderland communities with smaller development potential, exposed to socio-economic marginalization. The special status of these projects, resulting from the use of EU subsidies, is associated with extensive procedures for applying for co-financing, but also with complex requirements regarding the manner of managing such projects (including the requirement of simultaneous involvement of at least two partners, preparation of two complementary budgets, control of specific risk, quality or e.g. project personnel on both sides of the border). However, it should be emphasized that these projects are directed primarily at the construction of permanent cross-border, bilateral and network partnerships. They should serve to strengthen synergy and cooperation on the borderlands, in order to minimize the negative impact of the border as a barrier to cooperation. Nevertheless, the implementation of cross-border projects is not easy, since it must respect a number of specific assumptions. They condition both the direct goals of these projects and long-term cross-border effects, felt not only by direct beneficiaries of projects, but also by their surroundings on the border.

The aim of this paper was to identify the life cycle of a cross-border project, taking into account the role of cross-border partnership, as well as defining criteria for effective management of cross-border projects in terms of their impact on the development of cross-border partnership and achieving the European Union's structural policy objectives. The author based her considerations on the analysis of projects co-financed by the European Union, as part of the INTERREG VA Program, supporting the development of cross-border partnerships. In her paper, the author also presented recommendations regarding the effective management of cross-border partnerships - by the example of projects implemented with co-financing obtained from the INTERREG VA Program.

## 2 Funds of the European Union as an instrument to support cross-border cooperation

In the European Union, the problem of insufficient territorial integration and, above all, marginalization and development disparities in some areas is still strongly felt. This is due to many reasons, such as peripheral location or shortage of development potentials, but also mutual dislike and interregional antagonisms, or differences in the interests of various professional and social groups. Regardless of the reasons for such tendencies, these are significant difficulties in effective management of the socio-economic development of the European Union (MEDEIROS, 2014, p. 363-386). Examples of areas particularly exposed to developmental disabilities are borderlands, i.e. borderlands of at least two neighbouring countries (DOŁBZASZ, RACZYK, 2010, p. 16). In these areas, i.a. due to historical, geopolitical, infrastructural or urban planning conditions, development processes are slowed down. Geographical factors, characteristic of borders, often overlap here, e.g. the occurrence of mountain ranges, hence for natural reasons, the intensification of economic activity is not possible there (e.g. the Polish-Slovak border). Border regions often do not have sufficient endogenous potential to stimulate development processes (SMALLBONE, LABRIANIDIS, VENESAAR, WELTER, ZASHEV, 2007) and at the same time, the phenomenon of the so-called leaching intensifies, consisting in the outflow of strategic resources: human capital, financial resources, goods and services to regions with a faster rate of development (KUROWSKA-PYSZ, 2017). The need for cooperation and contacts between people living in the neighbouring areas is something natural and obvious, but on the borderlands, divided by state borders, it gains a new, specific dimension. The border often functions in the collective consciousness as an institutional and natural barrier in the integration of neighbouring communities, creating an artificial sense of separation, despite many linguistic, cultural or economic similarities (SOUZA, 2013, p. 669-687). Equalization of development opportunities in areas at risk of marginalization, burdened with numerous development barriers, is favoured by changing the approach to regional policy, understood, among others, as supporting restructuring processes in underdeveloped regions (PERKMANN, 2003, p. 153-171; BUFON, MINGHI, PAASI, 2014). Decisions, measures and responsibilities are transferred to lower levels of administration, and regions gain greater independence in creating development, while at the same time increasing the responsibility of regional and local communities for development policy and its consequences. The importance of regional administration is increasing, especially the one that deals with the management of EU funds, including cross-border ones (MEDEIROS, 2015, p. 95-115).

So called: catching up regions are those European Union regions, whose level of development was significantly lower than the European Union average. The European Union distinguishes between two types of the so-called catching up regions:

- Low-growth regions – experiencing a persistent lack of growth. They are less-developed or transition regions (regions with a GDP per head up to 90% of the European Union average) that did not converge to the European Union average between 2000 and 2013.

- Low-income regions – remain far below the EU average GDP per capita. They cover all regions with a GDP per head below 50% of the European Union average in 2013.

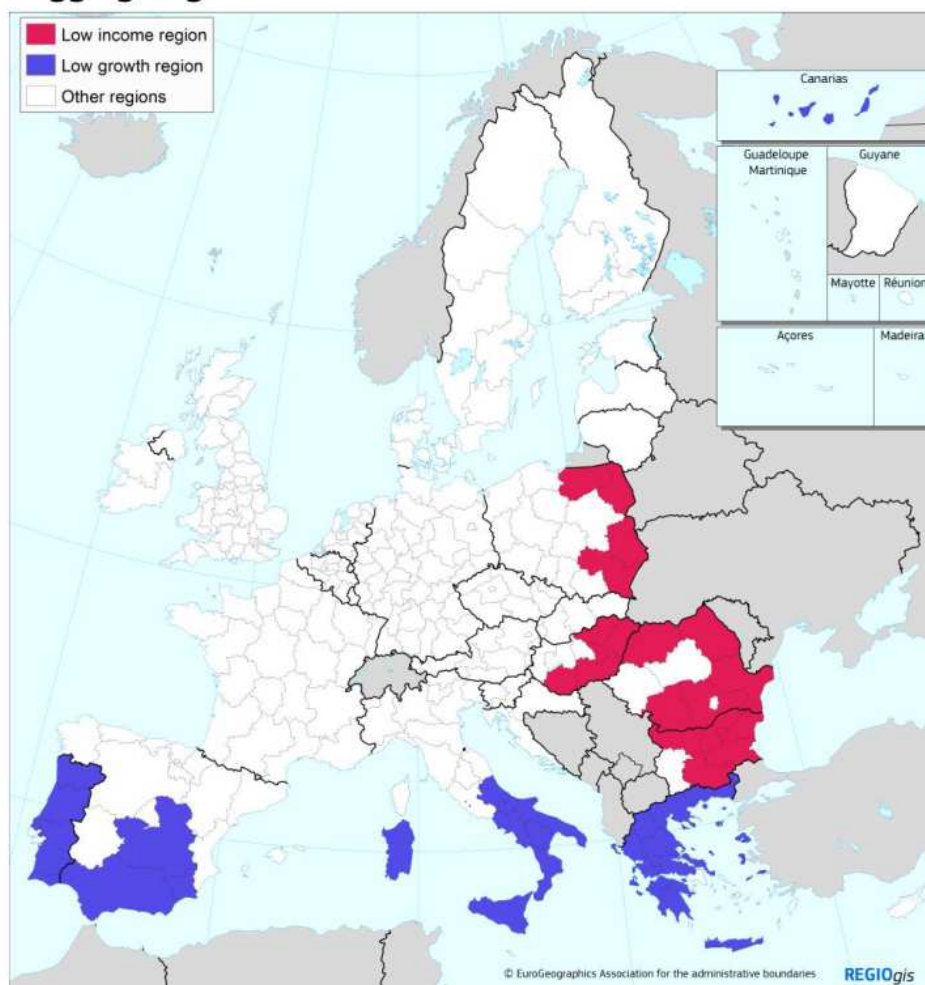
Home to 1 in 6 European Union residents (83 million inhabitants), these regions have been at the top of the cohesion policy agenda. In 2015, the Commission launched the Catching Up initiative (also known as the Lagging Regions initiative) – a pilot initiative to examine the factors that hold back growth and investment in catching up regions and to provide recommendations and assistance on how to unlock their growth potential. As such the less developed regions are helped to better identify and respond to their specific needs and maximise the impact of the investment on the ground. Piloted in 4 regions of Romania and Poland, the success of the initiative will see this model of cooperation of European Union, national and regional actors being transferred to other to other European regions facing similar challenges (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2018). Moreover, a report published in 2017 took a closer look at the competitiveness potential of the catching up regions. By studying 47 regions in 8 Member States the report identified the investment needs of these regions, namely human capital, innovation, quality of institutions, better accessibility, as well as the tools available within the framework of EU Cohesion Policy that could support them. The report showed that regionally differentiated investments and policy responses are required should these regions be able to move to the next level of development (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2017).

The Catching Up initiative, together with the Task Force for Better Implementation is part of the broader action launched by European Commission to help Member States and regions improve the way they invest and manage Cohesion Policy funds.



Figure 1. Lagging regions in Europe

### Lagging Regions



<sup>1</sup> List of analysed regions is in the annex. Mayotte has not been included in this report due to lacking data. The regions have been selected at the launch of the initiative in 2015 on the basis of the data available back then. The report covers essentially period 2000-2013, with update of data to 2014 or 2015 where possible. The report does not analyse the sector of agriculture.

Source: Improving how EU Member States and regions invest and manage EU Cohesion Policy funds, European Commission Fact Sheet, Brussels, 09 June 2015.

Many regions of this type are located on the borderland of two or more countries. Thanks to the special support from the European Union funds, in recent years they have gained significant independence in joint management of their development in the cross-border dimension, but also increasingly take integrated actions to solve common, transnational problems (JAKUBIEC, KUROWSKA-PYSZ, GAWĘDA, 2013, p. 10-11) among others as part of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation. These types of activities are referred to as intra-regional policy, i.e. regional socio-economic policy, which is generally the policy of regions in relation to themselves (DECOVILLE, DURAND, FELTGEN, 2015). At the European

level, the regional policy, also known as structural policy, is a platform for cooperation between government, self-government, central, regional and local authorities and international organizations, aimed at achieving the key development objectives of the European Community. Cohesion policy supports actions aimed at equalization of economic and social conditions in all regions of the European Union, and above all aims to reduce differences in the level of development of regions and elimination of underdevelopment of the least favoured regions and islands, including rural areas. The real dimension of cohesion policy are operational programs from which non-returnable subsidies are granted and other forms of aid for regions in the European Union are financed. This happens directly through the support given to specific groups of beneficiaries (recipients of this aid), on strictly defined conditions and on clearly indicated goals. In the years 2014-2020, the European Union's cohesion policy focuses on the implementation of 11 priorities, co-financed from the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2014):

1. Supporting research, technological development and innovation.
2. Increasing the availability, use and quality of information and communication technologies.
3. Improving the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises.
4. Supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy.
5. Promoting adaptation to climate change, risk prevention and management.
6. Protecting the natural environment and supporting the efficiency of the use of resources.
7. Promoting sustainable transport and improving the most important network infrastructures.
8. Promoting sustainable and high-quality employment and supporting labour mobility.
9. Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty and all forms of discrimination.
10. Investing in education, skills and lifelong learning.
11. Improving the efficiency of public administration.

Most of the above-mentioned objectives are included in the policy of development of territorial cooperation. European Territorial Cooperation is an integral part of the EU cohesion policy, supporting, promoting and implementing joint international projects within the European Union. Generally, European Territorial Cooperation consists of three types of operational programs:

- cross-border cooperation, the aim of which is to develop joint local and regional initiatives,
- transnational cooperation, focused on territorial integration of the European Union by supporting accessibility, sustainable development of urban areas, innovation and environmental protection,
- interregional cooperation, enabling the exchange of experience and best practices in the field of, inter alia, supporting innovation and knowledge-based economy as well as environmental protection. The main difference between the aforementioned types of cooperation is the territorial scope, however the types of programs are also different in terms of subject matter. The cross-border programs mainly served to build ties connecting communities on both sides of the border. On the other hand, transnational and interregional programs were support for

innovative projects relevant to areas belonging to many countries, also through the exchange of experience and best practices in the area of strengthening the potential of institutions and local governments.

In the years 2014-2020, the European Union continues the implementation of cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation programs in a similar format to those implemented in 2013-2020. For the years 2014-2020, the EU funds are intended to allocate nearly EUR 9 billion. The beneficiaries of these funds will be primarily non-governmental organizations, local governments, institutions conducting research or cultural activities. All programs, irrespective of their location and the main goal were of pro-social nature and served to support integration within the European Union through the development of partnerships, including in areas such as tourism, cultural heritage, security, environmental protection and stimulation of entrepreneurship.

### **3 Cross-border partnerships as a platform for the development of cooperation between the communities of neighbouring regions**

Cross-border partnership is one of the mechanisms supported by the European Commission for strengthening bilateral and network territorial cooperation between various types of organizations in the European Union. Since 1988, the European Commission has been developing a number of initiatives to solve various problems of major importance to the European Community. One of them is the INTERREG program, launched in 1990, co-financing many activities aimed mainly at the development of cooperation between organizations with different formal status, coming from neighbouring border regions<sup>1</sup>. The aim of these activities is to strengthen the development potential of cooperating organizations and to eliminate barriers in communication between them. It is also about creating conditions for the transfer of knowledge and experience and undertaking common challenges supporting cooperating partners and the cross-border region in which this cooperation takes place. Since 2007, the INTERREG initiative formally functions as European Territorial Cooperation and is one of the main objectives of the EU cohesion policy (MEDEIROS, 2018). This is due, among other things, to the process of expanding the borders of the European Union, resulting in a growing diversification of the level of development of countries or member regions. The EU policy of socio-economic convergence currently puts great emphasis on the development of borderlands as areas requiring special support, both on the level of improving socio-economic conditions as well as the integration of local communities in the neighbouring countries. The territorial partnerships of neighbouring countries, regions and local areas (e.g. municipalities) that can obtain financial support for their projects under the INTERREG program, financed by the

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<sup>1</sup> In some INTERREG initiatives, e.g. INTERREG Central Europe, cooperation of organizations from the neighbouring countries within the designated European regions is supported, while organizations established in any EU country can cooperate in INTERREG Europe fund, provided they meet the eligibility requirements.



European Regional Development Fund, play a very important role in the process of borderline development<sup>2</sup>.

A cross-border partnership, as a form of social integration of residents of the neighbouring communities, is an important aspect of the structural policy of the European Union, as it favours the dynamization of economic development of disadvantaged areas on the borderlands. Regardless of the economic aspects, the uniting Europe now puts a lot of emphasis on the neutralization of potential source of conflict in border areas, as tensions in the past were the source of inter-state conflicts and even wars in these areas. In some European countries, the borderlands occupy a significant part of the country, which is why so much emphasis is now placed on cross-border cooperation and euroregionalisation processes. The normative framework for cross-border cooperation arises from the European Framework Convention on Cross-border Cooperation between the Communities and Territorial Authorities, which defines it as any joint action undertaken to strengthen and further develop neighbourly contacts between territorial communities and authorities of two or more countries, as well as agreements and the adoption of arrangements necessary to implement such plans. Cross-border cooperation is limited by the framework of the properties of communities and territorial authorities in a manner determined by internal law (EKRWT). The European Charter for Border and Cross-border Regions, which is a ratification of the European cooperation agreement in the border areas, is of crucial importance for the institutionalization of cross-border cooperation (CASTANHO, CABEZAS, FERNÁNDEZ-POZO, 2016). The text contains, among others standards for the creation of Euroregions and cooperation of twin cities (EKRGiT). A modern cross-border partnership is part of the network economy, with a great variety of informal networks of processes taking place between people, (KUROWSKA-PYSZ, 2016a) as well as a formalized cooperation in the form clusters, networks, various types of associations. Analysing the scale of interest in the possibilities of using European funds for the development of borderland and cross-border cooperation, it can undoubtedly be said that this instrument is a kind of catalyst for this type of processes (CASTANHO, LOURES, CABEZAS, FERNÁNDEZ-POZO, 2017). They are settled, among others, by:

- the possibility of supplementing with funds from subsidies the shortage of public, social and private capital invested in the development of this area,
- strict focusing of support on strategic and priority areas in the aspect of borderland development policy, prevention of dispersion of support,
- mobilization of borderland development stakeholders to take joint, cross-border initiatives, exploit synergies, scale and critical mass (KUROWSKA-PYSZ, 2015),
- growing popularity of territorial partnerships, including cross-border ones, as a direction of development of network cooperation in a modern knowledge-based economy,

<sup>2</sup> These include: the Cross-Border Cooperation Operational Program Czech Republic-Republic of Poland 2007-2014 or the Cross-Border Cooperation Program Republic of Poland - Slovak Republic 2007-2014.

- mobilization of beneficiaries using EU support to improve the quality of prepared projects, reliable diagnosis of the needs and expectations of recipients of support, professionalization of tools and methods of project management and maintenance of the required durability of their results.

Despite many undeniable advantages resulting from the acquisition of EU subsidies for the development of borderland and cross-border cooperation, one should remember about the numerous, restrictive limitations and special conditions associated with the non-returnable nature of this instrument. This indicates a further need to professionalise the management of cross-border projects, including the management of cross-border partnerships, which are an integral part of these projects.

#### **4 Partnership management in cross-border projects**

As mentioned above, entities with a certain legal status, operating in the border areas of the European Union, in accordance with their territorial jurisdiction, have the possibility to obtain EU funds from the European Regional Development Fund for the development of cross-border partnerships, i.a. within the INTERREG VA Program. The key importance in the implementation of cross-border projects is assigned to the fact that any such undertaking should be implemented on both sides of the border, by partners coming from two neighbouring countries. Cross-border EU support can be applied primarily to: local government units at all levels, non-governmental organizations, public administration units, universities, schools and other entities as well as non-profit associations located or operating in the border area (CASTANHO, CABEZAS, FERNÁNDEZ-POZO, VULEVIC, NARANJO GÓMEZ, MARTÍN GALLARDO, LOURES, 2018).

The main goal of the INTERREG VA program is to intensify cross-border cooperation based on partnership, which will support the sustainable development of the cross-border area. This program is implemented separately at many borders of the European Union. The possibilities of implementing cross-border projects based on co-financing from the INTERREG VA Program must respect the following conditions:

- with a few exceptions, the application process must be carried out in partnership with at least two entities/institutions operating on opposite sides of the border, the evaluation of the application lasts from a few to several months;
- the purpose and scope of the project must be in line with the objectives of the INTERREG VA Program for a given borderland, beneficiaries do not have the freedom to shape the scope and objectives of the project solely based on their own needs, their task is to prove the real need for EU support for the undertaken activities;
- applying for funds takes place in competition mode, there is no guarantee of obtaining funding, the decision obtained by the project and the amount of the evaluation of other projects are decisive;

- project applications are subject to 2-step control, first formal and then substantive, positive assessment does not guarantee obtaining co-financing,
- entities applying for funds should secure funds for the implementation of planned activities, as support from the program is accounted for on the basis of refunds, no advance payments are made to beneficiaries,
- beneficiaries are required to contribute to the project, in a diversified amount, while the remaining ones are financed by the European Regional Development Fund and the budgets of the countries participating in the Program,
- the process of obtaining a return on the funds involved lasts on average from a few to several months,
- beneficiaries implementing cross-border projects are subject to the principle of maintaining durability in accordance with the objectives of the project, i.e. maintaining the results of activities carried out and using the infrastructure, equipment and apparatus acquired for the project for a period of at least 5 years from the date of its completion.

Already at the stage of project preparation, and then throughout its implementation period and throughout the period of ensuring the sustainability of results (minimum 5 years), the organization requesting funds should prove that the basic criterion of the program, i.e. the cross-border effect, has been met. As mentioned above, at least two partners must participate in the project, one of which assumes the role of Lead Partner. In general, the lead partner is responsible for:

- determination regarding its relationship with other partners joining the project,
- ensuring the implementation of the entire project,
- monitoring of expenses presented by partners participating in the project in terms of compliance with the implemented project and tasks performed,
- coordination of the process of approving the expenses of beneficiaries participating in the project by appropriate controllers,
- transferring the contribution of the European Regional Development Fund to the partners participating in the project,
- submission of an application for co-financing of the Project and its possible additions,
- signing a contract on project co-financing on behalf of all partners.

In turn, other project partners:

- fulfil their tasks in accordance with the project and partnership agreement,
- are liable in case of irregularities in the declared expenses.

In accordance with the applicable guidelines resulting i.a. from Regulation (EC) No. 1080/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 05.07. 2006 on the European Regional Development Fund - partner cooperation must be based on at least two of the four following criteria (KUROWSKA-PYSZ, 2016b):

- a) joint preparation - the project is the result of work and arrangements of all partners, partners in constant contact actively participate in its preparation, from the idea to the completion of the joint application with attachments;
- b) joint implementation of the project - the partners jointly participate in the implementation of the activities envisaged in the project, contributing to its objectives, the project must have clearly defined links integrating the activities

carried out by individual partners, on the implementation of activities, in accordance with a jointly developed project schedule, supervised by Lead partner,

c) common staff - depending on the project, for example, a joint team can be established that will work on the implementation of the project; the coordinator supervises the implementation of activities;

d) joint financing - the project has one common budget, which includes expenses incurred by all partners. The partners' financial obligations arise from the activities they carry out as part of the project. The Lead Partner is responsible for managing and transferring funds from subsidies to the partners and monitoring their use.

Practice indicates that in some situations project partnership becomes a factor weakening rather than strengthening the project. As a result, for example, the cross-border effect is disturbed, and the tasks and results of the project are concentrated mainly on one side of the border. There may be a number of reasons for this, among them the following can be indicated:

- intentional involvement of passive, submissive and not troublesome partner in the project,
- accidental partnership,
- focusing only on the intention to collect EU funds jointly,
- dependence of partnership on formal relations, e.g. twinned communes, and not on real cooperation needs,
- lack of awareness of mutual, real expectations and needs of each party,
- partnership 'overgrowing' one of the participants, e.g. in terms of financial and organizational capacity, available human resources, etc.
- matching the project only to the needs of one of the parties,
- partnership focused on institutions (entities) implementing the project, and not on the needs of their stakeholders, e.g. recipients of the cultural offer.

In order to avoid the above-described situations, looking for partners for joint implementation of cross-border projects, it should be borne in mind that in accordance with the guidelines on territorial cooperation, the relationships established in the project should be continued and developed after its completion, in a 5-year period of durability, and even longer. When identifying potential partners, entities / institutions should therefore be involved, which:

- have compatible goals, interests, expectations,
- are aware of their needs and benefits that they expect from cooperation,
- want to participate in the benefits of cooperation, but are also ready to share costs and risks,
- have the right resource for cooperation: knowledge, people, financial and material resources,
- they have genuine motivation to cooperate,
- they are focused on permanent partnership and not temporary.

The key principles of partnership (TVRDOŇOVÁ, BUDZICH-SZUKAŁA, 2008) are based on:

- equal rights for all partners, which leads to mutual respect,
- transparency in mutual relations, which leads to trust,
- mutual benefits for partners, which promises long-term cooperation.

A well-prepared partnership project takes into account the following assumptions:

- is a response to the real needs of potential recipients on the part of each partner, the needs are examined and assessed realistically, in relation to the activities and costs planned in the project,
- engages partners in the partnership in an accepted manner, adequate to their real competences and capabilities,
- is prepared in a way that ensures each of the partners achieve the expected results,
- results from genuine willingness to cooperate and is not forced by circumstances,
- leads to results, which should result from a further development path of the partnership, e.g. defined on the basis of the created cooperation strategy,
- its implementation is conducive to building and strengthening trust between partners and removing barriers to communication and cooperation,
- it is run in such a way that after its completion partners still want to cooperate with each other.

## **5 Processes and criteria for effective management of cross-border partnerships, as part of cross-border projects co-financed by the European Union**

Each project is an organized sequence of human actions aimed at achieving the assumed result. Characteristic features of the project are: high degree of complexity, uniqueness, specific implementation time. Projects are accompanied by various types of risks, and their implementation requires the involvement of specific resources: human, material, financial and specialist knowledge. The project can also be described as a new, atypical project that differs from routine activities, and at the same time as a coherent and coordinated operation, with clearly defined objectives, aimed at carrying out an indivisible task (PL-SK, 2007-2013).

The above description, in relation to cross-border projects co-financed from European Union funds, should be supplemented with at least the following characteristics (PL-SK, 2007-2013):

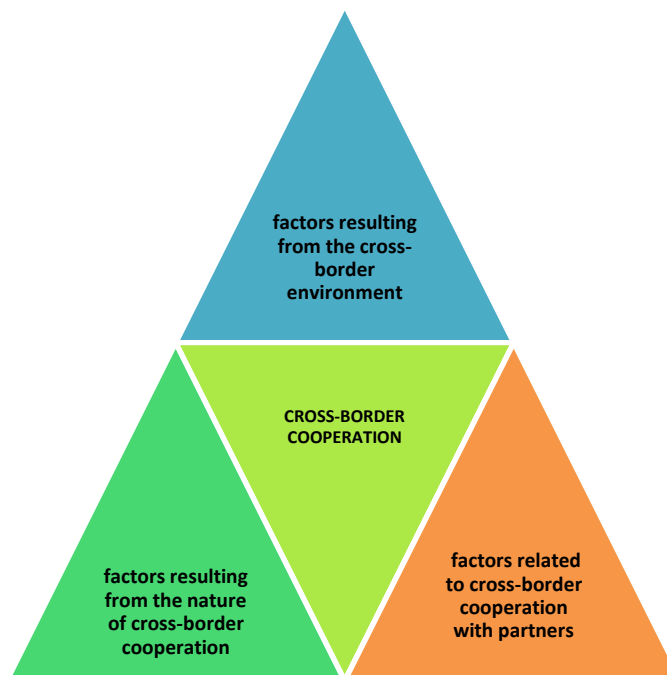
- partnership (of at least two partners from two participating countries in the Program should appoint a Lead Partner coordinating all activities on both sides of the border, a partnership that meets at least two of four criteria: joint preparation, joint implementation, joint staff, joint financing);
- additionality (the project must include additional activities in relation to those which are normally performed by the partners);
- meeting the deadline (the necessity to implement all activities within no longer than the eligibility period for all expenditure under the Program);
- financing (the project budget can only include costs closely related to the project, it must be realistic and feasible, it cannot be used to finance the daily and routine tasks of partner organizations, it should include expenditure on both sides of the border);



- ensuring a cross-border effect (the project should bring benefits not only to one country, and its results should be visible in the entire project area, i.e. across the entire border area);
- topics closely related to the objectives of the Program.

Cross-border cooperation, not only in the context of the implementation of projects co-financed by the European Union, is conditioned by various factors. Generally, they can be divided into three groups, which are shown in Figure 2 and are described in Table 1.

**Figure. 2. Selected factors shaping cross-border cooperation**



Source: own elaboration

**Table. 1. Selected factors shaping cross-border cooperation**

Factors related to cooperation partners		Factors resulting from the nature of cooperation		Factors resulting from the cross-border environment
1. Interest in the development of cross-border cooperation  2. Preparation for cross-border cooperation (organizational, financial and technical potential)  3. Compatibility of the objectives of cross-border cooperation with the interest of the organization  4. The quality of relations between cross-border partners  5. A common system of partner values, conducive to the development of cross-border cooperation  6. Observation of the attractiveness of partners developing cross-border cooperation  7. Tolerance for cultural diversity, global diversity, etc.	↔	1. Availability of cross-border cooperation structures (e.g. Euroregions)  2. Areas of cooperation cross-border cooperation possible to be developed under cross-border partnerships  3. The scope of cross-border cooperation supported by EU funds  4. Availability of models and good practices for the development of cross-border cooperation and partnerships	↔	1. Scope of system support for the development of cross-border cooperation at the level of countries, regions and local level  2. Strategic considerations of the development of the neighbouring areas, conducive to or hindering the development of cross-border cooperation  3. The similarity of historical and socio-economic background of the neighbouring communities  4. Geopolitical situation in the countries developing cross-border cooperation  5. Cross-border communication accessibility and its impact on the development of cross-border relations  6. Accessibility of EU funds for the development of borderlands

Source: own elaboration

As can be seen from Fig. 2 and Table 1 - many different factors affect the development of cross-border cooperation with varying strength, but a significant number of them refers directly to the quality and sustainability of cross-border partnerships. The greatest variability and uncertainty concerns the partners of cross-border cooperation. Their changing needs and interests as well as opportunities for involvement in cross-border cooperation significantly affect the final and lasting effect of cross-border cooperation.

The implementation of each project strictly fits into a specific life cycle (AID, 2007, p. 32). It is a sequence of stages through which the project has to go from opening to closing. At each stage of the implementation of the project, the impact of the partners is important. The transitions between stages are usually defined as

milestones in which, depending on the quality or evaluation of the results of the stage, the right decision can be made (IPMA, 2009, p. 54). The project cycle management, in classical terms, can refer to the following stages: programming, identification, initial assessment, financing, evaluation (STRYBAŁA, 2006, p. 398). In the aspect of the life cycle of a cross-border project, the determinants of cross-border project management and cross-border partnership are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. The life cycle of a cross-border project, taking into account the role of cross-border partnership**

The next stages of the project life cycle	Conditions for cross-border project management and cross-border partnership
1. Diagnosis of needs and identification of demand for partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- project implementation must result from genuine partners' needs and problems diagnosed by them;</li> <li>- partnership should be established between organizations that share common goals and synergistic potentials for project implementation, each partner should achieve the expected benefits in the project;</li> </ul>
2. Development of the project and the procedure for obtaining EU funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- joint preparation of the project application and partnership development plan by the partners;</li> <li>- conclusion of a contract for co-financing and joint preparation of the project for implementation on both sides of the border (mobilization of resources and potentials to implement the project);</li> </ul>
3. Implementation and financing of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- joint activities of partners to carry out tasks in a cross-border project;</li> <li>- project management by common staff (including ensuring proper communication in team and cooperation of all project team members and other stakeholders);</li> <li>- joint financing of project activities (each partner has its own budget, each contributes to the project);</li> <li>- risk management in the project (risk monitoring and undertaking actions minimizing the probability of occurrence of problems arising from it);</li> <li>- quality management in the project (monitoring of project implementation indicators, internal evaluation of the project);</li> <li>- presenting joint reports on the implementation of a cross-border project to the control bodies of EU programs;</li> <li>- meeting the requirements of information and promotion of EU funds;</li> <li>- keeping project documentation in accordance with EU requirements;</li> <li>- joint support for monitoring visits of inspection bodies under the project.</li> </ul>
4. Ensuring durability and evaluation of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- maintaining the sustainability of the project and the cross-border effect on both sides of the border,</li> <li>- monitoring and analysis of sustainable project results;</li> <li>- strengthening and further development of partnership established in the project;</li> <li>- defining the strategy for further cross-border cooperation of partners after the end of the project's duration period;</li> <li>- monitoring the sustainability of the project and cooperation of partners and the impact of the cross-border effect of the project.</li> </ul>

Source: own elaboration

The management of cross-border projects in a bilateral or network partnership is not an easy undertaking. Due to complicated project development conditions, the need to involve own funds and a relatively long evaluation procedure, only part of the projects concerning the development of cross-border partnerships is implemented with the support of the European Union. It is also influenced by high competition among projects applying for support from European Union funds, which means that only the best projects which have the greatest impact on the development of sustainable cross-border partnerships receive funding.

This means that the acquisition of knowledge, competences and skills related to the management of cross-border projects is also valuable from the point of view of the effectiveness of cross-border partnerships development. Managers in charge of cross-border projects should be aware that they are focused not only on meeting the needs of cross-border cooperation partners (e.g. local government units, schools, universities, cultural centres, etc.), but they should at least equally respect the needs and expectations of their stakeholders (e.g. local community, tourists, investors). Individual stakeholder groups may have different goals, requirements, and indicators of success (NEWTON, 2010, p. 27); however, taking into account their needs is important for the partners, as well as it affects the implementation of the objectives of the partnership and the objectives of the European Union's cohesion policy.

The success of the cross-border project, and thus the success of the cross-border partnership, is conditioned by the fulfilment of the project effectiveness assessment criteria described below, which are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Selected criteria for effective cross-border project management and their impact on the development of cross-border partnership**

Criteria for the effectiveness of cross-border project management	Impact on the development of cross-border partnership
1. Implementation of the project in a way that ensures achievement of objectives and effects of cooperation set up by the partners	Keeping partnership conditions and achieving partnership goals in the project is necessary to strengthen the mutual trust of the partners and encourage the continuation of cooperation
2. Ensuring appropriate relation of financial outlays to effects in the project which has been accepted by the partners	The general condition for joining the partnership is the relation of expenditures on joint activities to the effects of joint activities, more advantageous than in the case of independent implementation of these activities
3. Meeting all the requirements for partnership and project implementation (eligibility, budget, time of implementation, scope), resulting from the guidelines on European Union funds, under pain of losing co-financing	Meeting the requirements of professional implementation of a cross-border project, at the same time affects the requirements of professional management of project partnership, in accordance with the objectives of the partnership and in accordance with the requirements of the European Union's cohesion policy, under which the project is financed
4. Ensuring communication and cooperation between partners in the project, enabling them to jointly manage the project properly and to continue cooperation after its completion (e.g. development of a strategy for further cooperation)	Cooperation of people representing partners in the project, including good communication between them (mainly linguistic), as well as effective team work, has a positive effect on building synergies between cooperating organizations and direct synergies between these partners' employees. This has a significant impact on the long-term development of the partnership
5. Agreement on ensuring the sustainability of the project, with the partners providing all the resources required for this purpose (e.g. human, financial, material, etc.)	Long-term partnership is supported by the conditions for the implementation of cross-border projects, which oblige cooperating organizations to maintain the sustainability of project results for a period of at least 5 years. Thus, partners joining the project are forced to plan long-term cooperation and make available the required resources for this purpose. The obligation to continue cross-border cooperation after the end of the project supports the partner's development more and it is more stable than in the case of a developed partnership without the involvement of EU funds.

Source: Own elaboration.

The criteria presented in Table 3 are not exhaustive, due to a number of other stakeholder groups of cross-border projects (e.g. local authorities, entrepreneurs, investors, etc.) whose requirements or measures of success could also be analysed in a similar way. The management of cross-border projects, although it is by nature a complex and complicated process, when it concerns projects co-financed by the European Union, it is subject to some cyclical changes. They result from consecutive next financial perspectives of the European Union, also related to the changing guidelines for the implementation of cross-border projects<sup>3</sup>, which in turn is the result of collecting experience and drawing

<sup>3</sup> E.g. in 2004-2006 projects of this type were implemented on the basis of the INTERREG III A Community Initiative, in the years 2007-2013 - based on the Cross-Border Cooperation Program Republic of Poland - Slovak Republic; in the years 2014-2020 based on the INTERREG VA Program the Republic of Poland - Slovak Republic.



conclusions from the course of previous projects. Bearing in mind the very high demand for EU, non-returnable co-financing of projects implemented on the borderlands, these issues will certainly continue to be taken and developed in research and application work, primarily as regards the methodology of professional management of cross-border projects.

## 6 Summary

The issue of professional management of cross-border projects is a rapidly expanding field of theoretical and application knowledge, the importance of which - in the light of the growing role of the structural policy of the European Union - will be at least as important as it is today. An interesting issue is both the unique methodology for managing cross-border projects, as well as the methodology for managing cross-border partnerships. Establishing a cross-border partnership is an indispensable condition for the implementation of cross-border projects, but also constitutes a lasting result, coinciding with the objectives of the European Union's cohesion policy.

The life cycle of a cross-border project defined in the paper emphasizes the tasks to be undertaken by cross-border partnerships, as agreements of cooperating organizations. It is particularly important that the development of a cross-border partnership within a cross-border project is based on a much more stable methodology than is the case with loosely developing cross-border cooperation, which is not based on formalized assumptions. It can therefore be concluded that the development of cross-border partnerships based on cross-border projects is more effective and stable, as well as predictable, as it results from the conditions for the implementation of projects co-financed by the European Union. In turn, defining the key criteria for effective management of cross-border projects in the aspect of their impact on the development of cross-border partnerships shows a direct relationship between these two issues. It is clearly visible that in this type of project, the issue of cross-border is based primarily on the cooperation of partners who must ensure its effects for cooperating organizations, but also in a broader aspect, in accordance with the needs of the border area and in accordance with the objectives of the European Union's structural policy. The most important recommendations regarding the effective management of cross-border partnerships are as follows:

- ensure the collaboration of cooperating organizations based on built relations and dependencies, including relations with the territory on which cross-border cooperation develops, taking into account the terms of using co-financing from EU funds supporting the implementation of cohesion policy,
- multi-actorial activities aimed at common implementation of the assigned tasks, with the intention of achieving planned goals and results, strengthening synergy between resources and objectives between partners, which contributes to the sustainability of cooperation,
- action taking into account the opportunities and threats arising from the cross-border environment in which cooperation is being carried out, as well as respecting the needs and expectations of other stakeholders of cross-border cooperation across the border.

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**Joanna Kurowska-Pysz, Ph.D.**

Head of Engineering Management Department, Director of Technology Transfer Centre, WSB University, Faculty of Applied Sciences - Dąbrowa Górnicza, 41-300, Poland. [jkurowska@wsb.edu.pl](mailto:jkurowska@wsb.edu.pl)

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