

Jordi Baltà Portolés

CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION AND CULTURAL COMMUNITIES IN EUROPE



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by Jordi Baltà Portolés

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“No border in Europe is simple”

Colm Tóibín

“The sovereignty of the state ends at its borders. However the differences and problems of these borders continue to exist, and require sustainable solutions.”

Association of European Border Regions

⁵ Colm Tóibín, “Along the Catalan and Irish borders: politics of memory and progress through good manners”, *The Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland*, 5 (2010), p. 24; available at <http://www.crossborder.ie/pubs/journal5.pdf> [Last viewed: 18/12/2014]

⁶ Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), *European Charter for Border and Cross-border Regions* (2011, updated), p. 4; available at http://www.aebr.eu/files/publications/110915_Charta_EN_clean.pdf [Last viewed: 18/12/2014]

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

This paper was commissioned as part of a research call by the Centre Maurits Coppieters, regarding the analysis of Euroregions and cross-border cooperation within the European Union, with particular emphasis on their relevance to nations which have their territory divided across two or more EU Member States.

The aim of the document is to analyse how existing tools of cross-border cooperation, including Euroregions and European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) among others, could contribute to strengthening relations among peoples sharing a language or culture or identifying themselves as part of the same nation, but which live in different EU Member States. In order to do so, the paper examines the general context of cross-border cooperation in Europe and a diverse range of case studies, which could illustrate opportunities for communities sharing a language or culture. Focusing in particular on the public policy implications of these developments, the study analyses the motivations and areas of impact which can be observed within cross-border cooperation (socio-economic development, improved service provision, community cohesion, cultural cooperation, European integration,

etc.) and provides recommendations for stakeholders at different levels.

The study has been carried out in the second half of 2014 and in early 2015, by analysing existing literature in the field, including EU legislation, reports and statistics; policy, programme and project documents produced by cross-border cooperation structures; research reports, relevant websites and other relevant resources.

Following an introduction to the research subject and the key definitions used throughout the paper (section 1.2), chapter 2 presents the general context of cross-border cooperation in the EU, its European relevance, history and forms. Chapter 3 depicts six case studies which serve to illustrate the challenges addressed by cross-border cooperation and its value added. Finally, Chapter 4 presents the conclusions of the research and formulates recommendations for border regions, public authorities and other relevant stakeholders.

1.2. CONCEPTS

This paper focuses on the different forms of cooperation among local and regional governments across national borders in the EU, and the main areas of policy cooperation, social and cul-

tural integration and broader areas of sustainable development which they have addressed. The analysis of the general context of cross-border cooperation serves to shed light on the challenges and opportunities for groups and communities which share a language or culture but which live in different EU Member States.

In 2011, 185 million EU citizens, or 37% of the population, lived in border regions,³ whether internal borders (i.e. those among EU Member States) or external borders (i.e. those between an EU Member State and other countries). In some EU Member States, all or almost all of the land consists of “border” regions (e.g. Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Finland and Sweden, as well as Cyprus and Malta as maritime countries), whereas the proportion is much smaller, if demographically significant, in other countries (e.g. Germany, France, Poland, Italy, Spain, etc.).⁴

In the context of the EU, cross-border cooperation is one of the three strands of European territorial cooperation, alongside ‘transnational cooperation’ (i.e. cooperation within larger territorial areas such as the Alpine Space, the Northern Periphery and Arctic, or South West Europe) and ‘interregional cooperation’ (which links regions and

cities across the whole EU to work on issues of common interest, regardless of their geographical location). The promotion of European territorial cooperation responds, among others, to the Treaty of Lisbon’s acknowledgement that the EU “shall promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States”.⁵ In this respect, European territorial cooperation has been one of the main objectives of European Cohesion Policy in recent years.

Cross-border cooperation has been an important feature of regional development in Europe in recent decades. With early examples in the 1950s and 1960s, the number of formal cross-border arrangements visibly increased from the mid-1990s, partly due to the availability of EU funding, as well as the impending accession to the EU of new Member States with extensive border areas. As of 2005, a European Parliament report indicated that ‘today there are virtually no local or regional authorities in border areas that are not somehow involved in cross-border co-operation’.⁶ The statement remains valid today.

As it will be explained further later on, a broad spectrum of forms of cross-border cooperation exists in the EU, ranging from short-term project initia-

tives to long-term, institutional structures. In this paper, priority is given to stable cooperation frameworks (which are generally punctuated by short-term projects in the context of broad strategic goals) and to those in which local and regional governments are mainly responsible for the design and implementation of programmes. Yet, cross-border cooperation should be placed in the context of the emergence of multi-level and participative governance, which requires an active involvement on behalf of, on the one hand, different tiers of government (from EU institutions to local governments) and, on the other, civil society and private actors working alongside public authorities.

Euroregions are one of the forms adopted by cross-border cooperation in Europe, the name actually encompassing a diversity of specific forms with shared features (“euregio”, “euroregion”, “community”, “working community”, etc.).⁷ Whilst the term ‘Euroregion’ may also be used to refer to transnational or interregional cooperation frameworks, in the context of this paper the focus lies on Euroregions as forms of cross-border cooperation. Likewise, only Euroregions involving regions in EU Member States are explored, thus leaving aside cooperation with other European countries.

The diversity of arrangements existing in the field of cross-border cooperation includes the fact that Euroregions may be established according to either private or public law,⁸ although the coming into force of the EU Reg-

ulation on EGTCs in 2006 has enabled the increasing establishment of arrangements under public law. As a result of this, which is perceived to reinforce the European dimension of cross-border cooperation and to open avenues for new forms of collaboration, and taking into account that Euroregions are increasingly adopting the EGTC form, in the analysis of case studies particular emphasis will be placed on this type of approach. On the other hand, the broader analysis of cross-border cooperation, its meaning and history, presented in Chapter 2, covers different forms of collaboration.

Finally, the paper places emphasis on the potential opportunities to foster cross-border cooperation involving peoples sharing a language or culture or identifying themselves as part of the same nation, but which live in different EU Member States. The term ‘cultural communities’ has been used to refer particularly to these groups. Of course, the term could apply to many other groups in different contexts, whether sharing cross-border links or not, including communities which live outside their traditional homeland or which do not have one.

Whereas the analysis of case studies presented in Chapter 3 includes a diverse range of examples, regardless of their cultural or linguistic features, it serves to identify elements which could inspire cooperation between these ‘cultural communities’ in particular, as explained in Chapter 4.

³ This figure is calculated on the basis of NUTS 3 regions.

⁴ Cf. European Commission – DG for Regional Policy, *European Territorial Cooperation – Building bridges between people* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011), available at http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information/pdf/brochures/etc_book_lr.pdf [Last viewed: 18/12/2014]; Lewis Dijkstra and Hugo Poelman, ‘Regional typologies: a compilation’, *Regional Focus. A series of short papers on regional research and indicators produced by the Directorate-General for Regional Policy, 1/2011*, available at http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/focus/2011_01_typologies.pdf [Last viewed: 18/12/2014]; and European Commission, *Investment for jobs and growth. Promoting development and good governance in EU regions and cities. Sixth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion* (Brussels: European Union, 2014), available at http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion6/6cr_en.pdf [Last viewed: 18/12/2014]

⁵ EU, Treaty of Lisbon (2007), article 3.

⁶ Kyriacos Triantaphyllides (rapporteur), *Report on the role of “Euroregions” in the development of regional policy*, European Parliament report, 2004/2257(INI), 19 October 2005, available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A6-2005-0311+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> [Last viewed: 18/12/2014]

⁷ For a detailed analysis see, among others, Thomas Perrin, *Culture et eurorégions: enjeux institutionnels de l’action culturelle eurorégionale*, doctoral thesis, Institut d’études politiques, Université de Grenoble (2010).

⁸ Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), *Practical Guide to Cross-border Cooperation* (Brussels: European Commission, 2000, 3rd edition), available at http://www.aebr.eu/files/publications/lace_guide.en.pdf [Last viewed: 18/12/2014]; and AEBR (ed.), *Cooperation between European Border Regions. Review and Perspectives* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2008).

2 THE CONTEXT AND FORMS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN EUROPE

2.1. THE CHALLENGES OF BORDER REGIONS

The emergence of cross-border cooperation in Europe can be seen as a response to, on the one hand, the challenges traditionally faced by border and peripheral regions within their respective nation-states and, on the other, the endogenous impulse to overcome existing borders, which may be based, in some cases, on cultural similarities and/or on economic and social motivations.

Border regions have traditionally had to face a number of challenges derived from their own peripheral geographic position, as well as the peripheral position in the political, economic and cultural spheres which often resulted thereof. The former MEP and former president of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) Joan Vallvé summarised these challenges as follows: *“Beyond existing natural obstacles (mountains, rivers, sea), frontier effects were subsequently reinforced by the streamlining and centralisation of the administrative apparatus, the creation of country-*

*specific laws and jurisdictions or the establishment of unified country-internal transport and communication systems. But also other initiatives such as the establishment of single taxation systems, of fiscal policies, of protected national economies and of ‘homogenised’ cultural and social policies supported the transformation from state borders into actually noticeable barriers between national states.”*⁹ The limited ability of local and regional governments and political representatives from border regions (e.g. members of national parliaments) to make their voices and influence heard in national politics has also been noted.¹⁰ It is worth mentioning that, recognising the disadvantages experienced by border regions, the Treaty of Lisbon identifies ‘cross-border regions’ among those which should receive particular attention in the context of policies aimed at economic, social and territorial cohesion.¹¹

Border regions, therefore, have often been penalised in socio-cultural, political and economic terms, this becoming a structural feature in many of them, which in turn had an impact on

⁹ Joan Vallvé, *Cooperació transfronterera a Europa. Història, experiències i recomanacions per a una futura política de la Unió Europea després del 2006 / Cross-border Co-operation in Europe. The history, specific experiences and practical recommendations for the future policy of the European Union after 2006* (Barcelona: Editorial Mediterrània, 2004), p. 69.

¹⁰ Cf. Brian Harvey, ‘Community development along the border: an instrument for the development of the cross-border region?’, *The Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland*, 5 (2010), p. 42.

their ability to maintain pre-existing cross-border links or to set them up anew: “[Border strips] typically had a peripheral status in many of their nation’s spheres: the economy, transport, culture and population density often declined as one moved from the centres of a state to the border. With a few exceptions, this turned the border regions into structurally weak areas with non-existent or inadequate development in terms of roads or railways and economy... Culture, economy, society and policy were largely determined by a national way of thinking. Fostered by the growing communication possibilities, there was an almost inevitable gravitation towards national centres and political ideas. This trend has become particularly evident in Europe’s border regions. This led to losses of identity particularly where populations have shared cultural, linguistic, demographic and historical ties for centuries, despite new national borders.”¹²

Finding solutions to existing economic challenges and broadening economic opportunities for private actors and citizens of border regions (e.g. labour mobility, accessing the natural economic hinterland across the border, obtaining advantages through the purchase of cheaper cross-border products, etc.) are some of the main motivations behind much of today’s cross-border cooperation in Europe,¹³ this being sometimes complemented,

or even spearheaded, by other social and cultural considerations.

Despite the diverse motivations for cross-border cooperation, the need for accompanying policies, from the local to the European level, to address existing regional and cross-border structural weaknesses, and with the active involvement of local communities, arises as a common feature: “... regional economic policy in border and cross-border regions should promote a removal of border-related differences in development and be integrated into the basic goals of national and European policies (for example, agricultural, structural, economic, spatial planning, regional and social policy objectives, and so forth). Multi-annual ‘regional cross-border development concepts’ and ‘operational programmes’ must be drawn up and updated by the border and cross-border regions as the bases for their joint development and then supported by national governments and the EU.”

¹⁴ One underpinning aim of policies fostering cross-border cooperation should be to remove barriers derived from different administrative, economic and infrastructural systems¹⁵ – this representing, in a nutshell, one of the main elements in the broader European significance of cross-border cooperation, as described hereafter.

2.2. THE EUROPEAN SIGNIFICANCE OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

With the elimination of internal borders being one of the cornerstones of the EU in recent decades, cross-border cooperation has often been praised as a small-scale symbol of European integration. Former President of the European Parliament Hans-Gert Pöttering argued that “It is in the Euroregions where the European Union is brought to life.”¹⁶ A number of similar statements exist, often stressing that cross-border cooperation provides a ‘human face’ to the EU: “The ‘human face’ of European policy can show itself to its best advantage in places where the will to cooperate is vitally necessary and is put into practice, namely in border regions. Here, a ‘back-to-back’ existence must be transformed into a ‘face-to-face’ relationship by dismantling barriers and impediments at the borders.”¹⁷

Similarly, some authors have argued that border regions function as ‘adapters’, as they “develop mutual instruments, regulations and traditions, which enable the cooperation that can yield great benefit to all.”¹⁸ Indeed, cross-border cooperation initiatives can be seen as small-scale, bottom-up laboratories, epitomising the challenges and opportunities of European integration: “by building the local we are also thinking about

the general building of Europe.”¹⁹ This potential emerges as particularly relevant at a time when doubts exist about other dimensions of European integration.²⁰

As with broader EU integration, cross-border cooperation can be seen to combine a political vision and a pragmatic dimension, which results in a wide, diverse range of objectives being pursued: “... cross-border cooperation on regional/local level, involving various social partners and segments of the population across international borders, promotes peace, freedom, security and safeguarding of human rights and encourages the protection of ethnic and national minorities. Border and cross-border regions are thus building blocks and bridges in the process of European unification, on behalf of the coexistence of European populations.”²¹

In political and institutional terms, the emergence of cross-border cooperation and the setting-up of cross-border frameworks such as Euroregions and EGTCs can be seen as an expression of broader developments in the field of European governance, including the subsidiarity principle and its adaptation to a borderless Europe, the increasing centrality of regions as spaces combining a political, economic, social and cultural dimension,²² as well as the need to devise new multi-level governance

¹¹ The second and third paragraphs of article 174 of the consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (as amended in Lisbon 2007) read as follows: “In particular, the Union shall aim at reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions. Among the regions concerned, particular attention shall be paid to rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition, and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps such as the northernmost regions with very low population density and island, cross-border and mountain regions.” Emphasis added.

¹² AEBR (2011, updated), p. 4.

¹³ AEBR (ed.) (2008), pp. 12-14.

¹⁴ AEBR (2011, updated), p. 9. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁵ AEBR (ed.) (2008), p. 14; and Brian Harvey (2010), p. 38.

¹⁶ Hans-Gert Pöttering, “Opening address”, in AEBR (ed.) (2008), p. 7.

¹⁷ AEBR (2011, updated), p. 7.

¹⁸ Dr. Reinhold Kolck, “The experience of an EU-Member State in North-West Europe”, in Joan Vallvé (2004), p. 95.

¹⁹ Jordi Vaquer, transcript, in Consell Econòmic i Social de les Balears (ed.), *II Jornades sobre l'Euroregió* (Palma: Edicions UIB, 2009), p. 36. Translation mine.

²⁰ Casimir de Dalmau et al., *L'Euroregió Pirineus Mediterrània, un valor afegit* (Palma de Mallorca: Institut d'Estudis Autònoms, 2008).

²¹ AEBR (2011, updated), p. 3.

²² See, among others, Patrick S. Föhl, ‘Regionale Kooperationen im Kulturbereich. Begriffe und Systematisierungen’, in Patrick S. Föhl and Iken Neisener (eds.), *Regionale Kooperationen im Kulturbereich. Theoretische Grundlagen und Praxisbeispiele* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2009), pp. 15-45, available at http://www.transcript-verlag.de/ts1050/ts1050_1.pdf [Last viewed: 18/12/2014]

models which contribute to solidarity across Europe.²³

In this respect, Euroregions can also be seen as an expression of the search for new, adaptive forms in the relationship between human communities and the environment, the latter being a composite of natural, social and cultural elements, which requires a new approach to regional or spatial development: “*Spatial development today is considered synonymous with the deliberate organisation of the relationship between mankind and his environment.*”²⁴ The French notion of ‘territoire de projet’, which could roughly be equated with the design of an integrated, decompartmentalised approach to regional development, based on the identification of common traits in culture, landscape, history, etc., regardless of pre-existing administrative boundaries, can also be seen to relate to this vision – and is particularly relevant in cross-border cooperation among regions sharing certain cultural or linguistic features, if it can apply elsewhere as well. A ‘territoire de projet’ amounts to a bottom-up process, which in turn can contribute to moving from a vertical, interlocked approach to regional development and multi-level governance to one characterised by shared responsibilities and by horizontal, interdependent relationships among different regions and tiers of government.²⁵

A more pragmatic approach to cross-border cooperation is the aim to improve cost-effectiveness in the joint provision of public services in neigh-

bouring regions: “... *how do we deliver public services that are sustainable? On both sides of the border we need to reorganize our public services so that they are sustainable and affordable...*”²⁶ At a time when European governments have been forced to rethink their welfare policies and broader public expenditure, a certain European dimension can also be identified in these efforts.

In this respect, promoters of Euroregions and other cross-border cooperation arrangements have often stressed that these should not be seen as additional layers of administration, but rather as structures or instruments providing better, closer public services to citizens: “... *the goal of cooperation in border and cross-border regions is not to create a new administrative level, but instead to develop cooperative structures, procedures and instruments that facilitate the removal of obstacles and foster the elimination of divisive factors. The ultimate objective is to transcend borders and reduce their importance to mere administrative boundaries.*”²⁷ Ultimately, this could be interpreted as a step towards equal rights for all citizens, by tackling hindrances to those living in border regions: “*In the context of ongoing European integration and stronger area-wide economic cooperation in the ‘new’ Europe, people in border regions will then also be able to assert their right to equal living conditions, free movement and improved mobility at the de facto interfaces of European integration.*”²⁸

A range of different arguments can therefore be used to stress the significance of cross-border cooperation in a European perspective. As the next section shows, these have in turn led to a range of forms of cooperation over the past few decades.

2.3. THE FORMS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION THROUGH HISTORY

Responding to the aforementioned challenges and motivations, a number of specific frameworks for cross-border cooperation in Europe have been conceived since the 1950s, running in parallel to the process of European integration and often reflecting its own development phases.

The earliest known example of a formal cross-border cooperation structure in the European Community was the Euregio on the Dutch-German border, set up in 1958, with some other examples being established in the following years. Rather than fostering regional development in border regions, cross-border cooperation in the early years was mainly aimed at overcoming national differences and expressing a commitment to European unity,²⁹ thus also representing some of the main motivations of European institutions at the time, in a spirit not dissimilar to that of town-

twinning and other early people-to-people initiatives.

Cross-border cooperation was facilitated by inter-state protocols or agreements, which provided general frameworks for local and regional authorities to develop closer cooperation in areas such as regional planning. Specific cross-border schemes involving sub-national authorities often required approval by the respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs at national level – thus limiting the potential use of these agreements to bring together communities in different Member States for aims beyond those set by national authorities.

Although several inter-state agreements were pre-existing, both within and outside the EEC (e.g. BENELUX in 1969, Belgium-Germany in 1971, Switzerland-Germany in 1973, Austria-Germany in 1974, etc.),³⁰ the coming into force of the Council of Europe’s European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (known as the ‘Madrid Outline Convention’) in 1981 can be seen as a new stimulus in this process.³¹

One of the earliest visible manifestations of cross-border cooperation were the ‘working communities’, initially established across large mountainous areas (e.g. Alps, Pyrenees,

²³ AEBR (2011), updated.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

²⁵ Thomas Perrin (2010), pp. 66-67.

²⁶ Brian Cowen, former Irish Taoiseach, addressing cross-border cooperation between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, interviewed by Andy Pollak, *The Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland*, n°5 (2010), p. 12.

²⁷ AEBR (2011, updated), p. 8.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

²⁹ Cf. Martín Guillermo Ramírez, transcript, in *Consell Econòmic i Social de les Balears* (ed.) (2009).

³⁰ AEBR (ed.) (2008).

³¹ The Madrid Outline Convention remains valid and is particularly relevant nowadays to European countries outside the EU, including in their cooperation with EU Member States. Three protocols have been added to it, the latest of which, adopted in 2009, sets the basis for the establishment of Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (ECG), not to be confused with the EU’s regulation of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) in 2006. For additional information on the Madrid Outline Convention, including the text of the Convention and its Protocols, visit <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=106&CM=8&DF=19/12/2014&CL=ENG> [Last viewed: 19/12/2014]. A description of ECGs and their relationship with EGTCs can be found in Alfonso Zardi, “European Cooperation Groupings: a gadget or a solution?”, presented at the Second Regional Seminar on Introducing Protocol N° 3 to the Madrid Outline Convention (Budapest, 30 June 2014), available at <http://www.coe.int/t/dgap/localdemocracy/news/2014/Intro-Zardi-Buda3006.pdf> [Last viewed: 19/12/2014]. See also Martín Guillermo Ramírez (2009).

Jura), most of which continue to exist to this day. With a geographical size generally larger than that of Euroregions, working communities also tend to have a broader thematic scope and focus on the exchange of experiences rather than the management of specific projects. They rarely hold competences beyond those of the regional authorities involved.³²

In 1971, the increasing importance of cross-border cooperation led to the establishment of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR). A map produced by the German Section of the Council of European Municipalities at the time identified 21 border regions with potential cooperation activities in Western Europe, although in some of these cases actual instances of cooperation would not be implemented until the 1980s or 1990s.³³ Indeed, the number of formal cooperation structures was to considerably increase particularly after 1989. In 2008, a publication identified 131 cross-border cooperation spaces in Europe established between 1958 and 2007, 98 of which (i.e. 75%) had been established in 1990 or later.³⁴

The fall of the Berlin Wall, the abolition of internal borders in the context of the Single Market and the preparations for and subsequent Enlargement of the EU are some of the factors which led to the explosion of forms of cross-border cooperation across Europe.³⁵ These developments

pointed to a change in the nature of internal borders, from their previous role as pillars of national sovereignty into new spaces, yet to be defined.³⁶ Indeed, borders became 'open' in at least three different ways: *legally* (as per the increased facilitation of individual mobility), *physically* (through the building of new cross-border tunnels, bridges, etc.) and *'aspirationally'* (i.e. as areas to be re-conceived, with the potential to become meeting spaces, within which new identities of sharing and 'becoming' could unfold).

Another major factor in the promotion of cross-border cooperation was the provision of financial support by the European Union, with programmes such as INTERREG in place since 1989: "A decisive chapter in the history of cross-border co-operation began when the Community level made substantial EU-support for cross-border co-operation between regional and local authorities available... These different EU-funding instruments... have helped to significantly expand the scope of already-existing cross-border co-operation initiatives and allowed 'introducing' the concept of cross-border co-operation along borders where previously no experience in this respect existed... Interreg has also helped to prepare the accession of new members..."³⁷ Researchers such as Markus Perkman have described how EU support was critical in increasing forms of cross-border cooperation, which up

until the 1980s had mainly depended on national variables, including an enabling constitutional framework: "... in the period before the isomorphic pressures of EU regional policy on local [cross-border cooperation] initiatives became relevant, nation-statespecific variables played an important role in facilitating co-operation activities among border authorities. It was shown that the federalist set-up of German and, to an extent, Scandinavian, administration provided a fertile ground in this respect, particularly the two-tier structure of local administration that allows municipalities to engage in collective action to increase their bargaining power as well as their policy capacity..."³⁸ As shall be seen later, the availability of European funds can be both a short-term incentive and a mid- to long-term threat to cross-border cooperation, as many examples exist of cross-border initiatives which have failed to remain in place upon the end of initial EU funding.

A more recent milestone in the development of cross-border cooperation in the EU was, as already noted, the adoption of the 2006 Regulation on a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).³⁹ The result of sustained demands for a new legal instrument which provided a

homogeneous framework to public authorities across the EU, relevant for different types of cooperation (cross-border, transnational, interregional) and adapted to the specific needs of public actors (including their potential management of EU funds), EGTCs can be defined as a European legal instrument designed to facilitate and promote cross-border, transnational or interregional strands of cooperation among its members, with the aim of strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU.

Although some examples of cross-border administrative unions under public law had existed earlier (the Euregio Rhine-Waal since 1993 and the Ems-Dollart Region since 1998, both along the Dutch-German border⁴⁰) and other initiatives had taken advantage of the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG) under private law, the coming into force of the EGTC Regulation provided a common standard, valid across the EU, under public law. Therefore, it was an important, if not final, step to address asymmetries within national legislation, enabled public authorities in different Member States to set up new structures with a legal personality, specific budget and staff, and contributed to European objectives in the fields of economic, social and territorial cohesion.⁴¹ It also facilitated

³² Thomas Perrin (2010).

³³ V. Frhr. v. Malchus, *Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit Europäischer Grenzregionen (Rat der Gemeinden Europas – Deutsche Sektion, 1971)*, reproduced in AEBR (ed.) (2008), p. 17. ³⁴ AEBR (ed.) (2008).

³⁴ AEBR (ed.) (2008).

³⁵ See, among others, AEBR (ed.) (2008); and Vallvé (2004).

³⁶ "Today's borders have largely lost their previous function of blocking off nation states from each other, even though massive and clear economic, infrastructural, social and legal differences remain in the borders within the European Union and at the external borders to Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean, which make cooperation much more difficult." AEBR (2011, updated), p. 5.

³⁷ Vallvé (2004), pp. 81–83.

³⁸ Markus Perkman, 'Cross-border Regions in Europe. Significance and Drivers of Regional Cross-border Co-operation', *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 10(2) (2003), text also available at <https://spiral.imperial.ac.uk/bitstream/10044/1/1407/1/Perkman%20european%20urban%20regional%20studies%202003%20cross-border%20regions.pdf> [Last viewed: 28/6/2015]

³⁹ Regulation (EC) n°1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 5 July 2006, on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC); *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 210, 31/7/2006, available at http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/pdf/2007/gect/ce_1082%282006%29_en.pdf [Last viewed: 19/12/2014]; and 'Regulation (EU) n°1302/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 17 December 2013, amending Regulation (EC) n°1082/2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) as regards the clarification, simplification and improvement of the establishment and functioning of such groupings', *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 347, 20/12/2013, available at http://admin.interact-eu.net/downloads/8709/Regulation_EC_No_1302_2013.pdf [Last viewed: 19/12/2014]

⁴⁰ Kolck (2004), p. 93.

⁴¹ "The creation of coherent EU-wide legal framework conditions for decentralised co-operation... must... be considered a necessary prerequisite for a general EU-policy that aims at further promoting and expanding decentralised co-operation among territorial authorities in the European Union." Vallvé (2004), p. 107.

the involvement of cross-border structures in the management of EU funds, particularly in the field of territorial cooperation but also in other areas, this being one major incentive for the setting-up of EGTCs. Yet EGTCs could, and ideally should, manage funds other than those coming from the EU, this being critical to ensuring their long-term sustainability.⁴² Ultimately, the added value of EGTCs lies in their ability to “[fulfil] cross-border tasks by common decisions on regional/local level”⁴³ and to reinforce the ability of local and regional authorities to contribute to bottom-up regional development: “States can cooperate at any time; they do not need an EU-regulation. But public authorities on regional/local level need an EGTC; otherwise a bottom-up approach in territorial cooperation is very difficult.”⁴⁴

In comparative terms, the adoption of the EGTC Regulation can also be seen as a symbol of the specific political and legal nature of territorial cooperation in Europe, when compared to developments in other regions in the world, where legal instruments of this kind are missing.⁴⁵ It also serves to highlight the relevant role played by cross-border cooperation within the European integration process: “Bilateral or trilateral cross-border

*cooperation at regional/local level will... remain a necessity over the long term, not just in order to prevent cross-border conflicts and overcome psychological barriers, but, above all, in order to facilitate partnerships that will balance and reconcile these differences, through Euroregions and similar structures.... The sovereignty of the state ends at its borders. However the differences and problems of these borders continue to exist, and require sustainable solutions...”*⁴⁶

Indeed, the adoption of the EGTC Regulation provides one new common instrument to an increasingly diverse landscape of border regions and forms of cross-border cooperation across the EU: from short-term projects, which may be supported by EU programmes, national or regional funds and other resources; through the management of cross-border programmes to support smaller-scale local and civil society initiatives; to the establishment of permanent, cross-border structures addressing a wide range of areas of common interest and fostering the emergence of cross-border communities. As the next section shows, diversity is also visible in the areas of added value sought by local and regional authorities when designing and implementing cross-border cooperation initiatives.

⁴² See, among others, José María Zufaur Narvaiza, transcript, in *Consell Econòmic i Social de les Balears (ed.) (2009)*.

⁴³ Jens Gabbe, reply on behalf of AEBR to the European Commission public consultation on the review of the EGTC Regulation, 2010, pp. 5-6; available at http://www.aebr.eu/files/publications/100720_EGTC_consultation_questionnaire_EN_-_AEBR_contribution.pdf [Last viewed: 19/12/2014]

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

⁴⁵ See Perrin (2010). In more general terms, James Wesley Scott has also described the role played by cross-border cooperation in the EU when compared to other world regions: “The suspension of hostile, dividing state borders and the negative impacts they have had on interstate relations is perhaps a uniquely European achievement... For example, cross-border cooperation... has become a “trademark” of integration and Europeanization and is now firmly established in many border regions within the EU and in numerous neighboring countries. Furthermore, and in contrast to other international cooperation contexts such as North America, the European Union, the European Union has actively promoted local and regional cross-border interaction through its regional development and structural aid programs.” James Wesley Scott, “European Politics of Borders, Border Symbolism and Cross-Border Cooperation”, in Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (eds.), *A Companion to Border Studies* (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), p. 85.

⁴⁶ AEBR (2011, updated), p. 14.

2.4. THE ADDED VALUE OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

The objectives and priorities of cross-border cooperation initiatives in the EU differ greatly. Likewise, the value added provided by actual cooperation can be very diverse, in accordance with the contexts, policies and intensity of initiatives. The AEBR has identified the following major areas of added value of cross-border cooperation:⁴⁷

- ▶ **European added value**, through the contribution made to the promotion of peace, freedom, security and the observance of human rights.
- ▶ **Political added value**, including the contribution made to, among others, the development of European integration, mutual understanding and trust-building, the implementation of subsidiarity and partnership, increased economic and social cohesion and cooperation, and preparation for the accession of new members. Some authors have also referred to the ability of cross-border cooperation to enhance the visibility, specific identity and international profile of participating regions.⁴⁸
- ▶ **Institutional added value**, including the active involvement of citizens, authorities, political and social groups on both sides of the border, the availability of secure knowledge about neighbours, the setting-up of long-term cross-border cooperation structures and the joint drafting, implementation and financing of programmes and projects.

- ▶ **Socio-economic added value**, including the mobilisation of endogenous potential, the participation of actors from the economic and social sectors (e.g. chambers of commerce, associations, companies, trade unions, tourism agencies, etc.), the opening-up of the labour market and harmonisation of professional qualifications, developments and improvements in areas such as infrastructure, transport, tourism, the environment, education, research, etc. and the creation of employment which may result from them. Some authors have also referred to the potential of border regions to foster labour mobility among its citizens, by providing information about existing opportunities across national borders and addressing legal, labour and transport difficulties.⁴⁹
- ▶ **Socio-cultural added value**, including through the dissemination and availability of knowledge about the cross-border region (via maps, publications and teaching material among others), the development of a circle of multipliers (including schools, youth and adult educational establishments, cultural associations, libraries, museums, etc.), opportunities for language learning, etc.

It is worth noting that the AEBR’s European Charter for Border and Cross-border Regions highlights the substantial role played by cultural cooperation in the development and sustainability of other forms of cross-border cooperation: “... *cultural cross-border cooperation becomes a constituent element of regional development. Only if socio-cultural cooperation takes place is a workable cross-bor-*

⁴⁷ Adapted from AEBR (2011, updated), pp. 11-13.

⁴⁸ Perrin (2010), p. 86.

⁴⁹ José María Zufaur Narvaiza, in *Consell Econòmic i Social de les Balears (ed.) (2009)*.

der environment for business, trade and services established.”⁵⁰ The role of cultural aspects as an enabler of other dimensions of sustainable development is therefore underlined, thus aligning cross-border cooperation with observations made elsewhere, in the framework of the contemporary understanding of sustainable development as a multidimensional concept, wherein cultural aspects play a significant role.⁵¹ Some authors have called for EU support to cross-border cooperation to focus not only on economic integration, but to ensure that social and cultural integration is also taken into account.⁵²

A similar, if more specific, analysis of the advantages of cross-border planning in the EU has been conducted by Eduardo Medeiros, who identified the following benefits:

- ▶ promoting the involvement of actors from a number of territorial administrative levels, especially in the form of spatial planning commissions;
- ▶ augmenting the organisational proximity and facilitating the creation of cross-border facilities and services;
- ▶ cementing institutional building;
- ▶ better integration of administrative arrangements;
- ▶ building from the INTERREG success stories; and
- ▶ solving joint problems and harnessing shared development prospects.

The same analysis identified three possible effects on the EU space: changes in domestic planning practices or pol-

icies as a result of transnational cooperation; a re-scaling of planning strategies to take account of supranational spatial development trends; and the convergence of planning policies or systems across Europe in response to international influences and/or cooperation across national borders.⁵³

On the other hand, attempts have also been made to analyse the degree of cross-border integration (CBI) among border regions. According to the AEBR, CBI “is mainly understood as a synonym for territorial integration and is the result of two closely inter-related aspects: (1) socio-cultural and economic cohesion and (2) the intensity of cross-border cooperation.”⁵⁴

Each of these variables is, in turn, the result of several combined factors, with socio-cultural and economic cohesion being determined by issues such as common historical and cultural roots, a shared language, suitable cross-border policies and the nature of the relevant border (permeability, availability of a good transport infrastructure, etc.).

On the other hand, the intensity of cross-border cooperation is determined on the basis of the degree of institutionalisation of cross-border cooperation between local and regional authorities, the legal capacity of working methods or cooperation structures, the scope of actors involved in cross-border cooperation, the range of themes covered by

activities or the involvement in the management of EU programmes and projects. Observation generally shows that the establishment of permanent structures comes after the successful implementation of short- or mid-term cooperation projects. Cross-border structures (e.g. EGTCs or the Secretariat of a Euroregio) should not aim to be responsible for managing all activities, but rather to leave certain aspects in the hands of local and regional authorities or civil society groups on each side of the border: “Cross-border regions should not commit the mistake of doing everything oneself. A cross-border programme management in a Euroregio or similar structure is certainly necessary in order to coordinate the strands. The implementation of individual projects, however, should remain primarily a task of territorial authorities, organisations, associations and other bodies/instances, thus making cross-border use of their knowledge. Thereby, cross-border work will be facilitated, and the cross-border basis in the region, as well as the engagement of all partners, will be enhanced.”⁵⁵

On this basis, in 2008 the AEBR presented a typology of cross-border structures according to their CBI degree. Those identified as “integration forerunners” (i.e. showing the highest level of socio-cultural and economic integration as well as the highest level of cross-border cooperation intensity) were generally the longest-standing cross-border cooperation structures, including the original EUREGIO (1958), the Euregio Rhein-Waal (1971), the Espace lémanique et

franco-génévois (France-Switzerland, established in 1987) and Tornedalsrådet (Finland-Norway-Sweden, established in 1987).

Of course, the degree of cross-border integration can be a result of political will and the benefit perceived by the communities involved in collaboration, but it can also be interpreted as resulting from the prevailing tension between the aim to supersede traditional borders and the ongoing weight of national traditions and structures. As Paasi and Prokkola have shown in the case of Finnish-Swedish cross-border cooperation, “[co-operation] may support the idea of the removal of borders, but in everyday practice the situation is more complicated. A closer look at the co-operation on the Finnish-Swedish border shows that it is often organised in ways that actually adapt to the existence of the national border rather than contesting it. The practices of local actors and their understanding of border-work show that various invisible borders manifest themselves in daily practice and help people to organise space and to create and maintain social norms and identifications in co-operation.”⁵⁶

Groups sharing a language or cultural identity across national borders, or actively integrating a cultural dimension in their cross-border initiatives, have also been identified as being particularly relevant in the context of cross-border cooperation policies, if this must be accompanied by relevant projects and integration structures. The strength of socio-cultural cohesion may ensure the sustainability of

⁵⁰ AEBR (2011, updated), p. 13.

⁵¹ For further views on the role of culture as a ‘driver and enabler’ of sustainable development see, among others, UNESCO, ‘Culture: a driver and an enabler of sustainable development’, Thematic Think Piece for the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda (2012), available at <https://en.unesco.org/post2015/sites/post2015/files/Think%20Piece%20Culture.pdf> [Last viewed: 19/12/2014]

⁵² Vallvé (2004), p. 105.

⁵³ Eduardo Medeiros, ‘From cross-border cooperation to cross-border planning’ (c. 2014), paper, available at http://www3.fl.ul.pt/pessoais/Eduardo_Medeiros/docs/PUB_PAP_EM_CBC_CBPlanning.pdf [Last viewed: 28/6/2015]

⁵⁴ AEBR (ed.) (2008), p. 87.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, p. 62

⁵⁶ Anssi Paasi and Eeva-Kaisa Prokkola, ‘Territorial Dynamics, Cross-border Work and Everyday Life in the Finnish-Swedish Border Area’, *Space and Polity*, 12(1) (2008), p. 22

cross-border cooperation even in the absence of EU funding. It is worth noting that the rapid increase in the number of cross-border structures and Euroregions in Europe since the early 1990s was later followed by the existence of an increasing number of inactive cross-border structures, their internal dynamics vanishing upon the ending of EU funds.⁵⁷ Therefore, sustainability remains a real challenge for many cross-border cooperation initiatives.

Other factors to ensure the sustainability of experiences include political will and the integration of a 'cross-border awareness' or 'cross-border culture' in the standard design and management of policies and legislation: *"In some places, the permanent development of activities by euroregions has turned them into a recognised actor in the political, administrative and social landscape, ... they do not only manage European funds and their local co-funding, but also genuinely domestic funds. Many of the infrastructures and programmes ... involve consultations with the euroregional structures, which hold the knowledge about border issues. ... What remains an obstacle for the development of certain border regions in Europe has become an opportunity in others. Thus, we can observe regions which are host to the poorest regions in Europe and others which have become true high-technology, development leaders ... The strengthening of cross-border cooperation across Europe provides for the exploitation of latent, unused synergies, which have been made effective thanks to solid initiatives,*

leading to increased cross-border awareness among citizens and other actors. The results are ... a stronger feeling of belonging to a single community and increased cross-border collaboration in a number of fields."⁵⁸

As the next section shows, the motivations and value added sought by cross-border initiatives in Europe are very diverse, as are their points of departure and the ways in which they seek to ensure their sustainability. These experiences could inspire cross-border initiatives elsewhere in Europe.

⁵⁷ Cf. AEBR (ed.) (2008); and Martín Guillermo Ramírez, in *Consell Econòmic i Social de les Balears* (ed.) (2009), p. 60

⁵⁸ Martín Guillermo Ramírez, transcript, in *Consell Econòmic i Social de les Balears* (ed.) (2009), pp. 61-64. Translation mine.

3 CASE STUDIES

This section depicts six cross-border initiatives in different areas of the EU. The selection has aimed to present a diverse set of examples as regards the geographical location, stage of development, actors involved and areas addressed. As also noted in the introduction, particular emphasis has been placed on examples which have adopted the form of an EGTC, if other formulas are considered as well.

Whereas, because of the aim to present a diverse and relevant set of examples, the collection includes both initiatives wherein a shared language or culture exists and others where this element is not relevant, emphasis has been placed where possible on the cultural dimension of cross-border initiatives. This is, however, placed in the broader context of cross-border sustainable development. As explained on the previous section, social and cultural cooperation has often been seen as a necessary basis for broader and sustainable cross-border cooperation. On this basis, the final section will present conclusions and recommendations meant in particular for cross-border communities sharing a language or culture.

3.1. EUROREGION PYRENEES-MEDITERRANEAN EGTC

Participating regions:

Balearic Islands (ES), Catalonia (ES), Languedoc-Roussillon (FR) and Midi-Pyrenees (FR)⁵⁹

Institutional form:

Euroregion founded in 2004;

EGTC established in 2009

Population: 14.2 million

Area: 109,830 km²

Official website: www.euroregion.eu

Established in 2004, the Euroregion Pyrenees-Mediterranean (EPM) is a political cooperation project involving two regional governments in Spain (the Balearic Islands and Catalonia) and two in France (Languedoc Roussillon and Midi-Pyrenees). An EGTC was set up in 2009. The organisation has offices in Barcelona, Toulouse and Brussels, the latter serving as representation of the Euroregion to the EU. The EGTC had a budget between 800,000 and 1 million EUR in 2012, made up of contributions from the four participating regions as well as EU funds. It also counted 11 members of staff. Governance bodies

⁵⁹ The region of Aragon (ES) suspended its participation in 2006 due to an ongoing conflict with Catalonia over the preservation of some works of religious art. However, some civil society organisation from that region continue to take part in Euroregion activities.

include an Assembly (involving the presidents of participating regions), a rotating Presidency, a Director and a Secretary-General.⁶⁰

Part of the area covered by the EPM overlaps with that of the Working Community of the Pyrenees, another cross-border cooperation organisation established in 1983 which involves three French regions (the aforementioned two as well as Aquitaine) and four Spanish regions (Catalonia alongside Aragon, the Basque Country and Navarre).

Objectives of the EPM include the creation of a sustainable development cluster in the northwest Mediterranean, based on innovation and social and economic integration, contributing to the building of a united, socially-aware Europe that is close to its citizens and asserting the position of the EPM as a territory with Europe-wide projects.

Four major areas of policy cooperation have been identified, as described below:

- **Higher education, research and innovation**, including the promotion of student mobility and the setting-up of the Eurocampus online platform for learning mobility,⁶¹ as well as R&D networks in areas such as e-Health, water and the food industry.
- **Economic development and employment**, including initiatives in the area of entrepreneurship promotion (e.g. the Creamed business incubator network⁶²).

► **Culture**, including the support to cross-border cultural cooperation and artist mobility through regular calls for proposals, as well as a dedicated Internet portal⁶³ and professional networking events.

► **Sustainable development**, including support for projects which aim to mitigate and foster adaptation to climate change, as well as the promotion of energy efficiency and the development of renewable energy.

The setting-up of an EGTC enabled the EPM to implement common administrative tools, including joint calls for proposals in areas including culture, sustainable development, higher education, innovation and tourism.

Whereas part of the territories covered by the EPM have common linguistic and cultural traits (Catalan being spoken in Catalonia, the Balearic Islands and small parts of Languedoc-Roussillon and Aragon, whereas the two aforementioned French regions and a small part of Catalonia belong to the historical Occitan area), the official rationale of the Euroregion has avoided making these a central issue, while tending to place emphasis on the EPM's added value in areas like the broadening of educational and economic opportunities, sustainable development, service provision, research and innovation. The fact that no single language binds all participating regions and the existing political differences among some of the participating regions serve to explain that cultural unity has not been a core component of euroregional efforts.⁶⁴

Support to cultural cooperation has indeed been one of the main areas of support provided by the EPM, with several rounds of project funding granted by individual participating regions and the EGTC, yet efforts have been targeted primarily at recognising internal diversity and fostering professional and product networking among actors in the participating regions (e.g. performing arts circuits, cultural tourism routes, professional arts markets, etc.). In addition, the EPM has also managed some EU-funded projects, including the INTERREG-supported LabTechnoCulturS, which aimed to develop a common EPM cultural cooperation area, taking advantage of the new technologies (via, among others, the online broadcasting of performing arts events), similar industrial heritage, etc.⁶⁵

As shown by the case of cultural cooperation, the promotion of thematic networks and broadening of professional opportunities have been some of the most visible results of EPM cooperation since 2004. An initial analysis of the EPM's value added referred, among others, to the enhancement of labour mobility and improved competitiveness for economic actors.⁶⁶ Likewise, the ability to become a more visible actor at European level and have direct dialogue with EU institutions (as shown by the setting-up of an office in Brussels) arises as another relevant effect, somehow enabling EGTCs to become actors in multi-level governance. When celebrating the EPM's 10th

anniversary in October 2014, presidents of the participating regions called EU institutions to recognise the EPM as an integrated region and to acknowledge EGTCs as partners and tools in European integration.⁶⁷

On the other hand, the implementation of cross-border activities has often been linked to the design of common solutions to address shared challenges linked to everyday life, including the attention paid to issues such as water management, climate change and health. In this respect, it is worth noting that, although outside the institutional scope of the EPM, another EGTC set up in 2010 by the government of Catalonia and the French national government led to the establishment of a cross-border hospital, the first of its kind in Europe. Located in the border town of Puigcerdà, Catalonia, the hospital opened its doors in 2014 and serves a population of roughly 33,000 on both sides of the border.⁶⁸ The provision of health services across borders is indeed in the focus of many cross-border cooperation initiatives within the EU, as some of the following case studies will also show.

⁶⁰ AECT Pirineus Mediterrània, "Estatuts de l'AECT Pirineus Mediterrània" (2014, revised), available at http://www.euroregio.eu/sites/default/files/statuts_def_cat.pdf [Last viewed: 20/12/2014]. See also Metis GmbH, EGTC Monitoring Report 2013. Towards the New Cohesion Policy (Brussels: Committee of the Regions, 2014), available at <http://cor.europa.eu/en/documentation/studies/Documents/EGTC-monitoring-report-2013/EGTC-monitoring-report-2013.pdf> [Last viewed: 21/12/2014]

⁶¹ For further information, visit <http://www.eurocampusweb.eu/> [Last viewed: 20/12/2014]

⁶² For further information, visit www.eurocreamed.eu/ [Last viewed: 20/12/2014]

⁶³ For further information, visit <http://www.euroregio.eu/ca/espai-cultura> [Last viewed: 20/12/2014]

⁶⁴ It should be noted, however, that Catalan and, since 2014, Occitan, are two of the official languages of the EGTC, alongside French and Spanish. Catalan, French and Spanish are its working languages, according to the Statutes.

⁶⁵ For additional information, visit <http://www.euroregio.eu/ca/projectes/cultura> and <http://www.euroregio.eu/ca/espai-cultura> [Last viewed: 20/12/2014]

⁶⁶ Casimir de Dalmau et al. (2008).

⁶⁷ Euroregió Pirineus-Mediterrània, "Declaració de Xè aniversari de la constitució de l'Euroregió Pirineus Mediterrània", Palma de Mallorca, 27 October 2014, available at http://www.euroregio.eu/sites/default/files/declaracion_10_ans_cat.pdf [Last viewed: 20/12/2014]

⁶⁸ For additional information, visit <http://www.hcercadanya.eu/> [Last viewed: 20/12/2014]

3.2. PONS DANUBII EGTC

Participating towns:

Komárom (HU), Tata (HU), Kislér (HU), Oroszlány (HU), Komárno (SK), Hurbanovo (SK) and Kolárovo (SK)

Institutional form:

EGTC established in 2010

Population: 270,000

Area: almost 500 km²

Official website:

www.ponsdanubii.eu

The Pons Danubii EGTC is one of several cross-border cooperation structures across the Hungarian-Slovak border. Established in 2010, Pons Danubii (literally 'bridge over the Danube' in Latin) brings together seven small towns on both sides of the Danube river, which divides Slovakia to the North and Hungary to the South. Strong historical links between both sides of the river exist, as the towns of Komárom (HU) and Komárno (SK) were one single entity until the end of the First World War, when the founding of Czechoslovakia led to their division. According to 2001 data, 60% of the population of Komárno were ethnic Hungarians. The first Hungarian-language university in Slovakia since 1919, the Selye János University, was established in 2004 in Komárno.

The EGTC was set up with the main aim of implementing cross-border cooperation programmes and projects, ensuring equal opportunities among all members and citizens. It had a budget of EUR 235,000 in 2013 and employed 6 members of staff. The budget was funded with contributions of all member towns, with the potential to raise support from other public authorities. The area also benefits from several EU funding programmes, including European Territorial Cooperation resources. Governance struc-

tures include a General Assembly, a Chair and a Director, with a Supervisory Body in charge of controlling the performance of activities. In 2012, a development agency under Hungarian law, the Pons Danubii Development Agency Ltd, was set up, with the aim of facilitating the management of activities and fundraising.

Specific objectives of the EGTC include the strengthening of cross-border cohesion, the implementation of projects aimed at strategic development and the improvement of everyday life for inhabitants. Particular emphasis is placed on the areas of entrepreneurship, tourism, environment, accessibility and ICT use, as well as the creation of interconnections between urban and rural areas. Programmes are being implemented in the following sectors:

- ▶ **Cycle paths**, extending some previously existing cycling paths and creating others, to bring them together and enhance territorial attractiveness, with the ultimate aim of contributing to the development of bicycle tourism and increasing economic and social integration in the cross-border region.
- ▶ **Labour market**, including the provision of training for unemployed people on both sides of the border, the improvement of existing information on labour opportunities and the strengthening of existing cross-border cooperation relations.
- ▶ **Healthcare**, with the aim of improving the level of public health services in the region by both enhancing the accessibility of health services and conducting research in areas where statistical information is lacking.
- ▶ **Culture**, including the development of cross-border partnerships and a sense of identity through the promotion of the Hungarian and Slovak cultural heritage.

▶ **Media**, including the setting-up of a thematic web TV and the design of specific ICT solutions, as further explained below.⁶⁹

An underpinning objective involves the improvement and enhanced availability of information on relevant developments on both sides of the border among local inhabitants. This is done through both online and offline information and communication tools, including the setting-up of the Pons Danubii web TV.⁷⁰ Indeed, measures have been adopted to improve the cross-border communication flow, the development of joint audiovisual and printed contents in both languages (e.g. production and broadcasting of thematic TV programmes on both sides of the border and their further use), the establishment of a Media Office supporting the information flow, the organisation and delivery of marketing campaigns promoting ICT use (with special attention paid to disadvantaged people) and the establishment of a network that will enable the broadcasting of contents.

Indeed, several thematic committees have been established in a wide range of areas (tourism; education and vocational training; healthcare; urban development and infrastructure; environmental protection; energy and water resource management; media and ICT; economy, industrial development and SME support; and culture, sports, civil society and NGOs), this

being one of the aspects which brings life to cooperation within the EGTC.⁷¹

The focus on ICT aspects and the aim to produce new contents in both languages, as a basis for the development of territorial cohesion and further cooperation both among public authorities and civil society actors, are some of the elements which stand out in this example. Cross-border cooperation enables communities with historical links but separated because of history to develop new links, on a variety of areas including shared identities and heritage, but also more pragmatic fields of cooperation such as health and employment.

Other interesting features include the ability of the EGTC to raise funds from EU funding programmes (which have been important in particular for projects focusing on cycling paths, the labour market and ICT). Finally, it is worth noting that the EGTC developments are part of a broader ecosystem of cross-border initiatives between Hungary and Slovakia, including other EGTCs and Euroregions (including the neighbouring Ister-Granum EGTC), resource centres (such as the Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives, CESCO, a Budapest-based think tank inspired by France's Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière, MOT) and other related initiatives (such as Slovakia's Forum Minority Research Institute).⁷²

⁶⁹ Adapted from Metis GmbH (2014).

⁷⁰ For additional information, visit www.ponsdanubii.eu and <https://www.facebook.com/PonsDanubiiWebtv>. A YouTube channel presenting the videos produced by the web TV is also available at <https://www.youtube.com/user/PonsDanubii/featured> [Last viewed: 21/12/2014]

⁷¹ Zoltan Bara, "Pons Danubii EGTC", power point presentation (c. 2014), available at <http://www.huski.org/cgi-bin/itworx/itworx.cgi?modul=doctar/downloadfile&task=downloadfile&vid=302&dokid=274&uid=603> [Last viewed: 21/12/2014]

⁷² For additional information on these developments, visit CESCO's website at <http://www.cesci-net.eu/> and that of the Forum Minority Research Institute at <http://foruminst.sk/> [Both last viewed: 21/12/2014]

3.3. EGTC TRITIA

Participating regions:

Moravia-Silesia (CZ), Silesian Voivodeship (PL), Opole Voivodeship (PL) and Žilina Region (SK)

Institutional form:

EGTC established in 2013

Population: 7.6 million

Area: 34,096 km²

Official website: www.egtctritia.eu

Established in 2013 by the Czech region of Moravia-Silesia, the Polish Voivodeships of Opole and Silesia and the Slovak self-governing region of Žilina, the aim to set up a common cross-border framework for these four regions based in three different EU Member States had been made explicit since 2009. The regional governments had previous experience of cross-border cooperation initiatives at project and bilateral level (e.g. several INTERREG-funded initiatives), which were seen to have contributed to the improvement of wellbeing among the population in the participating areas.

The region includes the cities of Ostrava (CZ) and Katowice (PL), each with a population slightly above 300,000, and the Upper Silesian metropolitan area which links them both, with a total population above 5 million inhabitants – the Katowice-Ostrava conurbation is indeed one of the largest metropolitan areas in the EU, with a potential to foster polycentric, cross-border development. Other important cities include Opole (PL) and Žilina (SK). Overall the region is characterised by a historical reliance on heavy industries (in particular the car industry), which is pro-

gressively leading to a more diversified economy.⁷³ A Baltic-Adriatic Transport Corridor crosses the TRITIA territory. Common problems in the participating regions include pollution and environmental degradation, as well as a lack of cross-border cooperation. On the other hand, the cross-border area includes seven public universities, several education providers and research and development organisations, thus generating an attractive environment for business, research and innovation.

In this context, the EGTC Tritia was established to facilitate and support cross-border cooperation, as well as to enhance social and economic cohesion mainly through the smart implementation of territorial cooperation programmes and projects. The EGTC had a budget of EUR 88,000 in 2013, derived from annual contributions by the participating regions, which served to cover general costs, and employed three members of staff. Of course, the implementation of specific projects by participating regions enables overall cross-border programmes to manage larger budgets.

Governance bodies include the Assembly, made up of regional presidents, with one rotating Chair; a Supervisory Board, which controls the overall operation and financial management of the EGTC and provides opinions to the Assembly; and a Director, as the statutory representatives of the EGTC and responsible for the everyday management of its activities.

Priority areas for cooperation are the following:

► **Transport and infrastructure**, including the development of cross-border transport infrastructure and the exploration of synergies among existing regional transport networks, ensuring accessibility, safety and sustainability (e.g. support for low-emission forms of transport and more efficient public transport).

► **Economic cooperation**, including the creation of a suitable environment for innovation, entrepreneurship and business, through the availability and qualification of human resources, mutual complementarity, etc. Some activities have focused on enhancing market access for local products, including crafts and agricultural products, through improved marketing, business advice and the exchange of good practices – this is the aim of the ‘You are what you eat’ project, an initiative supported by the Visegrad Fund which involves the TRITIA EGTC and the Ister-Granum EGTC (Hungary-Slovakia). Another project, supported by the European Regional Development Fund, involves the promotion of sustainable businesses, particularly in the field of start-up development and the creation of a cross-border network of organisations supporting entrepreneurship and the transfer of know-how.

► **Tourism**, including the maximisation of the use of geographic and historical, cultural and natural resources of the regions for tourism development, through the building or modernisation of tourism infrastructures, joint strategy design and tourism promotion, the development of tourism based on local

products and the improvement of the quality of tourism services. In this context, another Visegrad Fund-supported project, entitled ‘Discover your industrial past’, is being implemented. Its aim is to raise awareness of the industrial heritage located in the TRITIA area, particularly through education and awareness-raising activities aimed at the local population, including young people. Previous experience of bilateral tourism routes around cultural and natural heritage among the participating regions existed.⁷⁴ Other tourism initiatives focus on cycle tourism.

► **Energy and environment**, including the reduction of environmental impact and the improvement of the quality of the environment through the use of energy-efficient solutions.

Other areas of interest include culture, education, labour mobility and sport. A strong underpinning aim, as shown by the examples above, refers to the mobilisation of funds from European territorial cooperation programmes, as well as from other public funds from national governments and regional bodies (e.g. the Visegrad Fund). The significant demographic and socio-economic weight of the region covered by the EGTC, as well as the tri-national nature of the initiative, provides an environment for the exploration of many synergies and opportunities, both within and outwith the participating regions.

Whereas aspects related to shared identities or languages do not play a particular role in this example, it is worth highlighting that elements

⁷³ Hýnek Böhm, “EGTC TRITIA”, Power Point presentation, c. 2011, available at <http://admin.interact-eu.net/downloads/4529/presentation> [Last viewed: 21/12/2014]; and Branislav Zacharides, “EGTC TRITIA”, Power Point presentation, c. 2014, available at www.slaskie.pl/zalaczniki/2014/08/01/1406896533/1406896602.ppt [Last viewed: 21/12/2014]

⁷⁴ EGTC TRITIA, “EGTC Tritia”, booklet (c. 2011), available at https://verejna-sprava.kr-moravskoslezsky.cz/assets/mezinarodni/tritia_250x210mm_final.pdf [Last viewed: 21/12/2014]

related to education, culture and awareness-raising, as well as cultural tourism and crafts-based economic development, are included within the EGTC's agenda and may provide examples to inspire developments elsewhere.

3.4. EGTC EURO-GO

Participating towns:

Gorizia (IT),
Mestna Občina Nova Gorica (SI) and
Občina Šempeter-Vrtojba (SI)

Institutional form:

EGTC established in 2011,
following several decades of
cross-border cooperation

Population: 73,750

Area: 365.11 km²

Official website: www.euro-go.eu

Cross-border cooperation between the local governments of Gorizia (IT) and Nova Gorica (SI) dated back to 1964. The two towns had in fact formed one single municipality until the end of the Second World War, after which a new border between Italy and Yugoslavia was established and the town of Nova Gorica was created within the Socialist Republic of Slovenia. A cross-border agreement was signed in 1998, with the local government of Šempeter-Vrtojba joining one year later. The Three-Town Council was established in 2002, with regular meetings of local decision-makers, shared transport lines and the establishment of a common agenda around shared challenges, including the building of infrastructures, the development of cultural and educa-

tional initiatives, water management, etc.

The towns benefitted from a range of EU programmes, both at the local level and at a broader transnational level. In fact, some authors have referred to a “Matrioška model” of cross-border cooperation in the Italian-Slovene border and, beyond, in the broader Alps-Adriatic and Ionic-Adriatic Euroregions, with EURO-GO and the neighbouring Trieste-Koper local cross-border spaces representing the smallest scale of a multi-level territorial cooperation space which stretches to include parts of Austria, Croatia, Greece and other countries along the Adriatic and Ionic coasts.⁷⁵

Cross-border cooperation between Italy and Slovenia is based on a number of principles, including partnership and subsidiarity; institutional continuity; the involvement of civil society; and the integration of all sectors.⁷⁶

Established in 2012, the EGTC reinforces a culture of cross-border town-twinning and community-building, in order to develop a true metropolitan area, building on closeness to foster cost-effectiveness of public services and improved well-being. It also symbolises the need for former border towns to re-think their economic models following the impact of national political changes and European integration on border areas, as well as the broader context of reduction in public budgets.⁷⁷

The EGTC had a budget of EUR 40,000 in 2013, with contributions provided by members on the basis of their respective population sizes. It employed one director for a 4-year term. Governance structures include an Assembly, made up of 14 representatives of the participating towns (7 from Gorizia, 5 from Nova Gorica and 2 from Šempeter-Vrtojba), a President and six permanent, consultative committees (on transport; energy; health; culture and education; urban planning; and youth and sports).

The main objective of the EGTC is to support and develop territorial cooperation programmes aimed at reinforcing territorial and social cohesion in different fields: energy, environment, transport, culture and tourism and urban planning. In this context, the EGTC is responsible for the strategic coordination of development policies in the metropolitan area, including in particular the following:

- ▶ Investment in infrastructures, systems and services, transport, travel and logistics. Coordination of public transport policies.
- ▶ Exploitation and management of energy resources and local environmental and development of a metropolitan energy plan.
- ▶ Preparation of plans for joint intervention in other areas, aimed at strengthening economic and social cohesion.
- ▶ Improvement of the quality of health-care and welfare services.
- ▶ Support to youth policies.
- ▶ Promotion of cultural heritage-related initiatives.
- ▶ Coordination of urban plans.

In this context, three major priority projects have been identified for the initial years of the EGTC, as described hereafter:

- ▶ A project on culture and territorial

development, including the regeneration of local heritage sites and the creation of a ‘cross-border park’ including cultural and natural heritage, food tours, cycling paths and tourist resources. In the mid-term, the possible submission of the Parco Isonzo-Soča natural site for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List is being considered.

- ▶ A project on transport, facilitating local mobility through common public transport lines and the improvement of logistical services.
- ▶ A project on health services, including innovation and optimisation in health service provision, improved infrastructures, training of health professionals, etc., with particular emphasis on neonatal and mental health.

Additional project proposals have been designed by the thematic committees. Among them, the culture committee has identified the potential for cultural and educational resources to become critical elements in regional development, with links to lifelong learning, tourism, economic development and social cohesion. A number of initiatives in this area have been proposed, including a cross-border oral history archive, a youth media education platform, a cross-border TV and media station, Italian and Slovene language courses, trilingual university courses and the design of urban marketing tools, among others.

Overall this provides an interesting example of how small-scale cross-border cooperation can serve to re-think border areas, erase previous divisions through joint projects and mobilise existing energies on both sides and work on a wide range of thematic areas to improve quality of life. Several cultural projects are identified as holding the potential to bring the communi-

⁷⁵ Sigrid Lipott, “Twin cities: cooperation beyond walls. The case of cross-border cooperation between Italy and Slovenia”, presented at the *Relocating Borders: a comparative approach – Second EastBordNet Conference*, Berlin, January 2013, available at http://www.eastbordnet.org/working_papers/open/relocatingborders/Lipott_Twin_cities_130411.pdf [Last viewed: 21/12/2014]. See also Metis GmbH (2014).

⁷⁶ Sigrid Lipott (2013).

⁷⁷ EURO GO, “Documento di sintesi degli obiettivi, azioni e proposte progettuali per la programmazione comunitaria e la stesura del piano strategico” (2013), available at <http://www.euro-go.eu/images/programmi-e-progetti/2%20-%20Piano%20Strategico%20-%20Strateski%20plan.pdf> [Last viewed: 21/12/2014]

ties together and foster social and economic development. The need to devise new institutional arrangements and re-think public service provision also stands out.

3.5. CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

Participating territories: the Republic of Ireland (IE) and Northern Ireland (UK). A wide range of cross-border initiatives have been implemented in recent decades, applying at different territorial levels; in many cases, only specific local governments or civil society actors on each side of the border take part.

Institutional form: a North-South Ministerial Council exists since 1999, following 1998's Good Friday Agreement; other activities have been implemented as short-term projects, in the context of the PEACE I-IV, INTERREG I-IV and other EU-funded programmes. Several cross-border bodies, established on a thematic or regional basis, also exist.

Population: approximately 6.4 million (including the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland)

Area: approximately 84,400 km²

Official website: n/a

Cross-border cooperation in Ireland follows a pattern rather different from that of other border areas in the EU. Political developments in the island, including the Troubles and the Good Friday Agreement, as well as the impor-

tant role played in cross-border initiatives by both the national government of the Republic of Ireland as well as that of the UK and, to a different extent, the EU and other foreign actors, place this case on a different level.

The specific nature of the area in terms of cross-border cooperation is expressed by the fact that, according to observations made at the end of last decade, *“the ... Community PEACE initiative has taken up so much of the administrative capacity and political interest of the authorities that relatively little attention has been available for INTERREG A.”*⁷⁸

On the other hand, a number of cross-border thematic and regional bodies exist (e.g. the East Border Region, the Irish Central Border Area Network and the North-West Region Cross-Border Group) and the area has been subject to extensive analysis and evaluation, not least as regards the social, economic and political effects of cross-border initiatives, thus rendering this a particularly interesting case. Of course, the scope of this paper does not allow for a detailed analysis of all relevant developments, but rather to identify some elements which may provide interesting lessons to other cross-border areas in the EU.

Over the past 15 years, cross-border cooperation between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland has derived from two main policy frameworks:

► EU Territorial Cooperation and other Structural Funds, in particular

the PEACE programmes;
► the commitment to cross-border cooperation that is integral to the Good Friday Agreement.⁷⁹

The PEACE Programmes, implemented since 1995 (PEACE I, 1995-99; PEACE II, 2000-06; PEACE III, 2007-13; PEACE IV, 2014-2020), aim at reinforcing progress towards a peaceful and stable society and promoting reconciliation in Ireland. Objectives have successively addressed the immediate legacy of the conflict and the opportunities arising from peace (PEACE I), increased economic development and cross-border cooperation opportunities (PEACE II) and the promotion of reconciliation (PEACE III and IV). Eligible regions include Northern Ireland and the Border Region of the Republic of Ireland. Approximately 23,000 small-scale projects have been supported over the past 20 years.⁸⁰

In the late 2000s, the Cross-Border Centre for Community Development at the Dundalk Institute of Technology (DIT) investigated the impacts in terms of community development of the 15,000 grants distributed under PEACE I mainly to community and voluntary organisations on both sides of the border. Impacts were identified in organisation-building (with informal groups becoming formal organisations as a result of the funding obtained, particularly in the Republic of Ireland), cross-border cooperation (*“62% of groups in Northern Ireland*

*and 85% of Southern groups worked across the border.... Many had opened contacts or begun their work during the time of the PEACE I programme in the 1990s”*⁸¹) and the transfer of good practices (*“... there was evidence that models of good practice in one jurisdiction were successfully applied to the other. Most of the traffic was from the North to the South and was evident in the fields of mental health, volunteering and projects to improve the physical environment.”*⁸²)

On the other hand, the observation also showed that progress in cross-border cooperation in Ireland was more complex compared to other cross-border areas in Europe: *“Traditionally, the history of cross-border cooperation in Europe has been a narrative of progression from ‘first contact’ between pairs engaged in back-to-back development; to cooperation in projects that traverse borders; and finally to devolved, integrated, single company operations working in such a way as to minimize and eventually eliminate the distorting effects of land borders. The experience of the Irish border shows that these trajectories are more complex and that there was no natural progression from ‘first contact’ to ‘pure partnership’.”*⁸³ This might be due to the specific complexity of the Irish case, as well as, according to some authors, the lack of a strong civil society dimension in cross-border cooperation, as per the absence of formal participative governance spaces.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ AEBR (ed.) (2008), p. 49.

⁷⁹ Ruth Taillon et al., *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation (Armagh and Kehl: Centre for Cross Border Studies / Euro Institut – Institute for cross border co-operation, 2011)*, available at <http://www.crossborder.ie/pubs/2011-IAToolkit.pdf> [Last viewed: 21/12/2014]; and Ruth Taillon, *“Impact Assessment: Developing an Innovative Methodology to Support Cross-Border Cooperation”*, *Journal of Cross-Border Studies in Ireland*, n°8 (2013), available at <http://www.crossborder.ie/wp-content/uploads/journal8-2013.pdf> [Last viewed: 21/12/2014]

⁸⁰ Pat Colgan, *“The PEACE programmes Ireland / Northern Ireland”*, Power Point presentation (2012), available at <http://admin.interact-eu.net/downloads/5898/presentation> [Last viewed: 21/12/2014]. See also <http://www.seupb.eu/home.aspx> [Last viewed: 21/12/2014]

⁸¹ Brian Harvey (2010), p. 36-37.

⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 40.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

⁸⁴ *“The continued absence of a formal civil society dimension in cross-border cooperation remains a point of extraordinary weakness in the Irish cross-border relationship. Examples from other parts of Europe show that people-to-people cooperation is given prominence, funding, permanence and institutional expression in successful cross-border relationships.”* *Ibidem*, p. 42.

Progress in cross-border cooperation involving the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland has been made under several areas, including health and social care, where a partnership of governmental departments from both sides of the border exists since 1992. It places emphasis on improving access to services, promoting health and well-being, reducing health inequalities and promoting social inclusion.⁸⁵ Other major projects have addressed education, tourism promotion, spatial planning and infrastructure. Former Taoiseach Brian Cowen stressed that a pragmatic, rather than political approach prevailed in cross-border developments: *“The genius of all of these agreements is that we are all on a common journey together where we have not decided on the destination. The problem with our ideologies in the past was that we had this idea about where we were going but had no idea how anyone was going to come with us on the journey.”*⁸⁶ A change of mentality and mutual trust among communities on both sides of the border should therefore be the result of practical improvements in everyday lives.⁸⁷ However, some external observers have considered that efforts have focused excessively on economic cooperation, at the expense of ‘softer’ forms of cooperation, including people-to-people exchanges and social policy.⁸⁸

The long-term and multidimensional nature of cross-border reconciliation and development processes in Ireland

has meant that a number of stable management, information, networking and monitoring initiatives have emerged, which could inspire similar projects elsewhere in Europe. Among them are the Centre for Cross Border Studies, which advocates and monitors cross-border developments in Ireland and Europe.⁸⁹ The Centre is one of the partners behind Border People, a one-stop information portal on labour mobility, learning opportunities, taxation, welfare services and related issues.⁹⁰ Several cross-border thematic networks have also been established, including the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD), which brings together university experts from different sectors concerned with regional development across the Island; the Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South (SCOTENS), which gathers colleges of education, university education departments, education trade unions and other educational stakeholders; and Universities Ireland (UI), which involves 10 universities across the island.⁹¹

3.6. GALICIA – NORTE DE PORTUGAL EGTC

Participating regions:

Galicia (ES) and the Regional Coordination and Development Commission for the North of Portugal (Comissão de Coordenação e Desenvolvimento Regional do Norte Portugal, CCDR-N, PT)

Institutional form:

EGTC established in 2008, following previous cooperation as a Working Community since 1991

Population: 6.4 million

Area: 51,000 km²

Official website: www.gnpaect.eu

A Working Community between the Region of Galicia and the administrative region of the North of Portugal was established in 1991, under the aegis of the Madrid Outline Convention of the Council of Europe. In 2008, taking advantage of the new EU Regulation, Galicia and Norte established one of the earliest EGTCs, which became operational in 2010. The North of Portugal region is represented by CCDR-N, a regional delegation of Portugal’s Ministry of Agriculture, Sea, Environment and Spatial Planning.

The territory covered by this Euroregion holds a strong social and economic network and is a coherent cultural and economic space. Strong cultural, social and economic links between both regions have long existed and the Portuguese and Galician languages are also similar, as are other cultural elements (e.g. landscape, gastronomy, traditions, etc.). As regards their economic features, the North of Portugal is rather industrialised, whereas Galicia is more dependent on agriculture. Both of them base their future development strategies on the tertiary sector. The economic activity consists mainly of trade and tourism, whereas the industry has the largest volume of employment and sales.⁹²

Shared challenges, which may be similar to those experienced by other cross-border regions in Europe, include the social and economic impact of the regions’ peripheral position, both in the Iberian Peninsula and in Europe; aging and population decline; the diverse administrative models on both sides of the border; structural imbalances between coastal and inland areas; loss of competitiveness in some economic sectors; increasing unemployment, particularly among young people; some difficulties in transport and internal mobility; difficulties in the provision of social and educational services, particularly in rural areas; and the need to adapt governance models to an increasingly complex euroregional space.⁹³

The general objectives of the EGTC include to facilitate and promote regional cooperation among its members and to enhance competitiveness in the fields of knowledge and innovation, ultimately resulting in increased cohesion. Its vision is to become an interconnection and promoting agent for the Euroregion, a meeting point for public institutions, businesses and citizens on both sides of the border to promote common interests and objectives. The EGTC had a budget of EUR 271,410 in 2012, made up of members’ contributions, EU funding and occasional contributions made by project partners. It employed 6 members of staff. Governance bodies include a General Assembly, a Director and a Council.

⁸⁵ See the website of Cooperation and Working Together (CAWT) at <http://www.cawt.com> [Last viewed: 21/12/2014]

⁸⁶ Cowen (2010), p. 19.

⁸⁷ ... by emphasizing that commonality of interest and identifying the mutual benefit that comes from cooperation, this is the means by which trust can be built and relationships can be restored to normal, as well as to the natural competition that communities engage in in order to progress in democratic countries.” Cowen (2010), pp. 11-12.

⁸⁸ Brian Harvey (2010), pp. 43-44.

⁸⁹ For additional information, visit <http://www.crossborder.ie/> [Last viewed: 22/12/2014]

⁹⁰ For additional information, visit <https://borderpeople.info/> [Last viewed: 22/12/2014]

⁹¹ For additional information, visit respectively <http://www.iclrd.ie/>, <http://scotens.org/> and <http://www.universities-ireland.ie/> [Last viewed: 22/12/2014]

⁹² Cf. Committee of the Regions, *The European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation. Delivering growth and opportunities* (Brussels: Committee of the Regions, 2012), available at <http://cor.europa.eu/en/documentation/brochures/Documents/EGTC-brochure-final-EN.pdf> [Last viewed: 22/12/2014]. See also Metis GmbH (2014).

⁹³ Adapted from Galicia – Norte de Portugal, *Plan de Inversiones Conjuntas de la Euroregión Galicia – Norte de Portugal 2014-2020* (2014), pp. 128-130, available at <http://bit.ly/1JHYjya> [Last viewed: 22/12/2014]

In this context, the main goals of cooperation in the context of the EGTC have been the following:

- ▶ To promote cross-border relationships.
- ▶ To add value to the euroregional entrepreneur base, by promoting competitiveness through knowledge and innovation.
- ▶ To develop transport and access to basic transport systems.
- ▶ To increase social and institutional cohesion within the Euroregion.

Several sectors have been identified for cooperation at both institutional and civil society level, and specific activities have been implemented within each of them, as described hereafter:

- ▶ **Culture and education**, including an analysis of the potential of the cultural and creative sectors as factors generating employment and economic growth; the promotion of tourist routes around cultural heritage; and the promotion of university and R&D networks.
- ▶ **Tourism**, including joint promotion of tourism opportunities and the coordination of sectoral meetings of tourism stakeholders in both regions.
- ▶ **Mobility and Logistics**, including the provision of information on cross-border transport and studies to foster transport integration.
- ▶ **Environment**, including educational and awareness-raising initiatives on the sustainable use of natural resources.
- ▶ **Employment**, including measures to facilitate certificate recognition and to foster entrepreneurship.

- ▶ **Infrastructure**, including the promotion of new cross-border transport infrastructure and cooperation among local authorities as regards the use of existing facilities.

- ▶ **Business cooperation**, including the promotion of partnerships between chambers of commerce.⁹⁴

These activities are also underpinned by a strong institutional component, which aims to raise awareness of the Euroregional space within the participating regions and beyond, including measures aimed at the joint branding and marketing of the Galicia – Norte area, as well as the strengthening of internal governance mechanisms.

The diverse range of sectors in which activities have been undertaken, the ability to identify a complex set of shared cross-border challenges which may be similar to those experienced by other regions in Europe and the need to deal with rather different political and administrative frameworks in their respective Member States make this an example which could inspire developments in other cross-border regions across the EU.

⁹⁴ Adapted from Juan Girón Lago, "Galicia – Norte Portugal. European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation"; Power Point Presentation (c. 2012), available at http://www.cesi.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/120629_LIRON_LAGO_Juan_Jose.pdf [Last viewed: 22/12/2014]; and Committee of the Regions (2012).

4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into account the general landscape of cross-border cooperation in the EU presented in Chapter 2 and the case studies described in Chapter 3, this section will present conclusions and recommendations which aim to respond to the paper's general aim of analysing how existing tools of cross-border cooperation could contribute to strengthening relations among people sharing a language or culture or identifying themselves as part of the same nation, but which live in different EU Member States.

The observations so far have shown how cross-border cooperation has become an increasingly important phenomenon in the EU, facilitated by changes in the understanding of territories, EU support and a set of motivations emerging from the communities affected. The latter include the aim to face traditional challenges experienced by border regions, including limited infrastructural development, economic disadvantages and obstacles to communication and cultural exchange with communities with shared linguistic or cultural features.

Indeed, whereas cross-border cooperation is a widespread phenomenon in the EU, cultural communities living across national borders have found particular motivation in the opening of opportunities for collaboration.

Cultural continuity may be seen as an important factor in facilitating the sustainability of forms of cross-border cooperation. Ultimately, this may be seen as a factor which serves to make European integration “real” for many citizens and stresses the value added of EU policies.

4.1. CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the observations from the previous chapters, this section presents a set of conclusions which could be used by public institutions, civil society actors and other stakeholders active in cross-border cooperation initiatives to consider potential approaches in this field. The focus was put mainly on the perspective of cross-border communities sharing cultural or linguistic features or representing stateless nations, while some conclusions may be valid in other cases as well.

a. Cross-border cooperation holds a special meaning for European integration

The observations have served to highlight the confluences between instances of cross-border cooperation and the key messages of European integration over the decades. At present, cross-border cooperation embodies mutual recogni-

tion, people-to-people exchanges and sustainable, integrated development, and it may also enhance public service provision and make it more cost-effective. All of these areas are relevant to EU objectives, e.g. those in the context of the Europe 2020 objectives.

Communities sharing a language or culture across borders could explore synergies between these broader political objectives and their own agendas, thus stressing how cross-border cooperation may provide benefits at a larger European scale. Of course, this should be tackled taking into account the existing obstacles (including the potential reluctance of national authorities and other actors to facilitate cross-border cooperation) and respecting other European values, including the recognition of internal diversity within participating communities.

b. Exploration of multi-level governance

Cross-border cooperation can be seen as an expression of emerging multi-level governance in the EU, which leads to rethinking territorial relations and burden-sharing among different tiers of government as well as between these and actors in civil society and the private sector, while including opportunities for extensive citizen participation.⁹⁵ Multi-level governance should provide opportunities for a stronger recognition of bottom-up processes, as well as for more horizontal and interdependent relations among public authorities at different levels, thus contributing to a more polycentric Europe.

Local and regional governments representing cross-border cultural and linguistic communities should explore the opportunities provided by this emerging, if yet limited and imperfect, paradigm. This includes building links with broader initiatives promoting multi-level governance at national and European level, including federations of local and regional authorities, civil society groups and other political actors.

c. Recognition of internal ecosystems and participative governance

The effectiveness and sustainability of cross-border cooperation requires the existence of a wide range of actors which are actively involved in cross-border initiatives and which see clear benefits for them. An 'ecosystem' of interrelated cross-border initiatives (e.g. major institutional dialogue frameworks, cross-border management structures, sectoral committees, universities, think-tanks and other monitoring bodies, NGO platforms, city-to-city exchanges, professional networks or working groups, joint service providers, school exchanges, joint tourist boards, etc.) is necessary to bring euroregions and other cross-border spaces to life. A diverse set of thematic areas should ideally be addressed, and a wide range of actors within each participating region should be involved as 'multipliers' of the cross-border dimension. Attention should also be paid to the identification of relevant obstacles to cooperation and to ensuring the existence of participative spaces which provide for plural, active governance internally.

Cross-border communities sharing a culture or a language should be able to take advantage of the often highly-mobilised network of civil society actors which may advocate for cross-border cooperation and foster community-building, and ensure that existing energies are suitably channeled into the development of sustainable structures and programmes. Attention should also be paid to the design of multi-dimensional agendas, which communicate the relevance to a wide range of actors, whilst giving priority to those which address existing challenges and which can foster engagement and cross-border cohesion.

d. Cultural aspects at the heart of cross-border cooperation

Whereas the map of cross-border cooperation in Europe is too diverse to provide one-size-fits-all models, several observers have identified cultural aspects as being one important factor in the success and sustainability of processes. This should be interpreted as confirmation of the multidimensional nature of sustainable development, which involves exploring the synergies between cultural, social, economic and environmental aspects within spatial development. The integration of cultural aspects in cross-border cooperation can take a range of forms, from the identification of shared features in history or language as an element to foster a sense of unity, to the promotion of cross-border arts exchanges. Efforts should always be made to recognise internal diversity, whether related to traditional communities or to present-day cultural expressions, and to ensure that internal cultural promotion is balanced with external cooperation and openness.

Ideally, rather than being anchored in visions of the past, the cultural dimension of cross-border cooperation should explore the contemporary meaning that cultural aspects may have to the communities involved, whether in terms of today's creativity (e.g. fostering creative spaces, co-productions and distribution networks in the performing or visual arts, literature, etc.) or in the social and economic significance of cultural assets (e.g. in terms of cultural and sustainable tourism, crafts development, creative entrepreneurship, lifelong learning, etc.).

e. The role of the new technologies

Cross-border cooperation, particularly when it involves large regions or those which face significant mobility difficulties, can take advantage of the opportunities provided by the new technologies in terms of internal communication (e.g. professional networks, joint project development, citizen participation, mutual knowledge, etc.), service and information provision (e.g. opportunities for labour mobility, differences in legal systems, etc.) and external visibility (e.g. joint branding, marketing, etc.).

The creation of joint content and the setting-up of common media platforms (e.g. joint websites and TV channels, publications, etc.), ultimately fostering the emergence of a shared media space, could be one area of particular interest for cross-border communities sharing a language or culture.

f. Improvements in everyday lives

As already noted, the success and sustainability of cross-border cooperation structures often relies on their ability

⁹⁵ The Committee of the Regions' Charter for Multilevel Governance, adopted in 2014, includes the commitment to "cooperate closely with other public authorities by thinking beyond traditional administrative borders, procedures and hurdles". Available at <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/mlgcharter/Pages/MLG-charter.aspx> [Last viewed: 23/12/2014]

to provide visible improvements to the everyday lives of citizens and communities. Areas such as health (including more accessible health provision in rural areas, etc.), employment (including information on job opportunities across the border, services helping to address incompatible legal systems, etc.) and education (student mobility, recognition of certificates, joint learning programmes, language learning, etc.) may be key to prove the value added of euroregions to citizens.

In this respect, paying attention to internal public service reforms and developing a rights-based approach to cross-border cooperation could be relevant measures for local and regional governments developing joint initiatives.

g. Cross-border awareness and the development of cross-border learning spaces

Likewise, one of the areas in which cross-border cooperation can provide clear impacts in local communities is by facilitating an exchange of approaches and good practices among different actors, including public authorities (e.g. local governments, service providers) but also community groups, schools, businesses and other stakeholders. The exchange of practices and knowledge could be the basis for the emergence of a cross-border 'awareness' or 'culture', i.e. the recognition that the relevant cross-border space is a permanent, essential reference framework for development in all walks of life, adopted both by public authorities when conceiving policy and legislation and by civil society in their regular dealings.

Authorities and organisations fostering cross-border cooperation in

areas sharing a culture or a language should take account of this dimension, by facilitating people-to-people exchanges, fostering online and offline publications which depict existing knowledge in different areas, contributing to evaluation and benchmarking models and promoting language learning where this is relevant, thus facilitating the vision of the relevant cross-border territory as a learning and permanent space.

h. European networking

As the observations have shown, cross-border cooperation has become an extensive phenomenon across the EU and beyond over recent decades. Despite the diversity of context in which this operates, many challenges are shared. Increasingly, platforms and spaces for the exchange of experiences exist (from the AEBR, the Assembly of European Regions and the Committee of the Regions, including its EGTC platform, to many thematic groups and initiatives in the context of European Territorial Cooperation programmes and other frameworks).

Communities aiming to further cross-border cooperation should take advantage of these existing spaces, in order to draw lessons from existing experiences and join forces with others in the context of institutional dialogue at national and European level.

i. The importance of political will and continuity

Among the factors which contribute to the effectiveness of cross-border cooperation are the existence of a strong political commitment on behalf of all public authorities involved and the mid- to long-term continuity of cross-

border cooperation. The latter should provide for accumulated learning and for the identification of the most suitable administrative form in each cross-border space – whereas EGTCs have emerged as an increasingly relevant model, promoters of cross-border cooperation may often use other forms in the early stages of their cooperation, later adopting more permanent structures.

Political will and the aforementioned engagement of a diverse range of actors within all the regions involved should be translated into a specific vision and common agendas (e.g. mid-term development strategies), which the participating regions should be invited to transfer to their respective policy contexts. These aspects are regarded as critical in order to ensure the sustainability of cross-border efforts.

j. Visibility, lobbying and institutional dialogue

The setting-up of permanent cross-border cooperation spaces may allow the participating regions to raise their profile at national and European level. This can also provide them with reinforced opportunities to establish a direct dialogue with European and national institutions, particularly as regards their regional development strategies and the need to adapt existing frameworks to the needs and opportunities of cross-border cooperation, including those that derive from different administrative and institutional frameworks between neighbouring Member States, which render effective cooperation difficult. Indeed, it has been noted that many national and regional opera-

tional programmes in the context of the Structural Funds still fail to refer to cross-border cooperation, and that legislation in some Member States poses serious difficulties to the establishment of effective cross-border structures.⁹⁶

Actors involved in cross-border cooperation could join forces at national, sub-regional and European level to raise the visibility of their experiences, call for further recognition of cross-border cooperation structures and request an adaptation of legal frameworks to their needs and practices. Ideally, visibility, lobbying and dialogue initiatives should be supported by research and evaluation of existing needs, results and impacts of activities.

4.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into account the observations and conclusions reached, this final section formulates recommendations aimed at the local and regional governments and other communities interested in developing cross-border cooperation among groups sharing a culture or a language, as well as to European-level platforms, foundations and networks which could support these developments.

a. Recommendations to local and regional governments and other regional stakeholders aiming to develop cross-border cooperation among communities sharing a language or a culture:

- To develop mid- to long-term strategies addressing a wide and diverse

⁹⁶ Cf. Committee of the Regions, "Dialogue with national authorities: The EGTCs demand participation to implement the revised Regulation", press release, 26 June 2014, available at <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/egtc/news/Pages/Dialogue-with-national-authorities-The-EGTCs-demand-participation-to-implement-the-revised-Regulation-.aspx> [Last viewed: 24/12/2014]

range of objectives, which help to maximise results and facilitate sustainability.

- To identify and foster synergies between local priorities and existing European strategies and objectives, e.g. the Europe 2020 strategy and its constituent initiatives.
- To ensure that the benefits of cross-border cooperation can be felt in citizens' everyday lives, in a variety of areas (education, culture, health, employment, etc.).
- To integrate a cultural dimension in cross-border development strategies, balancing heritage assets and contemporary creativity, exploring the added value of cross-border synergies (e.g. networking, coproduction, joint distribution) to cultural development, community-building and the recognition of diversity, and fostering integration with other objectives (e.g. tourism, entrepreneurship, employment, education, etc.).
- To take advantage of the opportunities provided by the new technologies for internal communication and information, content creation, service provision and awareness-raising purposes.
- To integrate research, evaluation, knowledge-sharing and learning in cross-border initiatives (including through partnerships with relevant universities, think-tanks, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders), thus developing a learning space from which both internal and external stakeholders can draw advantage.
- To design participative regional and cross-regional governance frameworks, aiming to actively engage a wide and diverse range of stakeholders and foster the emergence of an interconnected, multi-sectorial ecosystem.
- To raise awareness of regional and national governments about the specificities of cross-border coop-

eration, including its transversal integration in all relevant legislation, strategies and policies.

- To identify other partners at national or sub-regional level (e.g. other cross-border initiatives, federations of local and regional authorities, universities and think-tanks, etc.) with which cooperation could be fostered, particularly in terms of mutual learning, joint advocacy and lobbying.
- To explore synergies and cooperate with other public or civil society-led initiatives fostering the development of multi-level governance, at regional, national and European level.

b. Recommendations to European platforms, networks and foundations aiming to support these developments:

- To identify areas of common interest among existing or potential cross-border cooperation initiatives and foster mutual learning and knowledge-transfer among them, through spaces for the exchange of good practices, research partnerships and educational initiatives.
- To identify synergies between the priorities and interests of cross-border initiatives and current topics in the EU agenda, in order both to facilitate priority-setting at regional level and lobbying and awareness-raising at European level.
- To develop online platforms and spaces which facilitate the exchange of good practices and experiences among cross-border initiatives.
- To join forces with other initiatives (e.g. the AEBR, the Assembly of European Regions, the Committee of the Regions' EGTC platform, etc.) which call for the adoption of European and national legislative

and administrative frameworks to the needs and specificities of cross-border cooperation, as well as for the further development of multi-level governance frameworks.

- To facilitate dialogue between cross-border cooperation initiatives and European institutions where relevant.

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The European Parliament recognized the Centre Maurits Coppieters (CMC) as a Political Foundation at a European Level in 2007. Since then the CMC has developed political research focusing on European issues, also in the fields of multilevel governance, management of cultural and linguistic diversity in complex (multi-national) societies, decentralization, state and constitutional reform, succession of states, conflict resolution and protection of human rights.

So far, every little step has been important to the steady consolidation and growth of the Centre, that's why I'm especially proud of this publication. Indeed, it undoubtedly represents a crucial contribution to the current state of affairs and will certainly have a notorious impact both in the Academia and

among European decision makers in a broad sense, including European Institutions (like the European commission, European Parliament, Council and Committee of the Regions), other political actors, think tanks, research centers and contributors to the European integration process.

On behalf of the Centre Maurits Coppieters and our partners I sincerely wish to thank the author of the report for his groundbreaking approach to the subject and his passionate, conceptually robust and well structured factual presentation.

Finally I also wish to thank you (the reader) for your interest in our organization and for reviewing our modest contribution to a much wider European political debate in this area.

Günther Dauwen
Secretary of Centre Maurits Coppieters
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MAURITS COPPIETERS

The Fleming Maurits Coppieters studied history and later became a Doctor of Laws and obtained a master's degree in East European studies. During the Second World War, he refused to work for the German occupier. After many years as a teacher, he worked as a lawyer for a while. He was one of the people who re-established the Vlaamse Volksbeweging (Flemish People's Movement), of which he was the President from 1957-1963.

Coppieters' political career began when he became a member of the Flemish-nationalist party *Volksunie* (VU) which was formed in 1954. With the exception of two years, Coppieters was a town councillor between 1964 and 1983. He was also elected as a member of the Belgian Chamber (1965-1971) and Senate (1971-1979). At the same time, Coppieters became President of the newly formed '*Cultuurraad voor de Nederlandstalige Cultuurgemeenschap*' (Cultural Council for the Dutch-speaking Community, from which later the Flemish Parliament emanated), when the VU formed part of the government. In 1979, Coppieters was moreover elected during

the first direct elections for the European Parliament.

As a regionalist, he became a member of the Group for Technical Coordination and Defence of Independent Groupings and Members in the European Parliament (TCDI). Among other things, he made a name for himself when he championed the cause of the Corsicans. In the meantime, Coppieters also played a pioneering role in the formation of the European Free Alliance, of which he became the Honorary President and in whose expansion he continued to play a role, even after he said farewell to active politics in 1981. In 1996, Coppieters joined forces with the president of the Flemish Parliament, Norbert De Batselier, to promote '*Het Sienjaal*', a project with a view to achieve political revival beyond the party boundaries. Coppieters died on November 11, 2005.

Among other things, Coppieters was the author of: '*Het jaar van de Klaproos*'; '*Ik was een Europees Parlementslid*'; '*De Schone en het Beest*'. He is Honorary member of the EFA.

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