

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE OF UKRAINE
STATE UNIVERSITY
«UZHGOROD NATIONAL UNIVERSITY»**



**IN SEARCH OF THE BEST FORMS
AND PRACTICES FOR UKRAINE:
CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION
IN THE VISEGRAD FOUR COUNTRIES**

Collective Monograph

**Edited by M. Lendel, G. Ocskay,
J. Kurowska-Pysz, M. Lačný**

**Uzhhorod
2026**

UDC 330.3(477):339.92(438+437.3+437.6+439) (02.064)

In Search of the Best Forms and Practices for Ukraine: Cross-border Cooperation in the Visegrad Four Countries [Collective monograph] / Edited by M. Lendel, G. Ocskay, J. Kurowska-Pysz, M. Lačný; author team: M. Lendel, Yu. Fetko, O. Sviezhentseva, N. Kichera, et al. Uzhhorod National University Publishing House “Hoverla”, 2026. 195 p.

The present collective monograph is dedicated to the analysis of the institutional forms and practices of cross-border cooperation among the Visegrad Four countries. Its primary objective is to assess the potential for adapting these practices in Ukraine within the framework of European integration. This study is part of an international project, funded by the Visegrad Fund from 2024 to 2026, in collaboration with academic institutions from Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. The monograph systematically reviews and critically evaluates the various forms and practices of cross-border cooperation, with particular emphasis on their impact on territorial development, the needs of residents in border regions, and the promotion of interethnic dialogue. This study is applied in nature and serves as a basis for formulating political recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of cross-border cooperation in Ukraine.

The collective monograph “In Search of the Best Forms and Practices for Ukraine: Cross-border Cooperation in the Visegrad Four Countries” has been prepared within the framework of the international project titled “CBC in Ukraine and V4: in the Search for Examples of Best Practice”, project number 22410100.

Reviewers:

Tetyana NAHORNYAK, Doctor of Political Sciences, Professor, the Dean of the Kyiv-Mohyla School of Professional and Continuing Education of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy;

Vitaliy ANDREIKO, Candidate of Historical Sciences, Associate Professor, Dean of the Faculty of History and International Relations, Associate Professor at the Department of International Studies and Public Communications at UzhNU

*Recommended for publishing
by the Academic Council of State University «UzhNU»
(Minutes N 15 dated December 29, 2025)*

ISBN 978-617-8576-27-1

© State University «UzhNU», 2026

INTRODUCTION

The collective monograph entitled “In Search of the Best Forms and Practices for Ukraine: Cross-border Cooperation in the Visegrad Four Countries” has been developed as part of the international project “CBC in Ukraine and V4: in the Search for Examples of Best Practice” (Project No. 22410100). This initiative, undertaken from 2024 to 2026, was led by Uzhhorod National University in partnership with four academic and research institutions from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. The primary objective of this project, and the focus of this study, is to identify the most effective institutional and practical solutions for cross-border cooperation among the Visegrad Group countries. Furthermore, the study aims to explore the potential to apply these successful practices in Visegrad’s border regions and in Ukraine’s communities, particularly to advance the country’s European integration efforts.

The relevance of this monograph is underscored by a range of interrelated factors. As Ukraine pursues its objective of European Union membership, there is an urgent need to reassess and enhance approaches to cross-border cooperation. This reassessment must take into account anticipated institutional and legal reforms, as well as the requirements outlined in cohesion policies and the principles of European multi-level governance. In this regard, the experiences of the Visegrad Four countries serve as a particularly valuable reference. These countries have successfully adapted their national and local institutions to comply with EU regulations and have cultivated a plethora of practices that may prove beneficial for Ukrainian communities and regions.

The main objective of this project, and subsequently the present monograph, is to identify, systematise, and disseminate successful institutional models and effective everyday practices of CBC within the Visegrad Four countries. It is essential not only to document successful initiatives but also to engage in a critical analysis of what works effectively in cross-border interactions under varying conditions. Additionally, this project aims to highlight aspects that may prove to be ineffective, resource-intensive, or hindered by institutional barriers.

The monograph is designed with an applied focus, aiming to establish a framework for political recommendations that will enhance the relevance and effectiveness of Ukrainian cross-border cooperation participants in the EU accession process. Special emphasis is placed on examining how institutional forms and practices of cross-border cooperation influence territorial development, address residents’ needs,

and foster interethnic dialogue within border regions. To accomplish this, the project undertakes a comprehensive analysis and comparison of existing forms and practices of interaction among public institutions in Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. This comparative analysis provides an empirical foundation for drawing general conclusions and for adapting decisions to the Ukrainian context, while accounting for variations in administrative systems and available resources.

The transfer of best practices from the V4 countries is not merely a process of replication; rather, it is an adaptation tailored to Ukraine's unique circumstances. This approach considers various factors, including resource limitations, administrative procedures, and the specific needs of border communities. Furthermore, for the V4 countries, the dissemination of effective CBC models in collaboration with Ukraine enhances the prospects of establishing a reliable neighbour-partner in the context of European policy implementation, thereby adding a strategic dimension to the initiative.

The organisation of the project and preparation of the present monograph for publication were conducted by Uzhhorod National University, specifically through the Central European Research Institute, which was the beneficiary of Visegrad funding. The working group from UzhNU was led by Professor Myroslava Lendel and included Associate Professors Yuliia Fetko, Oksana Sviezhentseva, and Nadiia Kichera. Additionally, the collective monograph involved partnerships with the University of Prešov (Slovakia), WSB Academy (Poland), Technical University in Liberec (Czech Republic), and the Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives (Hungary).

In conclusion, this monograph presents a comprehensive overview of the institutional frameworks and practices of cross-border cooperation among the Visegrad Four countries. It also provides a structured approach for critically evaluating and adapting these frameworks to the Ukrainian context. Designed for representatives of state authorities and local governments, as well as experts, practitioners, researchers, and other stakeholders, this study aims to facilitate the development of effective solutions for advancing border territories during the European integration process and the post-war reconstruction phase. The monograph's practical value is particularly evident in its conclusions, which are intended to guide managerial and political decision-making, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of cross-border cooperation and fostering the long-term sustainability of communities and regions in Ukraine.

CHAPTER 1

INSTITUTIONAL MODELS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN THE VISEGRAD GROUP: IMPLICATIONS FOR UKRAINE

Introduction

One of the key instruments for advancing local democracy, balanced socio-economic development of border regions, regional security, and the integration of candidate and accession states into the European Union (EU) is cross-border cooperation (CBC) as a form of territorial cooperation. This phenomenon originated in the 1950s and exists in relations between nearly every nation on the continent. In addition to the previously mentioned arguments, the free movement of people across borders, the creation of spaces for social understanding and interaction, good governance, and economic cooperation are essential ideals for residents of border areas in EU countries. Communities located along interstate lines often retain memories of their historical cohabitation with neighboring regions.

The development and emergence of new EU policies, such as Cohesion Policy and Territorial Cooperation Policy, along with corresponding financial instruments, have significantly impacted the reform of public administration systems and the socio-political landscape of European countries. These changes have led to a greater variety of public cross-border cooperation institutions, which are the main actors in CBC and align with international legal norms developed by the Council of Europe (CoE) and the EU.

In Central Europe, including Ukraine, there have been significant efforts to leverage cross-border cooperation as a powerful tool for addressing a range of critical, specific tasks:

1) to reduce negative stereotypes regarding the inhabitants of the neighboring state along the border, stemming from previous historical traumas, and to prevent the emergence of new conflict lines;

2) to accelerate the integration processes into a common European market, customs, and other common spaces of the EU;

3) to disseminate best practices in public administration and economic innovations;

4) to more efficiently attract and utilise funds from EU programs and funds;

5) to make experiences with implementing eurointegration policies, disseminate effective governance models, and attract EU financial resources.

The national legislation in Central European countries, including Ukraine, permits various institutional forms for cross-border cooperation among public institutions, which are the primary actors in this collaboration, in accordance with international norms. The institutions and practices of CBC, formed under different historical and political conditions, take into account the political, legal, socio-economic, and ethnocultural differences among various regions in Europe, including personal (ideological, technocratic, and mental) characteristics of the political leaders involved in these processes, and therefore can be perceived as unique.

On the other hand, the international legal norms developed by the Council of Europe (CoE) and the EU aim to facilitate integration into the European market and other related areas and policies. This, in turn, could lead to a degree of unification among the various types of institutions involved in CBC. This trend is particularly pronounced in Central European countries, which have been confronting two key challenges since the 1990s and continue to do so today. Firstly, they are addressing the legacy of path dependency from the socialist era. Secondly, they are working towards integration into European common spaces and policies, including the Cohesion Policy.

These efforts are further complicated by latent ethnic conflicts brought on by the presence of minorities in border regions and the new threats posed by the rise of conservatism and populism. On the other hand, the presence of ethnic minorities in border regions offers a good opportunity to foster collaboration, with minorities serving as a bridge. Additionally, the trend of euroscepticism apparent among some Central European institutions and citizens, as well as emerging debordering policies for a variety of reasons – either national priorities or EU policies – undermines the efficacy and motivation of cross-border cooperation.

The interplay between internal and external factors shaping the CBC's institutional choices can be illustrated by the example of the Visegrad Group countries and Ukraine. The first ones have harmonised their legal, political, and administrative norms with European standards over the last two decades while preserving their specific characteristics. In contrast, Ukraine is quickly adopting various European policies in anticipation of its potential mid-term accession to the European Union.

Current state of the art and the methodology for the study of the cross-border cooperation institutional forms

Without concentrating research efforts on analysing and systematising the diverse concepts of CBC, we will use the methodology only as a tool for analysing its institutional aspects. Researchers and practitioners commonly define *cross-border cooperation*, based on the CoE's definition of the "*transfrontier co-operation*" as the process of fostering and developing positive relationships between "communities, authorities or bodies exercising local and regional functions" from the different parts of the shared border (Council of Europe, European Treaty Series - No. 106, 1980).

Our research focuses solely on cooperation between regions and communities in the Visegrad states and the extrapolation of this experience for Ukraine. Thus, our focus will not be on analyzing theories or data concerning other forms of territorial cooperation within the EU or its borders, such as interregional or transnational collaboration, though these forms of interaction were proposed later by both the CoE and the EU.

The methodology of *Borderland studies* proposed in this research focuses on cross-border areas that require analytical exploration across four spheres. 1) economic and trade interaction; 2) political activities of various levels of government in territories adjacent to borders; 3) political freedoms of the EU, the formation of the Schengen Union, and the Common Market resulted in the so-called *dissolution of borders*. *Debordering*, in other words, is a reduction in the functional weight of national states and, conversely, an increase in the role of regions that directly gained the opportunity to implement joint initiatives through cross-border cooperation. This phenomenon is also defined as *transboundary regionalism*, which influences exerted on the inhabitants of cross-border regions by various political actors; 4) the local political culture of the residents (Brunet-Jailly, 2005). In particular, from an academic perspective, a holistic view of cross-border development has been put forward by promoting the concept of *bordering*, which emphasises the socio-political aspects of borders. *Bordering* is a daily practice of constructing various kinds of borders between communities/groups, using ideologies, discourses, political institutions, relationships, and other political phenomena. Recognizing this reality, EU institutions consider the socio-political significance of reducing border effects in the formulation of Cohesion, Neighbourhood, and Enlargement policies (Scott, 2015).

The introduction of the four freedoms refers to the willingness of regional elites to engage in cross-border cooperation in order to bypass

national restrictions on interactions between neighbouring territories. At the same time, regions' desire to independently manage matters of cooperation and their paradiplomacy is not viewed as a threat to state sovereignty (Baral, 2024; Nadalutti & Rüländ, 2024; Perkmann & Sum, 2002; Scott & Collins, 1997).

Taking into account that, since the 1980s, cross-border cooperation has been perceived as part of the Regional (Cohesion) policy and, since the beginning of the 2000s, of the European Neighbourhood policy, it can also be regarded as an element of *Europeanization*. This phenomenon is understood as a process of developing, institutionalising, and disseminating both formal and informal rules, practices, political paradigms, styles of political behavior, as well as shared ideals and values. These elements are initially formulated within the context of EU political processes and subsequently integrated into national political institutions (Jones & Clark, 2024; Radaelli, 2000).

To conceptualise the phenomenon of Europeanisation, in addition to the aforementioned approach, we can adopt the position that it has several dimensions, including the following: 1) the process of the EU's expansion; 2) the development of European supranational governance structures; 3) the incorporation of European processes into national political systems; 4) the export of forms of political organisation; 5) the project of political unification of Europe (Olsen, 2002).

In close connection with the previously mentioned approach, the concept of *multilevel governance* can also be applied to the study of the institutional system of cross-border cooperation, which is the focus of our attention. According to this concept, it is a governance network that operates outside the jurisdiction of national states in order to implement cross-border initiatives, taking into account the interests of various actors, as well as other informal vertical and horizontal networks and institutions (Hooghe & Marks, 2021; Hooper & Kramsch, 2004; Marks, 1993).

Although *institutional analysis* of the CBC gained attention in the early 1970s, a clear theoretical framework and methodological clarity have yet to be achieved. Most studies focused on one or a few cases, or cross-border processes were analysed in isolation from European integration processes. Therefore, there is a theoretical gap regarding the generalisation of models of cross-border cooperation, particularly across all EU member states and/or participants in the CoE countries, i.e. external borders of the EU.

Between 2014 and 2017, empirical research focused on organizing data for 61 active Euroregions and proposed a set of key institutional forms for cross-border cooperation at EU borders. The list is as follows:

- 1) *official contacts* between the governing institutions of communities/districts/regions as the subnational levels of governance;
- 2) *informal contacts* between the aforementioned governing institutions and other actors of cross-border cooperation;
- 3) *common events* for the actors of cross-border cooperation: conferences, seminars, round tables, fairs, and other promotional events;
- 4) *bilateral or multilateral agreements* on key areas of cooperation between the governing institutions of border territories of neighbouring countries and/or the establishment of joint management structures;
- 5) institutionalised forms – *organisations* – of cross-border cooperation between *public institutions*: Euroregions, European groupings of territorial cooperation (EGTCs), Euroregional Cooperation Grouping (ECGs);
- 6) institutionalised forms of cross-border cooperation (*organisations*) between *private actors or public-private partnerships*: chambers of commerce, cross-border clusters, industrial parks, hubs, cross-border functional areas, special economic zones, priority development areas (Durà et al., 2018; Noferini et al., 2019).

One of the most common and successful forms of collaboration between European local public institutions is the twinning of border towns (cities), which unites points 1-3 from the aforementioned list. Towns that are directly adjacent to a border and have a comparable partner on the other side are known as border town twinings. They are thought to be based on functional interdependence due to their close proximity, but in earlier historical periods they were not typically separated by borders, which led to shared identity. The town twins' cooperation, especially on the French-German border in the post-World War II era, was motivated by the need for peaceful relations between citizens to overcome the legacies of conflict. Their cooperation was usually encouraged during EU enlargement by some local political actors driven by the opportunity to highlight shared European identity and history, as well as to serve as integration laboratories (Jancjak, 2018).

Initiatives pertaining to the establishment of geoparks or a realization of the shared approach to water management in the common – that are only divided by border – natural environments, and novel forms of border cooperation between professional organizations operating on the shared border can also be mentioned. Within the framework of the Interreg programme, plans for territorial actions to address issues such as employment are beginning to be developed (Ocskay, 2024).

However, we will focus on the analysis of the CBC forms that have the institutional status of organisations or associations of organizations due

to the research's aim limitation. As it is evident from the above-mentioned list proposed by Dura et al. (2018), Noferini et al. (2019), public institutions of European countries (mainly self-governments of regions, counties, municipalities) apply or could apply the following advanced institutional cross-border cooperation formats:

1. *Euroregions*, which we can think of as associations of subnational authorities, sometimes with the participation of national governments identify as partially institutional bodies because they lack a legal entity and are founded on agreements between public institutions from neighboring countries, usually between nationally based associations of the Euroregions are not a single legal entity but associations of legal entities – community/district/county/regional public authorities – that operate under the umbrella of the national law of the particular Euroregion.

These CBC institutions do not possess political authority but instead focus on facilitating cross-border activities and projects, including providing consulting services to the public authorities that serve as their founders. Euroregions function as cross-border organisations, equipped with a permanent secretariat and a technical and management team that has the capacity to secure its own resources. Cooperation within Euroregions occurs both vertically, with European institutions as well as regional and local authorities, and horizontally, among the organization's participants and similar structures.

Given the broad approach to understanding the essence of euroregions, there is a research perspective that this term encompasses both classic Euroregions and also includes Eurodistricts and Eurocities (Noferini et al., 2019; Rodil-Marzábal, 2022). The major international legal act that regulates the activity of Euroregions is already mentioned European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities, the so-called Madrid Convention, concluded on 21 May 1980 and two additional Protocols (Council of Europe. European Treaty Series - No. 159., 1995; Council of Europe. European Treaty Series - No. 169., 1998).

2. *European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs)* as a single legal entity with full legal responsibility established by public institutions (national, municipal, county and regional self-governments, regional/local development agencies, public enterprises, universities and other public law entities) from different states. EGTC has to be registered on the territory of an EU member state. The rules for setting up and operating an EGTC were laid down by Regulations of the European

Parliament and of the Council in 2006-2013 (EUR-Lex, 2006a; 1980; Official Journal of the European Union, 2013).

3. *Euroregional Co-operation Grouping (ECG)*, similar to EGTC, is a type of cross-border cooperation institutional format; however, ECG is a CoE tool operating on the basis of the already mentioned European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation, mainly its additional Protocol No. 3 (Council of Europe. European Treaty Series - No. 206., 1998). Like EGTC, ECG is a legally recognised nonprofit organisation and is subject to the national law of the state in which it is registered. ECG must be registered on the CoE member state's territory. As of yet, no working ECG is present.

In addition, institutionalized forms of CBC that primarily function as private law entities within the European Union include *Local Cross-Border Cooperation Groupings (LCCGs)*, *European Economic Interest Groupings (EEIG)*, *European Companies (SE)*. None of these forms, however, has become universal, nor are they tailor-made solutions for dealing with the particular challenges specific to different spheres of cross-border cooperation.

Following the initiation of the Interreg programme in the late 1980s, the conclusion is made that the use of its resources is one of the primary functions of Euroregions, particularly regarding the initiation, promotion, and implementation of cross-border projects, thereby engaging a large number of people in this activity (Chilla & Lambracht, 2022; Martín-Uceda & Rufi, 2021; Scott, 2000).

When considering activity priorities, it is important to note that both Euroregions and European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) are the most widely recognized forms of cross-border cooperation among public institutions. These entities typically concentrate their activities in one or more of the specified areas.1) local (regional) economic development; 2) transport and accessibility of the area; 3) environment; 4) education and culture; 5) social cohesion; 6) health; 7) spatial planning; 8) research and innovation; 9) governance; 10) various aspects of security.

At the same time, these descriptive criteria for typology are not sufficient for understanding the motivations of the founders of Euroregions and EGTCs, as well as all factors affecting their effectiveness or ineffectiveness at different chronological periods. It should be acknowledged that in some cases, these organisations may have been established primarily to attract funding from EU programs and funds. Therefore, another criterion for the effectiveness of euroregions is the

ability to formulate medium- and long-term activity strategies and joint policies for all national territories involved.

In the 2000s, a research position also gained popularity, suggesting that institutions created in border regions, where residents share or have a similar identity (ethnic, cultural, shared state-building history), are more effective. However, this factor alone is insufficient to ensure the sustainability of cross-border cooperation development (Boman & Berg, 2007; Fortuna & Andersen, 2025).

At the same time, the update of EU priorities for the 2021-2027 programming period contributed to the spread of a functional approach to analyzing the effectiveness of cross-border cooperation. Interaction is considered effective in cross-border areas, where more connections have formed, promoting the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people across international borders. The creation of *cross-border functional areas*, encompassing territories with strong functional ties on both sides of the state border, reflects this strategy. The borders of administrative-territorial units may not always align with these areas. Simultaneously, these domains could establish collaborative management frameworks to facilitate collaboration (Jakubowski et al., 2021).

It is also reasonable to conclude that, despite the unique historical, cultural and ethnic factors that influence the functioning of institutional forms of cross-border cooperation, the unifying factor of influence is the process of European integration. In particular, this statement is relevant for the states of Central Europe, including Ukraine, which are influenced by processes of Europeanization or by preparations for EU accession.

As it was already mentioned, one of the main political factors influencing the design of institutions and the politico-administrative practices of cross-border cooperation in Central European countries – both during their preparations to join the EU and after they became part of the single European space – is the process of obtaining and managing funding from European Union programs and funds. This is especially relevant within the framework of the EU's Cohesion policy. This support is considered by local actors of cross-border cooperation as perhaps the main opportunity to reduce the effects of peripheral status in relation to national centres, which receive more public investments from the budget and are more attractive to private investors. Consequently, in some cases, local actors are more interested in collaborating with partners on the other side of the border rather than with national governments, which in turn raises concerns among the latter, especially in the context of Central Europe. Meanwhile, the conditions for obtaining European funding (10-20-40% of the cost of a cross-border project must be co-financed by the grant

recipient or their local/regional/national partners or beneficiaries) result in the formation of local, and less often regional, partnerships. At the municipal level, this is one of the only institutional forms that can provide co-financing, especially when businesses or institutions engaged in economic activities are involved. At the same time, the institutional dependence of organisations created to promote the development of border areas – regional and local development agencies, entrepreneurship support centres, innovation and business/innovation centres – on funding from EU programmes and/or funds leads to the niche nature of their activities, necessitating a shift in priorities depending on changes in the policies of European institutions. The functioning of local and regional partnerships, which primarily aim to attract grants and technical support from the EU, represents a social process of adaptation to European priorities. This process seeks to secure resources to mitigate the challenges associated with peripheral status in European cross-border areas, which is particularly important for Visegrad Group countries (Lendel, 2024).

The topic of cross-border cooperation between the western regions of Ukraine and their counterparts in Central Europe has attracted considerable scholarly interest since the 1990s. Following the liberalization of political regimes and the introduction of a market economy, it became possible to establish beneficial connections between both sides of the border. This research also does not focus on listing the names and publications of the numerous scholars who have studied different aspects of cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and EU states over the past 20 years. Rather, our focus is on analyzing the research interests of those examining the types of institutions involved in CBC in this region, as well as the factors that influence these institutional choices.

Starting in the second half of the 1990s, there was a growing interest in the functioning of Euroregions as an institutionalized form of cooperation. This interest was largely driven by the establishment of the first Euroregion involving Ukrainian regions – the Carpathian Euroregion – created in 1993. At the beginning of the 2000s, it was noted that some of the Carpathian Euroregion's most significant achievements included a reduction in mistrust among nations and ethnic groups, as well as advancements in mobility and connections between public institutions, including universities. However, despite these positive developments, challenges related to the Euroregion's size, financial condition, and institutional structure began to emerge during this time, coinciding with the introduction of the Schengen Acquis Communautaire (Hiroshi, 2006).

A decade later, the experiences and outcomes of the operational institutional frameworks within the Carpathian Euroregion were

summarised and optimisation recommendations were made (Prykhodko, 2018). During this period, Ukrainian researchers rated Euroregions as the most effective institutionalised form of cross-border cooperation. However, there are many unresolved issues stemming from a lack of clarity about the role of Euroregions, which, in turn, leads to inadequate support for their functioning. This situation calls for the creation and establishment of new forms of cross-border cooperation that could yield the desired results (Prytula et al., 2019). Recently, an analysis was conducted on the institutional forms of the CBC in the borderland of Ukraine during the COVID-19 pandemic. The studies also included recommendations for subnational authorities in Ukraine aimed at improving the efficiency of the Carpathian Euroregion in light of changing global challenges (Khusainov et al., 2023).

Recent research indicates that the Carpathian Euroregion effectively functions as a platform for cross-border partners to collaborate on joint initiatives and projects. This collaboration enables participants to achieve better results collectively than they would independently, while also facilitating the exchange of experiences regarding efficient public management practices. However, some factors that hinder the development of cross-border cooperation within the CE include its large territorial scale and the varying scopes of competencies (Khimynets et al., 2021).

In recent years, research on the processes occurring in the borderlands of Ukraine and its neighbors has increasingly focused on the application of new institutional instruments. This primarily concerns the development of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), which are the public institutional forms emphasized in our study. This is in contrast to private clusters, public-private clusters, cross-border hubs, and industrial parks, which have also emerged and are not in the focus of this research. The only successful example of territorial groupings in Ukraine is the EGTC “Tisza”, founded in 2015. This grouping includes the Municipality of Kisvarda, the Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County Council, and the Zakarpatti Regional Council (EGTC Monitor, 2015). The legal regulation of this institutional form, particularly in the context of Ukraine, as well as its potential to facilitate Europeanization and attract EU funds for the development of the western Ukrainian borderlands, has been a focal point of contemporary research (Fetko, 2023; Ocskay, 2021; Ocskay & Scott, 2023).

Despite the fact that research on the existence and legal frameworks of different public institutional formats for cross-border cooperation in the borderlands of Ukraine and Central Europe is a popular area of study

among researchers, there is a lack of systematic categorization of the types of institutions involved in this process. Considering that modern cross-border cooperation in addressing various spatial issues – such as effective governance, economic development, health, transportation, environment, education, and culture – at the borders of the EU is supported by its Cohesion Policy, particularly through the financial incentives provided by the INTERREG program, the lack of relevant research on EU policies influencing cross-border cooperation development in Western Ukraine is increasingly apparent.

Taking into account the state of the art, we define the *main aim of the research as the identification of the most widespread and efficient institutional forms of cross-border cooperation between public institutions of the Visegrad group countries and the possibilities for using their experience for Ukraine.*

Our hypothesis suggests that, alongside internal factors – such as historical, cultural, social, and spatial considerations – the selection of institutional formats for cross-border cooperation among public entities is also significantly influenced by external factors. In the European context, particularly for countries aspiring to join the EU as candidate states (such as Ukraine, which initiated this journey in 2022), the EU's policies and the overarching process of Europeanization are pivotal.

In light of the research objectives and the theoretical framework for examining institutional forms, we articulate the research questions for this study.

The first research question we aim to address is: Has a dominant type of cross-border cooperation between public institutions emerged among the communities and regions of the Visegrad Group countries, specifically along the borders between the Republic of Poland and the Czech Republic, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, Poland and Slovakia, and Slovakia and Hungary, from the 1990s to the 2020s?

The second research question can be formulated as follows: What best practices can be identified for interaction between public structures in the aforementioned borderlands?

The other researchers' theoretical foundation and the clearly stated research questions suggest the use of some relevant research methods. Primarily, this involves desk research, particularly analysing:

- 1) the legislation of both countries regarding cross-border cooperation, the competencies of various public authorities concerning international activities;
- 2) the official websites of public cross-border cooperation institutions;

3) the data on Ukrainian public institutions receiving Interreg CBC programs funding from 2014 to 2025;

4) the findings of research conducted by other scholars.

The study will be organized according to geographical criteria, allowing us to analyze the forms and practices of cross-border cooperation institutions established along the Polish-Czech, Czech-Slovak, Polish-Slovak, and Hungarian-Slovak borderlands. Additionally, we will examine CBC experiences in public institutions in Zakarpattia region of Ukraine in relation to processes of Europeanization. This approach is justified by the need to conduct a detailed analysis of various types of cross-border interaction, which, in the context of the limited scale of this study, is possible only for the case of one region, as well as the uniqueness of Transcarpathia, which borders three Visegrad Four countries and is the place of operation of the only EECS in Ukraine. The research does not target other forms of territorial cooperation (interregional and transnational) present in this area.

Results and discussion

Polish-Czech borderland

The first research question we will seek to answer is: Has a dominant type of public cross-border cooperation institution emerged between Poland and the Czech Republic during the years 1990 to 2020?

The legal possibilities for cross-border cooperation between subnational authorities in the **Republic of Poland** are determined not only by adherence to international legal norms formulated by CoE and the EU institutions but also by its international treaties with neighbouring countries and domestic legislation regarding the international activities of public institutions.

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Article 172 (2)) municipalities (*gmina*), counties (*powiat*), and regions (*województwo*) as the units of local government have the right to join international associations of local and regional communities as well as cooperate with local and regional communities of other states (The Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2nd April, 1997).

Regions are designated as the primary administrative-territorial level for managing resources from EU funds and programmes directed towards supporting cross-border projects, as its public authorities are responsible for the economic and spatial development of the territory. At the same time, according to the Act of 15 September 2000 on Accession of local and regional self-government units to international associations of local and regional communities, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the

Republic of Poland grants permission for the activity by communes and counties after considering the position of the *voivode*, that is, the representative of the national government in the region (Report on Local and Regional Democracy in Poland. 2012).

Powiaty (counties) can join international associations; however, unlike *gminy*, this type of self-governing authority can only undertake cooperation at the local level and has no competence to join regional forms of CBC cooperation, as international cooperation is not among the counties' duties.

In contrast to counties, *gmina* (municipalities) have the right to cooperate with local and regional authorities in other states and to join relevant international associations. Local self-government of communes has the right to conclude agreements on CBC with legal entities operating not only under public but also by private law (Comparative analysis on the competencies, 2021).

The legal possibilities for cross-border cooperation among local and regional administrations in the **Czech Republic** were formulated, similarly to the Republic of Poland, in addition to international legal norms, by national legislation regulating the activities of local and regional self-governments. Specifically, the Constitution of the Czech Republic (1993), in Chapter Seven, recognizes the existence of self-governing regions and municipalities. It establishes a framework for their autonomy in both domestic and international matters. Cross-border cooperation between subnational authorities operates within this framework, provided it respects national sovereignty and adheres to international treaties (The Constitution of the Czech Republic, 1992).

The primary legal framework governing cross-border cooperation is Act No. 128/2000 Coll. on Municipalities. Municipalities (*obce*) may establish international partnerships, sister-city relations, or joint projects, particularly with towns across borders. They can also co-finance CBC initiatives (Zákon č. 128/2000 Sb. Zákon o obcích (obecní zřízení)). In the agreements, the legal addresses of the signatories, the subject of cooperation, the sources of its financing, the governing bodies of the cooperation, and the duration of the agreement must be recorded.

Act No. 129/2000 Coll. on Regions (Regional Establishment) explicitly permits self-governments of regions (*kraje*) to engage in international cooperation, which includes the ability to enter into agreements with foreign partners, as stated in Section 66 (Zákon č. 129/2000 Sb. Zákon o krajích (krajské zřízení)).

Researchers highlight that legal provisions directly authorize and municipalities and regions to sign agreements with foreign partners and to

join mutual public institutions. The legislation allows subnational authorities to create a legal entity in partnership with entities from other countries, provided there is a relevant international treaty ratified by the national parliament of the Czech Republic. In other situations, it is necessary to consult with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and obtain consent from the Ministry of the Interior. Additionally, the Ministry of Regional Development of the Czech Republic is legally required to oversee the registration and approval of public authorities' and other public institutions' participation in European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs). This requirement presents an extra challenge to the institutional development of cross-border cooperation (Bohm, Drapela, 2021; Halás, 2005).

Between 1990 and 2000, subnational authorities in the Republic of Poland and the Czech Republic effectively employed their administrative competencies to establish several **Euroregions** along the shared border. During this period, six Euroregions were created as a collaborative effort involving various entities from both states. Notably, in two of these Euroregions, local authorities from Slovakia and Germany participated as well (*Table 1.1*) (Bohm, Drapela, 2021).

Table 1.1 The list of Euroregions established on the Polish-Czech borderland

Name of euroregion	Year of establishment	States whose subnational authorities are co-founders of euroregions
Nisa/Nysa/Neisse	1991	The Republic of Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany
Glacensis	1996	The Republic of Poland, the Czech Republic
Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia	1998	The Republic of Poland, the Czech Republic
Silesia	1998	The Republic of Poland, the Czech Republic
Praděd/Pradziad	1998	The Republic of Poland, the Czech Republic
Beskydy	2000	The Republic of Poland, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic

Source: <https://www.euroregion-neisse.de/pl/>;

<https://www.euro-glacensis.cz/?lang=2>

https://euroregion-teschinensis.eu/pl/ts_pl

<https://euroregion-silesia.pl/>

<https://www.europraded.cz/>

<https://www.euroregion-beskydy.pl/>

Because the Czech Republic lacked regions and a corresponding degree of self-government in the 1990s, there were no Czech co-founders of Euroregions from these kinds of public institutions. Upon the establishment of the aforementioned level of governance, some kraj (regions) were invited to participate in Euroregion activities as observers;

however, such cooperation was ineffective due to competition over cross-border activities and the varying political configurations of the public administrations of communes and regions.

In terms of legal status, the Euroregions operating in this area are 'mirror' non-profit associations of municipalities, registered on the territory of the participating states and connected by an agreement establishing a Euroregion, its statutes, and governing bodies.

By the end of the 1990s, the Polish-Czech Euroregions gained the opportunity to attract EU funding reliably through a straightforward procedure and in conditions of low competition (initially within the framework of the PHARE CBC programme (1994-2004), then Interreg. In particular, Euroregions became responsible for managing and distributing funds to support small and micro-projects under the Interreg The Czech Republic-Poland programme (hereinafter, Interreg CZ-PL), which accounts for 20% of its total financial resources. As a rule, such projects aim to support measures of paradiplomacy (Interreg Czech Republic-Poland).

Since almost all Euroregions were established before the creation of regions as self-governing administrative units in the Czech Republic, they are therefore overseen by the municipalities' public authorities. Their effectiveness particularly depends on the efficiency of the local politicians serving on the governing bodies of Euroregions (Bohm, Bohac, Wroblewski, 2023).

Most Euroregions have also established permanent cross-border working groups or commissions composed of volunteer experts from both sides of the border. At the same time, they are not clearly institutionalised: information about their exact membership, names, and composition is difficult to find on official websites (Kurowska-Pysz, Castanho, & Naranjo Gómez, 2018). For example, in the Euroregion “Nisa”, there are 15 groups focusing on issues such as rail and road transport, tourism, the environment, and others. This format is also employed by the Euroregions Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia and Silesia. Some Euroregions create working groups only on an ad hoc basis: Silesia, Beskydy, Praděd/Pradziad – in the case of the latter, only on Polish territory.

After the formation of *kraj* as the territorial level of administration in the Czech Republic in 2000, and the inclusion of the EGTC format in national legislation after 2006, some regions took this opportunity to establish this institutional type of CBC.

As of 2025, according to the register of EGTCs administered by the Committee of the Regions, there were only 2 EGTCs involving public institutions from the Republic of Poland and the Czech Republic, and none

of them were registered in the Czech Republic (List of EGTCs, 2025). EGTC TRITIA also involves public institutions from Slovakia (*Table 1.2*). Both EGTCs were committed to advancing international collaboration in every way they could from a legislative perspective.

Table 1.2 European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation with the participation of public institutions from the Republic of Poland and the Czech Republic

Name of EGTS	Year of establishment	States whose subnational authorities are co-founders of euroregions	Official website
TRITIA Ltd	2013	The Republic of Poland, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic	http://egttritria.eu
NOVUM Ltd	2015	The Republic of Poland, the Czech Republic	http://euwt-novum.eu

Source:

List of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (2025). Retrieved from https://cor.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-11/Official_List_of_the_EGTCs.pdf

Therefore, we have all the arguments to state that Euroregions became the dominant form of public cross-border cooperation institutions on the Polish-Czech borderland during the more than 30 years that followed the fall of the socialist system in Central Europe.

The second research question can be formulated as follows: *What best practices for interaction between public structures can be identified in the Polish-Czech cross-border area?*

First and foremost, the focus will be on the best practices for resolving cross-border issues and responding to opportunities and challenges encountered by Euroregion institutions operating on the Polish-Czech border.

With impressive outcomes and impactful initiatives, the Euroregion Tesin/Cieszyn Silesia (founded in 1998) stands out as a prime example of public cross-border cooperation institutions (Bohm, Bohac, Wroblewski, 2023). The area of this borderland has the densest and highest-quality CBC contacts, which can be explained, among other things, by historical factors. Prior to World War I, this cross-border region was a part of the Austria-Hungarian monarchy. Despite having a large number of representatives from the Polish ethnic group, this region was split between the newly established Czechoslovak and Polish republics after the military conflicts over Cieszyn Silesia in 1919-1920.

Therefore, the uniqueness of the Euroregion Tesin/Cieszyn Silesia, compared to other Polish-Czech Euroregions, lies in the presence of a significant Polish ethnic minority in the Czech part of this cross-border area. Currently, this CBC institution serves as an example of best practices in executing para-diplomatic activities, particularly as a tool for reconciliation and neutralising the traumatic aspects of historical memory. This was achieved by the support of the people-to-people actions by means of the micro projects fund of the Interreg CZ-PL programme that is administered by the Euroregion (Euroregion Tesin/Cieszyn Silesia, 2024) (Kurowska-Pysz, 2015).

The Euroregion Glasensis, which is the second-oldest similar entity operating on the Polish-Czech border (established in 1996 after the first Euroregion Nisa/Nysa/Neisse, founded in 1991), can be regarded as a best-practice example in managing funds for the Interreg CZ-PL program. We refer to a small project fund with a maximum grant amount of 200,000 euros that supports travel and people-to-people initiatives. Management is carried out by both secretariats, located on the Polish (Kłodzko) and, respectively, Czech (Rychnov nad Kněžnou) sides of the state border (Euroregio Glasensis).

According to young people living in the Pradęd/Pradziad and Beskydy Euroregions, which are thought to be less effective than the two previously mentioned, subnational authorities ought to have greater freedom to choose locations and institutional structures for collaboration along the Polish-Czech border. In particular, the Beskidy region offers a range of activities for young people living in the borderland, which can also be developed in collaboration with Slovak partners (Kurowska-Pysz, Łodziana-Grabowska, Mikoláš, & Wróblewski, 2014).

At the same time, the national governments should provide financial support for these initiatives. The lack of information on best practices in Polish-Czech cooperation and the lack of road and rail connectivity between border towns are the main obstacles to the development of the CBC, according to young people. They also suggested that cross-border initiatives could be implemented through institutional cooperation between public and other types of institutions (business, educational, civil society), including in the fields of entrepreneurship, technological and innovation development, education, culture, sports, and recreation (Łangowska-Marcinowska, 2022).

Another institutional form that we would like to review for its best practices on the Polish-Czech border is the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation. EGTC TRITIA was established in 2013 by the regional public administrations of the Moravian-Silesian Region of the

Czech Republic, the Silesian and Opole Regions of Poland, and the Žilina Self-Governing Region of Slovakia. According to Polish law, public institutions of the country can be members of only those EGTCs registered as legal entities on its territory. Therefore, the secretariat of “TRITIA” is located in the city of Cieszyn (Republic of Poland).

The attempt by neighboring regions to obtain administrative status from the EU for at least one Interreg program, akin to the Polish-Czech Euroregions, was the main driving force behind the establishment of this CBC institution. In particular, inspired by the success of the EGTC Greater Region in the cross-border cooperation of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany, TRITIA aimed to obtain the status of a managing authority for its own separate trilateral Interreg programme for 2014-2020. Despite preliminary support from the European Commission, national governments, backed by the Euroregions, blocked this initiative. The fact that the EGTC did not obtain the status of a managing authority for a separate territorial cooperation programme was the main reason for the departure of the Opole region from its founders in 2018 (Bohm, Drapela, 2022). EGTC TRITIA is currently undergoing liquidation.

The main priorities identified for the activities include transport, economy, tourism, and energy, with a particular emphasis on renewable energy (TRITIA, 2024). However, the current success of the EGTC consists solely of the implementation of several cross-border projects financed through Interreg. The same results are achieved by other EGTCs operating in the Polish-Czech borderland, such as NOVUM (NOVUM, 2024). Currently, EOTC “TRITIA” is in the process of liquidation.

Conclusions

Since the 1990s, the Polish-Czech borderland communes have emerged as the most significant administrative-territorial level for cooperation, while the six Euroregions are the leading public institutions for cross-border cooperation.

Several factors contributed to the formation of this institutional picture.

The legislation of the Czech Republic is more favourable for the establishment of institutions of cross-border cooperation, which operate based on bilateral or multilateral agreements between subnational authorities within existing interstate agreements, the framework legislation of the CoE, and do not require the creation of a single legal entity as demanded by the format of the EGTC.

The legal framework in Poland permits subnational authorities to participate in international cooperation and to join associations of self-governments; however, permission must be granted by the Ministry of

Foreign Affairs following recommendations from the relevant regional governor. At the same time, under the legislation on associations of territorial cooperation, public institutions can be co-founders of an EGTC only if they are registered in the Republic of Poland.

By the late 1990s, Euroregions had already gained the opportunity, through a straightforward procedure and a low level of competition, to attract EU funding (initially under the PHARE pre-accession programme, then Interreg Cz-Pl programme), which contributed to the sustainability of their functioning and, therefore, did not compel local self-governments of communes to seek other institutional formats of cooperation at the Polish-Czech border.

Both EGTCs operating in the Polish-Czech borderland – TRITIA and NOVUM – have implemented several projects, mostly funded by the Interreg CZ-PL programme. However, they have not succeeded in becoming its administrator of the small or micro-project funds, similar to the Euroregions. This situation, along with the previously listed legislative obstacles, could be considered one of the reasons why Polish and Czech public institutions are cautious about forming an EGTC.

The best practices are demonstrated by public cross-border cooperation institutions that have historical linkages between the citizens living in the borderland. In light of the Polish minority's presence on the Czech part of its territory, the Euroregion Tesin/Cieszyn Silesia has emerged as a key player in paradiplomacy between the two countries, fostering a cooperative civic climate in the area, which has historically been the scene of conflicts.

The Euroregions Tesin/Cieszyn Silesia and Glasensis are the best examples of obtaining permission from the European Commission to manage small and microproject funds within the Interreg CZ-PL program and carrying out this function with excellence.

During the first decade of their existence, EGTCs “TRITIA” and “NOVUM” were seeking their role in the development of cross-border cooperation. This is because the European Commission did not grant them permission to administer Interreg funds, unlike Euroregions, and they can only be beneficiaries of projects. Also, EGTCs in this cross-border area are not active actors in paradiplomacy, unlike the already mentioned Euroregions.

Czech-Slovak borderland

The first research question we will seek to answer is: *Has a dominant type of institution for cross-border cooperation between the Czech and Slovak Republics been formed during the 1990s to 2020s?*

After the Velvet Revolution in 1989 and the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993, both countries retained cooperative ties across their shared border. Jerabek et al. (2021) note that, for example, the region between Moravia and Western Slovakia was historically cohesive and experienced uninterrupted socio-economic exchange even after the state split.

In both the Czech and the Slovak Republics, local and regional self-governments as public entities play a central role in cross-border cooperation. The legal foundation for CBC is the Madrid Convention, which both countries have ratified. Their legal authority to engage in such cooperation stems from national constitutional frameworks, specific legislative acts, and EU regulations. The decentralization processes following 1989 and the EU accession in 2004 further enhanced the autonomy and legal competencies of subnational entities.

As the legal foundations for the CBC of the subnational authorities of the Czech Republic were analyzed in the previous sub-chapter, we shall focus on such conditions in the Slovak Republic. The Constitution of the **Slovak Republic** (1992), Chapter Four, guarantees the right of self-government to municipalities (*obce*) and higher territorial units – regions (*kraje*), granting them legal personality and fiscal autonomy (Constitution of the Slovak Republic, 1992).

The legal basis for CBC is provided by Act No. 369/1990 Coll. on Municipal Establishment, which enables municipalities to cooperate with foreign municipalities and regions, including the creation of cross-border associations or the signing of agreements (Zákon č. 369/1990 Zb. Zákon Slovenskej národnej rady o obecnom zriadení).

The legal framework for CBC at the regional level was established a decade later, following the political challenges faced by the Slovak Republic until 1998. During this period, the central government was hesitant to allow decentralization, which is why support for paradiplomacy and other forms of CBC at this level of governance has been limited. It was only in 2001 that it was established that the self-governance of higher territorial units (regions – *kraje*) could engage in cross-border relations, sign cooperation agreements, and participate in international organizations or projects that serve the public interest (Zákon č. 302/2001 Z. z. Zákon o samospráve vyšších územných celkov (zákon o samosprávnych krajoch)).

The legal data shows that the Czech and Slovak Republics both have a foundation for local and regional cross-border cooperation. However, Czech legislation provides more explicit procedural mechanisms for agreements and oversight. In contrast, Slovak law focuses on functional autonomy, which is often complemented by guidelines from

government ministries. Moreover, in Slovakia, inter-municipal and inter-regional cooperation is formally grounded in Article 66 of the Constitution, which supports associations focused on local and regional development. In practice, these partnerships include not only joint offices but also co-ownership arrangements, shared service agreements, and experimental formats such as SMART city collaborations (Hasprová et al., 2012; Hulst & van Montfort, 2017).

Between 1990 and the 2000s, local authorities in the Czech Republic and Slovakia used their administrative powers to establish three Euroregions along their shared border, one of which was established in cooperation with subnational levels of government in Austria (*Table 1.3*). As noted in the theoretical analysis, this represents one of the most institutionalized forms of CBC between public entities.

Table 1.3 The list of Euroregions established on the Czech-Slovak borderland

Name of Euroregion	Year of establishment	States whose subnational authorities are co-founders of Euroregions
Pomoraví – Záhorie – Weinviertel (from 2021 Pomoravi)	1997-1999	The Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, the Republic of Austria
Beskidy-Beskydy	2000	The Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic. The Republic of Poland
Bílé-Biele Karpaty	2000	The Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic

Source: Sites of Euroregions

<https://somjm.webnode.cz>

<https://regionbeskydy.cz/euroregion-beskydy/euroregion-beskydy>

<https://www.regionbilekarpaty.cz/introduction>

The establishment of Euroregions began in the Czech Republic along the borders with Poland and Germany between 1991 and 1993. However, similar structures on the Slovak side of the border could not be formed until after 1998 due to political and institutional delays (Halás, 2007). That is the reason why the first Euroregion Pomoraví-Záhorie-Weinviertel was under institutionalization for two years between 1997 and 1999.

Due to the absence of regions and a corresponding degree of self-governance in the Czech Republic during the 1990s, there were no Czech co-founders of Euroregions from public institutions of this nature. However, following the establishment of regional governance in 2000-

2001, regions were invited to engage in Euroregion activities, initially participating as observers.

In terms of their legal status, the Euroregions functioning in this area operate as mirror non-profit associations of municipalities. These associations are registered in the jurisdictions of the participating states and are governed by an agreement establishing the Euroregion, along with its statutes and governing bodies. The entities involved in this context comprise the general assembly, the board of directors, the supervisory board, the secretariat, and the working groups (Euroregion Beskydy, Euroregion Bílé-Biele Karpaty, Euroregion Pomoravi).

After the formation of regions as the territorial level of administration in the Czech Republic in 2000, and the inclusion of the EGTC format in national legislation in line with EU regulations, some regions took this opportunity to establish this institutional type of CBC.

As of August 2025, according to the list of EGTCs published by European Committee of Regions, there were three EGTCs operating on the Czech-Slovak borderland (List of EGTCs, 2025) (*Table 1.4*).

Table 1.4 European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation with the participation of public institutions from the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic

Name of EGTS	Year of establishment	States whose subnational authorities are co-founders of Euroregions	Official website
EGTC Spoločný región Ltd	2012-2013	The Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic	https://www.spolocnyregion.sk
EGTC TRITIA Ltd	2013	The Republic of Poland, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic	https://egtctritia.eu/en/
EGTC Velká Morava/ Velka Morava	2022	The Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic	https://www.ezusvm.sk/

Source:

List of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (2025). Retrieved from https://cor.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-11/Official_List_of_the_EGTCs.pdf

Unfortunately, it was not possible to find a website about EGTC Spoločný región limited. Regarding the EGTCs TRITIA and Veľká Morava/Velka Morava, both are registered in the Slovak Republic due to its more favourable legal environment for implementing European Community regulations concerning EGTCs.

According to the Slovak legislature the members of EGTC can be the Slovak Republic as the state, a self-governing region, a municipality, a legal entity under specific legislation with its registered office in the Slovak Republic, an association of legal entities made up of either of state, regions or municipalities (Act No. 90/2008 Coll. on a European grouping of territorial cooperation).

Euroregions in the Czech-Slovak borderland, as voluntary associations, are primarily composed of municipalities. In contrast, EGTCs were established by regions. For instance, the EGTC Veľká Morava/Velka Morava was established in 2022 through a collaboration between the South Moravian Region of the Czech Republic and the Trnava Region of Slovakia. This initiative came nearly 10 years after the creation of the EGTC TRITIA, which was also founded by the Moravian-Silesian Region of the Czech Republic, the Žilina Self-Governing Region of Slovakia, and the Silesian and Opole Regions of Poland.

EGTCs differ from Euroregions in several key ways. They possess legal personality, have staff, established budgets, and defined decision-making structures. Böhm (2014) provides a thorough analysis of the internal structure of EGTC TRITIA, highlighting its budgetary framework, which combines financial contributions from member regions and utilizes EU funds to implement joint initiatives. However, the researcher also points out coordination challenges arising from differing national administrative traditions and legal systems. Additional barriers persist in harmonizing national laws, simplifying funding processes, and addressing the varying strengths of institutions across member bodies.

The second research question is: *What best practices for interaction between public structures can be identified in the Czech-Slovak cross-border area?*

Three Czech-Slovak Euroregions – Pomoraví-Pomoravie, Beskydy, and Bílé-Biele Karpaty – play important roles in supporting local development, environmental cooperation, and cultural exchange (Halás, 2007; Jeřábek et al., 2024). The Euroregion Pomoraví-Pomoravie, connecting the South Moravian and Trnava regions, was among the pioneers in launching cross-border infrastructure and education projects, particularly under the EU programmes.

The Euroregion Beskydy, established in 2000, spans parts of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland, including cities like Frýdek-Místek, Žilina, and Bielsko-Biała. It is recognized for its initiatives in youth and cultural exchange, tourism promotion, and grassroots participation in regional development (Halás, 2005).

The Euroregion Bílé-Biele Karpaty, also founded in 2000, brings together communities from the Zlín region (The Czech Republic) and the Trenčín region (Slovakia). Its key focus areas are environmental protection, sustainable tourism, and balanced development.

By the end of the 1990s, Czech-Slovak Euroregions had established relatively efficient mechanisms for accessing EU funding, initially through the PHARE CBC programme (1994–2004) and subsequently through Interreg. These Euroregions became central actors in administering and distributing funds for small-scale cross-border initiatives. The Small Project Fund (SPF), managed by Euroregions, was particularly significant in supporting micro-projects in civic engagement and cultural cooperation.

Studies underline that Euroregions have played an important role in enhancing regional development and competitiveness by effectively utilizing Interreg resources (Chilla & Lambracht, 2022; Martín-Uceda & Ruff, 2021). For instance, Jerabek et al. (2021) report that Euroregion Bílé-Biele Karpaty alone implemented over 70 micro-projects between 2007 and 2015. In the case of the Beskydy Euroregion, public awareness of SPF activities reached 74%, with around 33% of residents participating in at least one project, reflecting their social and cultural significance (Wróblewski & Kasperek, 2019). Environmental cooperation, especially in protected areas like Bílé-Biele Karpaty, has also been a success story (Böhm, 2016).

Nevertheless, some critical evaluations also emerged. Zalt (2013) highlights challenges during the 2007–2013 Interreg period, including administrative burdens, weak engagement of local governments, and overreliance on EU funds.

Under Interreg V-A Slovakia-Czech Republic 2014–2020, over 125 joint projects were funded with a total budget exceeding €90 million, including approximately €10 million for institutional cooperation. However, direct involvement of Euroregions in large-scale projects remained limited. For example, the Beskydy Euroregion implemented only three tourism-related projects during this period (Jerabek et al., 2021).

The current Interreg VI-A NEXT Slovakia - Czech Republic 2021–2027 programme has shifted toward systemic priorities such as disaster management, digitalization, and green transformation (Programme Interreg SK–CZ). Developed with broad stakeholder input, this

programme also emphasizes cultural tourism and social innovation as strategic pillars. According to Jerabek et al. (2021), such initiatives are essential for strengthening soft integration and fostering cross-border social capital.

The broader use of Cohesion Fund instruments, including Interreg, has also led to the professionalisation of Euroregion secretariats and better preparedness for potential transitions to EGTCs. The ex-post evaluation of Interreg Europe 2014–2020 confirmed strong programme outcomes and increased stakeholder participation.

Despite these advancements, Czech-Slovak Euroregions have demonstrated lower responsiveness and institutional capacity compared to their counterparts along the borders with Germany and Poland. Typically operating with limited administrative resources, they nonetheless play a vital role in building regional identity, facilitating economic exchange, and fostering civic participation (Böhm, Boháč & Wróblewski, 2023). However, persistent legal and administrative barriers on the Slovak side – particularly in areas such as service provision, permits, taxation, and procedural regulation – continue to hinder the full potential of cross-border cooperation (Nováčková, Paškrťová & Vnuková, 2023).

The formation, alongside Euroregions, of three EGTCs along the Czech-Slovak border – Spoločný región, Veľká Morava/Velka Morava, TRITIA – illustrates how EU Cohesion policy encourages subnational governments to seek new institutional formats to enhance cross-border collaboration. Despite high expectations and initial institutional support, the practical outcomes in this case did not mirror the successes observed in other European border regions (Böhm & Drapela, 2021).

Currently, no verified information is available regarding the activities of the EGTC Spoločny region, as its official website is non-functional. Similarly, the EGTC Veľká Morava/Velka Morava, being a newly established entity, has not yet produced measurable results. However, in 2023, it adopted a strategic framework prioritising tourism and mobility, the protection of cultural heritage, environmental sustainability, and the exchange of professional experience among employees in social service institutions and secondary schools (EZUS Velká Morava).

Conclusions

Both the Czech and Slovak Republics have comprehensive legal frameworks for cross-border cooperation, aligned with European standards and regional development policy. Their legislation grants autonomy to local and regional governments to engage in CBC, provides legal avenues

for participation in Euroregions and EGTCs, and supports strategic planning and access to EU financial instruments.

However, the practical effectiveness of CBC depends on political will, institutional capacity, and coordination between administrative levels. Persistent challenges include legal asymmetries in administrative procedures between Czech and Slovak partners, a lack of stable co-financing mechanisms at the local level, and limited capacity in smaller municipalities to manage EU-funded CBC projects. These factors often limit engagement in larger-scale, long-term initiatives.

Euroregions have played an important role in fostering cultural and social cohesion, notably through Small Projects Funds (SPF), developing administrative linkages via working groups, and enabling multilevel governance involving regions, municipalities, and civil society actors. Nevertheless, their limited legal authority, fragmented institutional frameworks, and reliance on external funding continue to hinder their impact and sustainability.

Despite these challenges, CBC between the Czech and Slovak Republics has demonstrated adaptability over three decades. The shared language, administrative traditions, and EU integration have facilitated collaboration. The establishment of Euroregions and EGTCs has provided institutional frameworks for cooperation, while national legislation has generally supported local-level initiatives. Nevertheless, despite great anticipation and initial backing from institutions, the real-world results of EGTCs set up along the Czech-Slovak border did not reflect achievements seen in other European border areas.

To enhance the long-term effectiveness of CBC, it is recommended to resort to deeper institutionalization, the development of sustainable financing mechanisms beyond EU programming cycles, and improved coordination among regional stakeholders. Without such measures, CBC initiatives risk remaining fragmented and project-based, rather than evolving into durable, strategic partnerships.

Polish-Slovak borderland

The first research question we will seek to answer is: *Has a dominant type of institution for cross-border cooperation between the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic been formed during the 1990s to 2020s?*

Following the collapse of communism in Central Europe and the subsequent democratic transitions in the early 1990s, both **the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic** began establishing frameworks for cooperation across their shared border. The 1990s were characterised by

the redefinition of territorial administration and local governance, as well as the decentralisation of state authority. These political and administrative changes created a conducive environment for initiating cross-border cooperation, particularly along the Polish-Slovak border, which stretches over 500 kilometres.

Several key factors facilitated CBC between the two nations, which were diverse yet interconnected. Firstly, the border regions of both states shared a common Carpathian heritage in terms of folk art, culture, language, and even mentality, reinforced by a shared history. Additionally, Polish and Slovak citizens living near the border faced similar socio-economic challenges, including underdeveloped infrastructure and limited employment opportunities. Last, but certainly not least, the processes of EU integration and accession served as significant precursors to effective CBC between the subnational authorities of Poland and Slovakia. Prior to their accession in 2004, both countries engaged in EU pre-accession instruments such as PHARE CBC. Subsequently, they gained access to various EU funding mechanisms for territorial cooperation, primarily through Interreg programs.

Since the legal environment for cross-border cooperation between subnational authorities in the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic was analyzed in the previous subchapters, it is reasonable to continue with the analysis of the institutional structures for CBC. This should particularly focus on the relationships between various authorities and other public stakeholders.

Cross-border cooperation between Poland and neighbouring countries has developed since the early 1990s, mostly in the form of agreements between local governments of neighbouring border regions, for example, “twinning” cities. Between 1990 and the 2000s, subnational authorities in both the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic used their legislative and administrative powers to establish three Euroregions along their shared border (*Table 1.5*). These institutionalized forms serve as platforms for collaboration, fostering regional integration and promoting shared interests across borders (Perkowski, 2013).

Table 1.5 The list of Euroregions established on the Polish-Slovak borderland

Name of Euroregion	Year of establishment	States whose subnational authorities are co-founders of Euroregions
Carpathian Euroregion	1993	The Republic of Poland, the Slovak Republic, Hungary, Romania, Ukraine
Euroregion Tatry	1994	The Republic of Poland, the Slovak Republic
Euroregion Beskidy	2000	The Republic of Poland, the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic

Source: Sites of Euroregions

<https://www.karpacki.pl/en/>

<https://www.euroregion-tatry.eu>

<https://www.euroregion-beskidy.pl/>

The Polish-Slovak border region, especially its communities and areas, is part of the Carpathian Euroregion (CE). This Euroregion was established in 1993 as a pioneering initiative in Central Europe by Polish, Slovak, Hungarian, and Ukrainian subnational authorities, primarily at the regional level, with support from national governments. The initiative was joined by its Romanian counterparts in 2000, although Slovakia's regional participation was developed only on an associated basis till 1999 due to political issues. The reason to create CE, besides establishing neighbourhood relations in a multiethnic area, was to bring European methods of governance and expertise to the Carpathian region (Oltean, 2013).

CE serves as the international association comprising 19 administrative subnational units from the neighboring regions of Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, Hungary, and Romania. It has national offices in all participating countries, which serve as the secretariats for the associations of local governments in their respective borderlands (the Carpathian Euroregion).

The second in chronological order of its creation, yet arguably the most effective in terms of outcomes, was Euroregion Tatry, formed in 1994 by the Malopolska region and five counties from Poland and dozens of municipalities from both countries. Originally, Euroregion Tatry brings together Polish and Slovak local self-governments from the historical regions of Podhale, Spiš, Orava, and Liptov, united by shared cultural and

geographic ties. Euroregion is active in terms of promoting tourism, cultural exchange, and environmental cooperation.

The same priorities are fundamental to the functioning of the Euroregion Beskidy, which was formed in 2000 by the local self-governments of municipalities from Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and some Polish counties. This establishment aims to foster cultural cooperation and joint development strategies in the Beskid Mountain area (Euroregion Beskydy). Considering its natural and cultural values, the area of Euroregion Beskidy also characterises an outstanding cross-border network of cooperation among tourist entities, as well as cross-border entrepreneurship across many other sectors (Howaniec & Kurowska-Pysz, 2014; Stverkova, Pohludka, Kurowska-Pysz, & Szczepańska-Woszczyzna, 2018).

In terms of their legal status, the Euroregions operating in this region, as in other Visegrad borderlands, function as mirror non-profit associations of municipalities. These associations are registered in the jurisdictions of the participating states and are governed by an agreement establishing the Euroregion, along with its statutes and governing bodies. The entities involved in this framework include the general assembly, the board of directors, the supervisory board, the secretariat, and various working groups.

The EGTCs, serving as a tool for enhancing territorial cooperation, began to be utilised by public institutions in Poland and Slovakia shortly after their legal framework was established in European public law (2006-2013). As of August 2025, the European Committee of the Regions published a list of EGTCs, indicating that two were operating on the Polish-Slovak border. Both were formed in 2013 (European Committee of Regions 14/05/2025 List of European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) (Table 1.6).

Table 1.6 European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation with the participation of public institutions from the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic

Name of EGTS	Year	States whose subnational authorities are co-founders of Euroregions	Official website
EGTC TATRY Ltd	2013	The Republic of Poland, the Slovak Republic	http://euwt-tatry.eu
EGTC TRITIA Ltd	2013	The Republic of Poland, the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic	http://egtctritia.eu

Source: List of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (2025). Retrieved from https://cor.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-11/Official_List_of_the_EGTCs.pdf

EGTC TRITIA connects the regions of Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. This subject was discussed in the previous sections and will not be the focus of this discussion, unlike EGTC TATRY. The uniqueness of this establishment within the Visegrad group lies in the fact that it was formed by the Polish and Slovak associations of local self-governments, which established the Euroregion Tatry in 1994. Essentially, it serves as an additional legal framework that enables municipalities along the Polish-Slovak border to facilitate cross-border cooperation. The grouping was registered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland and obtained legal personality on September 20, 2013. Its headquarters is located in Nowy Targ, Poland. The objectives of EGTC TATRY include enhancing cross-border infrastructure, promoting sustainable tourism, and engaging in joint strategic planning (Sohn & Giffinger, 2015).

Also, we have to mention that, besides the formation and development of the classic, already characterised, forms of the institutionalised CBC, the Polish-Slovak recent years have seen a growing emphasis on a functional approach to cross-border governance, particularly in areas such as infrastructure development, sustainable planning, and institutional learning.

The second research question is: *What best practices for interaction between public structures can be identified in the Polish-Slovak cross-border area?*

One important area of collaboration between CBC actors on the Polish-Slovak borderland has been civil protection. Within the Euroregion Tatry, local authorities have supported the organization of joint training sessions and coordination mechanisms for fire brigades and emergency services operating in the border municipalities. By enhancing disaster preparedness and improving response capacity, these activities have fostered practical interoperability and trust among first responders, facilitating faster and more coordinated interventions during emergencies.

Efforts to promote sustainable tourism have also demonstrated the added value of CBC. For instance, through the Carpathian Euroregion, Polish and Slovak partners jointly implemented the “Discovering the Carpathians” project, which focused on developing cross-border hiking trails, organizing cultural events, and establishing common tourism marketing platforms. As noted by Perkmann (2007), such initiatives not only contribute to economic development but also play an important role in shaping a shared regional identity grounded in cultural and environmental heritage.

Improvements in public transportation further illustrate the benefits of cross-border cooperation. Thanks to the involvement of the EGTC TATRY, bus connections between previously disconnected border towns were re-established. This has had a direct impact on residents' daily mobility, enabling easier access to services and economic opportunities across the border. It also reinforced social ties and restored historical linkages between communities once separated by administrative boundaries

Environmental governance represents another field where CBC has proven effective. Projects funded under the Interreg Poland–Slovakia programme have supported joint efforts in flood prevention, biodiversity conservation, and water quality monitoring in shared river basins, such as the Poprad and Dunajec. These collaborative environmental initiatives not only address transboundary ecological challenges but also contribute to the development of integrated data systems and coordinated management practices (Scott, 2012).

Recent evaluations, such as those by Halás et al. (2020), acknowledge that these CBC projects have strengthened institutional trust and fostered people-to-people contact. However, persistent challenges remain as compared with previous research findings by Duleba et al. (2014). Administrative burdens, insufficient continuity in long-term funding, and mismatches in regional planning frameworks continue to hinder the full potential of cross-border initiatives. These barriers suggest a pressing need for deeper policy harmonization and more sustainable financing mechanisms at both the European and national levels.

Conclusions

Overall, the Polish-Slovak experience of cross-border cooperation demonstrates the gradual strengthening of institutional capacity and trust between local and regional authorities. The initiatives described above illustrate how cooperation contributes to improving the quality of public services, environmental management and regional cohesion.

Nevertheless, several structural and operational challenges continue to constrain the long-term effectiveness of CBC in this border region. A key issue is administrative asymmetry, particularly the greater autonomy and financial independence enjoyed by Polish voivodeships and other subnational authorities in comparison to Slovak self-governing institutions. This imbalance can complicate decision-making processes and hinder the alignment of priorities across the border. Furthermore, the financial sustainability of cross-border cooperation projects is uncertain due to their dependence on multiannual Interreg funding cycles. In

addition to the stringent administrative requirements, they often lack long-term guarantees of resource support.

Furthermore, limited civic participation and low stakeholder engagement often undermine the social legitimacy and sustainability of CBC initiatives.

Addressing these challenges requires both institutional innovation and stronger multi-level governance. Enhancing legal harmonization, increasing the participatory dimension of CBC, and ensuring more stable and flexible funding mechanisms will be crucial to maximizing the developmental potential of Polish-Slovak cooperation in the coming years.

Hungarian-Slovak borderland

The first research question we will seek to answer is: *Has a dominant type of institution for cross-border cooperation between Hungary and the Slovak Republic been formed during the 1990s to 2020s?*

The preconditions for cross-border cooperation between Hungary and Slovakia date back to the political transformation of the early 1990s, when formerly closed borders in Central and Eastern Europe began to open. CBC in this region was initially limited due to a lack of institutional frameworks and imbalanced development on both sides of the border. Cooperation was motivated by EU accession prospects, which brought with it legal harmonisation, technical assistance, and funding mechanisms that encouraged local and regional authorities to engage across borders. However, many early initiatives lacked internal content and remained symbolic, functioning primarily to access EU funds (Soós & Fejes, 2023).

The development of cross-border cooperation among the Visegrad Group states was significantly influenced by legislation granting subnational authorities the right to collaborate across borders. As the normative environment of the Slovak Republic was analyzed in the previous subchapter, we will now focus on the legislation of **Hungary**.

Hungary's legal system facilitates cross-border cooperation at the subnational level through a combination of national laws and international agreements. The European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified in 1994 and enacted in 1997 through the law, grants subnational authorities the autonomy to form associations with similar institutions (1997. évi XV. Törvény). In Hungary, municipal self-governments (towns: *város*; villages: *község*) and county self-governments (*vármegye*) are afforded constitutional autonomy as outlined in the Fundamental Act CLXXXIX of 2011. Additionally, the Fundamental Act defines the territorial divisions of the country into the capital, counties, towns, and villages. Furthermore, Act LXV on Local Governments, enacted in 1990, empowers self-

governments to collaborate and establish cooperation agreements with local authorities from other countries (Steiner, 2016).

In Hungary, there are specific legal provisions governing the implementation of Council of Europe norms on cross-border cooperation. Unlike Slovakia, Hungary has adopted only the core provisions of the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (which entered into force in 1994) and has opted not to join any of its additional protocols. This decision is primarily due to the lack of a politically and administratively strong subnational level of self-government, which is essential for establishing cross-border cooperation organizations based on public law. Additionally, the current version of the Act on Local Governments (Act CLXXXIX of 2011) and the Fundamental Law should be amended to allow for the adoption of the 3rd Protocol of the Madrid Outline Convention.

Hungarian Act XXI of 1996 on Regional Development and Spatial Planning provides a framework for planning and implementing spatial cooperation, including cross-border initiatives, in alignment with the EU's NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) system. However, Hungary lacks elected regional bodies at the NUTS 2 level, hindering its ability to effectively cooperate and institutionalise cross-border cooperation at this administrative tier. As a result, many Hungarian stakeholders are engaged in CBC through civil associations or public benefit organizations rather than through formal public law structures (Soós & Fejes, 2023).

Thanks to the efforts of former MEP István Pálfi, who significantly contributed to the legislative groundwork for the establishment of EGTCs, Hungary became one of the first Member States in 2007 to adopt the European Commission regulations necessary for establishing these institutions (XCIX. törvény az európai területi együttműködési csoportosulásról, 2007). Hungary has also been proactive in utilising this legal framework to institutionalise cross-border cooperation. This is largely due to the opportunity for public institutions, organised as EGTCs, to reconnect with Hungarian minorities living in neighbouring countries, including Slovakia (Varga, 2022).

To draw preliminary conclusions, it is evident that despite the differences in the administrative structures of Slovakia and Hungary, both countries recognize cross-border cooperation as a strategic tool for regional development. It has to be mentioned that until the introduction of the EGTC legislation, the dominant institutionalised form of cross-border cooperation between Hungary and Slovakia was the Euroregions (*Table 1.7*).

Table 1.7 The list of Euroregions established on the Hungarian-Slovak borderland

Name of Euroregion	Year of Establishment	States whose subnational authorities are co-founders of Euroregions
Carpathian Euroregion	1993-1999	Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Ukraine and Romania
Ipel’/Ipoly Euroregion	1999	Hungary, Slovakia
VDI – Váh(g)–Danube–Ipel’ Euroregion	1999	Hungary, Slovakia
Neogradiensis Euroregion	1999-2000	Hungary, Slovakia
Košice–Miskolc Euroregion	2000	Hungary, Slovakia
Sajó–Rima//Slana-Rimava Euroregion	2000	Hungary, Slovakia
Triple Danube Euroregion	2001	Hungary, Slovakia
Danube Euroregion	2003	Hungary, Slovakia
Ister-Granum Euroregion	2003-2004	Hungary, Slovakia
Zemplén Euroregion	2004	Hungary, Slovakia

Source: Sites of Euroregions: Ister-Granum <http://istergranum.eu>; Danube Euroregion: (No official website listed) Sajó–Rima Euroregion: <http://sajorima.eu> (not responding); VDI Euroregion: (No official website listed); Triple Danube Euroregion: (No official website listed); Ipoly Euroregion: <http://ipolyvolgye.hu>; Novohrad-Nógrád Euroregion: <http://nnegtc.eu>; Košice–Miskolc Euroregion: (No official website listed); Zemplén Euroregion: (No official website listed)

The Carpathian Euroregion (CE), the first of its kind on the Hungarian-Slovak border, was established in 1993. The reasons for its creation, as well as its organizational characteristics, were discussed in the previous sub-chapters. From the Slovak Republic, the members include the Košice and Prešov regions (*kraj*). On the Hungarian side, the members consist of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Hajdú-Bihar, Heves, Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok, and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties (*varmegye*), as well as cities with county status, such as Miskolc, Debrecen, Eger, and Nyíregyháza (Khusainov, Lisnik, Zatrochová *et al.*, 2023).

Most of the other Euroregions operating along the Hungarian-Slovak border were established at the micro-regional level and are based on historical ties and cooperation among civil societies. They typically featured classic Euroregional organizational structures, which included a general assembly, thematic committees, and working groups. Legal personality was often conferred through mirror associations or through foundations registered under national law.

Some of the Euroregions formed along the Hungarian-Slovak border have not achieved any tangible results in their activities. This is

evidenced by their lack of an official operating website. Researchers are mentioning the Triple Danube Region Euroregion in such connotations. It is interesting that the VDI Euroregion, formed in 1999 through cooperation between Hungarian counties (Komárom-Esztergom, Pest, Veszprém, and Fejér) and the Slovak region of Nitra, was later duplicated by the establishment of new Euroregions on the same territory, but on a smaller scale. These new Euroregions operate at the micro-regional level as a result of cooperative agreements between associations of municipalities on both sides of the border (Danube Euroregion (2003), Ister-Granum Euroregion (2003-2004)).

To the Euroregions that mostly unite municipalities, their associations, and civil society actors, it is possible to include, besides already mentioned establishments, also the Sajó-Rima//Slana-Rimava Euroregion (2000), Neogradiensis Euroregion (2000), Ipel'/Ipoly Euroregion (2002), and Zemplén Euroregion (2004). For example, the Ister-Granum Euroregion, established in 2003, united 48 Slovak and 52 Hungarian municipalities. Its governance model featured a Joint Council with equal representation from both countries, supported by thematic working groups.

Kosice-Miskolc Euroregion (2000) was established by the authorities of the Kosice region, the town of Kosice in Slovakia, and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county, along with the town of Miskolc in Hungary. This means it united subnational authorities alongside municipal self-governments, but, as researchers stressed, it focused mostly on cultural and political aspects (Soós & Fejes, 2023, pp. 133–135).

In 2000-2001, the Slovak government introduced a one-stop subsidy to support the operational activities of the Slovak sections of the Euroregions. This included funding for the establishment of secretariats and ongoing expenses. This initiative greatly facilitated the establishment of Euroregions along the Slovak border, while leading to a decline in activities by Slovak actors following this period (Halas, 2007). Currently, only the CE, Ipel'/Ipoly, and Sajó-Rima//Slana-Rimava Euroregions on the Hungarian-Slovak border are actively involved in projects or organizing events. Other Euroregions *de facto* do not exist.

The diverse roles of state authorities in neighboring countries, coupled with longstanding cross-border intermunicipal relationships, have motivated local authorities in Hungary to effectively leverage a novel legal mechanism introduced in European law in 2006: the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). Additionally, the Hungarian government's initiative to bolster support for Hungarian minorities in

adjacent countries further underscores this development (Swensson, Ocskay, 2016).

Since 2011, the Hungarian government has provided financial and professional support for the establishment and operation of these groupings, amounting to approximately 500-600 thousand euros annually. This support has resulted in nearly one-third of the groupings established in the EU having Hungarian members. Specifically, 27 groupings were formed with Hungarian participation (three of which have since legally dissolved, and a Hungarian member has withdrawn from two of them). Three EGTCs are in the process of dissolution (Benczi & Ocskay, 2021).

The Hungarian government's initiative was the main factor in the creation of EGTCs in the same areas and under the same names as the two current Hungarian-Slovak Euroregions – Sajó-Rima and Ister Granum – despite the fact that their member entities differed from those of the Euroregions. In addition to the 2 institutions mentioned above, a total of 14 new EGTCs were created along the Hungarian-Slovak border between 2008, when the first Ister-Graunum EGTC was formed, and 2025, when the last one, the BOTILA EGTC, was established (*Table 1.8*).

Table 1.8 European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation with the participation of public institutions from Hungary and the Slovak Republic

Name of EGTC	Year Established	Participating Countries	Official Website
Ister-Granum EGTC	2008	Hungary / Slovakia	http://istergranum.eu
Ung-Tisza-Túr-Sajó (UTTS) EGTC	2009	Hungary / Slovakia	—
Karst-Bodva (Kras-Bodva) EGTC	2009	Slovakia / Hungary	—
ABAÚJ - ABAÚJBAN EGTC	2010	Hungary / Slovakia	http://abaujinfo.hu
Pons Danubii EGTC	2010	Slovakia / Hungary	http://ponsdanubii.eu
Arrabona EGTC	2011	Hungary / Slovakia	http://arrabona.eu
Rába-Duna-Vág EGTC	2011	Hungary / Slovakia	http://rdvegtec.eu
Bodrogközi EGTC	2012	Hungary / Slovakia	http://bodrogkoziek.com

Novohrad-Nógrád EGTC	2011	Hungary / Slovakia	http://nne-gtc.eu
Sajó-Rima (Slaná-Rimava) EGTC	2013	Hungary / Slovakia	http://sajorima.eu
Via Carpatia EGTC	2013	Slovakia / Hungary	http://viacarpatia.eu
Torysa EGTC	2013	Hungary / Slovakia	—
Svinka EGTC	2013	Hungary / Slovakia	—
PONTIBUS EGTC	2016	Hungary / Slovakia	http://pontibusegtc.eu
Ipoly-Völgye EGTC	2017	Hungary / Slovakia	http://ipolyvolgye.hu
BOTILA EGTC	2025	Hungary / Slovakia	https://egtcmonitor.cescinet.eu/en/egtc-fohub/hungarian-egtc/botila/ (without official site yet)

Source: List of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation. Retrieved from https://cor.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-11/Official_List_of_the_EGTCs.pdf

Some EGTCs, such as Ister-Granum and Pons Danubii are widely referenced in literature for their operational continuity and influence on regional planning. Ister-Granum EGTC was the second entity established in the EU (in 2008) and the first in Central Europe, including the Slovak–Hungarian border. In 2015, in a comparative analysis of the 13 existing Hungarian-Slovak EGTCs, which evaluated factors such as publicity, resources, regional development, and member satisfaction, Ister-Granum was ranked as one of the most mature organizations (Balogh, Pete, 2017).

EGTC Pons Danubii (registered in 2010) includes six municipalities from both countries. Its legal personality allows it to implement projects directly, manage funds, and coordinate long-term strategies. Notably, cities such as Miskolc, Esztergom, and Košice serve as the institutional seats of EGTCs, indicating their strategic and

administrative centrality. It is important to mention that Pons Danubii and Via Carpatia EGTCs are the only two of the fifteen EGTCs located on the Hungarian-Slovak border, whose headquarters are situated in Slovakia (Fejes, 2023).

The second research question is: What best practices for interaction between public structures can be identified in the Hungarian-Slovak cross-border area?

CBC along the Slovak-Hungarian border combines grassroots cooperation with institutional innovation. The EGTC model enables improved accountability, coordinated project implementation, and greater absorption of EU funds.

As already mentioned, Ister-Granum EGTC, encompassing the area around Esztergom (Hungary) and Štúrovo (Slovakia), is often cited as a best practice in small-scale cross-border development. It is successful in cross-border planning and building tourist routes, including bike paths, restoring castles, mansions, and religious itineraries, promoting shopping tourism, and local food, environmental protection, and economic networking (Balogh, Pete, 2017). Studies show that this establishment secured multiple rounds of Interreg funding and launched a local innovation cluster in 2011 (Durá et al., 2018).

The Ipeľ Euroregion leveraged INTERREG funding to restore and protect the Ipeľ River basin, integrating flood prevention infrastructure with eco-tourism routes, such as cycling paths along the river. Transparent project management and cross-border audit procedures have built mutual trust among citizens living along the border. On the other hand, EGTC Pons Danubii is recognized for its cross-border cycling path project, integrated urban planning, and joint youth summer camps (Noferini et al., 2019).

Currently, the most visible institution of this type on the Hungarian-Slovak border is the EGTC Via Carpatia. It is one of only two EGTCs registered in Slovakia, created by the Košice Self-governing Region and Hungary's Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County. The grouping effectively translates the shared objectives of regional development into practical projects in innovation, social care, ecology, and energy transition.

At the same time, the performance of the EGTCs varies: some perform well, while others show no signs of existence (Törzsök & Majoros, 2015). Currently, two of them are in the dissolution phase, while others are playing a pioneering role in terms of cross-border integration (Benczi & Ocskay, 2021). However, several challenges persist. First, linguistic and cultural differences – unlike the Czech-Slovak case – pose

obstacles in communication and public engagement. Hungarian minorities in southern Slovakia, while acting as bridges, also face legal ambiguities in administrative recognition and funding eligibility (Chilla & Lambracht, 2022).

Second, the asymmetry in financial and administrative capacities between Slovak and Hungarian municipalities often leads to imbalances in project leadership and implementation. Moreover, some Slovak municipalities, particularly in less-developed border districts, struggle with staff shortages and insufficient experience in EU project management.

Third, political tensions occasionally influence CBC. Disputes over minority language use, historical memory, and migration have occasionally disrupted local cooperation, though they have not generally affected the functioning of EGTCs or Euroregions in the long-term perspective.

Despite these challenges, EGTCs operating along the Hungarian-Slovak border constitute key institutional actors in the management and implementation of EU territorial cooperation programmes. Within the Interreg Hungary-Slovakia (HUSK) Programme, the *Small Project Fund* (SPF) is administered by two such groupings – Via Carpatia and Rába-Duna-Vág – with a combined allocation exceeding EUR 13 million in the 2014–2020 and 2021–2027 programming periods (Interreg Hungary-Slovakia Programme, n.d.). This model, introduced in 2014–2020, represented an institutional innovation within the Interreg architecture and has been retained due to its effectiveness. According to the programme’s governance framework, EGTCs are also formally integrated into decision-making structures: they may delegate a representative to the Monitoring Committee, while the Managing Authority maintains regular consultations with them regarding future cooperation and funding opportunities (Interreg Hungary – Slovakia Programme, n.d.).

Also, Slovakia and Hungary implemented over 180 projects under Interreg V-A Slovakia–Hungary 2014–2020, with a budget exceeding €170 million. The new Interreg VI-A programme (2021–2027) focuses on green mobility, inclusive education, and smart governance, giving EGTCs and Euroregions strategic roles in implementation.

In addition, EGTCs implement TAPE (2014–2020) and TAP (2021–2027) projects, supported by expert organisations such as CESCO (CESCO, 2022), which underscores their strategic role in territorial development along the border.

Conclusions

Cross-border cooperation between Hungary and Slovakia has undergone a significant transformation from the early 1990s to the 2020s.

Initially shaped by the establishment of Euroregions, cooperation was largely symbolic and focused on accessing EU funding rather than delivering tangible outcomes. While Euroregions created important platforms for dialogue, their dependence on national subsidies and reliance on associations rather than strong public-law institutions limited their long-term effectiveness. Many of them remained weakly institutionalized and lacked the resources or political capacity to sustain meaningful cooperation.

The introduction of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) instrument in 2006-2013 marked a turning point in institutional development. Hungary's proactive adoption of this framework, supported by consistent state-level financial and professional backing, enabled the rapid spread of EGTCs along the Hungarian-Slovak border. Some Euroregions were re-registered as EGTCs, while new groupings were also established, resulting in Hungary becoming one of the most active EU Member States in utilizing this instrument. EGTCs thus replaced Euroregions as the dominant institutional form of CBC, providing legal personality, financial accountability, and greater access to EU funds.

Best practices such as the Ister-Granum and Pons Danubii, Via Carpatia EGTCs demonstrate the potential of this model to deliver concrete results. These organisations have successfully implemented projects in tourism development, environmental protection, infrastructure, and cultural cooperation, while also building trust through permanent secretariats, bilingual staff, and joint planning mechanisms. Their ability to secure successive rounds of EU funding and to establish innovation clusters illustrates how CBC can evolve from symbolic to substantive forms of governance.

Despite these achievements, challenges persist. Linguistic and cultural differences, financial asymmetries between Hungarian and Slovak municipalities, and periodic political tensions create obstacles to balanced and sustainable cooperation. Moreover, not all EGTCs have performed equally, with some remaining inactive or dissolving. Nevertheless, the overall trajectory indicates that the EGTC has become the dominant and most sustainable institutional model of Hungarian-Slovak CBC, aligning local and regional cooperation with EU integration and regional development strategies.

Experience in cross-border cooperation between Zakarpattia region of Ukraine and the Visegrad Group countries

To study the institutional models of Ukrainian public institutions' cross-border cooperation with partners in Visegrad Group countries that share a border with Ukraine, we will focus on Zakarpattia region, using specific research questions.

The first research question is: *Which institutional forms of cross-border cooperation are established by Ukrainian legislation for public actors?*

Current institutional frameworks for cross-border cooperation among subnational authorities, alongside the established mutual initiatives and actions, are outlined in the Law of Ukraine "On International Territorial Cooperation," which was adopted in April 2024 as part of the effort to harmonize Ukrainian legislation with EU law (Vidomosti Verkhovnoi Rady, 2024a). This law replaces the previous legislation from 2004 governing cross-border cooperation (Vidomosti Verkhovnoi Rady, 2024b) and outlines that this type of territorial cooperation can be carried out through:

1. *Implementation of joint projects and programs.*
2. *Conclusion of agreements on cross-border cooperation.*
3. *Establishment or joining of Euroregional Co-operation Grouping (ECG).*
4. *Joining a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).*
5. *Establishment of a Euroregion.*

According to Ukrainian legislation, public entities engaged in CBC (so-called subjects of the territorial cooperation) include local state executive authorities and local self-government bodies, as well as their associations. These entities collaborate with relevant public institutions and/or their associations in neighbouring countries, functioning within the scope of their competencies and in alignment with agreements on international territorial cooperation.

The above-mentioned law of Ukraine introduces the concept of an "international territorial cooperation body," which, in the context of this study, corresponds to the term "institutional forms of cross-border cooperation" we use. Ukrainian legislation provides for the following: *Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (ECGs), European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), Euroregions, and others.*

Notably, Article 13 provides a comprehensive outline of the legal structure (a non-profit society), the founders, and the processes for establishing ECGs, particularly in light of Ukraine's membership in the

CoE and its potential to pursue this pathway. Article 14 delineates the regulations governing the participation of Ukrainian public institutions in EGTCs, emphasizing that such participation must align with Ukrainian legislation and be conducted under an agreement for the establishment of the EGTC proposed by a legal entity from an EU member state.

It is essential to note that the Law on territorial cooperation, unlike Ukraine's Law on cross-border cooperation from 2004, was enacted in response to the implementation of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, which was signed on June 27, 2014. This law also aligns with Ukraine's path to accession that began in 2022. Furthermore, Ukraine's ratification of Protocol No. 3 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities or Authorities on May 11, 2012, thereby establishing the framework for the creation of the ECGs (Council of Europe, European Treaty Series - No. 206., 1998). Considering the potential to join EGTCs established within EU member states, and with the precedent set by the EGTC Tisza, which included Zakarpattia region, relevant provisions regarding this entity were included in the previous law and are described in greater detail in the new legislation.

Speaking of the Euroregion, as a classic form of cross-border cooperation, according to the analyzed legislation, it is established in accordance with a bilateral or multilateral agreement on cooperation with the aim of establishing and deepening relations between the entities and participants of cross-border cooperation in Ukraine and foreign states. The Euroregion may be reorganized into another body of international territorial cooperation, for example, ECG or EGTC.

The western and southwestern regions of Ukraine, specifically Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Chernivtsi, Volyn, and Odessa, are currently at least *de-jure* involved in five Euroregions established in collaboration with EU or accession countries, including Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Moldova. These Euroregions are: the Carpathian Euroregion (established in 1993), the Bug Euroregion (1995), the Lower Danube Euroregion (1998), the Upper Prut Euroregion (2000), and Dnister (2012) (Pro zatverdzhennia Derzhavnoi prohramy rozvytku transkordonneho spivrobitnytstva na 2021-2027 roky, n.d.). The foundation for utilizing the structures of these Euroregions was established by the aforementioned CoE's European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation.

The Carpathian Euroregion (CE), encompassing Zakarpattia region of Ukraine, was established in 1993 as a pioneering initiative in partnership with its Hungarian and Polish counterparts. Romania and

Slovakia joined this initiative, as described earlier, further solidifying the Euroregion's significance. CE is acting as the international association comprising 19 administrative subnational (regional/county-level) units from the adjacent areas of Poland, the Slovak Republic, Ukraine, Hungary, and Romania. The reason for creating Euroregion, besides establishing neighbourhood relations in a multiethnic area, was to bring European methods of governance and expertise in the Carpathian region (Oltean, 2013).

Without delving into the challenges surrounding the functioning of the CE that became apparent beginning in the 2000s, and the reasons behind their emergence – which are not the focus of our study – we observe that their accumulation has resulted in a transformation of its organizational structure in Ukraine. On October 2, 2007, the Association of Local Self-Government Bodies “Euroregion Carpathians-Ukraine” was registered in Ukraine. It brings together 72 local self-governments and their associations – from Transcarpathian, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Chernivtsi regions. In November 2008, the Interregional Association of the Carpathian Euroregion recognized this organization as the official representation of Ukraine in the CE (Yevrorehion Karpaty – Ukraina, n.d.).

Starting in the second decade of the 21st century, increasing interest in Ukraine emerged in the modern model of cooperation between public institutions proposed by the European Commission, the EGTC. In Ukraine, the establishment of the EGTC was introduced by the Law of Ukraine 2515-VIII, titled “On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine on Cross-Border Cooperation”, which was enacted on September 4, 2018 (Vidomosti Verkhovnoi Rady, 2018). This format is currently governed by the effective law on international territorial cooperation mentioned earlier.

The EGTC Tisza, established in 2015 under an agreement between Zakarpattia region and the Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county and the municipality of Kisvarda from Hungary, represents the only example of the practical implementation of such a cross-border organizational form in Ukraine. Moreover, it is the first EGTC involving a non-EU state member. Considering the incomplete legal framework as of 2015, the management of the grouping has become one of the main drivers of the Europeanisation of the relevant Ukrainian legislation, resulting in the already analysed law on international territorial cooperation (Benczi & Ocskay, 2021).

It is necessary to mention that the most commonly used form of CBC between Zakarpattia region of Ukraine and neighbouring regions, counties, and communities of the EU states is through bilateral agreements. In some cases, there are also trilateral or multilateral agreements.

While analysing the institutional forms of CBC between Presov and Kosice regions of Slovakia and Zakarpattia region of Ukraine, respective counties and communities, the conclusions were made that can be regarded as valid for relations with other central European neighbours. After Slovakia's accession to the EU, which provided broader access to European Structural and Investment Funds and a wide variety of other programs, bi- or multilateral agreements between Ukrainian and Slovak subnational and local government tiers were primarily motivated by the goal of establishing a legal framework for collaborating on the development and implementation of CBC projects. Despite this, research indicates that representatives of public institutions – such as local self-governments, local state executive bodies, regional development agencies (RDAs), local development agencies (LDAs), public cultural institutions, and universities – often rely on ad hoc project partnerships as the most common institutional form of cross-border cooperation. This happens even though not all opportunities provided by the EU, other multilateral mechanisms, and individual states are fully utilized. This is due to a stated lack of knowledge, human and financial capacity, information, and partnership connections, despite a consistent motivation to engage in such activities (Cirner et al., 2023).

In this context, it is important to note that despite the challenges mentioned, the legal capacity of local self-governments in Ukraine has improved since the initiation of the decentralization reform in 2014-2015. Alongside the transfer of nearly 60 per cent of public revenues to local budgets, the capacity of local communities has increased with the unification of adjacent villages, towns, and other settlements into what are termed “unified territorial communities” and larger counties (districts) (Vidomosti Verkhovnoi Rady, 2015). However, due to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the subsequent full-scale Russian invasion in 2022, the decentralization process remains incomplete. This situation has imposed certain constraints on the powers and financial resources of local self-governments, making it challenging to assess the overall impact of these developments on cross-border cooperation.

The second research question can be stated as: *How do EU policies affect the institutional choices of public and non-profit organizations in Zakarpattia region regarding cross-border cooperation with partners from neighboring countries?*

Starting from the beginning of 2000 in the context of the accession of Visegrad countries to the EU, in particular Poland, Slovakia and Hungary, and the launching of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) institutions in the western regions of Ukraine became able to receive

funding for the implementation of their cross-border initiatives from two European funds, namely EFRD (for European partners) and TACIS (for Ukrainian partners). We are talking about the Programme Hungary-Slovakia-Ukraine INTERREG IIIA / TACIS cross-border cooperation (CBC) (2000-2004), Neighbourhood Programme Poland-Belarus-Ukraine INTERREG IIIA / TACIS cross-border cooperation (CBC) (2004-2006).

According to the Action Plan developed in 2005 between the EU and Ukraine in the framework of the ENP, significant support has to be provided to local authorities for their participation in this policy, including cross-border cooperation programs and projects. To effectively implement the main provisions of the ENP in the realm of cross-border cooperation, the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) was established and became operational from 2007 to 2013. It offered co-funding for promoting good governance and equitable social and economic development processes, supported cross-border and transregional cooperation, and gradual economic integration of neighbouring countries with the EU. Within this instrument, three cross-border cooperation programmes (Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine, Poland-Belarus-Ukraine, Romania-Ukraine, 2007-2013) were focused, besides others, on the territory of Zakarpattia region of Ukraine (EUR-Lex, 2006 b).

The European Neighbourhood Instrument (2014-2020) replaced its predecessor and aimed to promote regional integration, including cross-border cooperation. The ENI addresses the new challenges posed by a changing neighbourhood and is grounded in the principles of differentiation, joint ownership, and flexibility. This financial instrument aims to strengthen relationships with beneficiaries through bilateral, multi-country, and cross-border cooperation programs (Official Journal of the European Union, 2014). In 2020 and 2022, the European Commission adopted new regulations on ENI, taking into account logistical, financial and institutional challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the start of full-scale Russian aggression in Ukraine (EUR-Lex, 2020; EUR-Lex, 2022).

As a result of the signing of the Association Agreement with EU in 2014 Ukraine took the obligations to implement European standards in all areas, including cross-border and regional cooperation. The Agreement has a separate Chapter 27 “Cross-border and Regional Cooperation”. The provisions of Articles 446-448 of the Agreement confirm the authorities’ role in ensuring cross-border and regional cooperation, including the development of appropriate legislation (EUR-Lex, 2023).

In 2021-2027, the cross-border and other dimensions of European territorial cooperation with neighbouring countries, including Ukraine, were governed by the EU Cohesion policy and became the field of Interreg program interventions. To highlight the external dimension of Cohesion policy, the new programmes are called Interreg NEXT (European Commission, n.d.). They are aimed at promoting economic, social, and territorial development within the EU, aligning with the cohesion policy objectives, and their rules cover effective programming, including technical assistance, monitoring, evaluation, communication, eligibility, management, control, and financial management supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) (EUR-Lex, 2021).

The inclusion of communities and regions of Ukraine in the programme areas funded by the European Neighbourhood Policy instruments (ENPI (2007-2013), ENI (2014-2020), Interreg NEXT (2021-2027) created an opportunity to assess the potential of types of institutions that demonstrated readiness and capacity to develop cross-border cooperation with partners in neighbouring countries. For further analysis, we are also including data on CBC with Romanian actors, even though this state is not a member of the Visegrad group.

According to information provided by the Department of Euroregional Cooperation of the Zakarpattia Regional Military Administration and corroborated by the official websites of the ENI and Interreg NEXT programs, there has been a consistent level of support for cross-border collaboration projects between local institutions and their counterparts in the bordering regions of Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. This support has been facilitated through EU funding mechanisms within the framework of Neighbourhood policies, specifically the Cohesion Policy since 2021.

Considering the incomplete information about the projects won by communities and other public institutions in Zakarpattia region from 2007 to 2013 under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, our empirical study conducted a dynamic analysis of projects funded by the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI, 2014-2020) and the Interreg NEXT program (2021-2024, ongoing) (*Table 1.9–1.14*).

It is essential to emphasize that data analysis from this period holds greater significance for us than data prior to 2014. This is largely due to the fact that 2014 was the year the Association Agreement was signed between the EU and Ukraine, which heightened the Ukrainian governance system's focus on the motivations driving cross-border cooperation.

Table 1.9 Number of the supported cross-border cooperation projects prepared in partnerships with institutions from Zakarpattia region, Ukraine, by the EU financial instruments and programmes (2014-2025: ongoing)

Name of the cross-border cooperation programme	Number of the CBC projects supported within European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI, 2014-2020)	Number of the CBC projects supported within Interreg NEXT program (2021-2027, ongoing)
Hungary – Slovakia – Romania – Ukraine	67	39
Poland – Belarus – Ukraine (from 2021– Poland – Ukraine)	16	12
Romania – Ukraine	16	12

Source: Tables 1.9-1.13 were compiled from data sourced from the Zakarpattia Regional Military Administration and the official websites of programs funded by the European Neighbourhood Instrument from 2014 to 2020, as well as the Interreg NEXT program, which began in 2021¹.

Table 1.9 demonstrates the total number of cross-border projects that were supported by EU programs during the periods of 2014-2020 and 2021-2027, involving public and non-governmental not-for-profit institutions from Zakarpattia region. It should be noted that the Interreg NEXT program has only conducted its first call for project initiatives (2023-2024) at the time of writing; therefore, the dynamics of the projects will change.

¹ We included the following Interreg programmes:

- Interreg NEXT Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine: <https://next.huskroua-cbc.eu/>;
- Interreg NEXT Poland-Ukraine: <https://pl-ua.eu/en/news/>;
- Romania-Ukraine 2021-2027, <https://ro-ua.net/en/>.

Table 1.10 Names and types of institutions from Zakarpattia region, Ukraine, that were participants in the projects supported by ENI instrument projects (2014-2020)

Name of a CBC Program	Number of CBC Projects Supported	Number of Participations of Local Self-governments/Associations, Local Self-Government Establishments	Number of Participations of Local Executive Authorities, State Establishments	Number of Participations of Regional/Local Development Agencies and Funds	Number of Participations of Educational Institutions	Number of Participations of Non-governmental Organisations
<i>Hungary – Slovakia – Romania – Ukraine</i>	<i>67 project, 98 participations</i>	Uzhhorod City Council (<i>4 projects</i>), Vynohradiv City Council, Khust City Council (<i>2 projects</i>), Velyky Berezny Village Council (<i>3 projects</i>), Solotvyno Village Council, Khyzha Village Council, Vyshkovo Village Council (<i>2 projects</i>), Nyzhnia Apsha Village Council, Serednie Vodiane Village Council, Onokivtsi Village Council, Velyky Bychkiv Village Council, Perechyn Village Council. Velyki Luchky Village Council, Regional Children’s Hospital	The Main Department of State Emergency Service of Ukraine in Zakarpattia region, 6th State Fire and Rescue Unit of the Department of State Emergency Service of Ukraine in Zakarpattia Region, Zakarpattia Regional State Laboratory of “Derzhprodsposhyvsluzhba”, Tisza River Basin	Agency for Regional Development and Cross-border Cooperation “Zakarpattia” (<i>3 projects</i>), Association of Project Managers YADRO (<i>2 projects</i>), Communal Enterprise “Centre of Investments and Development” (Vynohradiv), FORZA – Agency for Sustainable Development (<i>2 projects</i>), International Association of the	Uzhhorod National University (<i>6 projects</i>)	NGO “Ecosphera” (<i>2 projects</i>), NGO “Institute of the Development of the Carpathian Region” (<i>2 projects</i>), Centre for Civic Initiatives, RachivEcoTur, Council for Protection of Rights of Patients and Medical Professionals, NGO “Institute of Environmental and Religious Studies”, Pro Cultura Subcarpathica, Hungarian Tourism

		<p>(3 projects), Zakarpattia Regional Clinical Hospital, Regional Clinical Infectious Hospital, Uzhhorod District Clinical Hospital, Uzhhorod City Maternity Hospital, Uzhhorod City Children's Hospital, Uzhhorod City Clinical Hospital, Rakhiv District Hospital, Mizhhiria District Hospital, Vynohradiv District Hospital, Zakarpattia Museum of Folk Architecture and Life, Mukachevo Historical Museum, Zakarpattia Regional Centre for Social and Labour Rehabilitation and Professional Orientation "Choice", EGTC "Tisza" (2 projects)</p>	<p>Water Resources Directorate (3 projects), Vynohradiv Interdistrict Water Management Department, Uzhhorod Interdistrict Water Management Department, Berehovo Interdistrict Department of Water Management, Road Service in Zakarpattia Region (3 projects), Uzhhorod Forest enterprise, State Ecological Inspectorate in Zakarpattia Region, Uzhansky National Nature Park</p>	<p>Regional Development Institutions (IARDI), Agency of Local Development and Information Resources "Europolis" (2 projects), European Initiatives Centre (3 projects), Ukrainian-Hungarian Regional Development Centre, Informational Centre for Innovation and Development "NOVUM" (2 projects), Charitable Fund for the Development of Cross-border Cooperation and Special Economic Zones (3 projects), Interregional Centre of Cross-border Cooperation</p>		<p>Council of Zakarpattia (2 projects), Cultural Alliance of Hungarians in Sub-Carpathia, Berehovo District Organisation of Ukrainian Red Cross, Greek Catholic Eparchy of Mukachevo, Zakarpattia Reformed Church (2 projects), Maltese Charity Organization in Berehovo, Religious Community of Berehovo Roman Catholic Church, ADVANCE Zakarpattia Advocacy and Development Center</p>
--	--	--	---	--	--	--

		<i>Total: 37 participations</i>	<i>Total: 15 participations</i>	<i>Total: 21 participations</i>	<i>Total: 6 participations</i>	<i>Total: 19 participations</i>
<i>Poland – Ukraine</i>	<i>16 projects, 22 participations</i>	Vynohradiv District Council, Perechyn City Council, Uzhhorod City Council <i>(3 projects)</i> , Vynohradiv City Council, Kolochava Village Council, Khust City Council, Regional Clinical Phthisiopulmonology Center, Zakarpattia Regional Theatre, Local Ethnomuseum of Perechyn City	Zakarpattia Regional State Administration.	FORZA – Agency for Sustainable Development, Communal Enterprise “Uzhhorod District Agency of Development”, Agency for Regional Development and Cross-border Cooperation “Zakarpattia” <i>(2 projects)</i> , Fund for the Cross- border Cooperation Development, Interregional Centre of Cross-border Cooperation <i>(2 projects)</i> , Communal Enterprise “Center of Investments and Development” (Vynohradiv)		NGO “Institute of the Development of the Carpathian Region”. NGO “Zakarpattian Film Commission”

		<i>Total: 11 participations</i>	<i>Total: 1 participation</i>	<i>Total: 8 participations</i>	<i>Total: 0 participations</i>	<i>Total: participations</i>
<i>Romania – Ukraine</i>	<i>16 projects, 20 participations</i>	Rakhiv City Council (2 projects), Berehovo City Council, Solotvyno Village Council (4 projects), Velyky Bychkiv Village Council (2 projects), Uzhhorod City Council (2 projects), Zakarpattia Regional Theatre <i>Total: 12 participations</i>	Tyachiv District State Administration, Border Guard Unit <i>Total: 2 participations</i>	Agency for Regional Development of Zakarpattia, International Association of the Regional Development Institutions (IARDI) <i>Total: 2 participations</i>	Uzhhorod National University (2 projects), Solotvyno Gymnasium <i>Total: 3 participations</i>	NGO “Ecosphere” <i>Total: 1 participation</i>

Table 1.10 and 1.12 present comprehensive information regarding the names and types of institutions within Zakarpattia region, along with project initiatives that were deemed successful between 2014 and 2020 and since 2021. The classification of these institutions was developed independently, yet grounded in the methodology outlined earlier in this article, as well as in accordance with the rules governing the EU programs analyzed. Notably, these funding instruments explicitly exclude profit-making organizations and entrepreneurial entities. Recipients of financial assistance from the EU for the implementation of cross-border projects can generally be categorized into two main groups:

1) public institutions, which include self-governing and executive bodies at the sub-national level, as well as communal or state-owned entities such as schools, hospitals, museums, theaters, nature reserves, and universities;

2) non-governmental non-profit organizations, which encompass community groups, charitable foundations, and religious organizations.

Additionally, regional or local development agencies, sustainable development centers, and centers for cross-border cooperation operate in both capacities – as communal institutions and non-governmental organizations. However, we distinguish them as a separate group because their statutory objectives focus specifically on project management.

Also, it is important to note that in Tables 1.10 and 1.12, we present the number of instances of participation in CBC projects supported by the Interreg programs, rather than the number of successful projects involving public institutions. That is why these numbers are higher than the number of successful projects won with the participation of the institutions from Zakarpattia region of Ukraine indicated in the Tables 1.9 – 1.11.

**Table 1.11 Summary Table: Number of Projects and Participations by Institution Type
(ENI instrument 2014-2020)**

Programme	Total Projects	Number of Participations of Local Self-governments/Associations, Local Self-government Establishments	Number of Participations of Local Executive Authorities, State Establishments	Number of Participations of Regional/Local Development Agencies and Funds	Number of Participations of Educational Institutions	Number of Participations of Non-governmental Organisations
Hungary – Slovakia – Romania – Ukraine	67	37	15	21	6	19
Poland – Ukraine	16	11	1	8	0	2
Romania – Ukraine	16	12	2	2	3	1

At the same time, Tables 1.11 and 1.14 summarize successful projects and participation of public and non-governmental institutions from Zakarpattia region, cross-border projects that were supported in the years 2014-2020 and 2021-2024, by the types that have already been described.

Table 1.12 Names and the types of institutions from Zakarpattia region, Ukraine, that are participants in the supported by Interreg NEXT cross-border projects (2021-2027: ongoing)

Name of a CBC Programme	Number of CBC Projects Supported	Number of Participations of Local Self-Governments/As sociations, Local Self-government Establishments	Number of Participations of Local Executive Authorities, State Establishments	Number of Participations of Regional/Local Development Agencies and Funds	Number of Participations of Educational Institutions	Number of Participations of Non-governmental Organisations
<i>Hungary – Slovakia – Romania – Ukraine</i>	<i>39 projects, 56 participations</i>	Uzhhorod City Council, Beerehovo City Council, Velyky Berezny Village Council (2 projects), Perechyn City Council, Solotvyno Village Council, Tiachiv City Council, Serednie Village Council, Zakarpattia	Main Directorate of the State Emergency Service in Zakarpattia Region, Vynohradiv Interdistrict Water Management Department, Department of Infrastructure of Zakarpattia Regional State Administration, Infrastructure Restoration and Development	Civil Organisation of the Regional Development “Velyka Dobron”, Communal Enterprise “Center of Investments and Development” of Vynohradiv City Council, Agency of Regional Development of Zakarpattia Region (3 projects), Regional Fund of Entrepreneurship Support “TES Fund”, International Association of Regional Development	Uzhhorod National University (3 projects), Solotvyno High School, Ferenc Rákóczi II Zakarpattia Hungarian College of Higher Education	Council for Protection of Rights of Patients and Medical Professionals, NGO “Institute of Carpathian Region Development”, Charity “Everybody Has a Second Chance”, NGO “Institute of Environmental

		<p>Frontier Local Governments Association, Zakarpattia Museum of Folk Architecture and Life (2 projects), Mukachevo Historical Museum, Uzhhorod City Multi-Profile Clinical Hospital (2 projects), Regional Children's Hospital, Nyzhnia Apsha Hospital EGTC "Tisza" (3 projects)</p>	<p>Service (3 projects), Mukachevo Border Guard Unit (2 projects), National Park 'Synevyr'</p>	<p>Institutions (IARDI), Association of Project Managers YADRO (2 projects)</p>		<p>and Religious Studies", RakhivEcoTour, NGO "Better Life" (2 projects), Charity "About the Agriculture Carpatica", Regional Charity "Edelweiss", NGO "Happy Children", Zakarpattian Hungarian-speaking Pedagogical Society, Pro Cultura Subcarpathica, Charity of the Regional Hungarian College, Volunteer Fire Department of Dercen Parish</p>
--	--	---	--	---	--	--

		<i>Total: 19 participations</i>	<i>Total: 9 participations</i>	<i>Total: 9 participations</i>	<i>Total: 5 participations</i>	<i>Total: 14 participations</i>
<i>Poland – Ukraine</i>	<i>12 projects, 15 participations</i>	Svaliava City Council, Kolochava Village Council, Khust City Council, Velyky Berezny Village Council, Uzhhorod City Council, Khust City Central Hospital, Regional Children’s Hospital, Zakarpattia Regional Clinical Hospital <i>Total: 8 participations</i>	Main Directorate of the State Emergency Service in Zakarpattia Region, Uzhansky National Park (<i>2 projects</i>) <i>Total: 3 participations</i>	Agency of Regional Development of Zakarpattia Region <i>Total: 1 participation</i>	Uzhhorod National University (<i>2 projects</i>) <i>Total: 2 participations</i>	NGO “Institute for the Development of the Carpathian Region” <i>Total: 1 participation</i>

**Table 1.13 Summary Table: Number of Projects and Participations by Institution Type
(Interreg NEXT cross-border projects (2021-2027 - outgoing))**

Programme	Total Projects	Number of Participations of Local Self-governments/Associations, Local Self-government Establishments	Number of Participations of Local Executive Authorities, State Establishments	Number of Participations of Regional/Local Development Agencies and Funds	Number of Participations of Educational Institutions	Number of Participations of Non-governmental Organisations
Hungary – Slovakia – Romania – Ukraine	39	19	9	9	5	14
Poland – Ukraine	12	8	3	1	2	1
Romania – Ukraine	12	6	3	3	1	2

Conclusions

Ukraine is among the few European states with separate legislation on cross-border cooperation. The transition from the 2004 Law “On Cross-border Cooperation” to the 2024 Law “On International Territorial Cooperation” is not merely a technical update; it signifies a fundamental shift in how Ukraine approaches and implements territorial cooperation.

The new law incorporates concepts introduced by the legislative frameworks of the Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Union (EU), such as the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) and the European Cooperation Grouping (ECG), besides joint projects and programs, agreements about cross-border cooperation, Euroregions, previously outlined in the old law. However, some contradictory formulations in this legislation pose obstacles to establishing the new EGTCs as modern institutional forms. Additionally, the law does not identify non-governmental, non-profit entities as participants in cross-border cooperation (CBC), despite their effectiveness as active institutions, as evidenced by statistical data from Zakarpattia region, which will be analyzed later.

This legal transformation, in general, reflects Ukraine’s strategic alignment with the EU’s *acquis communautaire* and the EU’s multi-level governance model. But despite recognizing a variety of institutional forms, the actual utilization of these instruments remains uneven. Most CBC initiatives still rely on ad hoc projects and bilateral agreements, while more complex and integrated formats like the EGTCs are not fully utilized. This institutional asymmetry indicates that, although the legislation has evolved, the capacity to implement it remains limited. There is a noticeable gap between what the legal framework permits and what institutions can effectively execute.

The EGTC Tisza serves as a model for how local initiatives can influence national legislative reforms, highlighting the bottom-up potential of local actors in shaping state-level frameworks. Conversely, Euroregions persist as a resilient legacy structure, particularly in western Ukraine. Despite criticisms regarding their limited effectiveness, Euroregions continue to provide a familiar and politically acceptable format for cooperation, especially in areas with established transnational ties, such as the Carpathian Euroregion. It appears that Ukraine is not abandoning Euroregions but rather layering new institutional forms onto existing ones, suggesting a path-dependent evolution rather than a complete institutional rupture.

The decentralization process initiated in 2014–2015 was anticipated to significantly enhance the institutional capacity of local actors to engage

in CBC. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian full-scale invasion disrupted this progression, limiting local governments' capacity for proactive involvement in CBC structures. Persistent challenges – such as inadequate financial and human resources, weak inter-institutional networks, and insufficient access to information – demonstrate that legal provisions alone do not guarantee effective institutional uptake. This underscores the structural barriers to CBC in Ukraine.

In conclusion, Ukrainian legislation now provides a comprehensive legal framework for various institutional forms of cross-border cooperation. However, the quality and depth of implementation differ significantly. The legal framework exceeds the realities of administration, which are hampered by internal systemic weaknesses and external geopolitical shocks. While Ukraine has adopted the European terminology of territorial cooperation, the ability to effectively implement this framework at the local level is still developing.

Cross-border cooperation policy – through mechanisms such as the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI, 2007–2013), the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI, 2014–2020), and Interreg NEXT (2021–2027) – has served not only as a funding source but also as a significant institutional filter. These frameworks have actively shaped which types of institutions in Zakarpattia region engage in cross-border cooperation and in what manner. By prioritizing administrative capacity, project management expertise, and legal clarity, EU policies have encouraged the formalization and professionalization of the participating actors.

The signing of the Association Agreement with the EU in 2014, particularly Chapter 27, which focuses on cross-border and regional cooperation, has further integrated cross-border cooperation (CBC) into the strategic priorities of Ukrainian governance. This policy shift has reinforced the necessity of aligning with EU norms and has obliged national and subnational authorities to support and institutionalize CBC as part of Ukraine's broader path toward integration.

Empirical evidence from the ENI (2014-2020) and Interreg NEXT programmes (2021-2027) shows a diversification in the types of institutions involved in cross-border initiatives. These include local self-government bodies and their associations, local executive authorities, regional and local development agencies, educational institutions, and a variety of non-governmental non-profit organizations. Among these, local governments remain the most active, followed by NGOs and development agencies, which often act as intermediaries or facilitators. The consistent presence of institutions such as the Uzhhorod City Council, the Agency for

Regional Development of Transcarpathia, and Uzhhorod National University indicates a process of institutional consolidation and specialization. This reflects not only enhanced administrative capacity but also a strategic pursuit of CBC opportunities.

The design of EU programs has also influenced institutional behavior. With each funding period, the EU has raised expectations regarding project sustainability, multi-stakeholder engagement, and result orientation. This has led to more structured and cooperative practices among institutions, often requiring formalized networks and cross-sectoral partnerships. Development agencies and experienced NGOs have become particularly vital in navigating and coordinating these partnerships, often bridging the gap between local governments and the EU's administrative and financial requirements.

Over time, a learning effect has emerged. Institutions that frequently participate in projects demonstrate increased competence in EU procedures, budget management, and cross-border strategy development. These actors benefit from accumulated experience, existing partnerships, and an enhanced ability to align with programmatic priorities, giving them a competitive advantage in securing future funding. However, participation data reveal an uneven distribution across the region: while some municipalities and organizations are highly active, others remain largely absent. This disparity reflects differences in institutional capacity, awareness, and access to technical support. Moreover, despite being eligible, some executive authorities and smaller NGOs face persistent barriers to participation due to resource constraints and the technical complexity of EU funding programs.

In conclusion, EU policies significantly influence the institutional landscape of cross-border cooperation in Zakarpattia region. They do this not only by providing financial incentives but also by establishing structural expectations, promoting institutional learning, and shaping collaborative practices. The outcome is a dynamic and increasingly mature ecosystem of public and non-governmental actors engaged in cross-border cooperation, though it is still marked by asymmetries that require targeted support to ensure inclusivity and sustainability.

General conclusions

The Visegrad Group countries (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary) have distinct yet complementary legal approaches to institutionalising cross-border cooperation. Their legislative frameworks differ in scope, clarity, and administrative practice, generating lessons for Ukraine.

Poland's legal framework combines constitutional recognition of local self-government international activities with sectoral laws that condition certain cross-border engagements on administrative approval. Polish legislation explicitly permits municipalities, counties and regions to join international associations, but some activities require prior consent from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and consultation with the voivode. One practical strength of the Polish model is the administrative framework established by the European Commission and Interreg programmes for Polish associations operating within Euroregions to manage small-project funds under Interreg. A relative weakness is the administrative gatekeeping that can delay initiatives, as well as the requirement that EGTC member public entities be registered on Polish territory, which limits the fluidity of cross-border registration.

The *Czech Republic* has a robust statutory framework that provides municipalities and regions with clear competencies for international cooperation. Czech law – complemented by administrative practice – allows local authorities to sign cross-border agreements, join associations, and participate in EGTCs, but it also imposes oversight via ministries (notably the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Regional Development) when EGTC registration is involved. Strengths include a detailed municipal and regional statute regime, legal predictability, and integration of EU instruments into domestic law. Weaknesses include periods of overlap between municipal and regional competencies and occasional friction when regional authorities seek to assert a role in Euroregions, initially driven by municipalities.

Slovakia's legislation offers a functional approach, emphasising the autonomy of higher territorial units and municipalities to engage in international cooperation. Slovakia's legal framework favours the registration of EGTCs and explicitly allows a range of public law entities to participate. At the same time, Slovakia faces administrative asymmetries and procedural complexity across sectors (e.g., environmental permits, public procurement), which can impede the practical implementation of cross-border projects.

Hungary presents a mixed model. Historically less enthusiastic about the full suite of Council of Europe protocols, Hungary nonetheless enacted early transposition of the EU EGTC Regulation and has actively promoted EGTCs as tools for reconnecting with ethnic diasporas and compensating for weaker economic performance along the borders. Advantages of the Hungarian approach include early legal clarity regarding the operation of EGTCs and deliberate incentives for regions and municipalities to use EGTCs. Limitations in Hungary arise from the

comparatively weaker subnational self-government. During the recent administrative reform, local and county authorities lost much of their competencies. In some cases, reliance has been placed on civil associations when public-law instruments would be more effective.

Two recurring legal challenges reduce the effectiveness of CBC institutions across the Visegrad borders: (1) administrative asymmetry – differences in permitting, tax, procurement, and service provision rules that hinder joint actions, and (2) funding dependency – heavy reliance on EU Interreg and related instruments without stable domestic co-financing or predictable post-programme financing. The most effective model for co-financing can be found in Hungary, where the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) covers the operational costs of the EGTCs. In contrast, under Interreg programmes, EGTCs may receive pre-financing that amounts to 50% of the total European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) support, similar to other non-state organizations.

Another shared weakness is the lack of harmonised rules for delegating public competencies to EGTCs (e.g., whether EGTCs can be delegated responsibilities such as managing small project funds or public services), which varies across member states.

A final legal dimension concerns subsidiarity, oversight, and national sovereignty. Visegrad legislation typically preserves national control (ministries retain notification or consent powers), but the balance between oversight and facilitation varies. The most effective systems strike a balance: ministries provide clear guidance and rapid authorisation, while subnational actors retain the practical authority to set CBC priorities and execute projects.

The comparative analysis of institutional models of cross-border cooperation (CBC) in the Visegrad Group countries demonstrates that different borderlands have pursued distinct institutional trajectories, shaped by historical ties, legal frameworks, and political contexts.

On the *Polish-Czech border*, Euroregions emerged as the dominant institutional form during the 1990s. Their effectiveness was supported by strong municipal leadership, favourable legislation, and early access to PHARE and Interreg funds. The Euroregions Tesin/Cieszyn Silesi, Beskydy illustrate how historical ethnic ties and the presence of minorities can be transformed into a positive factor for reconciliation and cultural cooperation. At the same time, EGTCs such as TRITIA and NOVUM, although established, have struggled to secure administrative powers comparable to those of Euroregions, particularly in fund management.

On the *Czech-Slovak border*, Euroregions such as Beskydy and Bílé-Biele Karpaty became key actors in local cultural and environmental

projects, but their limited resources constrained long-term influence. The later establishment of EGTCs, including Great Morava, illustrates attempts to scale up cooperation to the regional level. However, differing administrative traditions and legal asymmetries between the Czech Republic and Slovakia slowed their effectiveness compared to Euroregions along the German or Polish borders.

On the *Polish-Slovak border*, Euroregion Tatry demonstrates how local authorities can institutionalise CBC around functional needs such as civil protection, environmental management, and transport. The subsequent creation of EGTC TATRY provided municipalities with legal tools to expand cooperation and implement strategic projects, thereby serving as a model of continuity between Euroregions and EGTCs. The Carpathian Euroregion, spanning multiple states, has symbolic importance but faces challenges of scale and coordination.

On the *Hungarian-Slovak border*, the proliferation of Euroregions in the late 1990s and early 2000s created many formal platforms, but often without substantial content. These institutions were frequently established to access EU funds rather than to address shared strategic challenges. By contrast, Hungary has been highly proactive in promoting EGTCs since 2007, partly as a means of reconnecting with Hungarian minorities abroad. This explains why the Hungarian-Slovak border today has the highest density of EGTCs, although their impact varies depending on political will and resource allocation.

Across all borderlands, Euroregions remain crucial as grassroots platforms for people-to-people cooperation and the management of micro-projects, while EGTCs represent a more advanced institutional form capable of implementing large-scale, strategic initiatives. The sustainability of both formats, however, is strongly linked to EU Cohesion Policy instruments, with limited alternative funding mechanisms. Dependence on external support and administrative asymmetries between states remain major obstacles. Nevertheless, successful examples – such as the micro-project funds in the Polish-Czech Euroregions, the functional cooperation in the Polish-Slovak Tatry area, and Hungary’s proactive use of EGTCs – demonstrate the adaptability of CBC institutions to local contexts.

References:

2007. évi XCIX. Törvény az európai területi együttműködési csoportosulásról. Retrieved from http://www.huro-abc.eu/uploads/editors/file/XCIX_2007_tv-1.pdf
- Abaúj-Abaújban EGTC. Retrieved from <http://abaujinfo.hu>
- Act LXV of 1990 on Local Governments of the Republic of Hungary. Retrieved from <https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/1990-65-00-00>
- Act No. 90/2008 Coll. on a European grouping of territorial cooperation, supplementing Act No. 540/2001 Coll., as amended, as provided for in the amendments and supplements. Wording effective at 1 July 2020. Retrieved from https://mirri.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/EN_ACT-No-90_2008_on-EGTC_July-2020.pdf
- Act on Municipalities (Establishment of Municipalities (128/2000). Retrieved from <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/translation/cs/2000-128?langid=1033>
- Act on Regions (Establishment of Regions) (129/2000). Retrieved from <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2000-129>
- Act XXI of 1996 on Regional Development and Spatial Planning. Retrieved from <https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/1996-21-00-00>
- Allmendinger, P., & Haughton, G. (2009). Soft spaces, fuzzy boundaries, and metagovernance: The new spatial planning in the Thames Gateway. *Environment and Planning A*, 41(3), 617–633. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a40208>
- Arrabona EGTC. Retrieved from <http://arrabona.eu>
- Balogh, P., & Pete, M. (2018). Bridging the gap: cross-border integration in the Slovak-Hungarian borderland around Štúrovo-Esztergom. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*. 33(4), 605–622 <https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2017.1294495>
- Baral, B. N. (2024). Shifting Trends in Regionalism. *Journal of Political Science*, 24(1), 170–184. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jps.v24i1.62862>
- Benczi, M., & Ocskay, G. (2021). The evolution of cross-border cooperation in Hungary. *Észak-magyarországi Stratégiai Füzetek*, 18(2), 54-67. DOI: 10.32976/stratfuz.2021.35.
- Bodrogközi EGTC. Retrieved from <http://bodrogkozies.com>
- Bohm, H., Drapela E. (2021) Country profile: The Czech Republic. Comparative analysis on the competencies of regional and local authorities in the field of CBC of the 5 countries with cross-border cooperation for the Europeanisation of Ukrainian borders. Visegrad Fund, 8-20. Retrieved from https://www.iepd.kiev.ua/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CESCI-IVF_2021-Study-Comperative-analysis-authorities_EN.pdf

Border areas and educational attainment – Long-term analysis of Hungary for the period between 1960 and 2022. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/377028401_Border_areas_and_educational_attainment_-_Long-term_analysis_of_Hungary_for_the_period_between_1960_and_2022

Boman, J., & Berg, E. (2007). Identity and Institutions Shaping Cross-border Co-operation at the Margins of the European Union. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 17(2), 195–215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13597560701318516>.

Brunet-Jailly, E. (2005). Theorizing borders: An interdisciplinary perspective. *Geopolitics*, 10(4), 633–649. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040500318519>

Böhm, H. (2014). Co-operation of Moravian-Silesian (CZ) and Žilina (SK) Regions in EGTC TRITIA. CESCO. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/26252626/Co_operation_of_Moravian_Silesian_CZ_and_%C5%BDilina_SK_Self_governing_Regions_in_the_EGTC_TRITIA

Böhm, H. (2016). New forms of cross-border co-operation governance as a tool of environmental protection strategies: Example from Czech–Polish–Slovak borders. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/19720535/CROSS_BORDER_CO_OPERATION_AS_A_TOOL_OF_ENVIRONMENTAL_PROTECTION_EXAMPLE_FROM_CZECH_SLOVAK_BORDERLAND

Böhm, H. (2021). Five roles of cross-border cooperation against Re-bordering. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 38(3), 487–506. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2021.1948900>

Böhm, H., Boháč, A., Nowak-Žółty, E. & Szafránska, A. (2023). The divided town of Český Těšín/Cieszyn as the most integrated part of the Czech-Polish borderland: A life in the cross-border educational togetherness or side by side? *Moravian Geographical Reports*, Sciendo, 31 (4), 194–202. <https://doi.org/10.2478/mgr-2023-0018>

Böhm, H., Boháč, A., & Wróblewski, Ł. (2023). Evaluation of cross-border cooperation in The Czech Republic since 1993: Euroregions on the way to authentic cross-border regions? *Geografický časopis*, 75(3), 253–267. <https://doi.org/10.1515/geocj-2023-0021>

Carpathian Euroregion Retrieved from <https://www.karpacki.pl/en/CESCO>. (2022). *Annual report 2022*. Retrieved from https://budapest.cesci-net.eu/wp-content/uploads/_official/CESCO_Tev_jelentes_2022_ENG.pdf

Chilla, T., & Lambracht, I. (2022). The evolution of cross-border cooperation in the EU: From Euroregions to EGTCs. *Geographia Polonica*, 95(1), 33–48. <https://doi.org/10.7163/GPol.0227>

Chilla, T., & Lambracht, M. (2022). Institutional mapping of cross-border cooperation: INTERREG programme analyses with KEEP data. *European Planning Studies*, 31(4), 700–718. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09654313.2022.2058321>

Cirner, M., Fetko, Y., Lazur, Y., & Mendzhul, M. (2023). Cross-border cooperation between regional and local actors. In A. Duleba, M. Lendel, & V. Oravcová (Ed.), *Safe and Inclusive Border between Slovakia and Ukraine: Factors Influencing Cross Border Cooperation* (pp. 142–183). Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association. Retrieved from https://dspace.uzhnu.edu.ua/jspui/bitstream/lib/64251/1/SIBSU_monograph.pdf

Comparative analysis on the competencies of regional and local authorities in the field of CBC of the 5 countries, 22 March 2021, Visegrad fund. Retrieved from https://budapest.cesci-net.eu/wp-content/uploads/_publications/CESCI-IVF_2021-Study-Comperative-analysis-authorities_EN.pdf

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. (2013, October 31). Local and regional democracy in Hungary: 25th session, Strasbourg, 29–31 October 2013 (CG(25)7FINAL). Council of Europe. Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/local-and-regional-democracy-in-hungary-recommendation-artur-torres-pe/168071910d>

The Constitution of the Czech Republic, 1992. Retrieved from <https://constitutionnet.org.developmentzone.co/sites/default/files/Czech%20Republic%20Constitution.pdf>

The Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2nd April, 1997 As published in Dziennik Ustaw No. 78, item 483. Retrieved from <https://www.sejm.gov.pl/prawo/konst/angielski/kon1.htm>.

Constitution of Slovak Republic, 1992 Retrieved from https://www.google.com/search?q=Constitution+of+the+Slovak+Republic&rlz=1C1SQJL_ukUA883UA883&oq=Constitution+of+the+Slovak+Republic&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIICAEQABgWGB4yCggCEAAYgAQYogQyCggDEAAYgAQYogQyCggEEAAYgAQYogTSAQgzMzA4ajBqNKgCALACAQ&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

Council of Europe. (1980). *European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities*, Madrid, 21.V.1980 (ETS No. 106) Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/1680078b0c>

Council of Europe. (1995). Additional Protocol to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation (ETS No. 159). Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/1680078b15>

Council of Europe (1998) Protocol No. 2 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities or Authorities concerning interterritorial co-operation (ETS No 169). Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/168007f2cb>

Council of Europe (2009) Protocol No. 3 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities or Authorities concerning Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (ECGs) (ETS No. 206). Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/1680084827>

Del Bianco, D., Jackson, J. (Council of Europe) (2012) Cross-border Cooperation Toolkit, Prepared by Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform, Council of Europe. Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/cbc-cross-border-co-operation/1680747160>

Duleba, A, Lačný, M., Dudinský, V., & Kozárová, I. (2014) Pozostale propozycje zalecen i rozwiazan na rzecz rozwoju pogranicza. In V. Benč & V. Dudinský (Ed.), *Wyzwania i szanse dla rozwoju polsko-slowackiej współpracy transgranicznej* (pp. 144–147). Krosno: Arete. ISBN 978-83-62540-72-3.

Durà, A., Camonita, F., & Berzi, M. (2018). Euroregions, excellence and innovation across EU borders. Publications Office of the European Union. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/recot_crii_catalogue_0.pdf

EGTC Monitor. (2015). Tisza EGTC. Retrieved from <https://egtcmonitor.cesci-net.eu/en/egtc-infohub/hungarian-egtc/tisza-egtc/>

EGTC TATRY Ltd. (2013). Convention and Statutes establishing EGTC TATRY. Nowy Targ & Kežmarok. Retrieved from <https://www.euwt-tatry.eu/en/convention-and-statutes.html>

EGTC TRITIA. About and Members. Retrieved from <https://egtctritia.eu/en/>

Eppler, A., Große Hüttmann, M., & Rowe, C. (2024). More cooperation than conflict despite no ‘Third Level’? Understanding the dynamics of paradiplomacy towards the EU in Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 12 (10), 1483–1502. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2024.2369111>

EUR-Lex. (2006a). Regulation (EC) No 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 210/19. Retrieved from EUR-Lex: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2006/1082/oj/eng>

EUR-Lex. (2006b). Regulation (EC) No 1638/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006 laying down general provisions establishing a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 310/1. Retrieved from EUR-Lex: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2006/1638/oj/eng>

EUR-Lex (2013). Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 amending Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC). *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 347, 20.12.2013, pp. 303–319. Retrieved from EUR-Lex: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2013/1302/oj/eng>

EUR-Lex (2014). Regulation (EU) No 232/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 establishing a European Neighbourhood Instrument. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 77, 15.3.2014, pp. 27–43. Retrieved from EUR-Lex: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2014/232/oj/eng>

EUR-Lex. (2020). Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/879 of 23 June 2020 amending Implementing Regulation (EU) No 897/2014 as regards specific provisions to align the provisions for the implementation of cross-border cooperation programmes financed under the European Neighbourhood Instrument with specific measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 203, 26.6.2020, pp. 59–62. Retrieved from EUR-Lex: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg_impl/2020/879/oj/eng

EUR-Lex. (2021). Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg). *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 231, 30.6.2021, pp. 94–158. Retrieved from EUR-Lex: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1059/oj/eng>

EUR-Lex. (2022). Regulation (EU) 2022/2192 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 November 2022 laying down specific provisions for the 2014–2020 cooperation programmes supported by the European Neighbourhood Instrument and under the European territorial cooperation goal, following programme implementation disruption. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 292, 11.11.2022, pp. 1–11. Retrieved from EUR-Lex: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2022/2192/oj/eng>

EUR-Lex. (2023). Association Agreement with Ukraine. Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/association-agreement-with-ukraine.html>

European Commission. Interreg Next programmes. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/next_en

European Committee of Regions 14/05/2025 List of European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). Retrieved from https://cor.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-11/Official_List_of_the_EGTCs.pdf

Euroregio Glasensis. Retrieved from <https://www.cz-pl.eu/jine-dokumenty>

Euroregion Beskydy. Retrieved from <https://regionbeskydy.cz/euroregion-beskydy/euroregion-beskydy>

Euroregion Bílé-Karpaty. Retrieved from <https://erbbk.eu/>

Euroregion Pomoravi. Retrieved from <https://www.euroregion-pomoravi.cz/>

Euroregion Tatry. Retrieved from <https://www.euroregion-tatry.eu/en/about-euroregion>

Euroregion “Tessin/Cieszyn Silesia”. Retrieved from https://euroregion-teschinensis.eu/en/ts_en/

EZUS Velka Morava. Retrieved from <https://www.ezusvm.sk/projekty/>

Fejes, Z. (2023). Evolution of cross-border cooperation in the European Union: Challenges and opportunities. *Društveni horizonti*, 3(5), 55-78. <https://doi.org/10.5937/drushor2305055F>

Fetko, Y. (2023). Cross-border and regional cooperation between Ukraine and the European Union: historical and legal aspect. *Visegrad Journal on Human Rights*, (1). <https://doi.org/10.61345/1339-7915.2023.1.26>

Fortuna, M., & Andersen, D. (2025). Do I Cross a Border Now? An (Auto)Ethnographic Account of Borders and Bordering in Times of Crisis (and Beyond). In D. J. Andersen & L. Aubry (Ed.), *Resituating Crisis: Silencing and Voicing Crisis in Everyday Life* (pp. 81–100). Berghahn Books. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781805398271-toc>

Fundamental Act CLXXXIX of 2011 About the Local Governments of Hungary. Retrieved from <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A1100189.TV&searchUrl=/gyorskereso?keyword%3D1990.%2520%25C3%25A9vi%2520LXV.%2520t%25C3%25B6rv%25C3%25A9ny%2520az%2520%25C3%25B6nkorm%25C3%25A1nyz%25C3%25A1sr%25C3%25B3l>

Halás, M. (2005). Geographical aspects of cross-border cooperation. *Moravian Geographical Reports*, 13(2), 2–11. Retrieved from <https://geografie.upol.cz/soubory/lide/halas/clanky/Halas-MGR.pdf>

Halás, M. (2007). Development of cross-border cooperation and creation of Euroregions in the Slovak Republic. *Moravian Geographical Reports*, 15(1), 21–30. doi: 10.31577/geogrcas.2024.76.1.05

Hasprová, K., Žárska, E., & Fáziková, M. (2012). Forms and limits of inter-municipal cooperation in Slovakia. In V. Klímová & V. Žítek (Eds.), XXIV International Colloquium on Regional Sciences (pp. 630–637). Masaryk University. <https://doi.org/10.5817/CZ.MUNI.P210-9896-2021-56>

Hiroshi, T. (2006). Carpathian Euroregion and cross-border governance. *The Journal of Comparative Economic Studies* (JCES), 2, 59–80. Retrieved from https://www.ces.kier.kyoto-u.ac.jp/jces/02_jces_2006/05_Tanaka.pdf

History of the policy. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/what/history_en

Hojka Z. Polsko-czeski-niemiecki konflikt o Śląsk Cieszyński w latach 1918-1920 (2023). *Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie*, 2 (321), 255–279. doi: 10.51974/kmw-166223

Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2021). Multilevel governance and the coordination dilemma. In A. Benz, J. Broschek, & M. Lederer (Ed.), *A Research Agenda for Multilevel Governance* (pp. 19–36). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781789908374.00008>

Hooper, B., & Kramsch, O. (ed.) (2004). *Cross-Border Governance in the European Union*. Routledge. 256 ISBN 9780203563380

Howaniec, H., & Kurowska-Pysz, J. (2014). *Klaster jako instrument rozwoju polsko-słowackiej współpracy transgranicznej*. Dąbrowa Górnicza: Wyższa Szkoła Biznesu w Dąbrowie Górniczej. Retrieved from <https://open.icm.edu.pl/handle/123456789/5616>

Hulst, R., & van Montfort, A. (2017). *Inter-municipal cooperation in Europe*. Springer. Science & Business Media, 238 <https://doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-5379-7>

Interreg The Czech Republic – Poland. Retrieved from <https://interreg.eu/programmes/the-Czech-Republic-poland/>

Interreg Slovakia–Hungary (2021–2027). Programme Document. Retrieved from <https://www.skhu.eu/>

Interreg Hungary–Slovakia Programme. (n.d.). *About us / Small Project Fund*. Retrieved from <https://interreghusk.eu/about-us/spf/>

Ipoly Euroregion. Retrieved from <http://ipolyvolgye.hu>

Ipoly-völgye EGTC. Retrieved from <http://ipolyvolgye.hu>

- Ister-Granum Euroregion. Retrieved from <http://istergranum.eu>
- Jakubowski, A., Trykacz, K., Studzieniecki, T., & Skibiński, J. (2021). Identifying cross-border functional areas: Conceptual background and empirical findings from Polish borderlands. *European Planning Studies*, 30(12), 2433–2455. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2021.1958760>
- Jańczak, J. (2018). Integration de-scaled: Symbolic manifestations of cross-border and European integration in border twin towns. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 33(3), 393–413. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2016.1226925>
- Jerábek, M., Havlíček, T., Dokoupil, J., & Anděl, J. (2021). Cross-border Slovaca, 37. Retrieved from <https://www.sav.sk/journals/uploads/03280951Jerabek%20et%20al.pdf>
- Jerábek, M., Slavík, V., & Šindelář, M. (2024). Development of the Czech–Slovak border area and cross-border cooperation after 1993. *Geografický časopis (Geographical Journal)*, 76(1), 77–94. <https://doi.org/10.31577/geogrcas.2024.76.1.05>
- Jones, A., & Clark, J. (2024). *The spatialities of Europeanization: Power, Governance and Territory in Europe*. Routledge. doi: 10.4324/9780203847749
- Khimynets, V. V., Holovka, A. A., & Mirus, O. I. (2021). Transkordonne spivrobitnytstvo yak instrument mistsevoho ta rehionalnoho rozvytku. NISD. Retrieved from https://niss.gov.ua/sites/default/files/2021-09/analytrep_13_2021.pdf
- Khmeleva, G. A., Kurnikova, M. V., Nedelka, E., & Tóth, B. I. (2022). Determinants of sustainable cross-border cooperation: A structural model for the Hungarian context using the PLS-SEM methodology. *Sustainability*, 14(2), 893. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14020893>
- Khusainov, R. V., Lisnik, A., Zatrochová, M., Babiuk, M. A., & Mashov, Y. K. (2023). Economic and legal bases of the Carpathian Euroregion development during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Ukraine). *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, 12(45). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13731-023-00303-1>
- King Kézai, P., Dömötör, M., & Fekete, D. (2022). Economic development opportunities in the Hungarian-Slovakian cross-border area – Szigetköz and Csallóköz (Žitný ostrov). *DEUROPE*, 14(1), 87–110. <https://doi.org/10.32725/det.2022.005>
- Kurowska-Pysz, J., Łodziana-Grabowska, J., Mikoláš, Z., & Wróblewski, Ł. (2014). *Polsko-czeska współpraca transgraniczna w Euroregionie Beskidy: wybrane problemy*. Dąbrowa Górnicza: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Biznesu.

Kurowska-Pysz, J. (2015). *The circumstances of knowledge transfer within the scope of cross-border Czech-Polish projects 2014–2020*. *Forum Scientiae Oeconomia*, 3(3), 31–43.

Kurowska-Pysz, J., & Szczepanska-Woszczyna, K. (2017). The analysis of barriers to sustainable cross-border cooperation in the Euroregion Beskidy. *Sustainability*, 9(2), 222. doi 10.3390/su9122226

Kurowska-Pysz, J., Castanho, R. A., & Naranjo Gómez, J. M. (2018). Cross-border cooperation: the barriers analysis and the recommendations. *Polish Journal of Management Studies*, 17. <https://doi.org/10.17512/pjms.2018.17.2.12>

Lagana, G., & Sorondo Salazar, D. (2024). Cross-border paradiplomacy in the Irish Sea: a socio-spatial analysis. *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 35 (2), 1-22.

Langowska-Marcinowska. K. (2022). Euroregions and their influence on the development of the Polish and Czech borderlands. *Kultura i Edukacja*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.80/kie.0.0.0www.kultura-i-edukacja.pl>

Lendel, M., Rishko, L. (2023). Europeanization and the local political culture as challenges for public policy in the Slovak-Ukrainian borderland. *Public Policy and Administration*, 22 (4), 463-474. <https://doi.org/10.13165/vpa-23-22-4-06>

Lendel, M.O (2024) Metodolohiia instytutsiinoho analizu transkordonnoho spivrobotnytstva v Yevropeiskomu Soiuzi (The Methodology of the European Union's cross-border cooperaton institutional analysis). *Rehionalni studii*, 38, 193-202 [in Ukrainian]. <https://doi.org/10.32782/2663-6170/2024.38.32>

Lendel, M. (2024). Public Cross Border cooperation institutions on the Polish-Czech borderland. *Baltic Journal of Legal and Social Sciences*, (4), 293-302. <https://doi.org/10.30525/2592-8813-2024-4-31>

List of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (2025). Retrieved from https://cor.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-11/Official_List_of_the_EGTCs.pdf

Majorczyk, A. (2000). *Łączą nas Tatry: The early micro-projects and public engagement*. Nowy Targ: Euroregion Tatry Office. Retrieved from <https://www.euroregion-tatry.pl/old.php?id=publikacje>

Marks, G. (1993). Structural Policy and Multilevel Governance in the EC. In A. W. Cafruny & G. G. Rosenthal (Eds.), *The State of the European Community* (Vol. 2: *The Maastricht Debates and Beyond*, pp. 391–410). Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781685856540-024>

Martín-Uceda, J., & Rufi, J. V. (2021). EGTCs in the Iberian Peninsula: Challenges for a stable cooperation. *Regional Science Policy & Practice*, 13(5), 1271–1287. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rsp3.12315>

Martín-Uceda, J., & Rufi, V. J. (2021). Territorial development and cross-border cooperation: A review of the consequences of European INTERREG policies on the Spanish–French border (2007–2020). *Sustainability*, 13(21), 12017. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su132112017>

Nadalutti, E., & Rüländ, J. (2024). Cross-border regionalism in the EU and ASEAN: another dimension of the “varieties of regionalism”. *Journal of European Integration*, 46(8), 1193–1214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2024.2329636>

Noferini, A., Berzi, M., Camonita, F., & Durà, A. (2019) Cross-border cooperation in the EU: Euroregions amid multilevel governance and re-territorialization. *European Planning Studies*. 28(1), 35–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2019.1623973>

Novohrad-Nógrád Euroregion. Retrieved from <http://nnegtc.eu>

NOVUM Ltd Retrieved from <https://www.euwt-novum.eu/>

Nováčková, D., Paškrtová, L., & Vnuková, J. (2023). Cross-border provision of services: Case study in the Slovak Republic. *Administrative Sciences*, 13(2), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci13020054>

Ocskay, G. (2021). Europeanization of the Western Ukrainian Border: The Case of the Tisza EGTC. In M. Lačný (Ed.), *The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and Its Impacts on Cross-Border Cooperation* (pp. 24–44). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Ocskay, G., & Scott, W. J. (2023). Cross-Territorial Governance via EGTCs for Territorial Cohesion. In E. Medeiros (Ed.), *Public Policies for Territorial Cohesion* (pp. 191–209). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-24416-3_10

Ocskay, G. (2024). Improved cross-border relevance through integrated interventions: the TAPE tool of the INTERREG V-A Slovakia-Hungary Programme. *European Planning Studies*, 32(8), 1752–1772. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2024.2344645>

Olsen, J. P. (2002). The many faces of Europeanization. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40(5), 921–952. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00403>

Oltean, A. (2014). 20 років Карпатського Євроregionу: рецензія на книгу Іштвана Сюлі-Закаря “Emlékek, Sikerek, Megújulás. Közös Múltunk – Közös Jövönk. Együtt Európáért: 20 éves a Kárpátok Eurorégió”. *Eurolimes*, 17, 247–254. <https://www.ceeol.com/content-files/document-75227.pdf>

Perkmann, M. (2003). Cross-border regions in Europe: Significance and drivers of regional cross-border cooperation. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 10(2), 153–171. <https://doi.org/10.1177/096977640301000202>

Perkmann, M. (2007). Policy entrepreneurship and multilevel governance: A comparative study of European cross-border regions. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 25(6), 861–879. <https://doi.org/10.1068/c60m>

Perkmann, M., & Sum, N. L. (2002). Globalization, regionalization and cross-border regions: Scales, discourses and governance. In M. Perkmann, & N-L. Sum (Ed.), *Globalization, Regionalization and Cross-Border Regions* (pp. 3–21). Palgrave Macmillan.

Perkowski, M. (2013). *Legal Aspects of Euroregions and Cross-border Cooperation in Poland*. Białystok: University of Białystok.

Pons Danubii EGTC. Retrieved from <https://www.ponsdanubii.eu/>

PONTIBUS EGTC. Retrieved from <http://pontibusegtc.eu>

Pro zatverdzhennia Derzhavnoi prohramy rozvytku transkordonneho spivrobitnytstva na 2021-2027 roky. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/npas/pro-zatverdzhennya-derzhavnoyi-programi-rozvitku-transkordonnogo-spivrobitnictva-na-2021-2027-roki>

Programme 2021–2027 Interreg SK–CZ Official programme document. Retrieved from <https://www.sk-cz.eu>

Prykhodko, V. P. (2018). Pivnichnoievropeyskyi dosvid yak aktualna model transkordonneho spivrobitnytstva Ukrainy, Uhorschchyny ta inshykh krain YES/Vyshehradskoi hrupy u rehoni Karpat. *Stratehichni priorytety*, (1), 70–78.

Radaelli, C. M. (2000). Whither Europeanization? Concept stretching and substantive change. *European Integration Online Papers (EIoP)*, 4. Retrieved from <https://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/2000-004a.htm>

Report on Local and Regional Democracy in Poland – CG (9) 21 Part II Rapporteurs: Ms Kathryn Smith (United Kingdom, L) and Mr Miljenko Doric (Croatia, R). Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/report-on-local-and-regional-democracy-in-poland-14-november-2002-/168071b096>

Rodil-Marzábal, A. (2022). Euroregions and spatial planning: Redefining cooperation mechanisms in the European Union. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 10(1), 57–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2021.1897847>

Rába-Duna-Vág EGTC. Retrieved from <http://rdvegtc.eu>

Sajó–Rima Euroregion. Retrieved from <http://sajorima.eu>

Scott, J. W. (1999). European and North American contexts for cross-border regionalism. *Regional Studies*, 33(7), 605–617. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343409950079876>

Scott, W. J. (2000). Euroregions, governance and transborder cooperation within the EU. *European Research in Regional Science*, 10, 104–115. <https://doi.org/10.1080/12345678.2000.12345678>

Scott, J. W. (2012). European politics of borders, border symbolism and cross-border cooperation. In D. Wastl-Walter (Ed.), *The Ashgate research companion to border studies* (pp. 83–99). Farnham: Ashgate.

Scott, W. J. (2015). Bordering, Border Politics and Cross-Border Cooperation in Europe. In: F. Celata, & R. Coletti (Ed.), *Neighbourhood Policy and the Construction of the European External Borders*. Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-18452-4_2

Scott, J. W., & Collins, K. (1997). Inducing transboundary regionalism in asymmetric situations: The case of the German-Polish Border. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 12(1–2), 97–121. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.1997.9695500>

Slovak Act No. 90/2008 Coll. on a European grouping of territorial cooperation. Retrieved from https://mirri.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/EN_ACT-No-90_2008_on-EGTC_July-2020.pdf

Sohn, C., & Giffinger, R. (2015). A policy network approach to cross-border metropolitan governance: The cases of Vienna and Bratislava. *European Planning Studies*, 23(6), 1187–1208. doi: 10.1080/09654313.2014.994089

Szócs, E., & Fejes, Z. (2023). Hungarian experiences of cross-border cooperation. *Fundamentum*, 2023(1), 123–137. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/366812426>

Steiner, E. (2015). Introduction to the Hungarian local government system. TÖÖSZ. Retrieved from http://www.manorka.net/uploads/images/Kiadv%C3%A1nyok/Local%20Governments_boritoval.pdf

Stverkova, H., Pohludka, M., Kurowska-Pysz, J., & Szczepańska-Woszczyna, K. (2018). Cross-border entrepreneurship in Euroregion Beskydy. *Polish Journal of Management Studies*, 18(2), 324–337. <https://doi.org/10.17512/pjms.2018.18.2.26>

Svensson, S., & Ocskay, G. (Eds.). (2016). Overview of the EGTCs around Hungary. Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives / Budapest Observatory of Borders. ISBN 978-963-12-6743-3.

Tej, J., Vavrek, R., & Papcunová, V. (2021). Activities and barriers to cooperation in the territory of border regions of Poland and Slovakia. In Ardielli, E Molnárová, E. *Development and Administration of Border*

Areas of the Czech Republic and Poland: Support for Sustainable Development (RASPO 2021).

1st ed. Ostrava: VŠB Technical University of Ostrava, 244-251.

Selected Financial Factors of Tourism in the Slovak Republic. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381621661_Selected_Financial_Factors_of_Tourism_in_the_Slovak_Republic

TRITIA EGTC. (n.d.). European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation TRITIA, Ltd. Retrieved from <https://egtctritia.eu/en/about-us/>

TRITIA Ltd. Retrieved from <https://egtctritia.eu/en/about-us/>

Varga, J. (2022). Foreword. In Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives (CESCI) (Ed.), 15 years of the EGTCs (pp. 7–9). CESCI. Retrieved from https://budapest.cesci-net.eu/wp-content/uploads/_legalaccess/15_Years_EGTCs_00_VARGA_Foreword.pdf

Via Carpatia EGTC. Retrieved from <http://viacarpatia.eu>

Vidomosti Verkhovnoi Rady. (2015). Pro dobrovil'ne ob'iednannia terytorial'nykh hromad. No. 13, st. 91. Retrieved from <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/157-VIII>

Vidomosti Verkhovnoi Rady. (2018). Pro vnesennia zmin do deiakykh zakoniv Ukrainy shchodo transkordonnoho spivrobitnytstva. No. 43, st. 343. Retrieved from <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/220-VIII>

Vidomosti Verkhovnoi Rady. (2024a). Pro mizhnarodne terytorialne spivrobitnytstvo. No. 30, st. 213. Retrieved from <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3668-IX>

Vidomosti Verkhovnoi Rady. (2024b). Zakon vtratyv chynnist' na pidstavi Zakonu. No. 3668-IX vid 24.04.2024. Pro transkordonne spivrobitnytstvo. No. 45, st. 499. Retrieved from <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3668-IX>

Więckowski, M. (2002). Polish-Slovak transboundary cooperation. *Geografický časopis*, 54(3). Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327424679_POLISH-SLOVAK_TRANSBOUNDARY_COOPERATION

Wróblewski, Ł., & Kasperek, A. (2019). Euroregion as an entity stimulating the sustainable development of the cross-border market for cultural services in a city divided by a border. *Sustainability*, 11(8), 2232.

Yevrorehion Karpaty – Ukraina. Retrieved from <https://ekarpaty.com/> [in Ukrainian]

Zalt, I. (2013). Cross-Border Cooperation in Slovak-Czech Border Region under EU Programmes. *European Countryside*, 5(2), 133–145. <https://doi.org/10.2478/euco-2013-0010>

Zenka, J. (2015). Cross-border cooperation in Moravia–Silesia: Challenges and opportunities. *Moravian Geographical Reports*, 23(2), 12–24. <https://doi.org/10.1515/mgr-2015-0002>

Zákon č. 128/2000 Sb., o obcích (obecní zřízení). Retrieved from <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2000-128>

Zákon č. 129/2000 Sb., o krajích (krajské zřízení). Retrieved from <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2000-129>

Zákon č. 302/2001 Z. z., o samosprávě vyšších územních celků (zákon o samosprávných krajoch). Retrieved from <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2001-302>

Zákon č. 369/1990 Zb., Zákon Slovenskej národnej rady o obecnom zriadení. Retrieved from <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/1990/369/>

1997 évi XV. Törvény a Helyi Önkormányzatok Európai Chartájáról szóló, 1985. október 15-én, Strasbourgban kelt egyezmény kihirdetéséről. Retrieved from <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=99700015.tv>

CHAPTER 2

CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE LEGAL STATUS OF INSTITUTIONAL FORMS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP STATES AND UKRAINE

Introduction

In contemporary conditions, cross-border cooperation emerges as one of the key instruments of regional development, the consolidation of democratic values, and the promotion of good-neighbourly relations. Its legal nature, based on the interplay of international, supranational, and national law, demonstrates a tendency towards the strengthening of decentralisation, subsidiarity, and integrated governance. For this reason, the study of the legal status of institutional forms of cross-border cooperation has not only scholarly and theoretical relevance but also practical significance, particularly for states on the path to EU membership.

Following the ratification of the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities and its Protocols, Ukraine acquired the normative foundations for establishing and developing institutional forms of cross-border cooperation. At the same time, the implementation of European standards into the national legal order has revealed a number of challenges, ranging from normative uncertainty regarding the legal status of entities of institutional forms of cross-border cooperation to discrepancies in financial and administrative procedures. The relevance of the issue is further reinforced by the need to adapt Ukrainian legislation to EU regulations, in particular Regulations No. 1082/2006, No. 1302/2013, and No. 2021/1059, which govern the organisational and legal framework for the functioning of territorial cooperation and European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation.

In this context, the experience of the Visegrad Group states (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary) is particularly valuable to Ukraine. Having adapted their national legislation to the EU *acquis communautaire*, these states have developed effective models of legal regulation of cross-border cooperation that combine normative autonomy at the national level with pan-European principles of regional governance. Their example demonstrates that the effectiveness of cross-border cooperation is ensured not only by legal regulation but also by political stability, the financial capacity of local

authorities, and the effective functioning of robust institutional mechanisms.

The purpose of this study is to conduct a legal analysis of the institutional forms of cross-border cooperation in Ukraine in comparison with the experience of the Visegrad Group states, to identify legal conflicts, and to formulate proposals for adapting Ukrainian legislation to the EU *acquis communautaire*. The object of the research comprises the legal relations arising in the process of establishing and functioning institutional forms of cross-border cooperation. The research subject is the legal status of these forms, their legal personality, competences, financial and organisational mechanisms, and procedural specifics.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in the combination of comparative legal, institutional, and integration-based approaches to the analysis of the national legislation of Ukraine and the Visegrad Group states, as well as the practice of its application. The study employs a complex of methods, including systemic, legal, comparative, structural-functional, and historical-legal methods, which enable it to consider cross-border cooperation as a dynamic legal phenomenon grounded in the principles of good neighbourliness, solidarity, and subsidiarity.

The structure of the chapter is designed in accordance with the logic of the evolution of the European model of cross-border cooperation development, in particular ranging from the analysis of multilateral international treaties of the Council of Europe, EU legal acts, and the legal status of relevant actors, to a comparative examination of the regulatory legal systems of the Visegrad Group states, the identification of legal conflicts, and the formulation of proposals for improving Ukrainian legal mechanisms. Such an approach ensures the coherence of the study and aims to formulate scientifically substantiated conclusions that enable the determination of Ukraine's place within the contemporary European space of cross-border cooperation.

Conceptual and Legal Foundations of Cross-border Cooperation

After the Second World War, the concept of European integration acquired a new meaning, and cross-border cooperation became its practical instrument aimed at the formation of a "Europe without dividing lines" (Bildt, 2013). The European integration process has been viewed as a means of overcoming historical and political barriers and of creating a

common space founded on democracy, social cohesion, and the rule of law. As aptly noted by Robert Schuman, national borders are the “scars of European history”, and their overcoming is possible only through the development of mutual understanding and the establishment of effective legal mechanisms of interaction between territories separated by state borders (Covarrubias Peña, 2017, p. 17; Assembly of European Regions, 2021, pp. 2–7; Zenderowski, 2003, pp. 39, 44). The European legal model of cross-border cooperation was based on principles established in multilateral international treaties of the Council of Europe, which laid the legal foundation for cooperation between local authorities across different states. The adoption of the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities and its Additional Protocols established the legal basis for the creation of institutional forms of cross-border cooperation capable of operating as subjects of public international law. It was within the framework of the Council of Europe that the fundamental principles, concepts, and values of democratic governance at the local and regional levels were defined, which subsequently became the basis for the further formation, institutionalisation, and development of legal mechanisms of cooperation in Europe (Yevchak et al., 2020). Building upon these developments, the European Union endowed the concept of cross-border cooperation with a practical dimension by integrating it into the policy of economic, social, and territorial cohesion (Territorial Agenda of the European Union, 2023, pp. 7–13; Mertens & Unfried, 2024, p. 5). The adoption of Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006, Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013, and Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 established the legal mechanisms of European territorial cooperation and European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation, defined their legal status, and ensured the possibility of implementing joint governance of cross-border regions within the framework of relevant programmes Interreg (Regulation (EC) No. 1082/2006); Regulation (EU) 2021/1059; Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013). The European model of cross-border cooperation functions not only as a legal framework but also as an expression of the integrative idea of unity in diversity. Its essence lies in the gradual erosion of borders between states through the provision of legal conditions for the joint economic, cultural, and social development of border regions. As aptly stated by Carl Bildt, “Europe must become a continent without dividing lines, where people, ideas, trade, and investment can move freely across increasingly less perceptible borders” (Bildt, 2013).

Thus, this chapter will further examine two interrelated components of the European legal system of cross-border cooperation. First, it will

address the multilateral international treaties of the Council of Europe as sources of legal regulation of cross-border cooperation, which have laid its conceptual foundations and the normative framework for cooperation between local authorities. Subsequently, the EU founding treaties and legal acts will be examined as sources of legal regulation of cross-border cooperation, which have further developed these foundations in the institutional and legal dimensions and provided effective practical mechanisms for implementation.

Multilateral International Treaties of the Council of Europe as Sources of Legal Regulation of Cross-border Cooperation

In the context of the idea of a “Europe without dividing lines”, the Council of Europe conferred normative status on cross-border cooperation as a component of democratic governance at the local and regional levels. Its activities aim to establish a legal framework enabling local authorities to engage in effective cross-border cooperation, in line with the pan-European trend towards decentralisation and the strengthening of local authorities in international relations.

The principal multilateral international instrument in this field became the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities. The Convention enshrined fundamental principles and established a treaty-based framework for cooperation between local authorities of different states, in particular by providing for the conclusion of agreements and the establishment of joint bodies for cross-border cooperation. The Convention performed a dual function: first, it established the obligation of states to ensure a favourable domestic legal framework for such cooperation; and second, it legitimised the participation of local authorities in international legal relations (Council of Europe, 1980a; Council of Europe, 1980b).

The Additional Protocols to the Convention provided the mechanisms of cooperation with normative certainty and procedural elaboration. Protocol No. 1 to the Convention addressed procedural gaps by stipulating that local authorities are entitled, subject to compliance with national legislation and the consent of the central authorities of the states concerned, to conclude agreements on cross-border cooperation, and by determining the domestic legal effect of decisions adopted within the framework of such cooperation. At the same time, the institutionalisation of joint cooperation bodies took place, in particular by providing for the possibility of conferring upon them legal personality (of a public or private law nature), establishing requirements

regarding financing, audit, and supervisory procedures, and stipulating the application of the law of the state of establishment in whose territory the headquarters is located (Council of Europe, 1995a; Council of Europe, 1995b).

Further developing these provisions, Protocol No. 2 to the Convention provided for the possibility of establishing cooperation bodies endowed with their own legal personality, operating on the basis of a constituent agreement and the law of the state of establishment in whose territory the headquarters is located, while the powers of such bodies are of a derivative nature *vis-à-vis* the participating entities and are exercised within the nationally defined competences. Moreover, the Protocol regulated “interterritorial” cooperation between regions that do not share a common border, while at the same time preserving the guarantees of state sovereignty (Council of Europe, 1998a; Council of Europe, 1998b).

A logical continuation was Protocol No. 3 to the Convention, which enshrined the Euroregional Cooperation Grouping as an institutional form endowed with international legal personality. A Euroregional Cooperation Grouping is established on the basis of a multilateral agreement between at least two states that are parties to the Convention and is endowed with legal personality, which includes the capacity to acquire rights and obligations, dispose of property, conclude contracts, act as a party to disputes, and carry out internal control and audit. The statute of a Euroregional Cooperation Grouping defines its governing bodies, decision-making procedures, scope of activities, and limits of liability; the applicable law is that of the state in which the Euroregional Cooperation Grouping's headquarters are located. A Euroregional Cooperation Grouping constitutes a functional “mirror” of the institution of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation under EU law, providing a similar, albeit adapted, legal instrumentarium for states outside the European Union, as well as for groupings with a mixed composition of participants (Council of Europe, 2009; Council of Europe) (2013).

The European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities or Authorities and its Additional Protocols have formed a coherent system of norms and institutional and legal mechanisms that combine general principles with practical legal instruments for the implementation of cross-border interaction. This regulatory model is based on the fundamental principles of sovereignty, good neighbourliness, subsidiarity, and the autonomy of local self-government, while at the same time ensuring their practical implementation through contractual arrangements between local

authorities, the establishment of cooperation bodies endowed with legal personality, the application of unified statutes, the conferral of domestic legal effect on decisions, and the introduction of supervisory and audit procedures. In this manner, an institutional and legal framework was established that legitimised local authorities' participation in cross-border cooperation. Multilateral international treaties of the Council of Europe have shaped a universal model of legal regulation of cross-border cooperation, which has become the initial conceptual foundation for the subsequent development of legal mechanisms in this field.

Thus, the Council of Europe has established a pan-European legal framework for cross-border cooperation, which has gradually evolved from fundamental principles into fully-fledged institutional forms with unified procedures for their establishment, financing, supervision, and oversight. The norms of the multilateral international treaties of the Council of Europe laid the foundations for the development of the legal personality of local authorities in the field of cross-border cooperation, regulated the legal status of cross-border cooperation bodies, and created the conditions for their functioning within the international legal order.

The following subsection analyses how the European Union has developed its own, more practice-oriented legal mechanism for cross-border cooperation by integrating it into the EU's policy of economic, social, and territorial cohesion.

The EU Founding Treaties and Legal Acts as Sources of Legal Regulation of Cross-border Cooperation

The European Union regards cross-border cooperation as an instrument aimed at ensuring economic, social, and territorial cohesion, as enshrined in the provisions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union, 2016; Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 2016). This approach is implemented within the framework of European cohesion policy, which was originally initiated by the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community of 1957 (Treaty establishing the European Community, 1957). Such a policy aims to reduce regional disparities through financial solidarity, joint programming, and partnerships among Member States and local authorities, based on the principles of subsidiarity and complementarity. The policy is implemented with the support of the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Social Fund, and the instruments of the European Investment Bank, which support cross-border, interregional, and transnational programmes

(Interreg, Espon, Interact, Urbact, Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme, Interreg Alpine Space Programme, Interreg Mediterranean ra ih.), thereby fostering “bottom-up” integration (Yevchak et al., 2020).

Today, European territorial cooperation is regulated by Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of the European Union of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the objective “European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg)”. Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 constitutes a fundamental legal act governing the EU cohesion policy. It specifies the procedural and substantive rules for the planning, implementation, monitoring, audit, and financing of cross-border, transnational, and interregional programmes supported by the European Regional Development Fund and other relevant external financial instruments. Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 also establishes uniform standards for defining the objectives, content, structure, and governance of cooperation programmes, ensuring their consistency with the EU’s macro-regional and maritime strategies. Importantly, this legal act systematically integrated the mechanisms of the internal cohesion policy with instruments of external cooperation, thereby enabling the joint use of resources and the implementation of joint projects by European Union Member States and third countries through clearly defined legal mechanisms. In this manner, the legal act ensures the normative coherence and procedural predictability of the Interreg mechanism, thereby establishing it as a key legal instrument of territorial integration within the contemporary legal order of the European Union (Regulation (EU) 2021/1059).

In order to remove legal and administrative barriers to the implementation of joint cross-border projects, the European Union introduced the institution of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) in 2006 through the adoption of Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of the European Union of 5 July 2006 on a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). An EGTC is defined as a legal person governed by public law, authorised to represent and carry out activities on behalf of its members within the competences provided for by the agreement and its statute. The organisational structure of an EGTC comprises an assembly and a director, and its financial activities are subject to internal control, audit, and external supervision in accordance with the legislation of the state in which its headquarters are located. An EGTC may include public authorities from at least two EU Member States and, under specified conditions, entities from third countries. The introduction of the EGTC institution consists in the establishment of a unified legal mechanism of

public-law cooperation, aimed at eliminating legal and administrative barriers inherent in national regimes of cross-border interaction and ensuring legal certainty for cooperation actors from EU Member States and third countries (Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006).

Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of the European Union of 17 December 2013 amends Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) with a view to clarifying, simplifying, and improving the procedures for the establishment and functioning of such groupings. By this Regulation, the legal mechanism of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation was modernised by eliminating gaps identified during its practical application. The legal act expanded the composition of participants in an EGTC by allowing other legal persons engaged in the provision of services of general economic interest, including education, healthcare, and social welfare, to participate. The Regulation simplified and formalised the procedures for establishing an EGTC, extended the procedural time limits for the examination of the founding documents to 6 months, and detailed the procedure for their approval by the EU Member States. The internal governance structure of the grouping was improved, the competences of its governing bodies were clearly defined, and the rules on the liability of members, taxation, financial reporting, audit, and related matters were clarified (Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013).

A particularly valuable innovation was the possibility for entities from third countries and overseas territories to participate in an EGTC, which is consistent with the external dimension of the European Union's policy. This established the legal basis for involving partners outside the EU in joint territorial cooperation projects, including Ukraine. In this manner, Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 transformed the EGTC from an internal European institution into a universal legal instrument of cooperation capable of operating both within the integrated internal space and the external dimension of the European Union, thereby ensuring normative flexibility, legal compatibility, and functional effectiveness in the implementation of cohesion policy (Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013).

The further development of the EGTC and the legal framework for territorial cooperation in the European Union occurred in the context of the modernisation of cohesion policy for the 2021–2027 programming period. The accumulated experience in applying previous legal mechanisms of European territorial cooperation revealed the need for comprehensive alignment of legal, financial, and procedural provisions between the internal cohesion policy and the external legal mechanisms of cooperation of the European Union. In order to remove these obstacles,

Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of the European Union of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the objective “European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg)” was adopted, which defined the legal framework for the implementation of the objectives of European territorial cooperation (Interreg) in the new programming cycle. This act constituted a logical continuation of the legal mechanism initiated by Regulations No 1082/2006 and No 1302/2013 and ensured comprehensive unification of the procedures for planning, management, monitoring, and audit of Interreg programmes, thereby strengthening the institutional coherence between the internal and external dimensions of territorial integration within the European Union (Regulation (EU) 2021/1059). The adoption of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 has, for the time being, completed the normative consolidation of the system of European territorial cooperation, transforming it from a set of individual legal acts into a coherent model of sustainable institutional governance.

The institutional functioning of this model relies on the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy of the European Commission, which carries out overall coordination and supervision of the Interreg programmes. The European Committee of the Regions is a representative advisory body that establishes an institutional link between the European Union and the subnational level, while network-based cooperation platforms facilitate communication, the exchange of practices, and support for newly established groupings.

The growing practice of establishing EGTCs in European Union Member States and involving partner states from outside the EU demonstrates the transformation of cooperation, marking a shift from cooperation agreements to sustainable institutional forms of public-law cooperation with unified procedures for governance, budgetary control, and financial accountability. In this way, territorial cooperation has acquired the characteristics of a mature European legal model that combines normative integration, financial stability, and political sustainability.

The institutional model of cross-border cooperation that has emerged within the European Union is not confined to the EU’s internal space but has a pronounced external dimension aimed at integrating neighbouring states into a common legal, economic, and territorial space. The external dimension of the European Union’s regulation in this field is implemented through the European Neighbourhood Policy and external financing instruments, which enable neighbouring states to participate in Interreg programmes. Such instruments enable the joint financing of cross-

border, transnational, and interregional initiatives using the resources of the European Regional Development Fund and the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) (European Commission, 2021). The Eastern Partnership provides a political, strategic, and programmatic platform for deepening linkages aimed at the implementation of joint infrastructure, innovation, and social projects, as well as for the development of a unified space of European integration along the EU's external borders (European Commission, 2021; European External Action Service, 2025). Thus, the external dimension of the European Union's policy on cross-border cooperation goes beyond purely programme-based financing, becoming an integral component of the normative system of European public law. As a result of the combination of instruments of the European Neighbourhood Policy, Interreg mechanisms, and the participation of states in European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation, a space of functional integration is being formed that brings together norms of international, supranational, and national regulation.

The provisions of the EU founding treaties and legal acts concerning European territorial cooperation are developing in a direct systemic relationship with the norms of multilateral international treaties of the Council of Europe, which laid the ideological and normative foundations of the contemporary European model of interregional interaction. Although the European Union and the Council of Europe share common values, democracy, the rule of law, and the principles of subsidiarity, local self-government, and territorial solidarity, they differ in the legal nature of their acts, the character of the obligations they impose, and the scope of their normative effect.

Having analysed the mechanisms of cross-border cooperation, the multilateral international treaties of the Council of Europe, as well as the EU founding treaties and legal acts, it is logical to proceed to an examination of the practical aspects of their implementation within the national legal systems of the European Union Member States. Particularly valuable in this context is the experience of the Visegrad Group states, which have succeeded in adapting the provisions of the multilateral international treaties of the Council of Europe and EU regulations to their own constitutional and legal models. The analysis of the experience of these states makes it possible not only to identify the strengths and weaknesses of different models of legal regulation, but also to develop optimal approaches to the implementation of the norms of the multilateral international treaties of the Council of Europe and the legal acts of the European Union within the legal system of Ukraine.

Theoretical and Legal Foundations of the Legal Status of Institutional Forms of Cross-border Cooperation

The legal status of institutional forms of cross-border cooperation constitutes a fundamental category of law, as it determines the legal personality of participants, the scope of their competences, the mechanisms for participation in cross-border cooperation, and the guarantees for the implementation of joint programmes and projects. In legal doctrine, legal status is traditionally understood as a set of legal norms that determine the position of a subject within the system of legal relations, its rights, obligations, liability, and procedural capacities for the performance of the relevant functions. In the context of cross-border cooperation, this category assumes an institutional dimension, as it presupposes the normative regulation of joint activities between local authorities and legal persons in different states.

The foundation of the contemporary understanding of the legal status of institutional forms of cross-border cooperation is the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities and its Additional Protocols. These multilateral international treaties of the Council of Europe enshrined fundamental principles of voluntariness, mutual benefit, subsidiarity, legality, and respect for national competences while recognising the right of local authorities to enter into cross-border contractual relations. The European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities does not create new subjects of public international law; however, it establishes the framework principles governing the legal status of joint bodies of cross-border cooperation and related institutional arrangements. Further regulation of the legal status of institutional forms took place within the European Union, which provided cross-border cooperation with institutional and legal certainty. As a result of the adoption of the Regulations, namely Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), and Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013, which amends Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) with a view to clarifying, simplifying, and improving the procedures for the establishment and functioning of such groupings, the European Union enshrined the possibility of establishing cross-border groupings as legal persons governed by public law. Thus, the transition from “soft forms of cooperation” to a legally binding institutional framework was accomplished. An EGTC was granted full legal capacity, encompassing

the ability to conclude contracts, own property, open accounts, incur liability, act as a party in judicial proceedings, and implement projects, including those supported by European Union funds. Thus, the legal system of the European Union clearly defines a model of legal personality for territorial forms of cooperation that ensures their organisational autonomy while simultaneously requiring compliance with the national legal regimes of the participating states.

The national legal systems of the European Union Member States elaborate the provisions of the multilateral international treaties of the Council of Europe and EU legal acts by defining the organisational and legal forms, competences, financial autonomy, and procedures for the establishment of institutional forms of cross-border cooperation. In Central and Eastern Europe, particularly the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland, legislative acts provide for the establishment of EGTCs as legal persons governed by public law, with defined governing bodies, budgets, and liability. At the same time, classical Euroregions predominantly operate in the form of non-profit associations or consultative cooperation platforms, lacking legal personality, which limits their participation in international financial and legal mechanisms. By contrast, the Euroregional Cooperation Grouping (ECG) has no normative recognition in national legislation and lacks a defined legal status, which renders the institutionalisation of this form of cooperation impossible. Such differences affect the capacity of regions, their participation in EU programmes, and the overall effectiveness of the implementation of territorial cohesion policy. The legal status of institutional forms of cross-border cooperation performs an integrative function, as it enables local authorities to act as subjects of the European public space, to exercise joint management of resources, to implement sustainable development policies, and to contribute to the advancement of the concept of a “Europe of Regions” as a component of multi-level governance. In this regard, the study of the practice of the Visegrad Group states namely the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary is of substantial theoretical and applied significance, as it makes it possible to trace how the doctrinal foundations of the legal status of cross-border institutional forms are implemented within national legal systems, to identify which legal models have demonstrated the greatest effectiveness, and to determine which of them may be adapted to the Ukrainian legal context.

It may be asserted that the legal status of institutional forms of cross-border cooperation constitutes a complex, multi-level mechanism that combines norms of international law, supranational law, and the

national law of states. In this context, the analysis of the Visegrad Group's experience acquires particular scholarly and practical significance.

In light of the foregoing, further research should focus on a comparative legal analysis of the implementation of these principles within the national legal systems of the European Union Member States. Of particular interest is the experience of the Visegrad Group states the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland. These states have undergone a transformative transition from classical forms of cross-border cooperation based on the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities and its Additional Protocols to modern institutional forms of cross-border cooperation that combine the Council of Europe's public international law standards with norms of EU law. The Visegrad Group states the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland have partially succeeded in establishing a comprehensive system of legal regulation of cross-border cooperation aligned with the EU *acquis communautaire*. The examination of their experience will contribute to identifying both common patterns and specific national features in defining the legal status of institutional cross-border forms, will help to single out effective models of institutional support for cooperation, and will enable the formulation of practical recommendations for the further improvement of Ukrainian legislation.

Legal Foundations of Cross-border Cooperation and Certain Aspects of the Legal Status of Institutional Forms of Cross-border Cooperation in Poland

Poland stands out among the Visegrad Group states for the high level of normative elaboration and institutional maturity of its cross-border cooperation system. Its legal model is characterised by a coherent combination of norms of international, supranational, and national law, which ensures a substantial degree of compliance with the standards of the Council of Europe and the *acquis communautaire* of the European Union. The legal regulation of cross-border cooperation in Poland is grounded in the Constitution, ratified international treaties, statutes, and subordinate regulatory acts governing the system and competences of local self-government. The Constitution of Poland enshrines the principle of decentralisation of public authority and guarantees the right of local self-government bodies to independently perform their tasks, particularly in international cooperation. It also establishes the supremacy of ratified international treaties over national statutes, thereby creating a stable

foundation for the implementation of acts of the Council of Europe and the European Union (CESCI, 2021, pp. 38-40).

Among the key multilateral international treaties that form the legal basis for cross-border cooperation are the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities, the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and the European Charter of Border and Cross-border Regions. Although Poland has not signed the three Additional Protocols to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities, the provisions of the Convention are recognised within the national legal order as basic standards of international cooperation at the local level. Bilateral treaties on good neighbourliness, friendship, and cooperation concluded with neighbouring states Slovakia (1992), Ukraine (1992, 2000), and the Czech Republic (2000) also play an important role (Fetko, 2023, pp. 279–283).

The national system of legal regulation is based on a set of statutes that define the competences of local authorities and regulate the forms of their international interaction. In particular, the Law on Associations enshrined the right of citizens and legal persons to establish non-profit associations, including for the purposes of cross-border cooperation; the Law on Voivodeship Self-Government defined the competences of voivodeships in the field of international cooperation, including the conclusion of agreements with foreign regions; and the Law on the Procedure for the Accession of Local Self-Government Bodies to International Associations of Local and Regional Communities established a legal mechanism ensuring the official membership of Polish local authorities in international associations (CESCI, 2021, pp. 38–40).

A separate legal act is the Law on the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, which has become the principal legislative instrument implementing Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 by regulating the legal status, governance structure, competences, and financial framework of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (Ustawa z dnia 7 listopada 2008 r., 2008).

The Polish statute is based on the principles of transparency, publicity, and accountability. Article 1 defines the procedure for the establishment, operation, and registration of an EGTC, fully reproducing the content of Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006. Article 2 provides terminological definitions, thereby ensuring consistency with the EU *acquis communautaire*. Article 3 provides that, in cases not regulated by the Regulation or by this Act, the provisions of the Law on Associations shall apply, thereby emphasising the non-profit character of such

groupings (Ustawa z dnia 7 listopada 2008 r., 2008). The procedure for establishing an EGTC in Poland is multi-level and requires approval at various institutional levels. For central government authorities, participation is possible only upon a decision of the Council of Ministers of Poland. Local self-government bodies adopt the relevant decision by a majority vote, after which it is subject to further approval by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, in coordination with the ministers responsible for internal affairs, finance, and regional development. The mechanism of “tacit consent” facilitates the decision-making process: the absence of a response within the prescribed time limit is deemed to constitute approval of participation, except in cases where the headquarters of the EGTC is planned to be located within the territory of Poland (Ustawa z dnia 7 listopada 2008 r., 2008).

EGTCs are subject to state registration; such registration is carried out in the national register of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation maintained by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland. An EGTC is deemed to be established upon the entry being made in the register; that is, legal personality is acquired as of the moment of registration, and all information contained therein is publicly accessible (Ustawa z dnia 7 listopada 2008 r., 2008).

The financial activities of an EGTC are regulated by statute, which establishes the requirement of mandatory audit and transparent financial reporting. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland exercises state supervision over the activities of EGTCs and is also empowered to require the remediation of violations, temporarily suspend the activities of a grouping, or initiate its dissolution. The enshrined principle of limited property liability precludes the imposition of a grouping’s debt obligations on state or self-government authorities; accordingly, the state, local self-government bodies, or other public entities do not bear liability for the obligations of an EGTC (Ustawa z dnia 7 listopada 2008 r., 2008).

The Act provides that, in the absence of funding from the European Union, EGTCs registered in Poland may carry out only those tasks that correspond to the objectives defined in Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 within the framework of European territorial cooperation policy. Such alignment ensures the consistency of Poland’s legislation with European cohesion policy, in particular with the Interreg programmes. This Act establishes a coherent legal model of the EGTC that ensures legal personality through official registration, introduces mechanisms for financial transparency and public supervision, and, at the same time, preserves the institutional autonomy of local authorities (Ustawa z dnia 7

listopada 2008 r., 2008). Thus, the Polish model is characterised by institutional maturity and normative alignment with the EU acquis communautaire, enabling local authorities to participate effectively in Interreg programmes while simultaneously strengthening regional cohesion.

Legal Foundations of Cross-border Cooperation and Certain Aspects of the Legal Status of Institutional Forms of Cross-border Cooperation in the Czech Republic

Among the Visegrad Group states, the Czech Republic was one of the first to establish a comprehensive legal framework for cross-border cooperation, combining the standards of the Council of Europe and the European Union. The approach of the Czech Republic is based on a flexible combination of “soft” forms of cooperation, such as Euroregions, associations of local authorities, and inter-municipal agreements with “hard” institutional instruments of public law, primarily European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation. The legal framework for cross-border cooperation in the Czech Republic consists of the Constitution, international treaties ratified by Parliament, and statutes and subordinate regulations that define the status and competences of local authorities (Fetko, 2023, pp. 279–283). The Constitution of the Czech Republic enshrines the principle of local self-government and guarantees its autonomy, including the right of local authorities to cooperate, within the limits of the law, with foreign municipalities and regions (CESCI, 2021, pp. 8 - 12). The Czech Republic is a party to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities and the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which defines the core principles of voluntariness, reciprocity, and compliance with national legislation. Although the Czech Republic has not signed the three Additional Protocols to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities, the provisions of the Convention have been implemented within the domestic legal order. An important role is also played by interstate treaties on good neighbourliness, friendship, and cooperation concluded with Poland (1993) and Slovakia (1992), which provide for the development of regional and local ties (Fetko, 2023, pp. 279–283).

The domestic system of legal regulation of local self-government and regional development in the Czech Republic is based on a set of core statutes; in particular, Act No. 128/2000 on Municipalities defines the legal personality of municipalities and their right to conclude partnership

agreements with foreign municipalities. Act No. 129/2000 on Regions establishes the competences of the regions regarding participation in cross-border and interregional cooperation programmes. Act No. 131/2000 on the Capital City of Prague defines the special status of the capital as a subject of international cooperation. Act No. 248/2000 on Support for Regional Development includes specific provisions regulating the activities of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (CESCI, 2021, pp. 8–12). This Act serves as the primary instrument for implementing Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006, as amended by Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013, and establishes the procedural and substantive rules governing the functioning of EGTCs within the Czech legal system. An EGTC with a registered office in the Czech Republic holds the status of a legal person governed by public law and acquires legal personality upon entry in the official register maintained by the Ministry of Regional Development of the Czech Republic. The Act allows for the limitation of members' liability provided that continuous insurance coverage or another form of risk guarantee is ensured, thereby creating a balance between the autonomy of the EGTC and the requirements of public financial assurance (Zákon č. 248/2000 Sb., 2000).

The procedure for approving the participation of Czech entities is based on the principle of *ex ante* control. Each prospective participant in an EGTC, whether a local self-government body or another public legal entity, is required to submit to the Ministry the documents set out in Article 4 of the EU Regulation. The Ministry may refuse approval on grounds related to national security, public order protection, or doubts regarding the integrity of the applicant's executive officers. The establishment of an EGTC is permitted only after the agreement and statute have been approved by all competent authorities of the Member States. Information about a registered EGTC, including its name, participants, objectives, duration of operation, and governing bodies, is public and accessible online (Zákon č. 248/2000 Sb., 2000).

An EGTC is required to maintain accounting in accordance with national legislation, ensure the audit of its annual financial statements (if activity exceeds the established thresholds), and submit an annual report to the Ministry each year, accompanied by the auditor's opinion. EGTC reports are published publicly, ensuring transparency in the management of public funds. The Ministry performs state supervisory functions and, upon detecting violations, may require deficiencies to be remedied; if these are not addressed, it may decide to dissolve the EGTC or remove it from the register. During the liquidation process, the distribution of assets

takes place, including the return of public property to the members of the grouping (Zákon č. 248/2000 Sb., 2000).

The functioning of an EGTC in the Czech Republic is directly linked to EU cohesion policy and is implemented through participation in the Interreg programme. Coordination functions are assigned to the Ministry, which serves as the coordinator of Czech partners' participation in projects, while the Regional Development Centre administers joint secretariats and supervises the use of funds (Zákon č. 248/2000 Sb., 2000).

The Czech model of legal regulation of cross-border cooperation is characterised by a high level of legal certainty, administrative orderliness, and transparency. It provides for preventive control over public entities' participation, a transparent registration system with publicly accessible founding documents, financial guarantees and mandatory audits, effective state supervision, and accountability for violations. Thus, an EGTC in the Czech Republic functions as a fully-fledged public law institution that forms part of the institutional mechanism of EU cohesion policy. The model is characterised by an optimal balance between institutional autonomy and state oversight, ensuring the effectiveness and legal compliance of cross-border initiatives.

Legal Foundations of Cross-Border Cooperation and Certain Aspects of the Legal Status of Institutional Forms of Cross-border Cooperation in Slovakia

The Slovak model of legal regulation of cross-border cooperation combines constitutional guarantees of local self-government, international legal obligations under the acts of the Council of Europe, and directly applicable norms of EU law. The Constitution of Slovakia enshrines the autonomy of local authorities and recognises their capacity to cooperate with foreign partners within the limits of the law. International sources include the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities, the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and bilateral treaties on good neighbourliness, friendship, and cooperation with Poland (1992), The Czech Republic and Ukraine (both 2000), as well as Hungary (2001) (CESCI, 2021, pp. 47–52; Fetko, 2023, pp. 279–283).

The normative framework is formed by statutes that define the system and competences of municipalities and self-governing regions, their interaction with state administration, and the procedures for delegating functions. In particular, these include: Act No. 369/1990 on Municipal Governance; Act No. 221/1996 on the Territorial and Administrative Organisation of the Slovak Republic; Act No. 222/1996 on Local State

Administration; Act No. 302/2001 on Self-Government of Higher Territorial Units (Self-Governing Regions); Act No. 416/2001 on the Transfer of Certain Competences to Local Self-Government Bodies, as well as horizontal financial and procedural regulations; Act No. 528/2008 on Aid and Support Provided from EU Funds; and Act No. 539/2008 on Regional Development Support. Collectively, these legal acts confer upon local-level authorities the competence to plan socio-economic and cultural development, to conclude partnership agreements, and to participate in projects (CESCI, 2021, pp. 47–52; Fetko, 2023, pp. 279–283).

A key special statute is Act No. 90/2008 on European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), which transposes Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 (as amended in 2013) and establishes the complete procedural framework for the existence of EGTCs in Slovakia, from prior approval of participation to registration, operation, supervision, and liquidation. The legal personality of an EGTC arises upon its entry into the public register and must be distinct from that of other legal entities. To establish an EGTC, at least one Slovak and one foreign member are required. Slovak participants may include the state, self-governing regions, municipalities, and special public legal entities. Participation of the state requires a government decision specifying the central representative authority; for regions and municipalities, approval by the respective representative bodies is needed. Foreign participants may join provided that their participation is compatible with the law of their state and has its consent (Act No. 90/2008, 2008).

The functions of registrar and supervisory authority are performed by the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic. It maintains the public electronic register, grants approval for the participation of Slovak entities in EGTCs registered abroad, approves agreements and statutes (including amendments), makes decisions regarding registration and removal from the register, and coordinates supervisory activities with authorities of other states. The registration package includes the agreement and statute, the decision granting consent for the participation of the relevant entities, information about the director, and, if applicable, an evaluation of non-monetary contributions. The Ministry registers an EGTC within the statutory timeframe or provides a reasoned refusal, guided by requirements of legal compliance and public security (Act No. 90/2008, 2008).

The organisational structure of an EGTC corresponds to the European standard. The assembly serves as the supreme body, with exclusive competence to approve the budget, annual reports, and key corporate acts. The director manages operations within the scope of the

statutory mandate, while the supervisory board operates mandatorily only if the assets exceed the prescribed threshold. Conflict-of-interest safeguards are normatively established (prohibiting competition for officeholders), and qualification requirements for members of the bodies are defined (Act No. 90/2008, 2008).

The financial and legal mechanism for the functioning of an EGTC combines self-financing instruments with established guarantees of transparency and accountability. Sources of assets include membership contributions, revenues from statutory activities, donations, and the like, while entrepreneurial activity is limited – that is, commercial operations are permitted only within a narrowly defined scope. The EGTC is liable for its obligations with all its assets, whereas Slovak participants are liable only to the extent of unpaid contributions. For foreign participants, contractual limitation of liability is permitted provided that risks are properly guaranteed. The Ministry conducts continuous supervision, reviews annual reports, issues orders to remedy violations, and, in the event of non-compliance, may bring a court action to dissolve the EGTC. Grounds for liquidation include systematic failure to achieve objectives, disproportionate expenditures, misuse of assets, material breaches of the agreement or statute, inactivity of governing bodies, and similar issues. Removal from the register occurs after the completion of the EGTC's liquidation (Act No. 90/2008, 2008).

Thus, the Slovak model of legal regulation of EGTCs combines full legal personality with a clear procedural framework, including prior approval of participation by public entities, the maintenance of a centralized public register, transparency of founding documents and financial reporting, special protection of public assets, differentiated liability, and effective supervisory and judicial mechanisms. This legal mechanism simultaneously ensures institutional autonomy for the implementation of cross-border projects and adequate protection of the public interests of the state and local self-government. In combination with state co-financing, it creates clear conditions for the effective participation of Slovak regions and municipalities in EU programmes.

Legal Foundations of Cross-border Cooperation and Certain Aspects of the Legal Status of Institutional Forms of Cross-border Cooperation in Hungary

The legal regulation of cross-border cooperation in Hungary is based on the Constitution, international treaties, statutes, and subordinate regulations. As a member state of the Council of Europe, Hungary has ratified the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation

between Territorial Communities or Authorities (without the three Additional Protocols) and a series of bilateral treaties on good neighbourliness, friendly relations, and cooperation, including with Ukraine (1991) and Slovakia (1995). These agreements have established the foundation for creating sustainable mechanisms of regional cooperation based on the principles of reciprocity, subsidiarity, and decentralisation. The constitutional model of local self-government is further detailed in Act No. CLXXXIX on Local Governments of Hungary. The Act defines the legal status of municipalities, counties (comitats), and the associations established by them, ensuring their legal personality in the field of international cooperation. Local self-government bodies are vested with competences in the socio-economic and cultural development of their respective territories, including cross-border legal relations. The legal instruments guarantee their financial autonomy, the right to conclude non-political international agreements, and participation in European development programmes such as Interreg (CESCI, 2021, pp. 21–35; Fetko, 2023, pp. 279–283).

Hungary was one of the first EU Member States to adopt a national act on EGTCs in 2007 (Act XC), which was amended in 2010 (Act CXXVI). With Act LXXV of 2014, an updated version of the 2013 EGTC Regulation was implemented, and the previous Hungarian EGTC law ceased to be in force. In Hungary, specific legal regulation of EGTCs is provided by Act LXXV on European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation, which establishes the organisational and legal form, defines the objectives and tasks, sets out the procedures for the establishment, operation, and liquidation of EGTCs, and regulates the financial and procedural aspects of the participation of Hungarian entities in such groupings (Act LXXV of 2014, 2014). EGTCs in Hungary operate in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006, as amended by Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013, while Act LXXV of 2014 specifies the national implementation mechanisms, including procedures for approving the participation of Hungarian members, registration, maintenance of the official register, as well as grounds for refusal or termination of participation. Government Decree No. 485/2017 of 29 December 2017 further details certain procedural provisions regarding the establishment of EGTCs (Government Decree No. 458/2017, 2017).

Members of an EGTC may include local self-government bodies, their associations, budgetary institutions, and other public-law legal entities as defined in § 5(1) of Act CXLIII/2015 on Public Procurement. An EGTC acquires legal personality upon registration in the national register maintained by the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The

official name of the grouping must include the designation európai területi társulás (ETT), and if participants include entities with limited liability, this must be reflected in the name. Local self-government bodies bear limited liability only to the extent of their contributions to the grouping. This approach ensures a balance between financial discipline and the protection of public interests (Act LXXV of 2014, 2014).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs performs the functions of registrar, authority for approval, participation consent, and supervision of EGTC activities. It decides on membership approvals, maintains the electronic register of EGTCs, and initiates dissolution procedures in the event of violations. This centralised mechanism eliminates the risk of overlapping competences and ensures legal certainty. All information regarding an EGTC – including its name, membership composition, statute, agreement, duration of operation, structural changes, and financial documents – is published online. This electronic access system guarantees transparency and public oversight (Act LXXV of 2014, 2014).

EGTCs may engage in commercial activities only as ancillary operations exclusively for the achievement of their statutory objectives. Accounting must be maintained in accordance with national legislation, and the annual financial statements must be published within 150 days after the reporting date. If the EGTC holds the status of a “public-benefit organisation”, a report on public benefit must additionally be submitted to the competent authority. The state may conduct audits through the State Audit Office of Hungary, which verifies the legality of financial operations and liaises with authorities of EU Member States if a Hungarian entity participates in a “foreign” EGTC (Act LXXV of 2014, 2014).

In the event of a legal violation, the Minister issues an order to remedy the deficiencies, and if it is not complied with, initiates the dissolution of the grouping. Such measures ensure an effective system of legal control and adherence to the principles of good governance. The liquidation of an EGTC is carried out without legal succession. All procedures are conducted under the supervision of the Metropolitan Regional Court of Budapest, and official notices are published on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Act LXXV of 2014, 2014).

The Hungarian model of EGTCs demonstrates a high degree of regulatory clarity, institutional orderliness, and financial transparency. Its key features include a single administrative centre that ensures centralized management, registration, and supervision. Publicity and transparency are guaranteed through an open register and the mandatory public disclosure of founding documents and reports. The Hungarian model provides a balanced autonomy for EGTCs, allowing them to engage only in ancillary

commercial activities without conferring any governmental powers. Limited liability has been established, clearly delineating financial risks for municipalities and budgetary institutions. An effective sanctions mechanism has been introduced, including the possibility of terminating membership, prohibiting unlawful activities, and judicial dissolution of the grouping. Thanks to these elements, Hungarian legislation establishes a coherent, flexible, and EU-compliant system for implementing cross-border, transnational, and interregional initiatives within the framework of EU economic, social, and territorial cohesion policy.

Legal Foundations of Cross-border Cooperation and Certain Aspects of the Legal Status of Institutional Forms of Cross-border Cooperation in Ukraine

The legal regulation of cross-border cooperation in Ukraine is structured as a multi-level system that combines the Constitution of Ukraine, ratified international treaties, statutes, and subordinate regulations. Among international instruments, a central role is played by the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities and its Additional Protocols, which legitimize the participation of local authorities in cross-border cooperation and define the organisational models of legally competent cross-border groupings. The Association Agreement establishes a comprehensive framework for cooperation with the EU, enshrining the principles and mechanisms for Ukraine's participation in joint programmes and institutional forms of cross-border cooperation. Bilateral treaties on good neighbourliness and cooperation with Poland (1992), Hungary (1991), Slovakia (1993), and the Czech Republic (1995) specify sectoral directions and instruments for interaction between border regions (Fetko, 2023, pp. 279–283).

The Constitution of Ukraine (Arts. 9, 140–146) establishes that ratified international treaties form part of the national legal system and guarantees the autonomy of local self-government, which explicitly includes the right to engage in international cooperation within the framework of national legislation (Constitution of Ukraine, 1996). The Laws “On Local Self-Government in Ukraine” and “On Local State Administrations” define the system of authorities, their competences, and mechanisms for socio-economic development, which directly encompass cross-border cooperation with the corresponding authorities of neighbouring states (Constitution of Ukraine, 1996; Law of Ukraine “On Local Self-Government in Ukraine”, 1997; Law of Ukraine “On Local State Administrations”, 1999). The Law of Ukraine “On International Territorial Cooperation of Ukraine” serves as a special regulatory

instrument, defining the legal, economic, and organisational foundations for Ukraine's cooperation with foreign states. It is aimed at establishing collaboration among states, regions, and territories to ensure balanced socio-economic development, safeguard national interests and security, and promote mutually beneficial cooperation with members of the international community based on universally recognised principles and norms of international law, taking into account the historical, economic, ecological, geographic, and demographic characteristics of regions and territories. Among other provisions, the Law regulates the conceptual framework, the range of subjects and participants, and the forms of cross-border cooperation (agreements, Euroregions, ECGs, EGTCs), as well as the principles of state support and project programming. The Law also details the principles, objectives, and procedural mechanisms for the establishment of institutional forms of cross-border cooperation and their financing (Law of Ukraine "On International Territorial Cooperation of Ukraine", 2024). Unlike the Visegrad Group states, Ukraine has acceded to and ratified all three Additional Protocols to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities, consistently implementing the Council of Europe's standards on cross-border cooperation, legal personality, and the domestic applicability of acts of such cooperative bodies (Fetko, 2023, pp. 279–283). The legal and regulatory system of Ukraine is gradually being harmonised with the EU *acquis communautaire*. At the level of founding documents and procedures, the participation of Ukrainian entities in European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation is legitimised in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006, as amended by Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013, taking into account the requirements of national legislation regarding registration, accountability, and supervision.

The Law recognises a Euroregion as a form of cross-border cooperation carried out under bilateral or multilateral agreements to promote cross-border collaboration. The legal personality and competences of a Euroregion are established contractually in the agreements and statutes. It is possible to confer legal personality within the territory of Ukraine or to assign functions to the relevant executive bodies of local self-government authorities and/or structural units of local state administrations. The potential advantages of this form include flexibility and scalability, while the challenges involve dependence on interstate agreements, the complexity of intergovernmental coordination, ensuring stable funding for multilateral initiatives, and an unclear legal status of the Euroregion, which creates additional uncertainty regarding cross-border

cooperation (Law of Ukraine “On International Territorial Cooperation of Ukraine”, 2024).

According to the provisions of the Law, a Euroregional Cooperation Association is a form of an international territorial cooperation body established within the territories of Council of Europe member states to develop inter-territorial and/or cross-border cooperation among the subjects and participants of such relations in areas of shared competence, in accordance with the powers defined under national legislation. A Euroregional Cooperation Association is established as a legal entity under the national legislation of the Council of Europe member state in whose territory its headquarters are located. Founders/members may include state authorities, local self-government bodies of Ukraine and other Council of Europe member states, as well as non-commercial legal entities funded or supervised by public authorities. The founding documents are approved by the competent central executive authority and define the governing bodies, membership rules, and sources of financing (contributions, international aid, etc.). The strengths of this form include clear legal personality and transparent rules for governance and reporting, while its weaknesses lie in inter-jurisdictional conflicts, the complexity of synchronising procedures, and differing budgetary periods among the participating states (Law of Ukraine “On International Territorial Cooperation of Ukraine”, 2024).

The establishment of a Euroregional Cooperation Association between local authorities of Ukraine and the corresponding authorities of the Visegrad Group states is complicated by the asymmetry of international legal obligations. Ukraine has ratified Protocol No. 3 to the Convention, whereas the Visegrad Group states have not joined it. This results in the absence of a common contractual basis, a legal conflict between the Council of Europe and EU systems, and the impossibility of mutual recognition of the legal personality of ECGs. Prospects for the development of such associations are possible only if the Visegrad Group states accede to Protocol No. 3 and subsequently harmonise their national legislation (Fetko, 2023, pp. 279–283).

According to the Law, a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) is a form of international territorial cooperation that combines entities of Ukraine’s international territorial cooperation with corresponding entities of EU Member States and other countries. An EGTC is established as a legal entity under the national legislation of the EU Member State in whose territory the international territorial cooperation body (its headquarters) is located. Ukrainian legal entities that do not engage in commercial activities may become members of an EGTC provided that: their activities are primarily financed by a state

authority or a local self-government body; or their management is controlled by a state authority or a local self-government body; or at least half of the members of their administrative, management, or supervisory body are appointed by a state authority or a local self-government body. This model provides high operational capacity (uniform rules, financial accountability, and auditing) but requires careful alignment between legal systems and strict adherence to approval and registration procedures, which can sometimes slow the launch of joint initiatives. The establishment of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation between local authorities of Ukraine and the corresponding authorities of the Visegrad Group states is accompanied by a range of systemic challenges, including legal, institutional, financial, and political issues (Law of Ukraine “On International Territorial Cooperation of Ukraine”, 2024). The Ukrainian model of cross-border cooperation is characterised by a systemic approach and aligns with European legal standards. It ensures the legal personality of cross-border cooperation institutions, establishes structured and transparent organisational and legal mechanisms, and provides access to EU financial instruments and programmes. Despite certain improvements in legal regulation, the activities of entities and participants in cross-border cooperation still take place under conditions of fragmented and not fully harmonised legal frameworks. Insufficient standardisation of procedures, differences in approaches to reporting and auditing, and the complexity of obtaining approvals from central authorities create administrative barriers and sometimes delay the implementation of cross-border projects. The lack of regulation regarding co-financing and foreign currency operations exacerbates the financial instability of local partners, while the absence of an effective coordination mechanism reduces the efficiency of law enforcement activities and decision-making processes.

The legal status of institutional forms of cross-border cooperation in Ukraine – including Euroregions, Euroregional Cooperation Associations, and European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation – is established through a combination of multilateral Council of Europe treaties, EU legal acts, and specific domestic legislation. This normative mechanism clearly integrates legal personality, institutional transparency, and access to programme support, while still retaining certain inter-jurisdictional conflicts, complex approval procedures, and the absence of comprehensive financial mechanisms. Further approximation of national legislation to the EU *acquis communautaire* and the optimisation of domestic procedures will facilitate project activities, enhance their legal certainty, and deepen the integration of Ukraine’s border regions into the European space. Equally important is the establishment of effective mechanisms for implementing European standards within Ukraine’s legal

system. Legal challenges in the field of cross-border cooperation in Ukraine are systemic in nature and require a comprehensive approach, encompassing both legislative improvements and the strengthening of institutional capacity and other key components.

Conclusions

The European model of cross-border cooperation is the result of a sequential evolution from Council of Europe treaty-based mechanisms to a fully developed institutional system under EU law. This continuity between levels has established a multi-tiered legal mechanism in which international legal standards of legal personality, subsidiarity, and partnership have been institutionalised through the EU *acquis communautaire* via the creation of legal instruments such as EGTCs and EU programme support, notably the Interreg initiative. As a result, cross-border cooperation has become an effective mechanism of European public law and a tool for implementing cohesion policy, integrating norms from the international, supranational, and national levels.

The interaction between Council of Europe law and EU law has created an integrated system of a “Europe without borders”, in which local authorities have acquired the status of subjects of public-law relations, capable of implementing projects based on harmonised procedures, shared financial mechanisms, and coordinated supervisory rules. This approach ensures legal certainty, institutional stability, and financial viability of the institutional forms of cross-border cooperation, which are key prerequisites for the functioning of multi-level governance within the EU.

A comparative analysis shows that the Visegrad Group states (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary) have developed an effective legal model of cross-border cooperation, which integrates Council of Europe norms with the EU *acquis communautaire*. Their legislation guarantees the legal personality of local authorities, establishes transparent registration and financial procedures, provides a clear distribution of competences, and ensures effective supervisory control. The Visegrad model demonstrates that the resilience of cross-border interaction is achieved through a combination of legal certainty, financial accountability, and institutional capacity, forming a solid legal foundation for the stable development of regional integration.

By implementing the Council of Europe’s multilateral treaties and approximating its legislation to the EU *acquis communautaire*, Ukraine has developed its own systematically harmonised model of cross-border cooperation. It establishes the legal personality of institutional forms of cooperation, transparent organisational and legal procedures, and provides access to external financing and EU programmes. At the same time, the

further development of this model is constrained by a number of factors, including fragmented legal regulation, insufficient standardisation of procedures, the complexity of obtaining approvals from central authorities, financial limitations, and uneven institutional capacity across regions. The further improvement of Ukraine's legal model of cross-border cooperation should be based on the following principles: deeper and continued harmonisation of legislation with the EU *acquis communautaire* and the elimination of conflicts between international, supranational, and national norms; strengthening of coordination structures at both central and regional levels; and the modernisation of financial and supervisory mechanisms aimed at ensuring transparency, accountability, and access to external funding.

In summary, Ukraine possesses the necessary legal and regulatory framework for full integration into the European space of cohesion policy and territorial cooperation. Further legislative improvements, strengthening the institutional capacity at the regional level, and ensuring the financial stability of cross-border cooperation entities will contribute to the development of a stable, predictable, and effective legal model of cross-border cooperation, compatible with European principles of multi-level governance, legal certainty, and territorial cohesion.

References:

Bildt, C. (2013, November 28). The Eastern Partnership – Towards a reunified Europe. New Eastern Europe. <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2013/11/28/our-european-neighbours/>

Covarrubias Peña, J. D. (2016). Bridging the socioeconomic gap: Integrating cross-border regions through comparing different worlds – Region Laredo, Aquitaine-Euskadi and Öresund (Doctoral dissertation). Universidad de Deusto, Deusto Business School. <https://www.orkestra.deusto.es/en/publications-search/publications/doctoral-theses/853-bridging-socioeconomic-gap-integrating-cross-border-regions-comparing-different-worlds-region-laredo-aquitaine-euskadi-oeresund>

Assembly of European Regions. (2021). Charter for European border and cross-border regions. <https://www.aebr.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/140823-Charta-EN.pdf>

Zenderowski, R. (2003). Borders of Europe – Borders in Europe. *The Polish Foreign Affairs Digest*, 3(2), 39–50. <https://www.ceeol.com/search/viewpdf?id=55072>

Evchak, Yu. B., Zardi, A., Lazur, Ya. V., Ochkaï, D., Sanchenko, A. Ye., Soshnykov, A. O., Ustyenko, V. A., & Fetko, Yu. I. (2020). *Transkordonne spivrobitnytstvo: pravovi osnovy ta uspishni praktyky*:

posibnyk (Cross-border cooperation: Legal foundations and successful practices: Manual) (V. A. Ustymenko, Ed.-in-Chief; A. K. Huk & A. Ye. Sanchenko, Eds.-Comp.). Kyiv, Ukraine. <https://rm.coe.int/posibnukts/1680aedce1>

Territorial Agenda of the European Union. (2023). Territorial cohesion – The story. <https://territorialagenda.eu/wp-content/uploads/Territorial-Cohesion-The-Story-draft-30-June-2023-1.pdf>

Mertens, P., & Unfried, M. (2024). Dossier 1: European cross-border impact assessment and cohesion policy for border regions. ITEM. <https://crossborderitem.eu/wp-content/uploads/GREFRAP24-D1-EN.pdf>

Regulation (EC) No. 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC), OJ L 210, 31.7.2006, p. 19–24. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2006/1082/oj/eng>

Regulation (EU) No. 1302/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 amending Regulation (EC) No. 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, OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 259–268. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2013/1302/oj/eng>

Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments, OJ L 231, 29.6.2021, p. 1–61. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1059/oj/eng>

Bildt, C. (2013, October 1). Towards a reunited Europe. <https://upnorth.eu/towards-a-reunited-europe/>

Council of Europe. (1980a). European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (ETS No. 106). <https://rm.coe.int/1680078b0c>

Council of Europe. (1980b). Explanatory report to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities. <https://rm.coe.int/16800ca433>

Council of Europe. (1995a). Additional Protocol to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (ETS No. 159). <https://rm.coe.int/168007cdae>

Council of Europe. (1995b). Explanatory report to the Additional Protocol to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities. <https://rm.coe.int/16800cb5ed>

Council of Europe. (1998a). Protocol No. 2 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities concerning interterritorial co-operation (ETS No. 169). <https://rm.coe.int/168007f2cb>

Council of Europe. (1998b). Explanatory report to Protocol No. 2 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities concerning interterritorial co-operation. <https://rm.coe.int/16800cce40>

Council of Europe. (2009). Protocol No. 3 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities concerning Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (ECGs) (CETS No. 206). <https://rm.coe.int/1680084827>

Council of Europe. (2013). Revised version of the appendix to Protocol No. 3 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities concerning Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (ECGs) (CETS No. 206). <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168048d9f3>

Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union. (2016). Official Journal of the European Union C 202/1. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12016M/TXT>

Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. (2016). Official Journal of the European Union C 202/1. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12016E/TXT>

Treaty establishing the European Community (Treaty establishing the European Economic Community). (1957). https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/994_017#Text

European Commission. (2021). Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI – Global Europe). Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/funding-technical-assistance/neighbourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument-global-europe-ndici-global-europe_en

European External Action Service. (2025). Eastern Partnership. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eastern-partnership_en

CESCI. (2021). Comparative analysis on the competencies of regional and local authorities in the field of CBC of the 5 countries. Budapest: CESCI. https://budapest.cesci-net.eu/wp-content/uploads/_publications/CESCI-IVF_2021-Study-Comperative-analysis-authorities_EN.pdf

Fetko, Yu. I. (2023). Pravovi zasady transkordonnoho spivrobitnytstva Ukrainy ta derzhav Vyshehradskoi hrupy (Legal foundations of cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and the Visegrad Group states). <https://elar.navs.edu.ua/server/api/core/bitstreams/95f13765-19d9-4406-80df-b8cd7bc22150/content>

Ustawa z dnia 7 listopada 2008 r. o europejskim ugrupowaniu współpracy terytorialnej. (2008). <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20082181390>

Zákon č. 248/2000 Sb. o podpoře regionálního rozvoje. (2000). <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2000-248>

Act No. 90/2008 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation and on the amendment of Act No. 540/2001 Coll. on state statistics, as amended. (2008). https://mirri.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/EN_ACT-No-90_2008_on-EGTC_July-2020.pdf

Act LXXV of 2014 on the European grouping of territorial cooperation. (2014). <https://egtc.kormany.hu/download/c/60/42000/ACT%20LXXV%202014.pdf>

Government Decree No. 458/2017 on the detailed rules of the approval and registration procedures relating to the European grouping of territorial cooperation. (2017, December 29). <https://egtc.kormany.hu/download/d/60/42000/Government%20Decree%20No%20458%20of%202017.pdf>

Konstytutsiia Ukrainy (The Constitution of Ukraine). (1996). <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/254%D0%BA/96-%D0%B2%D1%80#Text>

Zakon Ukrainy “Pro mistseve samovriaduvannia v Ukraini” (Law of Ukraine “On Local Self-Government in Ukraine”). (1997). <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/280/97-%D0%B2%D1%80#Text>

Zakon Ukrainy “Pro mistsevi derzhavni administratsii” (Law of Ukraine “On Local State Administrations”). (1999). <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/586-14#Text>

Zakon Ukrainy “Pro mizhnarodne terytorialne spivrobitnytstvo Ukrainy” (Law of Ukraine “On International Territorial Cooperation of Ukraine”). (2024). <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3668-20#Text>

CHAPTER 3

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES IN CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION: IMPLEMENTED PROJECTS

Introduction

The study and exchange of best practices contribute to more informed decision-making, the development of more effective strategies, and the implementation of more relevant objectives. In most cases, researchers identify examples of best practices in cross-border cooperation as successful outcomes, including the implementation of strategies, policies, reforms, activities, the elaboration of study guides, and, in particular, the execution of joint projects.

In this part of the study, we focus on examples of best practices in cross-border cooperation through implemented projects. First of all, we will outline key indicators of best practices and consider a selection of successful actions and results of cross-border cooperation in Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, and Ukraine. For a detailed examination of successful models, the authors have selected examples of cross-border activities implemented by the Visegrad Group countries within a single programming period (2014–2020), supported by the European Territorial Cooperation Programmes Interreg.

The sources of this study encompass academic articles and scholarly works, analyses and commentaries from analytical centers and research institutes, news articles from media outlets, as well as analytical reports by civil society organizations focusing on regional development and cross-border cooperation. Additional sources comprise statistical data and reports from regional authorities concerning the use of European Union investment instruments for the development of the Visegrad Group countries' regions, as well as successful cases and best practices of cross-border projects and regional development initiatives in Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, and Ukraine available on the Interreg platform (Interreg Europe. Find policy solutions: Good practices.) Official European Union database and platform (KEEP. Knowledge and Expertise Exchange Platform). Projects on this platform can be searched not only by programming period, project partners, or country of origin, but also by key thematic areas, which may serve as an inspiration for cities and communities seeking an overview of successful activities and guidance when preparing their own project proposals. Successful projects are introduced to the platform by the entities that implemented them, but it is relatively common for those entities to define what they consider best practice. In addition, the selection of best practice examples is further

processed by Interreg platform analysts, who analyse the selected examples and formulate recommendations. Under the Interreg programme, an example of best practice is “...a regional development policy initiative that has proven successful. Success should be understood as areas in which best practice has already delivered tangible and measurable results in achieving a specific goal” (Interreg Europe. Find policy solutions: Good practices.).

Despite terminological inconsistencies, fragmentation, and the subjective nature of success criteria in the academic literature, the definition of “best practices in project implementation” generally implies proven methods, approaches, tools, or management solutions that ensure the highest efficiency, results, and sustainability in a specific context. They rest upon experience, empirical data and analytical assessment, and can be adapted to other projects or organizations with similar conditions. The study of best-practice examples is important because it provides, among other things, methodological recommendations for selecting such examples. This approach, which is becoming increasingly widespread in scientific and practical discourse, is based on the assumption that instead of abstract modeling of the desired state of the system, it is more appropriate to focus on empirically confirmed solutions that have already demonstrated effectiveness in real conditions (Veselý, A. 2011).

The methodology for selecting examples of best practices varies primarily by field. Each sector has its own criteria for evaluating examples of best practices, and it is important not to limit yourself to a mechanical description of the selected example without a clear justification of why the selected practice is a good one.

Agreeing with the authors of the Handbook on Planning and Implementing Cross-Border Cooperation Projects (Duleba, A., Oravtsova, V., & Gavaltsova, A. 2023), there is no necessity to delve into a deep methodological discussion on this issue, but rather, based on the common features of several texts describing best practices, select the main criteria by which a successful project should be defined as an example of best practice.

In our opinion, the following characteristics of projects are worth paying attention to: **effectiveness** – the project achieves the set goals and objectives in full, and the actual results meet or exceed the planned indicators. **Efficiency** – the project achieves its goals with minimal resource expenditure – time, money, human effort, and costs are proportional to the results obtained. **Sustainability** – the project results persist and influence the system even after funding or external support ends, there are local support mechanisms, community involvement or

institutionalisation of changes... **Scalability & replicability** – the practice can be adapted or scaled to other contexts – industries, regions or countries, the project implementation mechanisms are clearly documented, there is potential for replication or expansion. **Innovation & stakeholder engagement** – the project uses new approaches, technologies or solutions, actively involving target groups; the main feature of the project is a high level of public or end-user participation; the use of non-standard methods (Project Success Criteria).

Researchers of cross-border cooperation at the local and regional levels often highlight another important criterion for success in their works – **relevance**, which they call the most problematic criterion from the point of view of implemented projects, i.e. whether the project solves priority problems in areas of a given region or community (Duleba, A., Oravtsova, V., & Gavaltsova, A. 2023).

Within the scope of our research, the fundamental criterion of a successful project should be identified as **the cross-border nature of a project**, specifically its ability to ensure coordinated cooperation between border regions in order to jointly address pressing issues, while consolidating resources, needs, and effective actions on both sides of the border.

In different research materials, the conclusion is that successful cross-border projects are those aimed at developing border regions, improving interregional cooperation and ensuring sustainable development in various areas – from economics to ecology and culture. Thanks to these initiatives, self-governing regions receive unique opportunities to improve the quality of life of local residents, develop communities, and strengthen ties with neighboring states. Of course, when determining priority axes in cross-border cooperation programs, the key is to analyze the most important areas for the region, within which projects will be implemented.

To highlight examples of successful cross-border cooperation specifically on the borders of the V4 countries, we reviewed the Interreg Programs V-A of the completed 2014-2020 programming period (Interreg Czech Republic-Poland, Interreg Slovakia-Czech Republic, Interreg Slovakia-Hungary, Interreg Poland-Slovakia, Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC Program 2014-2020, Poland-Ukraine ENI CBC Program 2014-2020), which finance cooperation between regions of different countries to address common challenges and promote sustainable development.

Overall, the fifth programming period of INTERREG (2014-2020) envisaged a budget of €10.1 billion, invested in over 100 programmes of cooperation between regions and territorial, social, and economic partners.

This budget also included allocations from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to Member States for participation in 80 programmes of cooperation along the EU's external borders, supported by other instruments (the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance and the European Neighbourhood Instrument). INTERREG V provides three strands of cooperation; our focus is on Strand A – cross-border cooperation.

INTERREG V-A covers: 60 cross-border programmes – along 38 internal EU borders with an ERDF contribution of €6.6 billion; 12 cross-border IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) programmes with a budget of €242 million; 16 cross-border ENI (European Neighbourhood Instrument) programmes for international cooperation and development, with a total of €634 million.

The programme was based on key investment priorities, including research and innovation; information and communication technologies; competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises; climate change mitigation; environment and resource efficiency; employment and mobility; social inclusion; better education and training; and improved public administration.

One of the main objectives of the programme is to reduce the impact of national borders in favor of balanced economic, social, and cultural development across the entire territory of the European Union.

All projects funded under the Programme demonstrate a strong cross-border effect, not only through partnerships between institutions from these countries, but above all through the tangible outcomes and positive impacts of these projects on border regions.

What is very important when discussing our topic in the context of studying the best ideas, borrowing them, and the possibility of their further implementation is that Hungarian, Slovak, Polish, Romanian and Ukrainian border areas are covered by cross-border cooperation programmes – primarily Interreg NEXT, under which cross-border projects are implemented with the financial support of EU institutions. Ukraine's immediate proximity to four countries, being European Union member states, has created favourable conditions for cross-border cooperation between local self-government bodies and local executive authorities with the relevant institutions of these countries, as well as provided an opportunity for representatives of civil society, non-governmental organisations, educational and scientific institutions, and business structures interested in the development of regional partnerships to participate in such programmes.

As we know, Ukraine has had access to programmes financed from the EU budget for many years. Cross-border cooperation between EU Member States and neighbouring regions was first introduced as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy and was financed by the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) during 2007-2013, with the aim of promoting good neighbourly relations and the gradual economic integration of participating countries. In 2013, preparations began for cross-border cooperation programmes under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) for the period 2014-2020 (ENI CBC programmes 2014-2020). Ukraine became part of four joint operational programmes of the European Neighbourhood Instrument 2014-2020, namely “Poland-Ukraine-Belarus”, (Poland-Ukraine Programme), “Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine” (Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine Programme), “Romania-Ukraine” (Romania-Ukraine Programme) and “Black Sea Basin” (Black Sea Programme). The objectives of these programmes were to promote economic and social development in border regions, address common challenges in environmental protection, public health, and safety, and improve conditions for the mobility of people, goods, and capital. The total budget for these European Neighbourhood Instrument programmes (2014-2020) implemented in Ukraine is approximately €400 million, 90% of which is EU funding allocated on a non-repayable basis (The Accounting Chamber).

Currently, joint projects between participating countries to promote regional development are regulated by the European Union’s Interreg NEXT 2021-2027 cross-border cooperation programmes (Interreg NEXT programmes). Since 2024, opportunities have been expanding, and all Ukrainian communities have the right to participate in the Interreg Europe 2021-2027 Programme. Interreg Europe is an EU programme focused primarily on interregional cooperation. Until recently, only regions from EU member states could participate in it. The main objective of the Interreg Europe 2021-2027 Programme is to improve policies and practices in the field of local self-government, using the best practices of European municipalities. The Interreg Europe 2021-2027 programme focuses on supporting innovation, education, medicine and culture, as well as developing urban and rural environments and improving regional governance to enhance the quality of life of citizens. Priority areas of the programme’s projects: smart Europe – research and innovation, digitalisation, start-ups; Green Europe – energy efficiency, waste and water management; United Europe – development of the European transport network and sustainable mobility; Social Europe – education, healthcare, inclusiveness, cultural development and sustainable tourism;

Europe closer to citizens – integrated urban and rural development; better regional governance – improving the work of local and regional authorities and the level of services they provide to citizens.

One of the main programmes aimed at improving border regions by promoting environmental stability, ensuring equal access to healthcare services, and improving management efficiency through support for cooperation between government agencies, organisations, and civil society representatives is Interreg VI-A NEXT Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine 2021-2027. As part of this programme, 39 projects with a total value of €48 million are being implemented in Zakarpattia region through 2025, of which approximately €15 million has been allocated to Zakarpattia region.

The Interreg VI-A NEXT Poland-Ukraine 2021-2027 programme aims to preserve cultural and historical heritage, improve regional accessibility, jointly address security issues, and support the development of health care and social services. As part of the programme, 12 projects with a total value of €35 million are being implemented in the region through 2025, of which approximately €10 million has been allocated to Zakarpattia region.

The Interreg VI-A NEXT Romania-Ukraine 2021-2027 programme aims to improve the environment through adaptation to climate change, biodiversity conservation, and pollution reduction. It also supports social development through inclusive education and healthcare services. In addition, the programme promotes effective management of cross-border cooperation by ensuring safe and secure borders. As part of the programme, 13 projects with a total value of €10 million are being implemented in the region as of 2025, of which approximately €5 million has been allocated to Zakarpattia region.

In total, within the framework of these programs, as of 2025, 69 projects with a total value of € 99 million are being implemented in Zakarpattia region, of which about €31 million has been allocated for Zakarpattia region. Among these successful actors implementing international projects is Uzhhorod National University, which, in 2025, is implementing six cross-border projects under the Interreg NEXT program, totalling over €1 million in grants.

The following section presents examples that clearly and convincingly illustrate the importance and practical benefits of cross-border cooperation across key areas of public life. In particular, projects are considered that were implemented in the fields of healthcare, transport infrastructure development, education, tourism, and prevention and response to emergencies and risk management, as well as protection and

conservation of the environment, biodiversity, and climate change mitigation.

These examples demonstrate how cross-border cooperation has strengthened interaction between border regions, improved the quality of services for citizens, and promoted the sustainable development of border areas.

Strengthening Cross-border Mobility, Developing Transport Infrastructure

In contemporary Europe, where interdependence among nations is continually intensifying, the expansion of cross-border mobility has become a crucial driver of economic development, social integration, and territorial cohesion. Within this context, infrastructure initiatives that enhance transport links between border regions play a pivotal role, enabling smoother movement of people, goods, and services while fostering closer regional cooperation.

Improving transport accessibility is not only economically significant but also strengthens social ties between people on both sides of the border, facilitating interaction among families, friends, and communities. It further enhances access to education, healthcare, and administrative services, while fostering a sense of unity and mutual respect between border regions. Modern infrastructure projects increasingly take environmental considerations into account, incorporating sustainable solutions such as cycling routes and public transportation, promoting the development of eco-tourism, and supporting the preservation of natural heritage.

Public Cross-Border Bicycle-Sharing System in Esztergom and Štúrovo (Slovakia-Hungary)

The project titled “Public Cross-Border Bicycle-Sharing System in Esztergom and Štúrovo” was implemented within the framework of the Interreg Slovakia – Hungary Cooperation Programme. Investments were directed toward both cities – Esztergom (Hungary) and Štúrovo (Slovakia) – which are separated by the Danube River and the Slovak-Hungarian border, with the aim of enhancing mobility between the two towns (Interreg Slovakia-Hungary 2014-2020).

The aim of the project was to introduce a new form of public transport that prioritizes environmentally friendly modes of mobility and further strengthens the connections between communities on both sides of the border. To achieve this objective, a bike sharing system was created, facilitating movement not only within the towns but also across the border via the Mária Valéria Bridge. Since the aforementioned bridge plays a symbolic role in the cooperation between Štúrovo and Esztergom, the bike

sharing system was named Mária Valéria Bike. The project was implemented from November 1, 2017, to March 31, 2020. The municipalities participated in its development as project partners, with a total investment value of €921,155. As a result, 14 bicycle stations were established (six in Štúrovo and eight in Esztergom), equipped with 60 conventional and 45 electric bicycles. Overall, the integration of the twin towns has been enhanced through the introduction of a new mode of transport that supports cross-border mobility within tourism flows, as well as improving daily cross-border commuting for work and education.

The joint bike sharing system enables residents of both towns, as well as tourists, to rent a bicycle from any platform and return it to any other station (A közösségi kerékpáros rendszer). The stations are strategically placed near major points of interest and public spaces in Esztergom (Hungary) and Štúrovo (Slovakia), ensuring convenient access to sustainable mobility options. The project “Public Cross-Border Bicycle-Sharing System in Esztergom and Štúrovo” can be regarded as a best practice example for several key reasons, including its innovation, long-term sustainability, community impact, and cross-border relevance. Its model is highly adaptable and can be replicated in other European or Ukrainian border regions. The shared management structure, based on cooperation between two municipal governments, ensures institutional stability, cost-effectiveness, and long-term operational viability. This governance approach fosters trust and ongoing collaboration between neighbouring border communities. The Mária Valéria Bike project stands as an exemplary initiative that integrates ecological sustainability, technological innovation, cross-border cooperation, and measurable social benefits. It illustrates how targeted investments in sustainable mobility can enhance quality of life, promote regional integration, and form a foundation for more inclusive and interconnected border areas.

Cross-border Accessibility of Hanušovice-Stronie Śląskie (Czech Republic-Poland)

The project “Cross-border Accessibility of Hanušovice-Stronie Śląskie”, recognised as one of the best initiatives in Czech-Polish cross-border cooperation during the 2014–2020 programming period (Interreg Česká Republika-Polsko 2014-2020), the project is aimed at increasing the tourism attractiveness of the border areas between the Czech Republic (Olomouc Region) and Poland (Kladsko County) by enhancing the use of the region’s natural and cultural potential. The project has improved conditions for tourism development in the border zone by reconstructing key road infrastructure, thereby enhancing accessibility.

On the Czech side: Road II/446 has been reconstructed from the town of Hanušovice to the intersection with Road III/44649, improving transport links in mountainous and naturally attractive areas, making them more accessible to tourists.

On the Polish side: Road No. 3230D has been reconstructed from Stronie Śląskie through the villages of Bolesławów and Nowa Morawa to the state border with the Czech Republic. This road leads to picturesque areas with potential for active, ecological and hiking tourism.

As a result of the project, the quality of life for local residents has been enhanced through improved infrastructure, accessibility to tourist attractions in the border region has increased, and economic activity has risen. The project effectively combines economic, social, environmental, and cultural dimensions of development, is based on cross-border partnership, and generates a lasting positive impact on local communities.

Improving Transport Accessibility of the Bošácka Valley (Czech Republic-Slovakia)

The renewed road provides improved access to the Bošácka Valley. As part of the cross-border project “Improving Transport Accessibility of the Bošácka Valley”, two sections of a single road linking border areas were reconstructed, enhancing transport accessibility for residents and visitors of the cross-border region. The project partners were the Trenčín Self-Governing Region and the Roads Directorate of the Zlín Region.

The upgraded road section on the Slovak side begins at the border with the municipality of Zemianske Podhradie and ends in the municipality of Nová Bošáca, with a total length of 4.095 km. The section on the Czech side starts at the state border with the Slovak Republic and ends at the intersection with road III/4984, for a total length of 3.508 km. Together, these road segments directly connect the Bošácka Valley area, totalling 7.603 km of reconstructed infrastructure (Úrad Vlády Slovenskej republiky, Príklady dobrej praxe).

The project is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund under the Interreg V-A Slovak Republic-Czech Republic Cross-Border Cooperation Programme.

The project aims to promote sustainable development in peripheral areas and sparsely populated rural regions, which often have lower infrastructure quality.

Investments in transport infrastructure reduce the isolation of such areas and stimulate their socio-economic growth. The renovated road improves population mobility, reduces travel time, and increases safety.

This is a striking example of effective institutional cooperation between two regions of different countries, aimed at jointly addressing accessibility and development issues.

***Construction of the Cross-border Connection Jaworzynka-Čierne-
-Skalite-stage 2 (Poland-Slovakia)***

The aim of the project was to establish a new road transport connection across the Polish-Slovak border that would significantly improve access to the TEN-T corridors. The most important outcome of the project is the enhancement of travel conditions within the Tri-Border area – the point where the borders of Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic meet. Only a few kilometres of road remain to be completed for residents and tourists to move freely across the border. The project implementation enabled the connection of the municipalities of Jaworzynka in Poland with Čierne and Skalité in Slovakia (KEEP. Knowledge Exchange Platform. Programme 2014 - 2020 INTERREG V-A Poland-Slovakia).

The borders of Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic meet in the Beskid Tri-Border area. Only a few kilometres of road remained to be built for residents and tourists to move freely across the border (0.71 km in the Istebna commune and 0.2 km in the Čierne commune). The municipalities of Istebna and Čierne decided to change this situation. As a result, the first border crossing to Slovakia was created in Cieszyn County. This has facilitated travel between the two municipalities and shortened the distance by approximately 20 km. It has also provided access to major transport routes leading to Bratislava, Budapest, and Vienna.

Well-marked, well-illuminated roads have significantly improved traffic safety. A newly built parking area and tourist shelters now offer rest facilities along the route. The project has led to a remarkable reduction in travel time, as residents and visitors from Istebna no longer need to take a detour through Zwardoń or Jablunkov (Czech Republic) to reach Slovakia – and vice versa.

The project establishing cross-border road connectivity in the Tri-Border area of Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic serves as an exemplary case of effective local development enabled by targeted infrastructure improvement. It demonstrates that even relatively small interventions (less than 1 km of road) can fundamentally transform regional mobility dynamics, enhance residents' quality of life, and strengthen the integration of border communities into the broader European space.

Cross-Border Healthcare

Healthcare is one of the most critical concerns for the population, as access to medical services is a primary determinant of quality of life. Due to the historical development of states centered around their capitals, it is typically the central regions that possess adequate healthcare infrastructure. In contrast, peripheral areas – particularly rural border regions – frequently experience significant shortages of such resources.

This inequality in access to medical services negatively affects the living standards of local residents, contributing to depopulation and the social marginalization of border territories. Under these circumstances, cross-border cooperation in the field of healthcare becomes especially relevant for ensuring equitable access to medical services and safeguarding the lives of people living in border regions.

Together for Saving Lives. Integrated Polish-Ukrainian System of First aid in the Area of the border (Poland-Ukraine)

Neighboring Bieszczady County and Staryi Sambir District set the goal of addressing similar challenges in the healthcare sector – the poor technical condition of medical equipment and ambulance vehicles, as well as the insufficient alignment of medical services with patient needs (Poland-Ukraine Programme). Cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and accidents remain among the most common causes of death in the region. Moreover, the increased traffic at the Smilnytsia-Krościenko border crossing requires the provision of medical assistance there.

With a budget exceeding EUR 2.5 million, the project aims to overcome threats and barriers in healthcare not only for residents of the cross-border regions but also for individuals crossing the border. The project HealthontheborderPLUA has been implemented by Bieszczady County (Podkarpackie Voivodeship, Poland), the Independent Public Ambulance Service in Ustrzyki Dolne, the Staryi Sambir District Council, and the Staryi Sambir Central District Hospital (Lviv region, Ukraine). In Ustrzyki Dolne, the hospital has been modernized through the establishment of a state-of-the-art, fully equipped and functional emergency care unit (three stations with comprehensive medical equipment, a new operating room, etc.). In addition, new equipment has been purchased for the diagnosis of cardiovascular diseases and cancer, which will subsequently be used in cross-border diagnostic programmes.

Project activities at the Staryi Sambir Hospital include replacing outdated equipment and providing new medical devices for the existing wards. The project has also ensured the procurement of a new ambulance and diagnostic equipment for cardiovascular diseases and cancer. Furthermore, medical personnel from both hospitals will enhance their knowledge and skills through joint meetings and training sessions.

The modernization and equipment upgrade of the hospitals in Ustrzyki Dolne and Staryi Sambir will ensure access to various types of cardiovascular and oncological diagnostics, enabling the provision of new, high-quality medical services for residents and tourists in the border regions. Joint trainings and the exchange of professional experience will enhance the qualifications of medical personnel on both sides of the border. As a result of the project, joint cross-border medical care procedures have been initiated for the population living in the Ukrainian-Polish border area.

Creation of a Cross-border Platform for the Diagnosis, Therapy and Research of Gastrointestinal Motility Disorders (Slovakia-Czech Republic)

The project addresses a medically relevant issue – gastrointestinal motility disorders. Within the framework of cross-border cooperation between medical institutions, namely the University Hospital in Brno (Czech Republic) and the Gastroenterology Clinic of the Jessenius Faculty of Medicine of Comenius University in Martin (Slovakia), infrastructural and organizational conditions have been established to enable effective diagnostics, therapy, and scientific research in this field.

A key purpose of the project was the establishment of a cross-border expert working group and the creation of a shared database of clinical outcomes for patients with gastrointestinal motility disorders (KEEP. Knowledge Exchange Platform. Programme 2014–2020 INTERREG V-A Slovakia-Czech Republic). The project included training medical professionals in advanced diagnostic techniques such as antroduodenal and anorectal manometry, as well as therapeutic methods based on biological feedback (biofeedback therapy).

The training of highly qualified specialists in the Czech Republic and Slovakia has created a stable foundation for the sustainable development of the regional healthcare system. The introduction of centres of excellence in gastroenterology will help reduce morbidity, improve the quality of diagnosis and treatment, and enhance the quality of life of patients and their families.

It is important to emphasize the crucial role played by universities and their clinical units in the implementation of cross-border healthcare initiatives. Acting not only as academic institutions but also as platforms for the deployment of innovative medical practices, they are central to advancing scientific research and improving healthcare delivery. Their contribution is decisive for research capacity-building: universities provide the fundamental and applied research necessary for the introduction of new diagnostic, therapeutic, and monitoring methods, serving as

generators of scientific concepts and approaches to solving complex clinical challenges.

University hospitals provide an ideal environment for testing and implementing new medical technologies in clinical practice. Within the framework of such projects, they organize educational programmes, training sessions, and internships, which contribute to the dissemination of advanced methods among physicians in practical healthcare.

Academic institutions maintain well-established international networks, which facilitate cross-border coordination, knowledge exchange, and the harmonisation of medical protocols. Owing to their stability and long-term presence in the region, universities ensure the preservation and further development of project outcomes even after funding has ended. Their involvement guarantees the sustainability of expertise, clinical data, and research infrastructure.

Another notable example of university cooperation and successful implementation of cross-border collaboration is the project carried out by Uzhhorod National University in partnership with the Medical Centre of the University of Debrecen.

Implementation of New Standards and Technologies for Surgical Treatment of Central Nervous System Diseases in the Cross-border Region (Hungary-Ukraine)

The project was implemented within the framework of the Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014–2020, and carried out during 2021–2023 (Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine Programme).

The main purpose of the project was to improve the level of medical care in the field of neurosurgery in the border regions of Ukraine and Hungary. The priority was to reduce mortality and morbidity caused by brain disorders, as well as to enhance surgical treatment, including for patients with central nervous system tumours, cerebrovascular diseases, degenerative spinal disorders and spinal trauma, and for those undergoing epilepsy surgery. The project aimed to shorten the duration and invasiveness of operations, minimise the rate of postoperative complications, and ensure a good quality of life for patients in the postoperative period.

To achieve these goals, state-of-the-art technologies were introduced in order to make minimally invasive surgery as accessible and precise as possible.

Within the framework of the project, neurosurgery specialists carried out a range of activities, produced a joint scientific publication, organised an international conference, and held several professional

training sessions to exchange expertise, where new standards and technologies in the surgical treatment of central nervous system disorders were discussed. Interns and postgraduate students were also involved in these events (Mediacentr UzhNU).

Crucially, high-cost medical equipment was purchased to ensure the highest level of surgical safety and provide surgeons with real-time navigation of their instruments. Neuronavigation is particularly valuable during the removal of tumours located in functionally critical areas of the brain, such as the brainstem. At the Regional Clinical Centre of Neurosurgery and Neurology – which serves as the clinical base of the Department of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry of Uzhhorod National University – operations are performed on patients from all over Ukraine, while the specialists of the Department possess one of the most extensive experiences in brainstem tumour surgery in Europe and are regularly invited to deliver lectures at leading international scientific conferences.

This project demonstrates all the key features of “best practice”: scientific justification, interregional cooperation, innovation, sustainability, professional capacity-building, and tangible clinical impact. It can serve not only as an example of a successful cross-border initiative but also as a model for scaling in other regions or for further funding under future EU programmes.

Improving Health Care Services in Social Facilities (Slovakia-Ukraine)

The aim of the cross-border project of the Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine 2014-2020 programme was to improve the medical care of clients of social institutions in the border region between Slovakia and Ukraine (Košice Self-Governing Region – Zakarpattia region) by enhancing the quality of services, training staff and infrastructure (Official website of the city of Uzhhorod).

The tasks included improving the skills and knowledge of staff of social facilities serving people with physical/medical disabilities, creating better conditions for therapy, rehabilitation in social facilities and ensuring a change in attitudes towards people with disabilities through information campaigns.

Training sessions, seminars, and courses were organised for staff at social institutions on providing assistance, rehabilitation, and communicating with clients with complex conditions. Information campaigns were conducted and informational materials were distributed to change stereotypes about people with disabilities. The material and

technical base of social institutions in Uzhhorod (partner institutions) was improved within the framework of the project.

The project is a good example of cross-border cooperation in the field of social assistance and health care, targeting a specific group – clients of social institutions with medical/physical impairments. The model can be replicated by other regions with similar challenges (border areas, regions with a high proportion of people with disabilities). It highlights the importance of combining measures: staff training, raising public awareness, and improving material resources.

The main goal of the first project was to improve health care in social service institutions in the Košice Self-governing Region and the city of Uzhhorod. We chose this project as an example of best practice because of its relevance, as it addresses two key areas that have long been neglected in both countries, namely social assistance and accessibility of health services. The project can also be transferred to other communities where social facilities operate.

Protection and Preservation of the Environment, Biodiversity and Climate Change Mitigation

Protecting the environment and mitigating the effects of climate change are among the most pressing challenges of our time, both globally and regionally. Climate change, ecosystem degradation and loss of natural habitats directly affect the quality of life, public health and sustainable development. In this context, initiatives aimed at conserving natural resources, introducing innovative solutions in the field of environmental monitoring and strengthening cooperation between communities, scientific institutions and authorities are of particular importance. Below are examples of projects being implemented to counter environmental threats and create a more sustainable and balanced environment for future generations.

Restoration of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services by Climate Change of Endangered Forests of the Beskydy Region (Czech Republic-Slovakia)

The project is implemented with the support of the European Union within the Interreg Slovakia-The Czech Republic Programme (KEEP. Knowledge Exchange Platform. Programme 2014–2020 INTERREG V-A Slovakia-Czech-Republic). Its goal is to respond to the threats that climate change poses to forest ecosystems in the Beskydy region and to implement systemic tools to reduce future risks. This will contribute to more effective biodiversity protection and the sustainable provision of ecosystem services.

The target area covers the landscape conservation areas of Beskydy (Czech Republic) and Kysuce (Slovakia). The project is implemented through six interrelated activities aimed at achieving three main objectives: adapting forests to climate change, conserving biodiversity and supporting ecosystem functions. The main activities of the project included creating a common database of climate scenarios. Regional and local climate change scenarios were developed based on long-term meteorological observations. The data are presented in a form accessible to the public and stakeholders and will serve as a basis for predicting impacts on forests and landscape functions. Identification and protection of key biodiversity sites. The state of forest biodiversity has been assessed, and the most valuable and vulnerable areas have been identified. This has resulted in the creation of a map of these areas and the development of a strategy for their protection under changing climate conditions.

Models of biodiversity change have been developed based on three types of management: traditional (focused on timber harvesting), non-intervention (natural forest development) and optimised nature conservation. The models are based on regional climate scenarios.

The attitudes of local communities and stakeholders towards climate threats and proposed adaptation measures were studied. The aim is to build support for implementing a climate change adaptation strategy in the border region. Participatory modelling of ecosystem service changes. With the participation of key stakeholders, potential changes in ecosystem services were modelled (including economic assessments of the benefits and costs of adaptation or inaction). An interactive map was created for adaptation planning.

Transforming even-aged spruce monocultures into close-to-nature, diverse forests. In a forest area of about 300 hectares near the Velki Polom Nature Reserve, the transformation of the age structure of spruce plantations has begun. The goal is to increase their resistance to climate impacts by introducing alternative forest management methods that differ from standard forest plans (IREAS. Network akademických pracovníků).

The project in Beskydy demonstrates a high level of integration of science, practice and community participation, as well as adaptive forest management in the context of climate change. It is these characteristics that make it a best practice worth replicating in other regions facing similar challenges.

Environmental Assessment for Natural Resources Revitalization in Solotvyno to prevent the further pollution of the Upper-Tisza Basin through the preparation of a complex monitoring system REVITAL I (Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine)

An example of best practices involving cities and communities in the field of environment and climate is a project implemented under the Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine European Neighbourhood Instrument Cross-border Cooperation Programme. The project addresses an important local issue of environmental pollution caused by abandoned mining activities (Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine Programme). This project is the first step towards further activities leading to several necessary measures to prevent further pollution (the sustainability criterion is key in this case). Several universities and research institutions in the region are also involved in the project, striving to offer the best solutions. The main partner of the project was the Tisza EGTC, with other partners including the University of Miskolc in Hungary, the Ukrainian village of Solotvyno, the Romanian city of Sighetu Marmației, the Technical University of Košice and the Institute of Geological Sciences of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.

The salt mines around Solotvyno were opened in the 14th century, they were an important source of salt supply for centuries, over time the mines gradually began to close (the last one closed in 2013). Groundwater leaches salt from the mines into the Tisza River. To prevent further surface degradation (mine collapses) and further pollution of the Tisza River, which would also affect Romania and Hungary, the Tisza European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (Tisza EGTC) (established in 2015 by Zakarpattia region (Ukraine) Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County and the city of Kisvárda) launched the REVITAL I project in 2019 with the participation of experts from Ukraine, Romania, Slovakia and Hungary.

REVITAL I is the first step towards gradually implementing environmental proposals. The main goal of the project was to lay the groundwork for revitalising the Solotvyno salt mine and the surrounding area by strengthening cross-border cooperation.

The project experts developed the Strategic Concept Note – a document containing analysis and recommendations for future decision-making at all levels, researched and assessed the current environmental status of the Solotvyno salt mine and its wider surroundings using innovative technologies, established research monitoring and prepared a comprehensive monitoring system to track qualitative and quantitative changes in surface and groundwater, as well as soil movements, raised awareness and promoted the project results at various levels. This is important not only for local residents but also, given the nature of the problem, for settlements along the Tisza River in all four countries. According to the plans, the first REVITAL project will be followed by

further relevant measures concerning the salt mines and the revitalisation of the entire border region around Solotvyno.

Although Slovak communities were not involved in the project, but the Technical University of Košice on behalf of the Slovak side, it is an example of activities to solve a local problem, in this case pollution, in the solution of which several subjects, including regional scientific institutions, can be engaged. Such cooperation also inspires the solution of problems in other areas.

Together for the Preservation and Restoration of the Biodiversity of the Ecosystems of the Carpathian Mountains (Poland-Slovakia)

The project of the Interreg V-A Poland-Slovakia 2014-2020 Program, implemented in the cross-border region of the Carpathians, was aimed at restoring, preserving and protecting the biodiversity of mountain ecosystems, as well as strengthening cooperation between organizations from different countries working in the field of nature conservation (Projekty Interreg V-A Poľsko-Slovensko 2014-2020).

The main goal was to ensure the ecological integrity of territories divided by the state border, as well as to harmonize approaches to the management of nature conservation objects, which are important not only at the national but also at the European level.

During the project implementation, botanical studies were conducted to assess the condition of mountain-meadow habitats; the nutrient composition of vegetation and soils in target areas was studied; and, as part of wildlife monitoring, biological samples were collected to detect traces of heavy metals and the presence of parasitic invasions.

A sustainable approach to the management of mountain-meadow ecosystems was also introduced in the area explored under the project, covering an area of 130 hectares. Mechanical and manual removal of shrub vegetation was carried out, local grass species were sown, and territory care measures were carried out. In degraded areas, a prototype seed-collection device was used to preserve local floral diversity. Fruit trees were planted as elements of the agricultural landscape and a source of food for wild animals. Hydrochemical tests of rainwater and watercourses near the revitalised areas were done (Lesy Slovenskej republiky, štátny podnik).

The project has high environmental and scientific value, as it has contributed to improving the condition of targeted natural environments, strengthening institutional capacity for cross-border cooperation, and establishing a practical basis for long-term management of mountain ecosystems across borders. Its implementation demonstrates the potential

for effective international cooperation in environmental protection and adaptation to changes driven by both anthropogenic and natural factors.

Preparation Activities of the Szigetköz-Žitný Ostrov Nature Park and Further Joint Nature Protection Initiatives (Hungary-Slovakia)

The Szigetköz-Žitný ostrov region, located within the Danube River basin, surrounded on the Slovak side by the Little Danube and on the Hungarian side by the Moson-Danube, is the largest inland delta in Europe.

This area is of significant natural value and vulnerability, which necessitates coordinated and targeted measures in the field of biodiversity conservation and natural resource management. Despite the intensification of interagency cooperation between environmental organizations only in recent years, there is a growing awareness of the need for institutionalized cross-border cooperation.

In order to strengthen the coordination of environmental activities and formalize cross-border cooperation, the NAT-NET DUNA/DUNAJ project partners initiated preparatory measures for the establishment of a joint nature park “The Szigetköz-Žitný Ostrov” (Interreg Slovakia–Hungary 2014-2020). In the future, this nature park should become the main platform for coordinating initiatives in nature protection, environmental education, and the development of ecotourism along the Hungarian-Slovak border.

The main activities of the project covered several key areas aimed at nature conservation, raising environmental awareness and developing sustainable tourism in the border region between Hungary and Slovakia.

An important component of the project is the improvement of the level of environmental education and awareness, in particular through the creation of three mobile interactive exhibitions and a mobile laboratory, which were used in six environmental centers and thirty schools on both sides of the border. Joint educational activities were held for schoolchildren from the regions of Szigetköz and Žitný ostrov, as well as inclusive seminars for people with disabilities from Hungary and Slovakia.

In terms of developing eco-mobility, the fleets of eco-vehicles in partner organisations have been expanded and improved, enabling the effective implementation of field education programmes using the upgraded infrastructure.

The implementation of preparatory measures for the creation of the Szigetköz-Žitný Ostrov Nature Park lays the foundation for long-term, structured and sustainable cross-border cooperation in the field of nature conservation. The project not only contributes to the preservation of unique natural environments and raises environmental awareness among

the population, but also establishes an institutional basis for the integrated management of protected areas in the border region. This approach is important given the need for comprehensive protection of ecosystems that do not recognise administrative boundaries and is in line with the principles of modern European environmental policy.

Joint development of cross-border tourism

In the modern European context, cross-border initiatives aimed at integrating the cultural potential of border areas, developing local tourism and popularising a common historical past are gaining particular relevance. Thanks to projects focused on promoting local culture and historical heritage alongside tourism, products are being developed that blur boundaries, and cultural programmes with a cross-border effect are being created.

“Open museums” – expanding the program options of cultural institutions in the Polish-Slovak border region (Poland-Slovakia)

In today’s society, which is increasingly striving to ensure equal access to cultural heritage, the implementation of cross-border initiatives aimed at inclusion in the museum space is becoming particularly important. One striking example of such an initiative is the project “Open museums” – expanding the program options of cultural institutions in the Polish-Slovak border region (Interreg V-A Poľsko-Slovensko 2014 - 2020) - which aims to improve the accessibility of museums for people with disabilities and reduced mobility. The main goal of the project was to create a comprehensive system of physical, informational, and sensory-emotional accessibility of cultural objects for people with visual and hearing impairments and autism spectrum disorders, as well as for caregivers and family members of people with special needs. Thanks to close cross-border cooperation between five Polish and two Slovak museums, as well as the Silesian House of Culture, a number of infrastructures, educational and socio-cultural initiatives have been implemented.

Considerable attention was paid to modernising the museum spaces: restoration and reconstruction work was carried out, buildings were adapted for visitors with reduced mobility, and inclusive recreation and learning areas were created. In particular, the Open-Air Museum in Szymbark has created a park dedicated to the history of folk construction with an interactive exhibition of traditional architecture of the Polish-Slovak borderland, as well as an exhibition of authentic folk costumes.

The Tatra Museum in Zakopane has developed and installed miniature tactile models of architectural objects in the style of Witkiewicz, accompanied by Braille descriptions, enabling blind and visually impaired

visitors to better understand the exhibition. In addition, sensory educational kits have been prepared to introduce visitors to the Podhale style in folk art, architecture and folklore.

In the Slovak village of Pribylina, the Liptov Museum has created a recreation area designed for people with disabilities. The village of Szlachtowa has received specialized educational premises with the necessary social and hygienic infrastructure as part of the project, which are used to hold classes, exhibitions and workshops for children and young people.

The Vistula Ethnographic Park in Wygielzów has introduced a new educational format, equipping an open-air workshop space with a pottery wheel and work tables specially adapted for children in wheelchairs. In addition, the park has a new sensory zone, where visitors can interact with nature through smells, sounds and tactile sensations. The so-called “green walls” made of plants, as well as a sound zone with bamboo pipes, wooden and metal elements, contribute to the development of sensory perception and emotional interaction with the environment.

The project also included the inclusive renovation of historic buildings, in particular the Nikifor Museum in Krynica-Zdrój and the Renaissance building in Orava Podzamcze, where new entrance pavilions were built to meet the needs of visitors with mobility impairments.

With the aim of digital inclusion, a mobile application has been developed that allows independent visits to museums, in particular providing navigation for people with visual impairments. This significantly increases the independence of visitors and helps to overcome barriers to accessing cultural services.

Overall, the activities implemented as part of the Open Museums project demonstrate a new approach to the functioning of cultural institutions in the border region between Poland and Slovakia. They not only contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage, but also play an important social role in expanding opportunities for people with disabilities, increasing their participation in cultural life, and shaping an inclusive, open society.

The project is an example of how culture can be not only a sphere of aesthetic consumption, but also a tool for social integration and overcoming discrimination. This is the first large-scale initiative in the Polish-Slovak border region that comprehensively and modernly responds to the challenges of inclusion in the museum environment, combining tradition, innovation and human sensitivity.

Thanks to its openness, transparency and documentation of processes, the project can serve as a model for implementation in other

regions, both within the EU and in Ukraine. The “Open Museums...” project is a best practice because it combines deep social content, innovative approaches, interregional cooperation and universal applicability. It sets new standards for accessibility in the cultural sphere and serves as a model for the effective management of inclusive projects.

“Silesianka” – a trail of observation towers and lookout sites in the Silesia Euroregion (Czech Republic-Poland)

As part of cross-border cooperation between the Czech Republic and Poland under the Interreg V-A Czech Republic-Poland programme, a large-scale tourism project called “Silesianka” was implemented. Its main goal was to create a comprehensive tourism product by building new observation towers and platforms and integrating existing ones in the Euroregion Silesia.

The project envisaged the construction of three new observation towers and their integration with all existing facilities of this type on the Polish-Czech border. In total, the Silesian trail includes 34 observation facilities (both newly built and existing) on both sides of the border, complemented by bicycle and walking routes that provide access to notable tourist locations.

The trail passes through several sites that illustrate the region’s natural, cultural, and historical diversity. Among the landmarks are the Opava Hlaska observation platform, the “Enchanted Garden” in the arboretum in Racibórz, Poland, the “Bolt” Tower in Dolni Vitkovice, the concrete tower in Šibenice near Stěbřice, which refers to the period of Czechoslovak military fortifications, and the observation tower on the border meanders of the Oder River in the Polish village of Halupky. The 30-metre-high Halaška tower near Budišov nad Budišovkou, offering a panorama from the Jeseníky Mountains to the Beskydy, is also particularly noteworthy.

The Silesianka project is primarily focused on family tourism and promotes the development of multi-day recreation in the region, offering convenient infrastructure, including accommodation options, and thematic excursions (KAM po Česku).

As part of the initiative, a loyalty programme has been created for visitors, including an interactive campaign called “Take a photo and win!”, aimed at actively attracting tourists. Each site has information signs with QR codes for registering to participate in the programme, as well as metal stamps that can be transferred to a special tourist book. Traditional stamps are also available at some locations.

Participants receive commemorative souvenirs, 3D models of observation towers, and board games, which are mainly aimed at children,

helping to increase the interest of the youngest participants. Awards can be obtained at tourist information centres in Ostrava, Opava and Odry. Promotional materials are also distributed free of charge: a route map, a multilingual brochure, a tourist book, as well as cards with descriptions of individual sites and a list of local attractions.

The symbol of the trail is a creative children's figurine – the character Silesianka, created as part of an art competition for children. This image accompanies visitors to the route, adding an element of playful interaction and brand recognition.

The "Silesianka" project was developed in accordance with the Development Strategy of the Euroregion Silesia for 2014–2020, and its further operation and promotion are ensured through the new initiative "Discover our Silesianka!", which provides for additional activities aimed at the promotion and sustainable development of the trail in the coming years.

Thus, the Silesianka Trail is an example of the successful implementation of a cross-border tourism project that combines cultural heritage, natural resources, modern infrastructure and innovative approaches to attracting visitors. It not only contributes to the development of local tourism, but also forms a sustainable tourism brand of Silesia at the European level.

The success of the project is based not only on the implementation of planned activities, stimulating the economy of small border settlements, but also on a long-term vision that envisages the preservation, development, and promotion of the trail in the future.

CULTPLAY – Interactive thematic parks – innovative use of cultural heritage (Slovakia-Hungary)

A project combining cultural heritage preservation with innovative tourism and educational practices has been implemented within the framework of the Interreg Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme. The primary goal of this initiative was to enhance the tourism attractiveness of the border region by creating new themed parks based on the shared historical, architectural, and cultural elements of both countries.

The project envisaged not only the infrastructure renovation of spaces across nine municipalities (six in Slovakia and three in Hungary), but also the development of a concept for interconnected cultural sites. These sites are designed to simultaneously function as interactive platforms, tourist attractions, and educational resources (Interactive Thematic Parks).

The innovative concept of CULTPLAY is based on a synergistic combination of play, historical narrative, and educational functions. The

parks, developed and established within the framework of the aforementioned project, have been given the consolidated designation of CULTPLAY.

These facilities represent interactive spaces that simultaneously fulfil a multifunctional role, serving as: a children's playground, an educational environment where architectural elements of cultural heritage sites are replicated, a tourist platform which utilizes augmented reality technologies and provides multilingual informational support.

The CULTPLAY park environment is highly adaptable for a broad spectrum of users: children, adults, local residents, and foreign tourists. Visitors access information in four languages (Hungarian, Slovak, English, and German), which promotes intercultural dialogue and ensures the openness of the space.

The key innovation of the project was the reciprocal presentation of cultural heritage across both sides of the Danube River. This model implies that sites of historical or architectural significance to one municipality were replicated as a themed park on the territory of a partner in the other country.

The pivotal innovation of the project lies in the reciprocal representational strategy for cultural heritage on both sides of the Danube River. This implementation model mandates the precise replication of sites possessing historical or architectural significance – originally situated in one participating municipality – into a thematically integrated park framework within the territory of the international partner. Specifically, Slovak heritage – such as the Komárno Fortress, the water mill in Kolárovo, or the Pázmány Castle – is represented in Hungarian towns, while Hungarian sites (the castle in Tata, the mines in Oroszlány, the Lovarda equestrian centre in Kisbér) are integrated into the urban environment of the Slovak municipalities. This implementation model actively contributes to the formation of a shared cultural identity in the cross-border region, while simultaneously emphasizing the uniqueness and value of the local heritage of each partner.

In addition to the physical creation of thematic parks, the project encompassed the development of a unified marketing strategy with a focus on cross-border appeal. This included joint CULTPLAY park branding, the production of printed and digital promotional materials, the implementation of an integrated marketing campaign, and the organization of thematic events, seminars, stakeholder meetings, and joint cultural initiatives. This approach not only promotes the sites themselves but also fosters a sustainable environment for interregional communication and cooperation.

The anticipated outcomes of the project implementation are multifaceted and include: increased mutual tourism between the regions; activation of social contacts among residents of the border communities; strengthening of cross-border mobility; engagement of children and youth in the study of cultural heritage through an interactive format.

Due to their multifunctional, playful, educational, and touristic roles, the CULTPLAY parks become unique “contact points” between history and modernity, tradition and technology, and the national cultures of the two countries.

The project focused on creating interactive themed parks serves as a prime example of the successful synergy between innovation, cultural heritage preservation, and cross-border cooperation. Through its realization, the project not only succeeded in revitalizing local historical narratives but also established modern infrastructure that facilitates intercultural dialogue, educational activities, and sustainable tourism development within the region. This serves as a best-practice model that can be adapted for other cross-border territories across Europe.

Cultural and Historical Heritage as a Basic Attribute of National Awareness (Czech Republic-Slovakia)

As an example of best practice, we may consider the cross-border project “Cultural and Historical Heritage as a Basic Attribute of National Awareness” (Východní Morava), implemented in partnership between the East Moravia Tourism Centre (the Czech Republic) and the Regional Tourism Organization of the Trenčín Region (the Czech Republic). The project aimed to deepen the national consciousness of residents in the border region through the promotion of cultural and natural heritage sites, the enhancement of access to historical knowledge, and the development of sustainable tourism. This paper highlights the key areas of activity, the main outcomes of the project, and the prospects for further initiatives in the field of cross-border cooperation.

The project “Cultural and Historical Heritage as a Basic Attribute of National Awareness”, implemented during 2024–2025, exemplifies effective collaboration between the Czech and Slovak Republics in the domain of cultural tourism and historical-educational activities.

The primary objective of this project was to elevate public awareness concerning the value of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage assets within the cross-border area. Concurrently, the project aimed to stimulate scholarly and public interest in exploring the historical traditions of the Trenčín and Zlín regions.

Key tasks encompass: the popularization of cultural heritage sites (including those inscribed on the UNESCO list, national monuments,

castles, manors, parks, and ruins); the development of new tourist routes and the creation of a comprehensive tourist guide; the organization of educational events and study trips for knowledge exchange; the compilation of a compendium of best practices on the management of tourist facilities; and the implementation of a targeted marketing campaign utilizing both online and offline formats.

Project activities were grounded in a synthesis of research, analytical, and applied methodologies, engaging a wide range of stakeholders (including tourism operators, representatives of local self-government bodies, schools, and civil society organizations).

Within the scope of the project, a thorough analysis of the existing tourism infrastructure in the Zlín and Trenčín regions was conducted. Furthermore, photo documentation of sites with touristic appeal was executed, and new routes were developed and customized to meet the requirements of diverse target groups (including young travellers, families with children, students, and senior citizens).

A crucial element of the implementation was the educational component, specifically the organization of six study trips: four across the territory of the Czech Republic and two across the territory of the Slovak Republic. These events ensured a robust exchange of best practices among tourism professionals from both countries and contributed to the formation of a unified vision for the advancement of cultural tourism.

The compiled compendium of best practices encompasses descriptions of successful management models for tourist sites held in ownership by state authorities, the private sector, ecclesiastical structures, and civil society organizations. Particular emphasis is placed upon innovative forms of audience communication and documented examples of effective promotion strategies for lesser-known, yet historically significant, heritage assets.

A multi-faceted informational and educational campaign was strategically deployed, the scope of which encompassed: the systematic updating of partner web sites; active engagement in professional exhibitions, trade fairs, and academic conferences; the leveraged utilization of digital communication conduits (social networks, dedicated online platforms); and the dissemination of high-quality printed promotional collaterals.

The outcome of the implemented project lay in deepening intercultural dialogue between the regions, increasing the tourism appeal of the border territories, intensifying local communities' participation in cultural heritage preservation, and establishing means for the sustainable development of local tourism. The project contributed not only to

strengthening the tourism infrastructure but also to the formation of long-term cooperation mechanisms in the sphere of cultural policy at the regional level.

The project “Cultural and Historical Heritage as a Basic Attribute of National Awareness” affirms the efficacy of cross-border initiatives in the realm of cultural tourism and the preservation of historical memory. Such experience can serve as a model for the implementation of analogous projects in other European regions where the combination of local identities with a shared cultural space is of critical importance.

Development of Cross-border Cooperation in Education

In the contemporary world, education is a key determinant of individuals’ professional fulfillment and their opportunities in the labour market. This is particularly salient for border and peripheral regions, which often experience limited access to high-quality employment and lower economic activity compared to central areas of a country. In this context, cross-border cooperation in the field of education unlocks new prospects for residents on both sides of the frontier. Joint educational programmes, student and teacher exchanges, the establishment of simulated school firms, dual education models, and vocational courses collectively contribute to elevating the quality of education, better preparing young people for the actual labour market, and fostering practical skills. Furthermore, the harmonisation and mutual recognition of educational standards and qualifications between partner countries facilitate the mobility of graduates and workers, which in turn enhances the overall competitiveness of the region.

Such cooperation also strengthens social ties between neighboring communities, supports cultural exchange, and promotes greater mutual understanding and tolerance. Ultimately, cross-border education represents not only an investment in individual career development but also a contribution to the long-term growth of the region as an integrated European space.

Competence 4.0 (Czech Republic-Poland)

In the context of the rapid development of digital technologies and the transformation of the labour market, the project “Competence 4.0” emerged as one of the first holistic initiatives seeking to adapt secondary education to the conditions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Implemented between January 1, 2019, and December 31, 2022, the project covered territories in the Czech Republic and Poland, focusing on enhancing the competitiveness of secondary school graduates in the border regions.

The primary objective of the project was to identify the new competencies relevant under the conditions of Industry 4.0 and to develop instruments for their implementation into the educational process. Priority was given to practical approaches to learning, the formation of entrepreneurial skills, and the adaptation of students to changes in the technological and economic environment.

A key component of the project involved the establishment of “simulated companies” (or “fictitious firms”), through which 1,230 students (592 from the Czech Republic and 638 from Poland) participated in the practical training incorporating entrepreneurial elements over a two-year academic period. This engagement facilitated the acquisition of proficiencies in accounting, marketing, and sales management, alongside the development of critical thinking and collaborative skills within a context highly approximating a genuine business environment, yet devoid of financial exposure.

Multimedia laboratories and e-learning programmes, which included instruction in the Czech language for the Polish cohort, played a specific supportive function in the educational methodology.

Within the framework of the project, methodological principles were developed for the identification of new market-oriented competencies, taking into account global and local trends in the sphere of employment. To this end, working groups were established in 10 key economic sectors, engaging experts from various domains, ranging from business representatives to academic institutions.

Throughout the year, these interdisciplinary teams systematically analysed the anticipated shifts in employment structure and qualification requirements. Based on their work, the following deliverables were formulated: cards of new competencies, competency pyramids for primary and continuing education, maps of broad professions, and detailed competency profiles that can serve as the foundation for updating curricula.

These innovative solutions were piloted in the Moravian-Silesian, Ústí nad Labem, Zlín, and Central Bohemian regions, following which the elaborated materials were disseminated at the nationwide level (Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí).

Through close interaction with the business sector, the project enabled employers to directly influence the content of educational programmes. This approach not only enhanced the relevance of education to market needs but also ensured graduates’ improved readiness for actual employment within their region.

The project “Competence 4.0” was co-financed by the European Union through the Interreg Czech Republic–Poland programme and also received support from the budget of the Lubań Powiat (Okresní hospodářská komora Liberec). Participation in the project was provided free of charge to both students and teachers.

“Competence 4.0” serves as an exemplary case of how an educational system can effectively respond to the structural challenges of modernity. Through a comprehensive approach that integrates practical learning, interregional cooperation, and methodological innovation, the project not only prepared students for the emerging labour market but also established the foundation for the sustained modernisation of education within the digital era.

Digitalization and Innovation of Education in Musculoskeletal Diagnostics (Slovakia-Czech Republic)

Another successful project was implemented by higher education institutions in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, with the support of the Interreg Programme within the investment priority of “investing in education, training, and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning by developing education and training infrastructure” (Škola Diagnostiky).

The core of the project is to enhance the relevance of educational content in the field of musculoskeletal system diagnostics with the goal of improving the employment prospects of university students in the labour market. The project’s objective was to develop a joint educational programme for universities specializing in health sciences and physical education. This programme was verified by participating institutions in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. It incorporates innovative learning materials that align with the requirements of modern physiotherapy, rehabilitation, and sports practice. These materials include updated diagnostic methods for the musculoskeletal system utilizing new technologies and corresponding applications, as well as techniques for data evaluation and result interpretation.

An additional value lies in the biomechanical analysis of movement across different population groups, including individuals with motor skill impairments due to illness or injury. Such innovations, coupled with the integration of digital technologies into the educational process, will enhance the effectiveness of instruction and the accessibility of e-learning materials, lectures, and seminars.

The acquisition of new knowledge and experience in assessing the human musculoskeletal system using contemporary diagnostic methods and procedures will enable students to develop the key competencies required by modern professional practice.

The development and implementation of this programme involved researchers, educators, and practitioners in the fields of physiotherapy, rehabilitation, biomechanics, and functional diagnostics.

The project was strategically managed from 2021 to 2023 by the academic staff of Cyril and Methodius University in Trnava and Palacký University Olomouc. The initiative also benefited from the expertise of specialists from several other institutions, including Prešov University, Alexander Dubček University of Trenčín, Catholic University in Ružomberok, Masaryk University in Brno, University of Ostrava, and Tomas Bata University in Zlín.

The project is aimed at updating the knowledge and refining the practical skills of specialists in the fields of physical therapy, rehabilitation, and sports medicine, a focus that has acquired particular salience for Ukraine amid the conditions of full-scale war. As a consequence of hostilities, there has been a significant increase in the number of individuals with musculoskeletal injuries among both military personnel and the civilian population. This situation necessitates the urgent training of highly qualified personnel capable of applying contemporary methods of diagnosis, rehabilitation, and biomechanical analysis of movement. This project can therefore be leveraged as a model for the modernisation of Ukraine's higher medical education system, aligning it with the requirements of post-war recovery and the standards of evidence-based medicine.

Stop Bullying – No Bullying (Hungary-Slovakia)

A project was executed within the framework of a cross-border cooperation programme, with the primary objective of providing systemic support to educational institutions in the field of prevention and mitigation of bullying manifestations (KEEP. Knowledge Exchange Platform). The project activities were focused on three key target groups: teachers, pupils, and parents.

During the initial implementation phase, a needs analysis was conducted for each target group. Based on the data acquired, a comprehensive set of methodological tools and practical recommendations was developed. These resources were designed to enhance the capacity of teachers to timely identify, respond to, and prevent aggression and bullying among schoolchildren. Recognising that the efficacy of preventive measures significantly increases with the involvement of parents, the project also included provisions for familiarizing parents with the relevant methodologies and engaging them as partners in the educational process.

For students, an innovative component was elaborated: an educational theatrical training intended to foster an awareness of the negative consequences of bullying and cultivate empathy through dramatic practices.

The project implemented the following key components: three analytical studies were conducted in Slovakia and Hungary; training curricula were developed for parents and teachers, alongside trainer preparation programmes for both groups; a methodological guide detailing contemporary approaches to bullying prevention was produced; and collections of best practices (know-how) were compiled. A series of training sessions for educators and parents was conducted, complemented by an information campaign to raise social awareness. In total, 10 school events were organised (five in each country), a theatrical educational programme involving 200 students was realised, and individual mentoring support was provided to teachers and parents. Furthermore, a short PR-film and a television commercial were produced and broadcast on regional television channels, along with a digital campaign across social media platforms.

The project yielded several tangible outcomes: the level of pupil safety within the school environment was demonstrably increased, the capacity of educators to timely identify the preliminary indicators of bullying was reinforced, and both teachers and parents were equipped with actionable tools for violence prevention. Moreover, the collaborative partnership between the school and the parental community was broadened, facilitating the effective resolution of conflict situations.

This project exemplifies a successful practice, given its integration of a scientific underpinning, innovative methodologies, practical implementation, cross-border cooperation, and the strategic sustainability of its results. Consequently, it is positioned to serve as an effective model for analogous initiatives in the domain of education and the prevention of school violence.

Cross-border Cluster of Gymnasiums G13 (Poland–Slovakia)

The project, titled “Cross-border Cluster of Gymnasiums G13”, stands as an example of an ambitious initiative in the sphere of cross-border cooperation between educational institutions in Poland and Slovakia. The core objective of the project was the creation of a sustainable cluster of gymnasiums, within which all partner schools would implement a unified model for the advanced training (upskilling) of pedagogical staff, with the aim of enhancing the quality of the educational process and the internal development of the educational establishments (Projekt G13).

A key element of this model is the systemic cooperation and continuous exchange of experience among cluster participants, which is actualised through both inter-institutional meetings and digital formats, notably including video materials and virtual learning platforms. This structure ensures the feasibility of transferring best practices within a cross-border dimension.

The project solution is distinguished by its innovativeness due to several determining factors:

- Overcoming educational barriers between the two national education systems, notably through a transition towards a unified conceptualisation of planning, didactics, and the execution of the educational process. This strategy facilitates the formation of a cohesive educational environment within the border regions.

- Implementation of a vectorial (integrative) approach to learning, wherein key thematic content permeates multiple subjects. This ensures interdisciplinary interaction and fosters the development of complex, holistic thinking in both educators and students.

- Organisation of subject-oriented meetings and workshops within the cluster, which serve as forums for discussing specific challenges in the educational process, as well as for the development and presentation of practical, school-environment-tested solutions.

The project is strategically directed towards institutional strengthening of schools through: investment in the material and technical provision of the educational process, enhancement of teachers' professional competence, and the development of mechanisms for horizontal experience exchange.

The central mandate of managing the initiative consists in elevating the quality of education in gymnasiums across both countries through long-term cross-border interaction, focusing on the sustainable development of regional educational systems.

An analysis of the 2014–2020 programming period indicates that among the cross-border projects under the Interreg programmes (Czech Republic-Poland, Slovakia-Poland, Slovakia-Czech Republic, Hungary-Slovakia) aimed at the development of education, vocational training, and investment in school infrastructure, the highest number of projects – a total of 43 – was implemented in the territories of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This data underscores the high regional activity in implementing educational innovations through cross-border cooperation mechanisms.

Prevention of Disasters

Extension of the Operational Space Emergency System towards Monitoring of Dangerous Natural and Man-made Geo-processes in the HU-SK-RO-UA Cross-border Region

The selection of this project as an example of best practice is based on its clear cross-border dimension, particularly in the joint monitoring, analysis and management of natural and man-made risks in the territories of four countries – Ukraine, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania – which share common natural systems (notably the Tisza river basin) and face similar threats such as floods, landslides and earthquakes (Official website of Uzhhorod National University).

A team of representatives from the four countries conducted geomonitoring of natural and technological processes across the cross-border area to prevent emergencies. The project “Extension of the Operational Space Emergency System towards Monitoring of Dangerous Natural and Man-made Geo-processes in the HU-SK-RO-UA Cross-border Region” was elaborated upon to integrate advanced methodologies into new, harmonised and innovative approaches in order to improve the understanding of ground deformation (landslides) along the Tisza river and their environmental impacts. The project also reflects effective interaction between researchers and stakeholders, as civil protection bodies are systematically informed about the project’s results, demonstrating how research contributes to the risk-management cycle.

Researchers from Uzhhorod National University, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, and the Budapest University of Technology and Economics ensured the development of an integrated and unified monitoring network that covers the border regions of several countries and enables harmonised data collection and processing. They also created a shared cross-country database (for example, of zenith tropospheric delays) that is used for weather forecasting and regional-scale risk assessment, and developed a transboundary GIS-based risk map that represents hazardous processes irrespective of national borders, thereby contributing to comprehensive territorial safety planning.

This project can also be considered a best practice, as it effectively combines scientific research, international cooperation, and the practical application of results to reduce the risks posed by emergency situations in the cross-border region.

Safe Borderland (Czech Republic-Poland)

The “Safe Borderland” project strengthened cooperation between the fire and rescue services of the Czech Republic and Poland along their

shared border. Firefighters and other emergency response personnel organised conferences, took language courses, held expert meetings, conducted training activities, and acquired specialised equipment essential for their mission (European Commission).

The project has significantly improved cooperation between fire brigades across the entire Czech-Polish border. In the event of an emergency, citizens will receive assistance regardless of national boundaries.

Within the framework of the project, new specialised equipment was purchased for joint use by Czech and Polish rescue teams. This includes mountaineering gear, breathing apparatus, specialised fire trucks and boats, and radio communication devices for use during on-site evacuations.

The equipment will improve the quality of cross-border training and enable more comprehensive preparation for firefighters. Future planned investments include a new data-processing system that will support emergency services in managing and exchanging information during crisis situations.

The Czech-Polish border covers 47,000 square kilometres and is home to nearly 7.1 million inhabitants. When natural disasters such as fires and floods cross national boundaries, fire and rescue services from different countries must be able to cooperate seamlessly. The project strengthens collaboration among all national bodies responsible for disaster response and safety in the region. It also involves adapting risk-prevention and risk-management measures to address the consequences of climate change, including erosion, wildfires, floods, storms, and droughts.

Polish project partners include the Voivodeship Headquarters of the State Fire Service in Opole and Wrocław. Czech partners include the Fire Rescue Services of the Liberec, Pardubice, Hradec Králové, Olomouc, and Moravian-Silesian regions.

The total investment in the “Safe Borderland” project amounts to €7,936,284.

Joint Activities for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in the Transboundary Uzh River Basin. FloodUZH (Slovakia-Ukraine)

The FloodUZH project aims to enhance the effectiveness of flood protection for the population of the Uzh River valley and to improve the river’s hydrological regime under low-water conditions and drought. The implementation area covers more than 2,700 km², including 2,000 km² in Ukraine and 740 km² in Slovakia, while the total length of the river section under study amounts to 133 km (NGO “ECOSPHERE”).

Within the framework of the project, two-year scientific research on the biodiversity of the river ecosystem, including the area within the city of Uzhhorod, was conducted, and an assessment of the impact of the planned construction of a retaining dam on the ecological state of the river and its riparian zone was carried out. The findings were summarised in a Biodiversity Impact Assessment Report and a dedicated monograph.

Among the key outcomes were: the development of a Digital Terrain Model (DTM) and a 2D hydrological model; the creation of flood hazard and flood risk maps; the preparation of design documentation for the construction of a spillway; as well as the organisation of numerous seminars, conferences, public hearings, and training events to engage relevant stakeholders. Particular emphasis was placed on environmental education activities for Uzhhorod school students, focusing on the role of river ecosystems in climate stability and nature conservation.

FloodUZH, with project partners including the Tisza River Basin Water Resources Administration, the Uzhhorod Interdistrict Water Management Department, the Uzhhorod City Council, civic organization “ECOSPHERE”, and the Slovak Water Management Enterprise has become a notable example of effective cross-border cooperation that integrates science, engineering, and environmental education to support joint management of natural disaster risks in the Uzh River basin.

Joint protection of people and environment through the creation of Ukrainian-Polish system of disasters prevention and response in the Carpathian Euroregion (Poland-Ukraine)

To protect people and the environment of the Carpathians, the SECINCARP project introduced a comprehensive cooperation system for the prevention of and response to natural and technological disasters between four regional fire units in Poland and Ukraine. The position of the Carpathians within a shared ecosystem necessitates joint approaches, including cooperative safety measures.

Major investments on the Ukrainian side include the procurement of 14 fire vehicles of various technical specifications: medium-type fire and rescue trucks, specialised vehicles for mobile operational groups, and minibuses for regional emergency-response units. On the Polish side, the construction and full equipment of a specialised training facility – a smoke chamber – in Przemyśl will enable personnel from both countries to enhance their competencies through professional training seminars simulating real emergency situations. Through joint training, awareness-raising, and strategic planning activities, the project has established the foundations for deeper cooperation between Ukrainian and Polish firefighting institutions when addressing safety challenges.

Among the project partners are the Association of Local Self-Government Bodies “Euroregion Carpathians – Ukraine” (Lviv region, Ukraine), the Main Department of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine in Lviv region, the Main Department of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine in Ivano-Frankivsk region, the Main Department of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine in Zakarpattia region, and the Regional Headquarters of the State Fire Service in Rzeszów (Poland-Ukraine Programme).

As a result, the fire and emergency rescue units are enhancing their capacity for rapid, effective responses to emergencies in mountainous areas, which will directly contribute to the safety of residents and the protection of the Carpathian environment. The project will generate a synergistic effect for the regions, local communities, and tourists on both sides of the Polish-Ukrainian border.

Conclusions

Therefore, within the scope of the above-analysed programs, which were completed, the largest in terms of funding (with a budget of approximately €250.17 million, of which slightly more than €212.65 million came from the European Regional Development Fund) was INTERREG V-A Czech Republic-Poland 2014-2020 (Czech Republic-Poland), with over 400 projects implemented. Among the key priorities were the protection and development of natural and cultural heritage (60% of the budget), improved accessibility, risk management, education and qualifications, cooperation between institutions and communities, and technical assistance. Hence, the funded projects covered a broad range of areas, including cooperation between emergency response services – a field that was practically absent in other programmes mentioned here. According to research, the largest number of projects was implemented under the priority “Cooperation of Institutions and Communities in the Border Region”. Although this priority did not receive the largest share of funding compared to others (€54.5 million, or ~24.1%), it demonstrated a high level of project submissions and successful implementation. The programme’s website showcases exemplary projects that meet key criteria such as effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and others. These criteria influenced the selection of the best practices described above.

The INTERREG V-A Poland-Slovakia 2014–2020 programme, from a total ERDF co-financing amount of €178.6 million, allocated more than half – over €101.1 million – specifically for the creation of joint, sustainable products based on cultural and natural heritage. Within the priority “Protection and Development of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Border Region”, there were implemented numerous projects aimed

at preserving and promoting natural and cultural landmarks such as castles, churches, museums, and nature reserves. These initiatives also contributed to tourism development and strengthened cooperation between communities on both sides of the Poland-Slovakia border. Notably, the results of these projects are intended to create potential for future development.

This priority has also become a key strategic direction for local communities in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, which have sought to preserve and enhance their cultural and natural heritage through joint initiatives with partners across the border. The INTERREG V-A Slovakia–Czech Republic 2014–2020 programme facilitated the development of cross-border cooperation by supporting priorities related to the protection and valorisation of natural and cultural heritage (€59.9 million) and by strengthening institutional cooperation between local and regional actors (€39.8 million).

These measures contributed to consolidating inter-community relations and to the sustainable development of the border region. Admittedly, the overall budget of the programme – approximately €99.68 million – was the smallest among comparable Interreg cross-border initiatives (Czech Republic-Poland, Slovakia-Poland, Slovakia-Czech Republic, and Hungary-Slovakia).

It is particularly important to highlight that the largest number of projects (43) were aimed towards the development of education, vocational training, and the improvement of school infrastructure in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This demonstrates a significant level of regional engagement in advancing educational innovation through cross-border cooperation mechanisms.

The INTERREG V-A Slovakia–Hungary 2014–2020 programme had a total budget of over €172.3 million, of which approximately €146.4 million was financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The programme budget was allocated among three main priority lines: the preservation and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage in the border region; the improvement of cross-border mobility and the development of transport infrastructure; and the strengthening of cooperation between public authorities and institutions in both countries. These priorities reflect the key strategic directions of cooperation between Slovakia and Hungary. Within this programme, the improvement of infrastructure, particularly measures focused on reducing border-crossing time, developing road infrastructure and enhancing public transport, received the largest share of funding, exceeding €92.8 million.

As demonstrated by the examples discussed in this section, the INTERREG V-A programmes represent a complex mechanism of financial support for the integrated development of border regions. They aim to bring together the countries of the Visegrad Group through the advancement of culture and tourism, the enhancement of institutional cooperation, the engagement of local communities in grassroots initiatives, cross-border integration and interaction, and flexible support for both large- and small-scale projects. All of these programmes share a common logic: strengthening ties between people and fostering the sustainable development of border areas, while the practical outcomes of the projects contribute to the social and economic transformation of the region under study.

References:

A közösségi kerékpáros rendszer. Retrieved from <https://mariavaleriabike.eu/>

Black Sea Programme. Retrieved from <http://blacksea-cbc.net/>

Construction of the Jaworzynka-Čierne-Skalite cross-border connection, stage 2 KEEP. Knowledge Exchange Platform. Programme 2014 - 2020 INTERREG V-A Poland – Slovakia. Retrieved from <https://keep.eu/projects/22220/Construction-of-the-Jaworzy-EN/>

Creation of a cross-border platform for the diagnosis, therapy and research of gastrointestinal motility disorders. KEEP. Knowledge Exchange Platform. Programme 2014 - 2020 INTERREG V-A Slovakia-Czech Republic. Retrieved from <https://keep.eu/projects/28927/Creation-of-a-cross-border-EN/>

Cultural and Historical Heritage as a Basic Attribute of National Awareness. KEEP (Knowledge and Expertise Exchange Platform). Retrieved from <https://keep.eu/projects/19861/Cultural-and-Historical-Her-EN/>

Environmental Assessment for Natural Resources Revitalization in Solotvyno to prevent the further pollution of the Upper-Tisza Basin through the preparation of a complex monitoring system <https://huskroua-cbc.eu/projects/financed-projects-database/environmental-assessment-for-natural-resources-revitalization-in-solotvyno-to-prevent-the-further-pollution-of-the-upper-tisza-basin-through-the-preparation-of-a-complex-monitoring-system>

European Commission. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects/poland/polish-czech-firefighters-team-up-to-improve-crisis-preparedness

European Neighbourhood Instrument CBC programmes 2014-2020
Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/cbc_en

Find policy solutions. Interreg Europe. Retrieved from <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policy-solutions/good-practices>

First Cross-Border Bicycle Sharing System Completed in Štúrovo and Esztergom Interreg Slovakia–Hungary 2014-2020. Retrieved from <https://www.skhu.eu/funded-projects/public-cross-border-bicycle-sharing-system-in-esztergom-and-sturovo>

Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine Programme. Retrieved from <http://www.huskroua-cbc.net/>

Implementation of new standards and technologies for surgical treatment of central nervous system diseases in cross-border region. Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine Programme. Retrieved from <https://huskroua-cbc.eu/projects/financed-projects-database/implementation-of-new-standards-and-technologies-for-surgical-treatment-of-central-nervous-system-diseases-in-cross-border-region>

Interactive Thematic Parks. Retrieved from <https://www.cultplay.eu/en>

Interreg Česká republika – Polsko 2014-2020. Retrieved from <https://cz.cz-pl.eu/dobra-praxe/vzorove-projekty>

Interreg NEXT programmes. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/next_en

Interreg Slovensko-Česko 2021-2027 Retrieved from <https://14-20.sk-cz.eu/sk/>

Interreg V-A Poľsko-Slovensko 2014-2020. Projekty. Retrieved from <https://projekty.plsk.eu/sk/projekty/projekt/74>

IREAS. Network akademických pracovníků. Retrieved from <https://www.ireas.cz/projekty/obnova-biodiverzity-a-ekosystemovych-sluzeb-klimatickou-zmenou-ohrozenych-lesu-regionu-beskyd/>

KAM po Česku. Retrieved from <https://www.kampocesku.cz/clanek/32287/silesianka-stezka-rozhleden-a-vyhlidkovych-mist-v-euroregionu-silesia>

KEEP. Knowledge Exchange Platform. Retrieved from <https://keep.eu/>

Lesy Slovenskej republiky, štátny podnik. Retrieved from https://www.lesy.sk/lesy/o-nas/projekty-spolupraca/projekty-eu/projekty/pl-sk-2014-2020/pl-sk-2014-2020.html?fbclid=IwAR0SKhLmU2NGIBOm_PX-SnDZh0nZptloWcSQVR-oZ3nbcx-o2IBCw-A2ddY

Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí. Podrobné informace o projektovém záměru, cílech a přínosech projektu Retrieved from <https://www.mpsv.cz/podrobne-informace-o-projektovem-zameru-cilech-a-prinosech-projektu>

Obnova biodiverzity a ekosystémových služeb klimatickou změnou ohrožených lesů regionu Beskyd. Stránká projektu. Retrieved from http://beskydy.czechglobe.cz/?page_id=24

Okresní hospodářská komora Liberec. Retrieved from <https://ohkliberec.cz/projekty/kompetence-4-0/>

Poland-Ukraine Programme. Retrieved from <http://www.pbu2020.eu/en>

Preparation Activities of the Szigetköz-Žitný Ostrov Nature Park and Further Joint Nature Protection Initiatives. Interreg Slovakia–Hungary 2014-2020. Retrieved from <https://www.skhu.eu/funded-projects/preparation-activities-of-the-szigetkoz-zitny-ostrov-nature-park-and-further-joint-nature-protection-initiatives>

Project Success Criteria: Realistic Expectations for Optimal Results Retrieved from <https://www.ittoolkit.com/articles/project-success-criteria>

Projekt G13. Retrieved from <https://www.g13.sk/sk/projekt-g13-1>

Projekty Interreg V-A Poľsko-Slovensko 2014-2020. Retrieved from <https://projekty.plsk.eu/sk/projekty/projekt/47>

Romania-Ukraine Programme. Retrieved from [https://ro-ua.net/en/Skola Diagnostiky](https://ro-ua.net/en/Skola_Diagnostiky). Retrieved from <https://www.skoladiagnostiky.sk/?no-popup=1>

Slovenská republika - Česká republika. Retrieved from 2014 - 2020 <https://14-20.sk-cz.eu/sk/projekty/zoznam-projektov>

Tisza EGTC. Retrieved from <https://tiszaett.hu/en/home/>.

Úrad Vlády Slovenskej republiky Príklady dobrej praxe. Retrieved from <https://www.partnerskadohoda.gov.sk/zlepsenie-dopravnej-dostupnosti-bosackej-doliny/>

Veselý, A. (2011). Theory and methodology of best practice research: A critical review of the current state. *Central European Journal of Public Policy*, 5(2), 98–117.

Východní Morava. Retrieved from <https://www.ccrvm.cz/doc/kulturni-a-historicke-dedictvi-jako-zakladni-atribut-narodniho-uedomeni/>

Duleba, O., Oravtsova, V., & Gavaltsova, A. (2023). Slovatsko-ukrainske transkordonne spivrobotnytstvo na mistsevomu ta rehionalnomu rivniakh yak instrument spilnogo terytorialnogo rozvytku ta onovlennia

Ukrainy: Posibnyk z planuvannia ta realizatsii proektiv transkordonnoho spivrobotnytstva. Bratyslava.

Official website of the NGO "ECOSPHERE". Retrieved from <https://ekosfera.org/spilni-zahody-z-poperedzhennya-pryrodnyh-katastrof-u-transkordonnomu-basejni-r-uzh-flooduzh/>

Official website of Uzhhorod National University. Retrieved from <https://www.uzhnu.edu.ua/uk/cat/projects-huskroua>

The Accounting Chamber. Retrieved from <https://rp.gov.ua/PressCenter/News/?id=1816>

Official website of the city of Uzhhorod. Retrieved from https://www.0312.ua/news/2957185/zakarpatta-spilno-z-kosickim-kraem-realizuut-proekt-z-udoskonalenna-poslug-u-socialnih-zakladah-video?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Mediacentr UzhNU. Retrieved from <https://mediacenter.uzhnu.edu.ua/news/uzhnu-otrymav-suchasnu-medychnu-systemu-nejronavihatsii-u-ramkakh-grantu-huskroua/2022-09-04-52541>

CHAPTER 4

THE CURRENT STATE OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN THE VISEGRAD GROUP COUNTRIES AND UKRAINE (ZAKARPATTIA): PRACTITIONERS' POINT OF VIEW

Introduction

Cross-border cooperation opportunities are catalysts and additional sources for the economic and social development of border regions and cultural enrichment; it is important to ensure appropriate regulatory and institutional capabilities. And border regions have significant potential for establishing and strengthening investment cooperation, thereby creating new jobs, flows of goods and services, and constructive use of cultural and ethno-national factors, etc. The participation of border regions in cross-border cooperation processes is a bonus and opportunities for the rest of the regions of the state, for it as a holistic entity in the context of international cooperation, as well as for the same integration goal. In this case, we are talking about the possibilities of testing the constructive reform experience of neighbors in the territories on the other side of the border, which can become an attractive object of investment, both in the literal sense and from the standpoint of political support. A similar scenario was typical of the border regions of Poland and Hungary, for example, especially on the German and Austrian sides, in the context of their progress toward European integration. Today, Poland and Hungary are full members of the European Union and are ready to share their positive experience with Ukrainian regions, including in the format of cross-border cooperation. During the implementation of cross-border cooperation, EU member states have developed their institutional forms and relevant regulatory frameworks for this area of cooperation. Coordinated cross-border cooperation is both a factor in dynamizing the development of cross-border territories, but also a tool for establishing understanding.

For a better understanding of cross-border cooperation, in terms of its features, opportunities, prospects, challenges, obstacles and problems, the most informative will be work and communication with the CBC subjects themselves. At the same time, international documents make it possible to maximize the potential of cross-border cooperation, in particular for European countries on both, the national and regional levels. These are the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation (the Madrid Convention, 1980), already mentioned in the previous

sections, the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE) (14 January 1994), the Charter on European Border and Cross-Border Regions, and the European Regional Spatial Planning Charter. International and national legislation allows for standardization cross-border cooperation' forms and, accordingly, regional development. In the previous sections, we had the opportunity to analyze the expansion of cross-border cooperation capacities, in regulatory, institutional and programmatic aspects, which largely depends on the unique needs and characteristics of states, regions and communities. The implementation and management of cross-border cooperation involve a significant number of participants, both actors and beneficiaries. Among them, most often these are state institutions, local governments, public organizations/NGOs, educational and scientific institutions, healthcare institutions, regional development agencies, technology agencies, and others.

Successful cross-border cooperation projects funded by the European Union demonstrate the advantages of such initiatives for regional development. It is important to have relevant information and details regarding the regulatory and practical dimensions of cross-border cooperation. This will provide an opportunity to take advantage of the benefits of various European cross-border cooperation programs, such as Interreg. The examples of specific practices analyzed in the previous sections, implemented in particular within the framework of the Interreg initiative, provide the broadest possible idea of initiatives and areas of cooperation, including in European countries. At the same time, they can motivate actors with low involvement but sufficient potential to participate in cross-border cooperation. Often, for example, local authorities are much more active in cross-border cooperation than businesses or other potential CBC actors.

As real practice shows, there are fundamental and most typical areas of cross-border cooperation, such as environmental protection, culture, education, tourism, infrastructure development, energy, etc., but first you should analyze the specific socio-economic situation of your region to identify the main opportunities and priorities. Ukraine's consideration and implementation of these features of cross-border cooperation will significantly contribute to the development of Ukrainian regions, which is especially relevant in the context of European integration and war. The experience of the Visegrad Four countries shows the importance of the role of border regions in the processes of European integration, not only through better mutual understanding, but also their practical attractiveness in using cross-border cooperation instruments for economic development, adaptation of infrastructure and environmental

European standards, appropriate development of the spheres of culture, ecology, energy, tourism, etc. Accordingly, the European experience of cross-border cooperation is an important catalyst for the economic and social development of Ukraine, which will at the same time increase its integration into the European space (Holovchanska, 2024). Thus, we can talk about tools for the Europeanization of Ukrainian borders through increasing the socio-economic development of territories involved in cross-border cooperation (Rozvytok transkordonnoho spivrobotnytstva, 2021).

Despite a number of opportunities and advantages, international and national regulatory and legal support, the practice of implementing cross-border cooperation demonstrates a number of obstacles, challenges, and untapped opportunities, which are best known to CBC practitioners. This will be best helped by clarifying the most popular forms of cross-border cooperation in the Visegrad Four countries, substantiating their popularity, identifying relevant funding programs and other financial instruments to support CBC, and outlining areas of cooperation. An assessment of these parameters will reveal a picture of the state and prospects of CBC for both the Visegrad Four countries and Ukraine. But the most important thing is the opportunity to assess the obstacles and challenges to the implementation of cross-border cooperation in order to develop appropriate recommendations, in the perspective of mechanisms for their regulation or overcoming (See Annex A).

Surveys results

As part of the implementation of the project “CBC in Ukraine and V4: in the search for examples of best practice”, funded by the International Visegrad Fund, a survey of cross-border cooperation practitioners was conducted during the spring-summer of 2025 on several key aspects of their experience of participating in the CBC (https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSerHaeUL9ChplnU7_m3K8x-OnZE76n2YN6pc9-8nfGloC-Sug/viewform?usp=header; <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe1LbJxBTnhOjTYkd3dN4Lq5UxWomsp9dmY8BODSY0MAI4EiA/viewform?usp=header>). These surveys were also preceded by surveys of experts on cross-border cooperation issues, in particular project partners, who also tried to provide answers to questions similar in content, but from a professional point of view, as researchers of CBC issues in European countries and Ukraine. The European Union has a typical practice of monitoring regional development and cross-border cooperation issues, including surveys,

which allow identifying advantages and obstacles in relevant areas (Flash Eurobarometer 422, 2015).

The first chapters analyzed the general picture of the state of cross-border cooperation in the Visegrad Four countries and Ukraine, in particular on the issues of institutional forms and models of CBC, legal regulation, programs and relevant projects, primarily those that had the best practical results in the previous programming period of the EU financial framework. But during project implementation, surveys and ongoing consultations were conducted with partners, who are also experts in cross-border cooperation issues. Among the project experts are: Alexander Duleba, Martin Lačný, Michal Cirner, Nataliya Maradyk (University of Presov), Gyula Ocskay, Melinda Istenes-Benczi (Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives), Joanna Kurowska-Pysz (WSB University, Dąbrowa Górnicza), Artur Boháč, Hynek Böhme (Technical University of Liberec). The expert survey showed that various institutional forms of CBC are common on the V4 borders, including the Euroregional model, EGTCs, twinning towns, and partnership agreements between local authorities. However, there is differentiation between the Visegrad Four countries in the practice and experience of using these forms of cross-border cooperation. In particular, Hungary has the greatest experience in creating, for example, EGTCs, while for Polish local authorities this structure is still quite innovative. Mentioned institutional forms of cooperation were stimulated by the EU during the pre-accession period. Accordingly, the tools of the PHARE CBC (PHARE – Cross-border Cooperation Programme) and INTERREG programs were available to entities officially engaged in cross-border cooperation. At the same time, experts emphasize the need to form cross-border ties in a balanced way, not only using large-scale EU instruments, but also attracting other financial resources for small-scale initiatives; to promote and explain the importance of cross-border cooperation at the institutional and personal levels to involve as many local participants as possible. Among the obstacles, experts point out, in particular, the lack of common long-term interests: the partnership is often created to implement a project, and accordingly, the partners are not ready for further cooperation after its completion. In addition, this is also influenced by the lack of financial opportunities after the project is completed. In particular, among the obstacles or challenges in implementing cross-border cooperation, the opinions of experts and practitioners often coincide, as evidenced by the identification of the human resource weakness factor in cases where changes occur in the project team or there is a lack of competent personnel. However, according to experts' opinion, the development of

cross-border cooperation brings more benefits to participants on both sides of the border. In particular, Joanna Kurowska-Pysz (WSB University in Dąbrowa Górnicza, Poland), among the main advantages and positive changes, cites the development of cooperation between partners, protection of cultural and natural heritage, integration of local communities, providing new services and new products available on both sides of the border, increasing the tourist visibility of the border area, expanding knowledge about the neighboring country, increasing transport accessibility, changing the way border area residents and tourists spend their free time, improving the quality of cross-border infrastructure, services, products, increasing the socio-economic development of the border region (Expert survey materials, 2025).

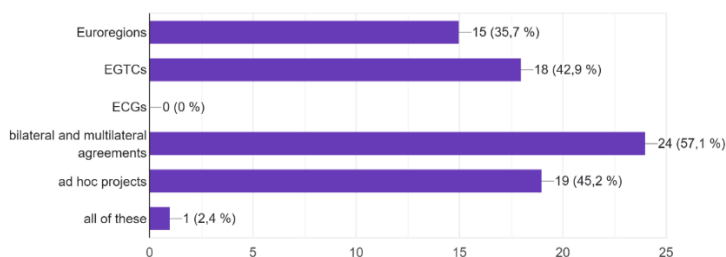
Responses from a survey of cross-border cooperation practitioners in the Visegrad Four countries and Ukraine (Zakarpattia) are also useful and informative. The questionnaires were distributed through various channels, including through contacts of project partners and participants, through local governments, and personal contacts. During the survey period, responses were received from forty-two CBC practitioners in the V4 countries and twenty-seven in Ukraine (Zakarpattia). Of course, compared to the capabilities of analytical institutions, in particular European ones, the sample is difficult to consider sufficiently representative, primarily from the V4 side, but given the content of the answers, their similarity, it is absolutely informative for the possibility of assessing the realities of CBC in individual regions of the Visegrad countries and, above all, Zakarpattia, appropriate formulation of recommendations in combination with regulatory analysis and developed methodology. Among respondents from the Visegrad Four countries, the EGTCs, local governments, non-governmental, scientific and analytical institutions, and regional development agencies predominate (See Annex B). Most often, they represent such organizational forms of cross-border cooperation as a) project partnership (cooperation limited exclusively to the implementation of cross-border projects) – thirteen responses come from Slovakian and Polish respondents; b) EGTCs, mainly respondents from Hungary; c) twinning (Slovak Republic). Thus, this fact attests to the typical features of cross-border cooperation among the Visegrad Four countries, as noted by the interviewed experts. EGTCs are the most common in Hungary, which is explained by the well-developed regulatory framework and, in particular, the state's financial support. Even if these are respondents, representatives of the EGTC from Slovakia, this EGTC was created in partnership with Hungarian partners. According to EGTC Monitor data, as of 2024, Hungary is involved in 24 EGTCs, 19 of which

are based in Hungary (What do we mean?, EGTC MONITOR). But in 2020, 21 EGTCs had their headquarters registered in Hungary.

At the same time, as the survey data show, the average indicators show that the most common forms of CBC in the Visegrad Four countries are bilateral and multilateral agreements, ad hoc projects, EGTCs and Euroregions. The responses of Ukrainian (Zakarpattia region) respondents are similar, except for EGTCs and Euroregions, of course.

Based on your experiences which institutional forms of cross-border cooperation are the most popular in your country? (Multiple choice question)

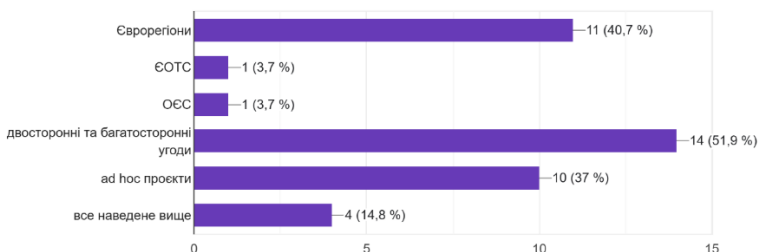
42 ответа



V4 countries respondents

На основі вашого досвіду, які інституційні форми транскордонного співробітництва є найпопулярнішими в країні? (Питання з кількома в...popular in the country? (Multiple choice question)

27 ответов



Respondents from Ukraine (Zakarpattia region)

Among the most important reasons for the popularity of this particular form of cross-border cooperation, practitioners cite access to resources for this type of cooperation, the initiative of neighbors on the

other side of the border, historical reasons, and proper regulatory and legal support. Among other reasons are the requirements for implementing cohesion policy and territorial cooperation in the EU, joint cross-border solutions to regional challenges, the exchange of experiences and knowledge, working with the community, and getting to know each other.

Why is this institutional form of cross-border cooperation the most popular in your country? (Multiple choice question)

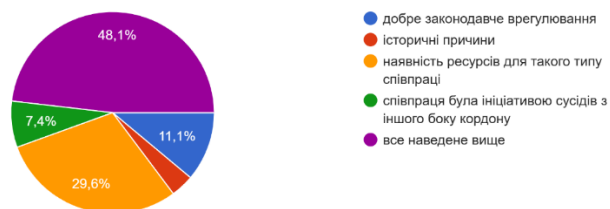
42 ответа



V4 countries respondents

Чому ця інституційна форма транскордонного співробітництва є найпопулярнішою? (Питання з кількома варіантами відповідей) / Why... is the most popular? (Multiple choice question)

27 ответов

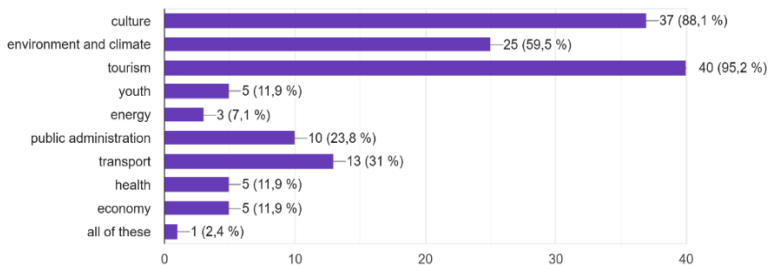


Respondents from Ukraine (Zakarpattia region)

The most popular areas/spheres of cooperation are tourism, culture, environment and climate. Transport and public administration are also popular. At the same time, Ukrainian respondents named environment, health, culture and tourism as the most common.

Which themes for cooperation are the most popular in your cross-border region? (Multiple choice question)

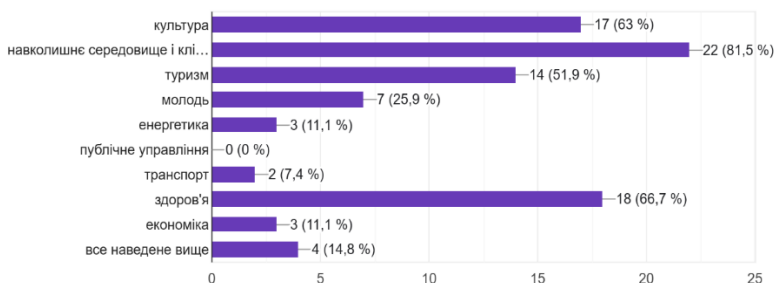
42 ответа



V4 countries respondents

Які сфери для співпраці найбільш популярні у вашому транскордонному регіоні/громаді? (Питання з кількома варіантами відповіді) / What...ur region/community? (Multiple choice question)

27 ответов

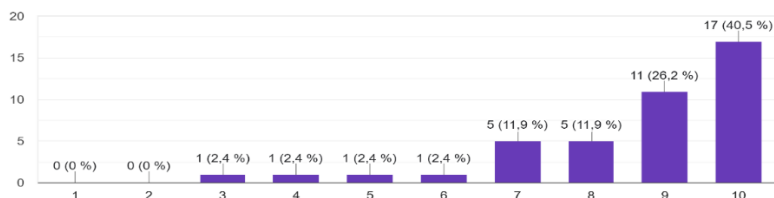


Respondents from Ukraine (Zakarpattia region)

At the same time, several questions in the questionnaire indicate that the most popular programs for cross-border cooperation are Interreg, slightly inferior to other programs financed by European funds. However, the assessment of the potential of domestic budgetary resources is quite low. In particular, seventeen surveyed European respondents rated the Interreg programmes ten out of ten, eleven respondents rated it nine out of ten, and five more rated it eight out of ten. The situation is similar among Ukrainian respondents, as out of twenty-seven respondents, fourteen gave

the highest score to the capabilities of the Interreg programmes, in addition, six rated it 8 points and three, respectively, nine points.

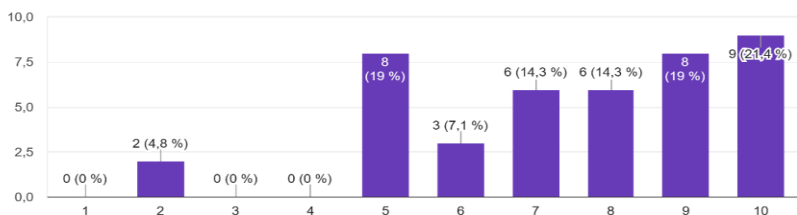
What practices of cross-border cooperation between public institutions (regional authorities and local self-government, regional development agenc..., 10 is the maximum) Interreg CBC programmes
42 ответа



V4 countries respondents

Also, according to both the Visegrad Four and Ukrainian respondents, the creation of permanent border management institutions would be effective.

establishment of permanent institutions managing the border area
42 ответа



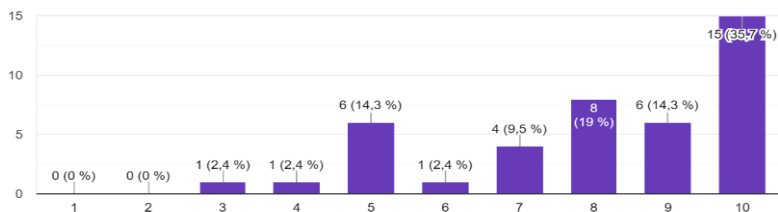
V4 countries respondents

Of course, it is impossible to reveal the entire spectrum of a particular issue without resorting to analytical logic and without assessing the background under study according to the parameters of strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats, which, in turn, makes it possible to conduct the research. In particular, it was possible to identify a number of institutional opportunities for cross-border cooperation among the Visegrad Four countries, as well as with Ukraine. Their potential has not

yet been fully realized, which opens up new opportunities for intensifying cross-border cooperation in the future. Cross-border cooperation actors in Ukraine and the Visegrad countries similarly assess the accessibility and popularity of areas of cooperation, which expand opportunities for constructive cooperation and the search for partners. Accordingly, financial instruments are also available, given the high assessments of the capabilities of the Interreg programme by European and Ukrainian practitioners. Therefore, among the strengths, we can name, first of all, the significant diversity of CBC participants, the availability of a resource base for cooperation and financial instruments for its implementation. Among the opportunities is the appearance of new actors in cross-border cooperation in both the V4 countries and Ukraine, respectively, the establishment of new partnerships, and, in the future, the expansion of the network of areas of cooperation using the financial instruments of the European Union.

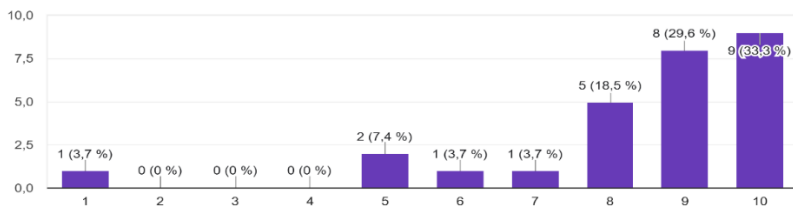
Of course, to expand the strengths and enhance the opportunities for cross-border cooperation in the region, it is also worth assessing obstacles and threats of various kinds, in order to identify ways and mechanisms to minimize them. The experience of the surveyed CBC practitioners indicates a number of challenges in cross-border cooperation. During the survey, they were offered a closed question with an extensive list of possible obstacles to effective cross-border cooperation. The vast majority of respondents cited a lack of financial and human resources as the biggest obstacles. Thus, among forty-two European respondents, fifteen rated the lack of financial resources as the highest score, respectively, as a significant obstacle; eight respondents scored eight points, and six scored it nine. Among Ukrainian respondents, nine CBC practitioners rated it highest, eight rated it 9 points, and five rated it 8 out of 10. That is, this obstacle is among the most noticeable for cross-border cooperation among the Visegrad Four countries and Ukraine.

Based on your experiences what are the biggest threats to successful cross-border cooperation? (Determine on a scale from 1 to 10, wh..., 10 is the maximum) lack of financial capacities
42 ответа



V4 countries respondents

Виходячи з вашого досвіду, які найбільші загрози для успішної транскордонної співпраці? (Визначити за шкалою від 1 до 10, де 1 – мініма...сових можливостей / lack of financial resources
27 ответов



Respondents from Ukraine (Zakarpattia region)

At the same time, for the Ukrainian side, the lack of human resources is more noticeable, as indicated by 21 out of 27 respondents, assessing this obstacle with negative scores of 10, 9, and 8, respectively. Among Visegrad Group countries, the lack of human resources was cited by 20 of 42 respondents, or almost half, as a significant obstacle to CBC. Fifteen out of 42 and 11 out of 27 indicate weak political interest in establishing and developing CBC as an obstacle to cross-border cooperation. Only 11 out of 42 respondents from the V4 countries indicated weak interest from local residents as an obstacle, while in Zakarpattia region, only six respondents from different communities of the region indicated it, including two responses from the Uzhhorod city community.

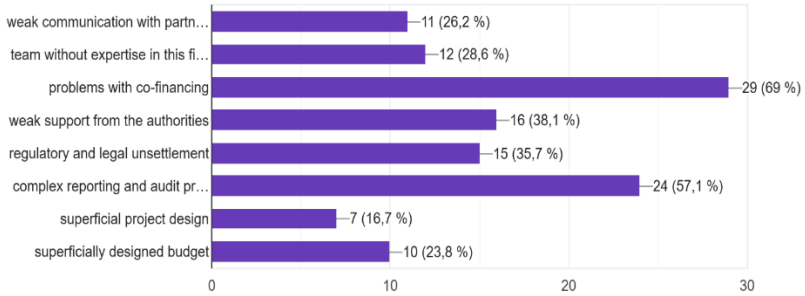
Practitioners from both surveyed sides almost do not consider the lack of a clear cross-border strategy an obstacle, indicating the constructive experience of the surveyed participants in the field of CBC in both the Visegrad Four countries and Ukraine (Zakarpattia). Only 8 out of 42 and 5 out of 27 Ukrainian respondents, respectively, indicate cultural misunderstandings and a low level of mutual trust as obstacles to CBC. Which, therefore, can hardly be called an influential or destructive factor in cross-border cooperation. At the same time, this is a good indicator that indicates the closeness and mutual understanding of neighbors on different sides of the border, both within the V4 countries and with Ukraine.

More threatening to the measurement of cross-border cooperation in Ukraine, compared to the Visegrad Four countries, is the unsuccessful choice of cross-border partners, as indicated by nine out of 27 Zakarpattia respondents, while from the V4 side, only six out of 42 respondents assessed this factor as an obstacle, giving negative scores of 8, 9, and 10, respectively.

Practitioner respondents were also asked a question that allowed them to indicate one or more obstacles to the implementation of cross-border cooperation projects. Eight factors were proposed that could negatively affect the project's implementation. Accordingly, in most cases, respondents indicate several obstacles from the proposed list, while one respondent indicates all eight (weak communication with partners, team without expertise in this field, problems with co-financing, weak support from the authorities, regulatory and legal unsettlement, complex reporting and audit procedures, superficial project design, superficially designed budget). Nineteen, or almost half, of the 42 Visegrad respondents point to only one or two obstacles, which again indicates a good experience of participating in the implementation of cross-border projects. For the rest of practitioners, obstacles range from three to six circumstances. Among Ukrainian respondents, fourteen, that is, more than half, consider one or two circumstances from the proposed list as obstacles, while none of the Ukrainian respondents indicated more than four obstacles, which primarily indicates the ability to solve or prevent them.

Which of the following can you identify as the main obstacles to the implementation of cross-border projects? (Multiple choice question)

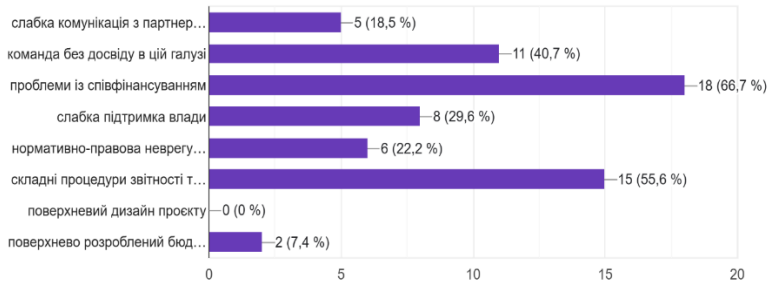
42 ответа



V4 countries respondents

Що з перерахованого Ви можете назвати головними перешкодами для реалізації транскордонних проєктів? (Питання з кількома ва...oss-border projects? (Multiple choice question)

27 ответов



Respondents from Ukraine (Zakarpattia region)

Of course, in addition to the proposed list, respondents could choose their own option and provide their own answer in the “Other” section. In this survey, four respondents in the Visegrad Four countries and six respondents from Zakarpattia took advantage of this opportunity. In particular, respondents from the Visegrad Four countries also indicated as obstacles the refund method of financing, the lack of transparency in the

assessment of projects by experts, which leads to abuses and favoritism of some projects to the detriment of others; lack of knowledge/technical training of some experts, which distorts the assessment of the project at the grant application stage. Among practitioners of Zakarpattia, the war with Russia, the search for partners, and the lack of project managers were also indicated as significant obstacles. Also, from both sides were cross-border cooperation practitioners who do not consider difficulties insurmountable.

For respondents from Ukraine (Zakarpattia), three additional questions were also proposed regarding legal and/or administrative difficulties. The key question in this block was closed-ended and contained eight answer options, in particular the lack of harmonised legislation on cross-border cooperation/cross-border projects, lengthy and complex approval or permit procedures, restrictions on financing or transferring funds abroad, lack of clear coordination mechanisms between central and local authorities and other organizations, lack/limited legal support for cross-border cooperation and cross-border projects, the creation of joint cross-border institutions (e.g., the EGTCs and the ECG), tax/customs barriers, restrictions in the field of public procurement, and, accordingly, all of the above. The last option in this question was used by one respondent, the Uzhhorod community. Eighteen respondents faced one or two difficulties of a legal or administrative nature, the rest – with from three to five. Accordingly, almost half of the surveyed Zakarpattiapractitioners encountered a small number of obstacles of an administrative or legal nature, which indicates both good experience in the field of TCS and the functionality of the regulatory and institutional fields. Respondents also had the opportunity to independently cite a specific case/cases of legal and/or administrative obstacles they encountered and how it affected cross-border cooperation and/or the implementation of a cross-border project. This was the last question of the questionnaire, answered by only 7 respondents from various communities in Zakarpattia region, in particular Uzhhorod, Sotolvyno, Berehove, Velyky Berezny, and Khust.

In particular, respondents described a negative experience with the State Treasury Service of Ukraine (STSU), as funds received are exchanged and sent to the treasury account for further payments. Accordingly, there is a possible loss of funds on the exchange rate, and there is also a loss of time, since payments are not made immediately. Respondents described the experience of this mechanism since the beginning of the Russian military aggression. For 6 months, it was not possible to make payments through the treasury, as everything was blocked, even though the funds were in both the bank account and the

treasury account. As a result, the project was not completed on time, and the implementation deadlines had to be extended by another six months. According to respondents, if a mechanism were developed that allowed local governments to be financed directly through a bank, it would greatly facilitate and simplify project implementation. Another obstacle pointed out by practitioners is the adoption of the NBU Resolution “On the operation of the banking system and the foreign exchange market from February 24, 2022 under martial law throughout the territory of Ukraine”, in particular, the clause on the introduction of a moratorium on cross-border currency payments (except for enterprises and institutions that ensure the implementation of mobilization plans (tasks) and the Government, individual permits of the NBU), significantly slowed down the implementation of the project, because it limited the main project partner in Ukraine from receiving the next tranche and, accordingly, the transfer of funds to project partners both in Ukraine and abroad. Over time, the above rule was abolished for international projects. Some aspects of the decentralization reform in Ukraine were also identified as challenges, as during the project implementation, the partner in Ukraine faced reorganization, which caused difficulties. For some practitioners, the full-scale invasion necessitated the suspension of the project. Due to the war in Ukraine, it became necessary to cancel the mass public events planned in the project, and to reformat training events and experience-sharing programs into an online format. For some practitioners, obtaining a project registration card from the Ministry of Economy of Ukraine was an obstacle, which somewhat delayed the project implementation schedule. Of course, this nuance does not significantly affect the possibility of implementing the project. In addition, the practitioners also encountered unqualified work by bank employees, in particular, poor knowledge of legislation and regulations led to delays in transferring funds to partners.

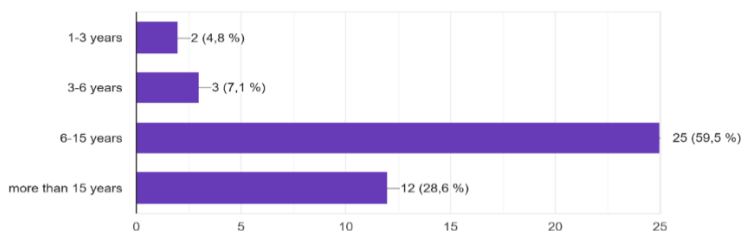
Thus, the beginning of a full-scale invasion, in particular the regulatory documents adopted in this context, will negatively affect the possibility of implementing cross-border cooperation and of carrying out projects. Unfortunately, this became an objective obstacle that negatively affected the state's ability to function as a whole.

As mentioned above, the sample of this study cannot be called sufficiently representative, especially for the Visegrad Four countries, but each practical experience is important and indicates a specific situation, a practice that may be repeated. Crucially, potential negative impacts must be addressed early to develop mechanisms for their prevention, mitigation, or resolution. The same applies to respondent practitioners in Zakarpattia

region, where the study demonstrates a good sample size across communities, which can be indicative and illustrative for recommendations to the rest of the CBC practitioners in the region. In addition, as the survey shows, the vast majority of respondents from the V4 countries have been involved in the cross-border cooperation system for 6 to 15 years, indicating their involvement in the first years after accession to the EU. Also, a significant proportion of respondents have been working in CBC for more than 15 years.

How many years have you been working in the field of cross-border cooperation?

42 ответа

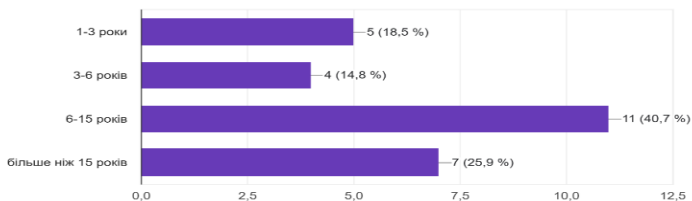


V4 countries respondents

The vast majority of Ukrainian respondents also have experience working in CBC ranging from 6 to 15 years, or more than 15 years.

Скільки років ви працюєте у сфері транскордонного співробітництва? / How many years have you been working in the field of cross-border cooperation?

27 ответов



Respondents from Ukraine (Zakarpattia region)

Thus, the survey was attended by respondents with significant experience in cross-border cooperation, who are sufficiently familiar with the topic and can demonstrate the benefits and challenges of CBC from their own experience.

Thanks to the implemented projects, only the surveyed cross-border cooperation practices in the Visegrad Four countries and Ukraine have brought significant benefits to their own regions and countries as a whole. These are in various areas, from the preservation of cultural heritage to the construction of bicycle paths in border areas and waste disposal, because the implemented projects yielded various results and products with long-term cross-border impact. In particular, thanks to them, green tourism was established, thematic playgrounds for children on cultural themes were built, cultural and natural heritage was mapped, and cross-border cooperation in the field of health care was established, a cross-border tourist route with educational facilities and bus connections has been created, a system of environmental protection, crisis management, and, accordingly, cooperation between local governments and other stakeholders has been established, an information transfer system has been formed and an information service has been created for the exchange of information due to the Covid pandemic; the promotion of local products has been established, a regional food brand, databases of local producers, marketing strategies have been created, agro-festivals have been organized; public safety systems, including fire safety, were established; an amphitheater was built, a museum was created, a tourist train was launched; people from low-income families were returned to work and study; biodiversity was preserved, regional cross-border cooperation in the field of gastronomy and tourism was strengthened; digitization of historical sites was carried out, archiving of historical buildings was carried out accordingly; construction of a solid waste landfill and a waste sorting plant was carried out, preparation of a comprehensive system for monitoring water pollution, training of personnel developing a low-carbon economy was carried out; homes for the elderly have been built with the provision of appropriate services, including a social kitchen, a social laundry, an educational center, a club for the elderly, a bus for medical examinations, training of social mentors, purchase of educational equipment, purchase of electric bicycles, vehicles; there were organized the development of tools and strengthening of language competences of representatives of the state administration, teachers, employees of cultural institutions, the aid sector, NGOs from Poland and the Czech Republic, as well as refugees from Ukraine who emigrated to the aforementioned border region; a series of educational, animation and social events were organized, that will serve the integration and exchange of knowledge of citizens and immigrant populations of the border region, and, language courses have been organized; tools have been developed for effective air quality management (air quality management system and predictive

warning system), as well as strategies for improving air quality and reducing emissions from various sources.

Thanks to the implementation of cross-border projects in Zakarpattia in recent years, the most noticeable results have been the improvement of the quality of medical services in the border region, the organization of advanced training courses for medical workers, repair of outpatient clinic buildings, purchase of equipment for doctors; creation of a citizen security center, installation of video surveillance cameras throughout the community, with an appropriate data storage system; increasing the capacity to respond to emergencies, purchasing equipment to respond to various emergencies; establishing cross-border cooperation in the field of alternative energy sources and energy efficiency, respectively, installation of solar power plants at medical institutions, exchange of experience in the field of energy efficiency, modernization of medical equipment and cooperation in the field of rehabilitation and minimally invasive surgical methods; guidelines have been developed for the forestry sector of Ukraine on the management of dead wood in forests; scientific research was carried out on the biodiversity of aquatic and periaquatic flora and fauna of the Uzh River in its middle reaches, and accordingly, an assessment was made of the impact of the planned construction of a retaining dam on the ecological state of the Uzh River, the biodiversity of the river itself and the coastal area; construction, reconstruction, and maintenance of forest roads to improve access to affected forest areas, installation of bank fortifications, and a water reservoir; forests affected by climate change were restored by growing resistant seedlings, young forest plantations were afforested and protected in certain areas, the Demonstration and Educational Center “Forest and Climate” was created, and a number of other achievements were made, which were obtained as a result of the implementation of cross-border projects in different programming periods. Of course, almost every project involves organizing joint events and developing practical recommendations for various focus groups and stakeholders, depending on the sphere and nature of the project. Therefore, cross-border cooperation is an important source of initiatives and opportunities that produces long-term results and has a positive impact on regional development, from natural resources to social protection and infrastructure.

Conclusions

The survey provides clear answers on current cross-border cooperation practices, with the potential to connect with broader research on CBC in Central Europe. The questions were formulated in such a way that we could compare practices and the current situation in the field of

cross-border cooperation in the Visegrad Four countries and in Ukraine, particularly in Zakarpattia region. In accordance with the logic of working with the target group, a questionnaire was developed. The initial work with experts, in the form of questions with detailed answers, enabled the identification of closed questions for practitioners of cross-border cooperation across different countries. Given their professional and research experience, the experts were able to provide analytical answers to questions of various nature, from institutional forms, legislative norms to recommendations for strengthening CBC in Zakarpattia. At the same time, for the surveyed practitioners of cross-border cooperation, short, closed questions were more appropriate, given their practical, rather than scientific and analytical, experience. In addition, the questions for practitioners were formulated in such a way that it was possible to rank the answers from more to less popular, or from greater to lesser obstacle in the field of CBC.

As the results show we have the following summary ranked in descending order of response:

Why is this institutional form of cross-border cooperation the most popular in your country?

1. eased access of resources for such type of cooperation
2. well regulated by law
3. cooperation has been an initiative of the neighbors on the other side of the border
4. all of these
5. historical reasons.

Such an ordinal list is typical for Ukrainian respondents, while it differs somewhat among European practitioners, in particular, the second most popular is the initiative from neighbors on the other side of the border, and the third is historical reasons that contribute to cooperation, which indicates a stable partnership and historical closeness, based on the frequent residence of the same ethnic group on both sides of the border.

Which themes for cooperation are the most popular in your cross-border region?

1. Environment and climate
2. Health
3. Culture
4. Tourism
5. Youth
6. Energy
7. Economy
8. Transport.

Again, this is a gradation of the answers of Ukrainian respondents, while the result of a survey on this issue of practitioners of cross-border cooperation in the Visegrad Four countries gives a slightly different gradation, in particular, the most popular areas of cooperation were tourism, which came in first place, culture, environment and climate, and transport, respectively, which indicates a somewhat different nature of urgent needs in European countries and Ukraine.

Based on your experiences, what are the biggest threats to successful cross-border cooperation?

- 1.lack of financial capacities
- 2.lack of human resources
- 3.weak political interest
- 4.weak interest on behalf of the local citizens
- 5.lack of clear cross-border vision / strategy
- 6.cultural misunderstandings, weak level of mutual trust
- 7.failed selection of cross-border partners.

Thus, Ukrainian practitioners identify lack of financial capacity, lack of human resources, and weak political interest as the biggest threats. These are the threats also identified by European CBC practitioners as the biggest.

Which of the following can you identify as the main obstacles to the implementation of cross-border projects?

- 1.problems with co-financing
- 2.complex reporting and audit procedures
- 3.team without expertise in this field
- 4.weak support from the authorities
- 5.regulatory and legal unsettlement
- 6.weak communication with partners
- 7.search for partners
- 8.superficially designed budget
- 9.war with russia

As for the obstacles that European practitioners see and face, co-financing is also in first place, and among the main ones is the complexity of the reporting and audit procedure, however, weak support from the authorities was ranked third, followed by regulatory and legal unregulated conditions, and only the weak experience of the team was next, while for Ukrainian practitioners this obstacle was among the top three, which may indicate better training of European personnel for participation in cross-border cooperation processes.

Thus, thanks to these questions, we can identify the most promising forms and areas for cross-border cooperation in the Visegrad Four

countries, as well as the participation and involvement of Ukraine and Ukrainian regions in these processes. We can also identify the most significant obstacles and threats that European and Ukrainian stakeholders should work on. A good indicator is the presence among the surveyed respondents from both sides of the institutional practitioners who do not see significant or insurmountable obstacles to participating in and implementing cross-border cooperation. This indicates the experience of the participants, and therefore the significant potential for CBC on both sides of the border.

Among the general conclusions that provide the basis for developing recommendations using European experience for Ukrainian, including Zakarpattia region, practitioners and other CBC stakeholders, we can focus on the following:

1. Zakarpattia has favorable conditions and significant potential for cross-border cooperation and extrapolation of experience to other regions of Ukraine.

2. In Ukraine, in particular in Zakarpattia region, there are many specialists/practitioners (entities) of cross-border cooperation, the list of which has the potential to expand and deepen if the necessary resources are available.

3. They work closely with partners from Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

4. The most popular programmes for CBC: Interreg NEXT programmes – Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine Programme, Poland-Ukraine Programme, Romania-Ukraine Programme, and other European Programmes.

5. Cross-border cooperation is an effective tool for supporting Ukraine, in particular on the path of European integration, post-war reconstruction and development. This is demonstrated by a simple fact: in 2025, two Zakarpattia communities, Kolochavska and Synevyrska (among our Ukrainian respondents), made it into the UN ranking of the best tourist villages, not without the help of cross-border cooperation tools.

References:

Holovchanska, V. I. (2024). *Yevropeyskyi dosvid transkordonnoho spivrobitnytstva: perspektyvy implementatsii v Ukraini* [European experience of cross-border cooperation: prospects for implementation in Ukraine]. *Rehionalna ekonomika*, (4), 137–145. https://re.gov.ua/re202404/re202404_137_HolovchanskaVI.pdf

Centre for Economic and Social Cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe. (2021). *Rozvytok transkordonnoho spivrobitnytstva dlia yevropeizatsii ukrainskykh kordoniv* [Development of cross-border cooperation for the Europeanization of Ukrainian borders]. Budapest. https://budapest.cesci-net.eu/wp-content/uploads/_publications/CESCI-IVF_2021-Training_materials_UA.pdf

Khymynets, V. V., Holovka, A. A., & Mirus, O. I. (2021). *Transkordonne spivrobitnytstvo yak instrument mistsevoho ta rehionalnoho rozvytku* [Cross-border cooperation as a tool of local and regional development]. National Institute for Strategic Studies.

Hornostai, N. I., & Mykhalchenkova, O. Ye. (2023). *Stan ta osoblyvosti rozvytku transkordonnoho spivrobitnytstva v Ukraini* [State and features of cross-border cooperation development in Ukraine]. *Nauka, tekhnolohii, innovatsii*, (2), 20–25. https://nti.ukrintei.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Горностаї_2-2023.pdf

Ustymenko, V. A. (Ed.). (2020). *Transkordonne spivrobitnytstvo: pravovi osnovy ta uspihni praktyky* [Cross-border cooperation: Legal foundations and successful practices]. Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/posibnuk-tks/1680aedce1>

European Union. (2015). *Flash Eurobarometer 422: Cross-border cooperation in the EU*. <https://doi.org/10.2776/964957>

Centre of International & European Economic Law. (n.d.). *PHARE – Cross Border Cooperation Programme*. <https://www.cieel.gr/en/program/phare-cross-border-cooperation-programme/>

Lenel, M., Kichera, N., Sviezhentseva, O., & Fetko, Y. (2025). *Expert survey materials (presentations and online seminar records)*. Personal archive. https://www.uzhnu.edu.ua/uk/cat/projects-cbc_in_ukr/materials

Lenel, M., Kichera, N., Sviezhentseva, O., & Fetko, Y. (2025). *Practitioners survey in V4 countries within the project “CBC in Ukraine and V4: In the search for examples of best practice”* [Unpublished questionnaire]. Uzhhorod National University. https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSerHaeUL9ChplnU7_m3K8x-OnZE76n2YN6pc9-8nfGloC-Sug/viewform

Lendel, M., Kichera, N., Sviezhentseva, O., & Fetko, Y. (2025). *Practitioners survey in Ukraine (Zakarpattia region) within the project “CBC in Ukraine and V4: In the search for examples of best practice”* [Unpublished questionnaire]. Uzhhorod National University. <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe1LbJxBTnhOjTYkd3dN4Lq5UxWomsp9dmY8BodSY0MAI4EiA/viewform>

EGTC Monitor. (n.d.). *What do we mean by European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)?* <https://egtcmonitor.cesci-net.eu/en/egtc-the-tool/about-egtcs/>

European Committee of the Regions. (2024). *List of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation*. https://cor.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-11/Official_List_of_the_EGTCs.pdf

Questionnaire

1. Country/region/city
2. Your organization
3. How many years have you been working in the field of cross-border cooperation?
4. Which of the organizational forms of cross-border cooperation do you represent?
5. Based on your experiences, which institutional forms of cross-border cooperation are the most popular in your country? (Multiple choice question)
6. Why is this institutional form of cross-border cooperation the most popular in your country? (Multiple choice question)
7. What practices of cross-border cooperation between public institutions (regional authorities and local self-government, regional development agencies), non-profit institutions (NGOs, universities, other institutions) are the most effective for developing the border area? (Determine on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the minimum score, 10 is the maximum)
8. Which themes/spheres for cooperation are the most popular in your cross-border region? (Multiple choice question)
9. Based on your experiences, what are the biggest threats to successful cross-border cooperation? (Determine on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the minimum score, 10 is the maximum)
10. Describe your experience of cross-border cooperation involving the support of European programs and funds (name the programs and funds you usually apply for).
11. Describe your experience of cross-border cooperation involving the support of European programs and funds. Please indicate the names of three projects, including an EU funding program
12. Which of the following can you identify as the main obstacles to the implementation of cross-border projects? (Multiple choice question)
13. What normative legal acts regulate the legal status of the institutional form of cross-border cooperation you represent?

Respondents from V4 countries

Country/region/city	Organization
Hungary	Nógrád Development Agency Nonprofit Ltd.
Slovakia	CESCI-Carpathia
Slovakia/Komárno/Moča	Municipality Moča
Slovakia/Nové Zámky	Town Nové Zámky
Slovakia/Košický/Košice	Via Carpatia EGTC
Slovakia	Regional development agency Stúrovo
Hungary/Komárom-Esztergom/Esztergom	Ister-Granum EGTC
Slovakia	Pons Danubii EGTC
Slovakia	Regionálna rozvojová agentúra pre rozvoj regiónu Stredného Poiplia
Hungary / Győr-Moson-Sopron County	Local Government of Győr-Moson-Sopron County
West-Hunary, Győr	Arrabona EGTC
Hungary, Bodrogeköz, Cigánd	Cigánd Város Önkormányzata
Poland, Silesia, Bielsko-Biala	Smart Steps Foundation
Poland, Malopolska voivodeship, Krakow	KREATUS Ltd.
Cieszyn	local government
Poland/Silesian voivodeship/Cieszyn	Stowarzyszenie Rozwoju i Współpracy Regionalnej «Olza»
Hungary / BAZ / Miskolc	Jövő Útja Nonprofit Kft.
Slovakia	Slovenský raj & Spiš
Prešov	PRERAG

Poland	PUEB
Snina	DO FÉNIX Snina
Slovakia/ Presov /Presov	Europe Direct Prešov
Poland	Puńsk Municipality
Slovakia/Prešov/Prešov	RIA,n.o.
Slovakia/Košice region / Košice	Košice Self-governing region
Slovenská republika	Mesto Medzilaborce
Hungary/Nógrád/Ludányhalászi	Ipoly Valley EGTC
Slovakia	The town of Stropkov
SR, Levoča	Mesto Levoča
Poland/Lubelskie/Lublin	Statistical Office in Lublin
Slovakia, Košice self-governing region, Rožňava	Gotická cesta, NGO
Hungary, Pest county	Pontibus EGTC
Hungary, Komárom-Esztergom vármegye, Tatabánya	Rába-Duna-Vág EGTC
Hungary/Pest County/Slovakia/Nitra County	Pontibus EGTC
Poland	UK Katowice
Polans/Silesia Region/Sosnowiec	Akademia WSB
Poland	Cieszyn
Poland, Silesia, Cieszyn	EGTC
Poland/Silesia	Cieszyn
Hungary	Pest county
Poland	Coffee and Tea Market Research Institute
Hungary, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County Kisvárdá	The Tisza European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation with Limited Liability

Annex C

Respondents from Ukraine (Zakarpattia)

1. Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County Kisvárda (Hungary)	The Tisza European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation with Limited Liability
2. Zakarpattia region, Solotvyno Territorial Community	Solotvyno Settlement Council
3. Uzhhorod	International Association of Regional Development Institutions
4. Uzhhorod	NGO «Center of European Initiatives»
5. Zakarpattia region, Uzhhorod community	Institution «Regional Development Agency of Zakarpattia Region»
6. Zakarpattia region, Uzhhorod city	State University «Uzhhorod National University»
7. Zakarpattia region, Uzhhorod city	NGO «Ecosphere»
8. Zakarpattia region/Uzhhorod	Agency for Sustainable Development of the Carpathian Region «FORZA»
9. Zakarpattia region, Uzhhorod	Zakarpattia Regional Charitable Foundation «Edelweiss»
10. Uzhhorod	Municipal Institution «The Zakarpattia Museum of Folk Architecture and Life» of Zakarpattia regional Council
11. Tiachiv district	Regional Development Agency of Tiachiv District
12. Zakarpattia region/Uzhhorod	Department of Urban Infrastructure of the Uzhhorod City Council
13. Velyky Berezny Community	Velyky Berezny Settlement Council
14. Velyky Berezny Territorial Community	Velyky Berezny Settlement Council
15. Zakarpattia region, Uzhhorod city	Main Directorate of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine in Zakarpattia Region
16. Zakarpattia region / Synevyr village	National Nature Park «Synevyr»
17. Zakarpattia region, Uzhhorod city	Municipal Institution «The Zakarpattia Museum of Folk Architecture and Life»

	of Zakarpattia regional Council
18. Zakarpattia region /Velyky Berezny	Uzhansky National Nature Park
16. Zakarpattia region / Velyky Bychkiv Territorial Community	Velyky Bychkiv Settlement Council
17. Zakarpattia region, Dubove Community	Dubove Settlement Council

CONCLUSIONS

The Visegrad Group countries share several common characteristics, including similarities in the political, cultural, and socio-economic behaviours of both citizens and elites, a gap-bridging role of ethnic communities, as well as the impacts of post-socialist governance and Europeanisation. However, they also demonstrate distinctions in the institutionalisation of cross-border cooperation. Key areas of divergence include the level of autonomy granted to subnational authorities, the extent of state supervision, and the practices related to the application of relevant laws and regulations. Furthermore, the trajectories of cross-border cooperation are influenced by a combination of historical factors, administrative traditions, and the current political landscape. This diversity plays a crucial role in shaping the functional capacity of various institutional forms of transnational CBC across different regions of the Visegrad Four countries, influencing both the scale of initiatives undertaken and their degree of integration within a multi-level governance framework.

The authors have determined that the framework for CBC in the Republic of Poland is founded on a combination of constitutional recognition of the international roles of local self-governments and administrative oversight by the central government. The success of Euroregions within Poland is significantly influenced by the engagement of gminas in these initiatives, as well as their integration into the structures of EU cohesion policy. This is particularly evident in their management of small project funds from Interreg programs and their ability to form local self-government associations. However, the stipulation that EGTCs must be registered exclusively within Poland limits the flexibility of this CBC model. This constraint affects the willingness of public institutions at the voivodeship level to participate actively, especially since these entities lack the authority to oversee cross-border Interreg programs.

It has been found that Czech legislation provides a well-defined and stable framework for the participation of communities and regions (*kraje*) in cross-border cooperation, including the EGTC. This framework effectively integrates EU instruments into the national legal system. However, the overlapping powers between communities and regions, along with competition for leadership roles within Euroregions, pose challenges to strategic coordination and long-term planning for cross-border initiatives. Furthermore, the presence of as many as three ministries responsible for state supervision over the establishment of institutional forms of CBC can complicate their implementation.

The CBC model in the Slovak Republic provides sufficient autonomy for regions (*kraje*) and municipalities (*obce*) in international

engagements, as well as supportive conditions for establishing EGTCs. Nevertheless, certain challenges persist, including administrative asymmetry with neighbouring Visegrad Group countries, the relatively late establishment of kraje as an authorised tier of local governance, and the intricate procedures related to public procurement, financial control, and project management. These factors significantly complicate the execution of cross-border initiatives and diminish their overall effectiveness.

Hungary has adopted a hybrid model for the institutionalisation of CBC. This approach integrates a selective openness to the international framework established by the Council of Europe with a proactive implementation of EU norms concerning EGTCs. These institutional mechanisms are strategically employed to support border regions, foster socio-economic development, and strengthen connections with Hungarian communities abroad. A notable advantage of the Hungarian model lies in the ongoing financial and political support from the government, which effectively addresses the limited authority held by subnational levels of governance.

To summarise, in our analysis of the experiences of the Visegrad Group countries, we have identified several shared institutional challenges. These challenges include variations in administrative procedures, the complexity associated with delegating public powers to the EGTCs, and a pronounced dependence of CBC institutions on EU programme funding. We believe the most effective model is one that establishes clear mechanisms for state oversight and support, while also granting genuine autonomy to regions and communities to determine their priorities for cross-border cooperation.

In its turn, Ukraine stands out among European nations for its specialised legislation on CBC. The enactment of the Law “On International Territorial Cooperation” in 2024 signifies not merely a technical but a substantial advancement in the legal framework governing this area, facilitating the alignment of national practices with EU standards. Nonetheless, the effective implementation of contemporary instruments, particularly the EGTC, has been hindered by inconsistencies and fragmentation within legal norms, as well as the limited institutional capacity of public entities engaged in CBC.

The case of Zakarpattia region exemplifies the undeniable impact of EU policies and programmes in shaping the institutional landscape of CBC. These initiatives are key in promoting professional development, fostering intersectoral partnerships, and facilitating institutional learning. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the persistent asymmetry in

the participation of various communities and organisations in CBC efforts, which can be attributed to different access to financial, human, and managerial resources.

The successful advancement of CBC in Ukraine necessitates not only the continued alignment of legislation with European Union standards but also systematic state support. Additionally, it is mandatory to strengthen subnational entities' institutional capacity and cultivate sustainable partnerships. In this regard, CBC should be the main tool for European integration, the Europeanization of Ukraine, regional development, and the enhancement of public administration quality.

This is largely explained by the fact that the European CBC model has evolved, transitioning from the multilateral treaty mechanisms established by the Council of Europe to the intricate legal framework formulated by the EU. This has resulted from the interplay between the multilateral international treaties of the CoE and the foundational treaties and EU legal instruments. Consequently, a cohesive legal environment has emerged, enabling local authorities to operate as stakeholders in public-legal relations. This framework facilitates the implementation of projects through standardised procedures, shared financial and legal mechanisms, and coordinated public oversight. While the CoE and the EU share crucial values such as democracy, the rule of law, the principles of subsidiarity, local self-government, and territorial solidarity, they diverge significantly in the legal nature of their acts, the obligations they impose, and the scope of their regulatory authority. These distinctions inherently lead to varying degrees of legal bindingness and different mechanisms for implementation within the national legal systems of EU member states. Given the legal norm delimitation, the CoE has established a comprehensive legal framework for CBC across the continent. This framework has evolved from fundamental principles into fully realised institutional structures, complete with standardised procedures for establishment, financial support, public oversight, and other pertinent matters. Simultaneously, the European Union has developed its own legal framework for CBC, which emphasises practical implementation and aligns with the EU's policies on economic, social, and territorial cohesion.

The legal frameworks for CBC, established within the CoE and the EU, are designed to serve practical purposes. Their effectiveness is contingent not only upon adherence to international and supranational standards but also on their integration into the legal systems of individual states. The implementation of norms derived from multilateral international treaties of the Council of Europe, along with EU legal acts, occurs at the level of EU member states. This process yields a range of institutional solutions and legal models for fostering

cross-border cooperation. The Visegrad Group countries – comprising the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland – have developed their national legal mechanisms for CBC. This has transitioned from traditional frameworks, based on the European Framework Convention on Transborder Cooperation and its additional protocols, to contemporary institutional forms that harmonise the CoE's international legal standards with the EU *acquis*. A comparative analysis indicates that the Visegrad Group countries have established an effective legal framework for CBC. This framework harmonises the norms of the CoE with those of the European Union. Their legislation ensures that local authorities have legal personality, facilitates transparent registration and financial processes, and delineates clear responsibilities along with robust supervisory control. The Visegrad model exemplifies that sustainable cross-border cooperation is achieved through a blend of legal certainty, financial accountability, institutional capacity, and responsibility. This combination provides a solid legal foundation for the stable development of multi-level territorial governance.

Ukraine has taken important steps in implementing multilateral international treaties established by the CoE and aligning its legislation with EU standards. This effort has led to the development of a partially harmonised legal framework for CBC. However, several challenges hinder the further advancement of this model. These include fragmented legal regulations, insufficiently unified procedures, complexities in agreements with central authorities, financial constraints, and varying institutional capacities across different regions. To effectively enhance the Ukrainian legal model for CBC, it is essential to focus on the following principles: further harmonisation of Ukrainian legislation with EU law, alongside the elimination of collisions between international, supranational, and national regulations; institutional strengthening of coordination structures at both central and regional levels; updating financial and control mechanisms to ensure transparency, accountability, and accessibility in the management of external funding. The European Territorial Cooperation INTERREG V-A programmes examined in this study provide a robust mechanism for financial support aimed at the integrated development of border regions. These programs unite the Visegrad Four countries around shared priorities, fostering the advancement of culture and tourism, enhancing institutional cooperation, engaging communities in local initiatives, and promoting cross-border integration. The overarching objective of these programs is to strengthen interpersonal connections and encourage sustainable development in border areas. This is accomplished through a combination of large-scale infrastructure projects and smaller, grassroots initiatives. The tangible results of these supported efforts illustrate their capacity to generate long-term socio-economic benefits, bolster local communities'

capabilities, and lay the groundwork for further integration of border regions into the wider European cooperative landscape.

The cross-border cooperation projects among the V4 countries that we have selected to exemplify best practices are characterised by several essential features. These projects demonstrate successful attainment of their established goals, alignment of outcomes with predetermined indicators, and the efficient utilisation of financial, temporal, and human resources. Additionally, the sustainability of results beyond the funding period is a critical aspect of their success. Key indicators of these projects' effectiveness include their relevance, which reflects their alignment with the actual needs of the regions and communities they serve. Furthermore, these projects are distinguished by their innovative methodologies and high levels of stakeholder engagement. They also possess the capacity for scalability and reapplication in diverse regional and sectoral contexts. By facilitating coordinated collaboration across border territories, these initiatives help address urgent challenges constructively on both sides of the border.

The implemented cross-border cooperation projects in the Visegrad Four countries represent an instrumental repository of best practices for fostering collaboration among communities, regions, and public institutions. A comprehensive review of project activities from the 2014–2020 programming period, supported by *Interreg* programmes, highlights effective models of cross-border engagement that can serve as valuable benchmarks for the continued development of such cooperation, particularly regarding Ukraine's involvement. In this context, the operation of cross-border cooperation programmes, most notably *Interreg NEXT*, which spans the border regions of Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, and Ukraine, is of paramount importance. These programmes facilitate the exploration and implementation of successful ideas and practices in Ukraine. By creating the necessary conditions for the execution of cross-border projects with financial backing from EU institutions, they open meaningful avenues for borrowing and adapting successful experiences to suit the specific context of Ukraine.

The thorough analysis of the key practices and stakeholders involved in CBC in Ukraine, particularly in Zakarpattia region and the Visegrad Four countries, demonstrates that such collaboration facilitates the adoption of innovative and effective management practices and the establishment of new areas, forms, and standards of cooperation. Given the current European integration processes and the imperative to bolster both regional and national development during wartime and in the subsequent recovery phase, these opportunities hold significant value for

Ukraine. Traditionally, border regions have been viewed as peripheral; however, they possess considerable resource potential. This potential stems from several factors that enhance CBC, including strategic geographic locations, transit opportunities, historical ties to neighbouring countries, the presence of ethnic minorities that serve as cultural bridges, shared natural resources, and advancements in overall infrastructure and economic development.

Thus, the strategic location of Zakarpattia region on both sides of the border, along with effective CBC instruments, presents significant opportunities for social, economic, environmental, cultural, tourism, and political development. This region serves as an exemplary platform for advancing European practices in multi-level governance and for implementing cohesion policy through the European Union's CBC programmes. Moreover, the valuable experiences gained here can be extended to other regions of Ukraine. Zakarpattia region has the potential to represent Ukraine positively in the European Union, demonstrating successful cross-border cooperation practices. This will not only highlight its capabilities as a dependable, stable partner but also showcase its commitment to evolving in line with European standards.

The analysis of existing CBC practices among the Visegrad Four countries and Ukraine, based on surveys of practitioners and experts, highlights both common opportunities and challenges faced by public institutions involved in these practices. It also identifies potential avenues for the mutual exchange of best practices. Key areas for strengthening partnerships include the economy, ecology, energy, tourism, culture, healthcare, and transportation. From an institutional perspective, the EGTC is a significant yet underutilised opportunity for collaboration. Currently, only one instance of this mechanism is in use in Ukraine's Zakarpattia region. In contrast, European partners possess a wealth of experience with various forms of institutional cooperation, such as agreements, town twinning, and Euroregions. They are well-equipped to impart valuable insights regarding the effective use of the EGTC.

It is essential to enhance Ukraine's capacity to learn from European partners' experience in training CBC specialists. A recent survey of stakeholders indicates that representatives from the Visegrad Four consider the presence of teams lacking sufficient professional expertise to be a significant barrier to effective collaboration, ranking this issue fifth on their priority list. In comparison, Ukrainian respondents rank it third. Additionally, the survey identifies meaningful opportunities to expand and deepen CBC initiatives, reflecting the shared interests of the involved partners. However, it also underscores a lack of experience in

implementing certain institutional forms of CBC, affecting practitioners in both Ukraine and Europe.

Distinct urgent developmental needs necessitate adjustments to the varying demands for cooperation among the Visegrad Four countries and Ukraine, particularly in Zakarpattia region. These differences are shaped by both the current wartime context in Ukraine and the historical relationships with neighbouring countries on the other side of the border. It is anticipated that these priorities may undergo drastic changes following the conclusion of the Russian-Ukrainian war and Ukraine's potential accession to full EU membership. Such developments are likely to enhance collaboration opportunities between Ukrainian and European stakeholders in CBC. In the present context, it is essential to focus on developing capacities, enriching experiences, and expanding the network of professionals engaged in CBC. This initiative aims to foster a positive image of Ukraine and its regions. Cross-border programmes, along with appropriate collaboration structures and instruments, offer effective mechanisms to support this endeavour.

The implementation of CBC instruments has demonstrated significant social, economic, and infrastructural benefits, particularly in Zakarpattia region. The positive effects of CBC initiatives on beneficiaries from the Visegrad Four countries are evident, as reflected in the various projects examined during the survey. These initiatives include the preservation of cultural heritage, the development of a network of bicycle paths, the construction of thematic playgrounds, enhancements in crisis management, the creation and promotion of regional food brands, the establishment of waste sorting facilities, the development of social housing, and the improvement of civil servants' skills. Furthermore, the beneficial impact of CBC on the Ukrainian border region should not be overlooked. Through these projects, notable improvements have been made in the provision of medical services, the development of alternative energy sources, and enhanced efforts to protect and preserve the environment – particularly concerning water and forest resources. Furthermore, advancements in public security services have also been achieved. Overall, CBC represents a valuable opportunity for the cross-border regions of the Visegrad Four countries and Ukraine to improve the quality of essential services and address residents' vital needs, both in the short and long term.

BRIEF INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Artur Boháč

PhD

He serves as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography at the Technical University of Liberec, the Czech Republic. His research primarily addresses issues in social geography, with a focus on Central Europe and the Middle East, particularly concerning cross-border dynamics and minority populations. Additionally, he is a member of the Research Group on Borders and Migration within the Czech Geographical Society.

Hynek Böhm

Associate Professor, PhD

Dr Böhm serves as an Associate Professor and Researcher in the Department of Geography at the Technical University of Liberec in the Czech Republic and the University of Opole in Poland. His research specialises in the examination of borders and the dynamics of cross-border cooperation in Central Europe, with a particular emphasis on the interactions between the Czech Republic and Poland. His scholarly interests also encompass the sustainability of these cooperative efforts and the declining significance of their multilateral forms.

Michal Cirner

MA, PhD

He currently holds the positions of Assistant Professor and Secretary at the Institute of Political Science, University of Prešov, Slovakia.

His research expertise encompasses public policy, public administration, local self-government, cross-border cooperation, and the political and party systems within the Slovak Republic. He regularly contributes analytical reviews and commentaries to esteemed Slovak publications.

Alexander Duleba

Professor, Doctor of Science, PhD

He currently holds the position of Professor of Political Science at the Institute of Political Science, University of Prešov, Slovakia, and serves as a Senior Researcher at the Slovak Foreign Policy Association.

From 2021 to 2023, he served as an advisor to the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, focusing on relations with Eastern European countries. His research and consulting activities are concentrated on areas such as international relations, Slovak foreign policy, the domestic and foreign policies of Eastern European countries, European Union policies, and the paradiplomacy of subnational political actors.

Melinda Istenes-Benczi

PhD

She holds the position of International Relations Coordinator at the Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI) in Budapest, Hungary. She is a member of a research group exploring cross-border cooperation. Her research focuses on national minorities in cross-border economic collaboration, perceptions of borders, the development and enhancement of cross-border initiatives, and methodologies for evaluating projects related to cross-border cooperation.

Nadiia Kichera

Candidate of Political Sciences

She currently serves as an associate professor in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Uzhhorod National University. Additionally, she is the Chairman of the Board of the Research and Development Centre "Prykordonniia." Her scholarly interests are centred on European integration, the theory of international relations, the protection of national minorities' rights in Central and Eastern European countries, and the field of political analytics.

Joanna Kurowska-Pysz

Associate Professor, Doctor of Science, PhD

She holds the position of Director of the Research on Territorial and Inter-Organisational Cooperation at the WSB University in Dąbrowa Górnicza, Poland. Additionally, she serves as Deputy Chair of the Doctoral School and Head of the Department of Management at the same university. She is a Senior AMI Expert for DG REGIO, European Commission. Her research interests encompass cross-border cooperation, territorial cooperation, and regional governance and development.

Martin Lačný

Associate Professor, PhD

He serves as an associate professor at the Institute of Political Science at the University of Prešov in Slovakia. His research and academic interests encompass border studies, regional economic development, economic behaviour, and corporate responsibility.

Myroslava Lendel

Professor, Doctor of Political Sciences

She currently holds the position of Vice-Rector for Scientific and Pedagogical Work at Uzhhorod National University in Ukraine. Additionally, she serves as a Professor in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration and as the Director of the Central European Research Institute at the university. Her research expertise encompasses cross-border cooperation and development within Central European countries, local democracy, multi-level governance, and European Union policies.

Nataliya Maradyk

Associate Professor, PhD

She holds the position of associate professor at the Institute of Political Science at the University of Prešov, Slovakia. Her research focuses on the analysis of democracy development, globalisation, cross-border cooperation, and party systems within Central and Eastern European countries. In her analytical endeavours, she collaborates with the Slovak Foreign Policy Association.

Gyula Ocskay

PhD

Currently serving as the Secretary General of the Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI) in Budapest, Hungary. Engaged in research and analysis within the fields of border studies, governance, and regional studies.

Oksana Sviezhentseva

Candidate of Historical Sciences, Associate Professor

She currently serves as the Head of the Department of International Relations at Uzhhorod National University. Her scholarly and academic pursuits are primarily centred around the history of international relations, contemporary European integration processes, cross-border cooperation, and the internationalisation of higher education.

Yuliia Fetko

Doctor of Philosophy in Law, Associate Professor

She is currently the Director of the Research Institute for Fundamental and Applied Research on European Territorial Cooperation and serves as an Associate Professor in the Department of International Law at Uzhhorod National University.

Her research interests encompass European Union law, the legal regulation of European integration, and the legal mechanisms that facilitate EU territorial cooperation. Additionally, she focuses on the legal aspects of the interaction between Ukraine's national legal system and European Union law, including the adaptation of Ukrainian legislation to comply with the EU *acquis*.

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

(M. Lendel, J. Kurowska-Pysz, G. Ocskay, M. Lačný)3

Chapter 1. INSTITUTIONAL MODELS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN THE VISEGRAD GROUP: IMPLICATIONS FOR UKRAINE *(M. Lendel)*5

Chapter 2. CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE LEGAL STATUS OF INSTITUTIONAL FORMS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP STATES AND UKRAINE *(Yu. Fetko)*83

Chapter 3. EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES IN CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION: IMPLEMENTED PROJECTS *(O. Sviezhentseva)*114

Chapter 4. THE CURRENT STATE OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN THE VISEGRAD GROUP COUNTRIES AND UKRAINE (ZAKARPATTIA): PRACTITIONERS' POINT OF VIEW *(N. Kichera)*155

CONCLUSIONS

*(A. Boháč, H. Böhm, M. Cirner, A. Duleba, M. Istenes-Benczi,
N. Kichera, J. Kurowska-Pysz, M. Lačný, M. Lendel, N. Maradyk,
G. Ocskay, O. Sviezhentseva, Yu. Fetko)*183

BRIEF INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHORS190

Scientific edition

**IN SEARCH OF THE BEST FORMS
AND PRACTICES FOR UKRAINE:
CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION
IN THE VISEGRAD FOUR COUNTRIES**

Collective monograph

**Edited by M. Lendel, G. Ocskay,
J. Kurowska-Pysz, M. Lačný**

Prfoofreading
Oksana Dudash

Layout
Andriana Brodych

Times New Roman Font
Format 60x84/16.

Conventional printed sheets 12,90. Publishing sheets 10,68.
Order № 1. Circulation 50 copies

Original layout prepared by the Editorial and Publishing Department of State
University “Uzhhorod National University”
89 Zankovetska St., Uzhhorod, 88000
E-mail: dep-editors@uzhnu.edu.ua

Uzhhorod National University Publishing House “Hoverla”,
18 Kapitulna St., Uzhhorod, 88000
*Certificate of Entry into the State Register of Publishers, Manufacturers, and
Distributors of Publishing Products
Series 3m № 32 dated May 31, 2006*