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TERRITORIAL COOPERATION: WIDELY PURSUED, WIDELY QUESTIONED

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Development challenges and solutions are not confined by borders, and as such cooperation is highly prized. Territorial cooperation across national borders with neighbouring territories has a long history in Europe and is widely pursued. The most familiar forms of territorial cooperation are the EU's Territorial Cooperation Programmes, specifically Interreg. However, in practice territorial cooperation arrangements vary enormously in terms of their scope, scale, objectives, and operations.

In a rapidly changing policy environment, and against a background of difficult economic conditions, the role and expectations of territorial cooperation are continually challenged and changing. Numerous challenges and criticisms associated with territorial cooperation are made linked to complexity, value for money, impact and relevance in an increasingly integrated Europe. However, the fact remains that territorial cooperation

continues to be widely pursued and could potentially fulfil more of a role in the future as new initiatives and instruments are applied and policymakers look to build synergies and complementarities across regions and sectors.

The paper provides an overview of the huge range and diversity of European territorial cooperation, the diverse border contexts of EoRPA countries, different forms, focus and funding of territorial cooperation across Europe. In the context of criticisms of the added value of territorial cooperation, and challenges to territorial cooperation, the interrelationships between initiatives, contributions and areas of added value are considered, e.g., in terms of policy synergies, innovation, network building and critical mass, and international profile.



1 INTRODUCTION

Regional development challenges and solutions are not confined by borders. The UN's sustainable development goals state 'the world is more interconnected than ever, progress has to involve partnership, cooperation, and a collaboration'.¹ While the value of international cooperation and partnership is clearly a primary focus, the importance of territorial cooperation in development is also highlighted, e.g., by the OECD² and EU.³

European territorial cooperation across national borders with neighbouring territories has a long history and is widely pursued. The most familiar forms of territorial cooperation are the EU's Territorial Cooperation Programmes, specifically Interreg. In the context of the European Union, territorial cooperation is about reducing disparities between regions, reinforcing cohesion, and encouraging optimal economic development. Interreg has a history of over 30 years and is a well-established component of the regional policy landscape. However, European territorial cooperation is a much broader concept and process. Beyond Interreg, other territorial cooperation arrangements vary enormously in terms of their scope, scale, objectives, and operations.

In this paper the broad processes of territorial cooperation are examined as well as the implications of changing expectations on the role and value of cooperation initiatives. Based on policy and academic literature, the paper explores the variety of territorial cooperation in the forms of macro/transnational (involving multiple regions from multiple countries), regional cross-border (between adjacent regions), and place-based territorial cooperation (direct territorially based cooperation between places across a national administrative boundary). The rationales, forms and foci of territorial cooperation programmes differ considerably, linked to different development paths, contexts and needs.⁴ However, common issues and a high level of interdependencies are also apparent.

Following the introduction, Section 2 looks at the context for territorial cooperation in the diversity of border types in Europe, with particular reference to the 'new border' conditions along a number of the EU's external borders, as well as differing capacity at regional and local level. Sections 3 and 4 review the very different scope and scale of territorial cooperation

¹ UN Sustainable Development Goals, <[² OECD \(2020\) OECD Programme on a Territorial Approach to the SDGs <<https://www.oecd.org/cfe/territorial-approach-sdgs.htm>>](https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals#:~:text=The%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals%20(SDGs)%2C%20also%20known%20as%20the,people%20enjoy%20peace%20and%20prosperity.></p></div><div data-bbox=)

³ Ferreira E. (2021) Interreg Annual Event, Speech by Commissioner Elisa Ferreira, DG Regio,

⁴ Faludi, A. (2007) "Territorial Cohesion Policy and the European Model of Society1", *European Planning Studies*, 15:4, pp. 567-583; Perkmann (2007) *Policy Entrepreneurship and Multi-Level Governance: A Comparative Study of European Cross-Border Regions*, *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, Vol. 25, No. 6, pp. 861-879, 2007; ESPON (2006) 2.3.2 Governance of territorial and urban policies Department of Geography / Inter-University Institute of Local Development.



arrangements, the diversity of institutional arrangements and density of the networks of cooperation. Section 5 finally considers debates around the added value of territorial cooperation.

2 CONTEXT FOR TERRITORIAL COOPERATION: BORDER TYPES AND CAPACITIES

Territorial cooperation takes place in the geographical context of a very diverse range of different border types within Europe. Numerous efforts have been made to categorise border links across Europe, e.g., making distinctions between Western Continental, Northern European, Central, East and South Western cooperation and most recently borders with Ukraine and bordering Russia and Belarus,⁵ or between the maturity of links and the intensity of exchange.⁶ These broad categorisations struggle to do justice to regional variations within countries and significant efforts between specific territories across what can be challenging borders. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight the huge variation in Europe's border types and that the types of territorial cooperation pursued are informed by the nature of the borders they cover.

EU internal Border regions cover approximately 40 percent of the EU territory, and 30 percent of the population.⁷ Links and relationships across internal EU borders are diverse, incorporating:

- **closely integrated borders** within the Schengen area with high levels of cross border commuting⁸, integrated services;
- **increasingly integrated borders** between EU15 Member States and EU Member States that joined post 2004; and
- **borders involving major physical barriers**, e.g., extreme distances between key centres of population, mountain areas, maritime borders, and overseas territories.

⁵ Durand, F., & Decoville, A. (2018). Establishing cross-border spatial planning. *European Territorial Cooperation: Theoretical and Empirical Approaches to the Process and Impacts of Cross-Border and Transnational Cooperation in Europe*, 229-244 and Böhm, H. (2023) Reinforcing Territorial Cooperation and Addressing Challenges on European Integration, Report to the Future of Cohesion Policy Group of High-Level Specialists

⁶ ESPON IRIE Project (2021) Interregional Relations in Europe, <<https://www.espon.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/IRiE%20Project%20Brief%20July%202021.pdf>>

⁷ CEC (2021) Report on EU Border Regions: Living Labs of European Integration, Brussels 14.07.2021 <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=COM:2021:393:FIN&from=EN>>

⁸ Internal EU border regions host almost 2 million cross-border commuters, Source: Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament 'Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions', SWD(2017) 307 final, COM(2017) 534 final, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/communication/boosting_growth/com_boosting_border_s.pdf. Quoted by Böhm, H. (2023) Reinforcing Territorial Cooperation and Addressing Challenges on European Integration, Report to the Future of Cohesion Policy Group of High-Level Specialists.










Even more diverse are **EU external borders**. EU Member States share borders with:

- states pursuing EU Membership and actively seeking closer links, e.g., N. Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia Herzegovina, and Ukraine;
- EFTA members with agreements in place to inform and enable territorial cooperation (Norway, Lichtenstein, Iceland and Switzerland);
- maritime borders with non-EU Member States, with some engagement in territorial cooperation programmes, e.g., around the Mediterranean;
- microstates and enclaves, e.g., Andorra, Monaco, San Marino;
- overseas territories, e.g., Greenland, Aruba, French Polynesia;
- the EU's new external border with the UK where formal territorial cooperation relations are still evolving, but key elements remain most notably through the PEACE plus Interreg programme;
- Russia and Belarus, where cross border collaborative links are suspended with no foreseeable change in the future.

EoRPA partner experience reflects this mix of transborder and cross border links (see Table 1).

Table 1: EoRPA Partner Borders

Country	Border Type	Description
	EU EFTA	Austria borders 6 EU and 2 EFTA members, A key position in Central Europe. Debates around border controls along border with Slovenia and Hungary and extension of Schengen area.
	EU EFTA External links suspended	Shares 832-mile-long land border with Russia Åland is a Finnish governed autonomous archipelago at the mouth of the Gulf of Bothnia Member of the Nordic Passport Union
	EU EFTA	Has the largest number of neighbours at 9 Border with Denmark was democratically decided by plebiscite in 1920, 1955 declaration affords rights to the Danish-German minorities across the opposite border
	EU EFTA Non-EU international cooperation	Coastline of 7,600 km with extensive maritime borders Encircles the political entities of San Marino and the Vatican City
	EU Non-EU international cooperation	Constituent countries of the Kingdom of the Netherlands: Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, and Netherlands Special municipalities of the Netherlands: Bonaire, Saba, Sint Eustatius Interreg D Outermost regions cooperation
	EU Non-EU international cooperation External links suspended	External borders with Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad Security increased 2022, suspension of cross border activity
	EU EFTA Non-EU international cooperation External links suspended	Northern land and maritime borders with Russia, Local border cooperation continues to a limited extent, despite national tensions Member of the Nordic Passport Union Dependent Antarctic territory and Svalbard and Jan Mayen under the Kingdom of Norway





	EU Overseas territory	800-Year-old land border with Spain. Autonomous regions of Madeira and the Azores in the Atlantic Ocean. Maritime region is 40x larger than land
	EU EFTA	Oresund bridge connects Malmo directly to Copenhagen Mountainous border with Norway Nordic passport Union
	EU EFTA	Non-EU but member of the Schengen Agreement. Mountainous topography. Shares control of the Euroairport with France within the Basel Trinational district
	EU EFTA External	Constituent Countries Crown Dependencies Overseas Territories Sovereign Base Areas Antarctic Territory Gibraltar border with Spain under border negotiation Land border the Republic of Ireland

Source: Author Illustration



Decentralisation and relations with central government can inform engagement with territorial cooperation. Many territories have the **autonomy and resources to promote and deliver cooperation**, particularly those within decentralised governance systems. For example, the German *Länder* can operate cultural and economic representation abroad. Territorial cooperation may be an opportunity to build the profile of the regional/devolved authority in an international context. Past engagement in EU territorial cooperation programmes gave devolved authorities and regional authorities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland active roles in driving external relations with partners in the Arctic, across the Irish Sea, and North Sea areas. However, in other cases, territories can lack capacity at regional level or demand/drive to participate. Compounding the issue, particularly as budgets are pressured, territories are increasingly concerned with directing limited financial and institutional resources to core activities.



Central government commitment to territorial cooperation has a strong role to play. For example, Ireland has adopted a more coherent approach to territorial cooperation with central government conscious of its value in building external links and profile post Brexit. Intergovernmental links and agreements can ease territorial cooperation along specific borders, e.g., through Union for the Mediterranean, Baltic Cooperation, Nordic Intergovernmental Cooperation, Visegrad group, Good Friday Agreement, and Treaty of Aachen on cooperation and integration. Equally, central governments may afford territorial cooperation initiatives little attention. Territorial cooperation may be viewed as little more than a required exercise to gain resources. Territorial cooperation can suffer from lack of awareness/understanding at central government level, viewed as something 'for the regions to deal with'. On one hand, less central government involvement facilitates a stronger regional role and ownership of territorial cooperation. On the other hand, territorial cooperation can suffer without central government 'weight' behind it to lobby for resources, support agendas, take up strategies, or support synergies.





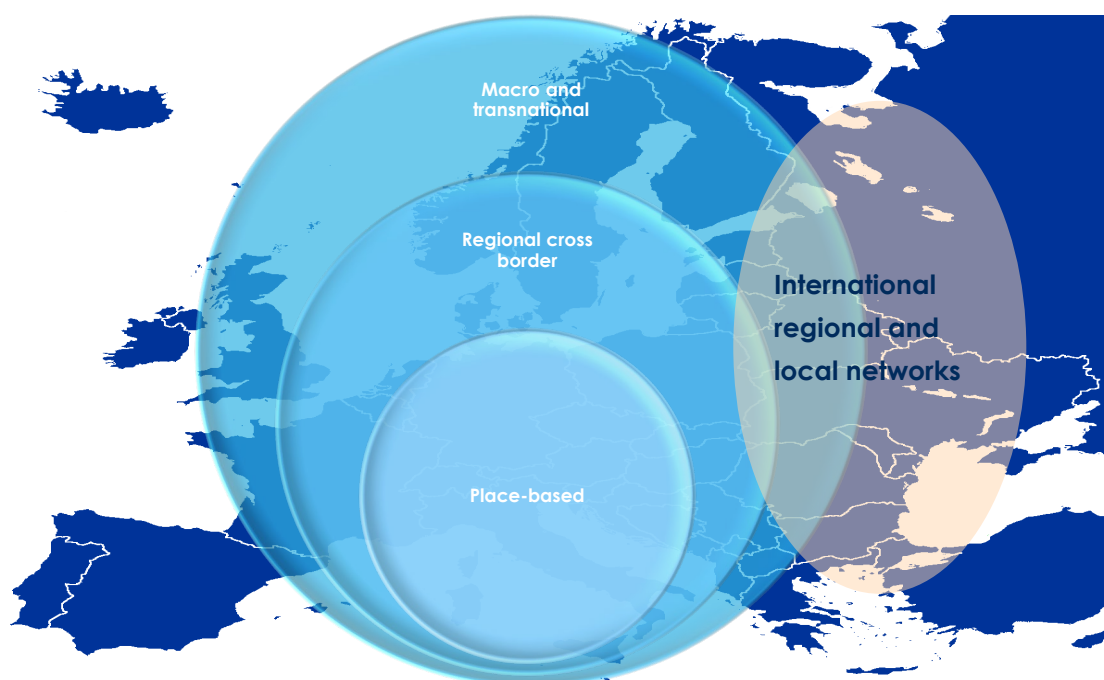
Differing capacities and approaches either side of a border are challenging for establishing equal/joint activities and structures. Productive cross-border cooperation is highly dependent on the relevant organisations' capacity to deliver.⁹ Significant imbalances risk the perception of 'leaders' and 'followers' in the cooperation, as opposed to partnerships and balanced inputs, concerns over the benefits of cooperation for one region over another and tensions in agreeing suitable approaches, particularly in relation to management and administration.

⁹ Lagana, G. and Wincott, D. (2020) The Added Value of the Ireland-Wales Cooperation Programme, Wales Governance Centre, p. 13



3 SCOPE AND SCALES OF TERRITORIAL COOPERATION

Territorial cooperation links in Europe are increasingly diverse reflecting not only different border relations but also a wide spectrum of rationale and ambitions for the cooperation initiatives themselves. The considerable diversity of border types and capacities mean a 'one size fits all' model and single set of expectations in relation to territorial cooperation is unrealistic. For some highly integrated borders pursuing close operational territorial integration is an option. For others, working to build mutual trust and understandings across borders is an equally important goal. Territorial cooperation operates at a wide continuum of spatial scales including macro and transnational areas, directly between border regions, and locally/ 'place to place'.



The levels of ambition range from maintaining/building a level of commitment to cooperation and developing joint strategies on key themes to truly joint actions delivering change on the ground. **The scope, scale and rationale for territorial cooperation range** from:

- pursuit of EU territorial integration and cohesion (Interreg) to addressing specific administrative legal and administrative barriers (B-solutions and EGTC),
- basis for long term strategic planning and cooperation (macroregions) to a means to 'keep in touch' and keep working on practical issues (Straits Committee); and
- regional development tool for lagging border regions to a means of pursuing paradiplomacy.






The following overview of cooperation initiatives, while not exhaustive, aims to provide an insight into the range and nature of different types of territorial cooperation in Europe including differing governance approaches and paths of evolution.¹⁰

3.1 Macroregional/transnational territorial cooperation



Macro/transnational - multiple regions from multiple countries, based around territory with shared/common development concerns, may also involve multi-level governance

Table 2: Macro and transnational cooperation

 Macro and transnational	
Interreg Transnational	
Transnational territories, involves national, regional, and local partners. Also work alongside IPA and Interreg NEXT (formerly ENI) cross border programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi annual programmes • Highly structured and planned • 13 Programmes with budget of 1.5 billion for 2021-27 • Administratively complex, variable policy profile and visibility of impact • A number of programmes impacted by the suspension of links with Belarus and Russia
Macro-region/Sea Basin	
EU macro-regional and sea basin strategies arose from a need to find more targeted solutions to common challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic, multi-level cooperation brings a strategic/territorial dimension to locally/driven projects and vice versa • Combine funding sources while working towards shared and common goals • Sea basin strategies link territorial development concerns and marine development issues • Scope to work across a wide range of areas/themes • Commitment to no new instruments, no additional legislation, and no institutions has made the concept challenging to work with
Territorially based within intergovernmental cooperation	
For example: In the Nordic area common societal and cultural links lie at the heart of contemporary cooperation. Formalised/political territorial cooperation gradually developed to manage specific development issues. ¹¹ For example, NORA organisation –funded as a regional cooperation programme and covers the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland and the west coast of Norway.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop integrated cross-sectoral approaches to territorial needs • Mix of formal programme-based cooperation, governmental and regional/local level initiatives • Capacity to reflect specific territorial interests/approaches • Links to other forms of territorial cooperation, e.g., NORA projects have gone on to secure funding from Interreg

¹⁰ Engle, A. (2009) Territorial Cooperation in Europe: Coordinated Strategy or lost in Confusion?, Paper presented at the Conference "Innovation for Good Local and Regional Governance - A European Challenge" Institute of Governance Studies, University of Twente Enschede, 2-3 April 2009

¹¹ Sundelius, B. and Wiklund, C. (1979) 'The Nordic Community: The Ugly Duckling of Regional Cooperation' 11 Journal of Common Market Studies, Vol. XVIII, No. 1 pp. 59-71



Area conventions	
<p>Area-based cooperation arrangements with a regional focus and representation, but also a strong national government representation. For example, the Carpathian and Alpine Conventions provide a framework for cooperation in sustainable development and environmental protection measures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Territorial focus, but with high level national government representation, e.g., ministerial level meetings • Facilitates further dialogue around a shared geographical issue • Structured with institutional resource, e.g., secretariat function • Use of thematic working groups
Area Commission	
<p>Six geographical Commissions of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), incl. the North Sea and Atlantic Arc Commissions. Act as cooperation platforms for regions around their respective shared territories. Wales, Ireland and England have areas in the Atlantic Arc. Scottish and English Regions have been involved in the North Sea Commission.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looser form of cooperation. • Strong local/area roots and representation • Engagement on strategic issues facing the area, both territorial and maritime • Well attended conferences and network events • Open to EU and Non-EU territories • Patchy geographic coverage and visibility • Variable levels of engagement • Lacks established sources of funding to support regular projects

Macro and transnational territorial cooperation covers a large cooperation area comprised of territories in multiple countries. This scale of cooperation takes numerous forms. Among the best known are the **Interreg B Transnational territorial cooperation programmes**. Following the first Interreg Community Initiatives in 1990-1993, the first Interreg B programmes were adopted for the 1994-1999 programme period. In the 2021-27 period, 13 programmes cover areas from the Northern Periphery and Arctic to the Mediterranean and have a budget of €1.5 billion. Covering large areas, transnational programmes operate within a complex cooperation environment, covering a wide variety of border types, administrative arrangements, and forms of territorial cooperation.

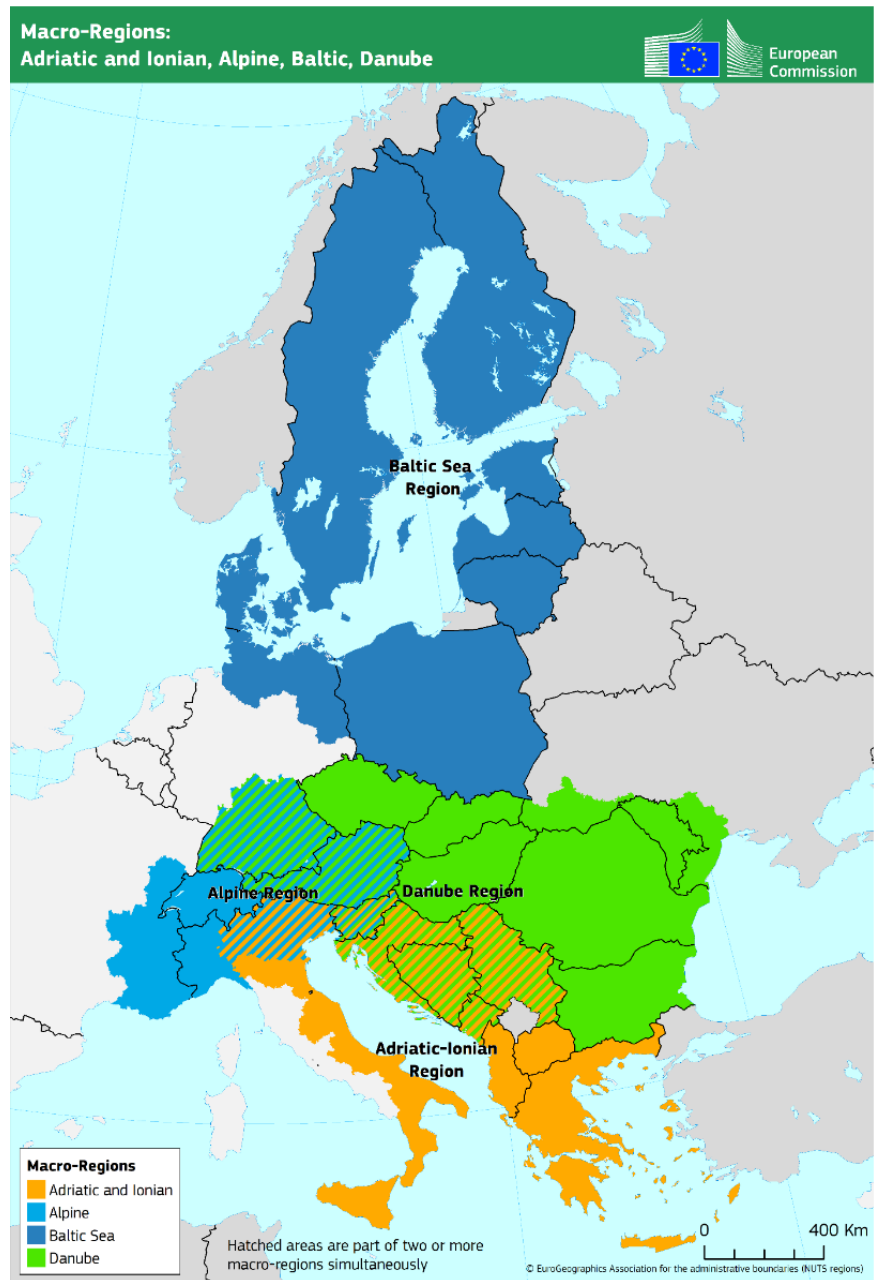




Figure 1: EU Macroregional Strategies

EU Macroregional and Sea Basin Strategies are a newer form of cooperation. The first Macroregional Strategy was adopted in 2009, covering areas around the Baltic Sea. Subsequently, strategies were adopted for the Alpine Area, Danube, and Adriatic, see Figure 1. Macro-regional strategies aim to be 'open and agile platforms for strategic networking'¹² and to facilitate and coordinate joint policies and actions, e.g., through thematic platforms and work plans that influence cooperation on the ground.

Recognising the importance of regional cooperation in the development of maritime spaces three Sea Basin Strategies are in place: the Atlantic, Western Mediterranean and Black Sea. Each has a specific territorial focus, but also common themes such as blue growth, and eco-system management. The approach can enable more strategic cooperation, with longer-term horizons than through project-based cooperation and helps prioritise and build synergies across a portfolio of actions.



Source:
https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies_en



Large-scale territorial cooperation programmes are not solely driven by the EU. **Nordic cooperation** also incorporates a transnational territorial dimension. For example, West Nordic cooperation between Iceland, Greenland, and the Faroes is promoted via an interparliamentary council which allows the members to form recommendations and discuss shared regional opportunities and challenges. More specifically, building on West Nordic Cooperation, the NORA partnership, which also includes coastal Norway, has the aim of making the North Atlantic a dynamic part of the Nordic region. NORA operates through funding allocations, creation of regional strategies, and supporting sustainable economic development between private and public sectors. Increasingly, NORA also seeks links with wider North Atlantic partners, including the US state of Maine and Scotland, particularly Orkney, Shetland, and the Hebrides. In May 2023 Scotland's Orkney Council signed a Memorandum of Understanding with NORA to pursue closer links.¹³

Territorially based cooperation is also pursued under the umbrella of intergovernmental agreements. For example, the Union for the Mediterranean has Regional Dialogue Platforms involving participants from across levels of government and regional organisations to exchange knowledge and inform better cooperation projects.¹⁴

Arctic territories are the focus of numerous forms of cooperation and collaboration. However, many have an intergovernmental or sectoral/thematic focus and lack a specific territorial/regional development focus. Exceptions include:

- Nordic Arctic cooperation programme coordinated by the Nordic Institute of Greenland. The programme funds projects with a minimum of three Nordic partners with potential inclusion of other Arctic countries, e.g., Canada.
- The Barents Regional Council which works with the intergovernmental Barents-Euro Arctic Council to promote regional cooperation at all levels across multiple themes. Since its inception, the work of the Barents Regional Council built up strong and productive links with Russian Arctic Territories, which have now been lost, disrupting wider cooperation efforts.

The Treaty of Aachen between France and Germany entered into force in January 2020 and involves a number of cooperation projects and initiatives. Work includes the creation of a cross border committee responsible for drawing up a common strategy for identifying priority projects, monitoring difficulties encountered in border regions and proposing solutions to

¹³ Collaboration with Russia is suspended and Russia's Nenets Autonomous Okrug currently holds the council chair, which has stalled further cooperation. However, in late 2023 the Council chair will pass to Finland's North Karelia region, which could open up cooperation between the remaining participants in this strategically significant area of the Arctic. <https://nora.fo/news/164/samarbejdsaftale-med-orkney-islands?fbclid=IwAR085mTGDAAsG-izVe77yK6-LAtFCExl_9mkaANVGSfAMLq6heLBD1Xslo&_l=no>

¹⁴ Union for the Mediterranean (2023) Regional Dialogue Platforms <<https://ufmsecretariat.org/what-we-do/platforms/>>



address them. The timing of the committee's establishment meant it took on a role preserving cross border cooperation through the Covid pandemic.¹⁵

Area conventions and commissions cover territories from multiple countries linked by shared/common territorially based themes. For example,

- the Alpine Convention was signed in 1995 by eight Alpine countries and the EU as a formal acknowledgement and commitment to addressing the region's transnational issues, including biodiversity loss, shifting demographics, and the impacts of a changing climate. The convention provides a framework for engagement between national, regional and local stakeholders. The Alpine Convention is currently operating within a multi-annual work programme 2023-2030 which progresses and concludes in line with EU and UN climate strategies.¹⁶



- An example of one of six area commissions under the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions, the North Sea Commission aims to act as a 'voice of the North Sea regions'.¹⁷ The Commission acts as a framework of dialogue built on knowledge exchange and research collaboration concerning regional issues and particularly the process of maritime spatial planning. Membership is voluntary and not confined to EU regions. Scottish regions of Fife and Aberdeenshire remain members, as are regions of Southern and coastal Norway. Similarly, the Atlantic Area Commission highlighted the importance of actively engaging UK regions in cooperation¹⁸ and currently has members from Wales and Northern Ireland.
- The Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Carpathian Convention) was adopted and signed by the seven Parties (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Ukraine) in May

¹⁵ Government of France (2022) Threat of Aachen on Franco-German Cooperation and Integration <<https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/germany/france-and-germany/franco-german-treaty-of-aachen/article/the-treaty-of-aachen-on-franco-german-cooperation-and-integration>>

¹⁶ Alpine Convention (2023) <https://www.alpconv.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Organisation/AC/XVII/AC_MAP_2023-2030_en_web.pdf>

¹⁷ CPMR North Sea Commission <<https://cpmr-northsea.org/download/nsc-information-folder/?wpdmdl=2691&ind=1576054141799>>

¹⁸CPMR Atlantic Commission <<https://cpmr-atlantic.org/download/2021-2022-activity-report-of-the-atlantic-arc-commission/?wpdmdl=13874&ind=1652857677730>>




2003, and entered into force in January 2006. It is the only multi-level governance mechanism covering the whole of the Carpathian area.¹⁹

3.2 Cross Border Territorial Cooperation



Regional cross border - specific regions along national administrative boundary

Table 3: Cross Border Cooperation

 Regional Cross border	
Interreg A	
<p>Supports cooperation between NUTS III regions from at least two different Member States lying directly on the borders or adjacent to them</p> <p>Also work alongside IPA and Interreg NEXT (formerly ENI) cross border programmes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 64 Programmes focus on supporting the addressing of border region issues and opportunities • Particularly relevant are emergency response initiatives • Operates within defined thematic priorities and objectives which can restrict local impact and uptake of opportunities • A number of programmes impacted by the suspension of links with Belarus and Russia i.e. the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine programme from 2014-2020 has been altered to Poland-Ukraine for the 2021-2027 period. An Interreg NEXT programme between an EU member and neighbour country.
Interreg D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 outermost regions cooperation programmes enable cooperation neighbouring non-European Third Countries and territories.

¹⁹ Carpathian Convention < <http://www.carpathianconvention.org/>>





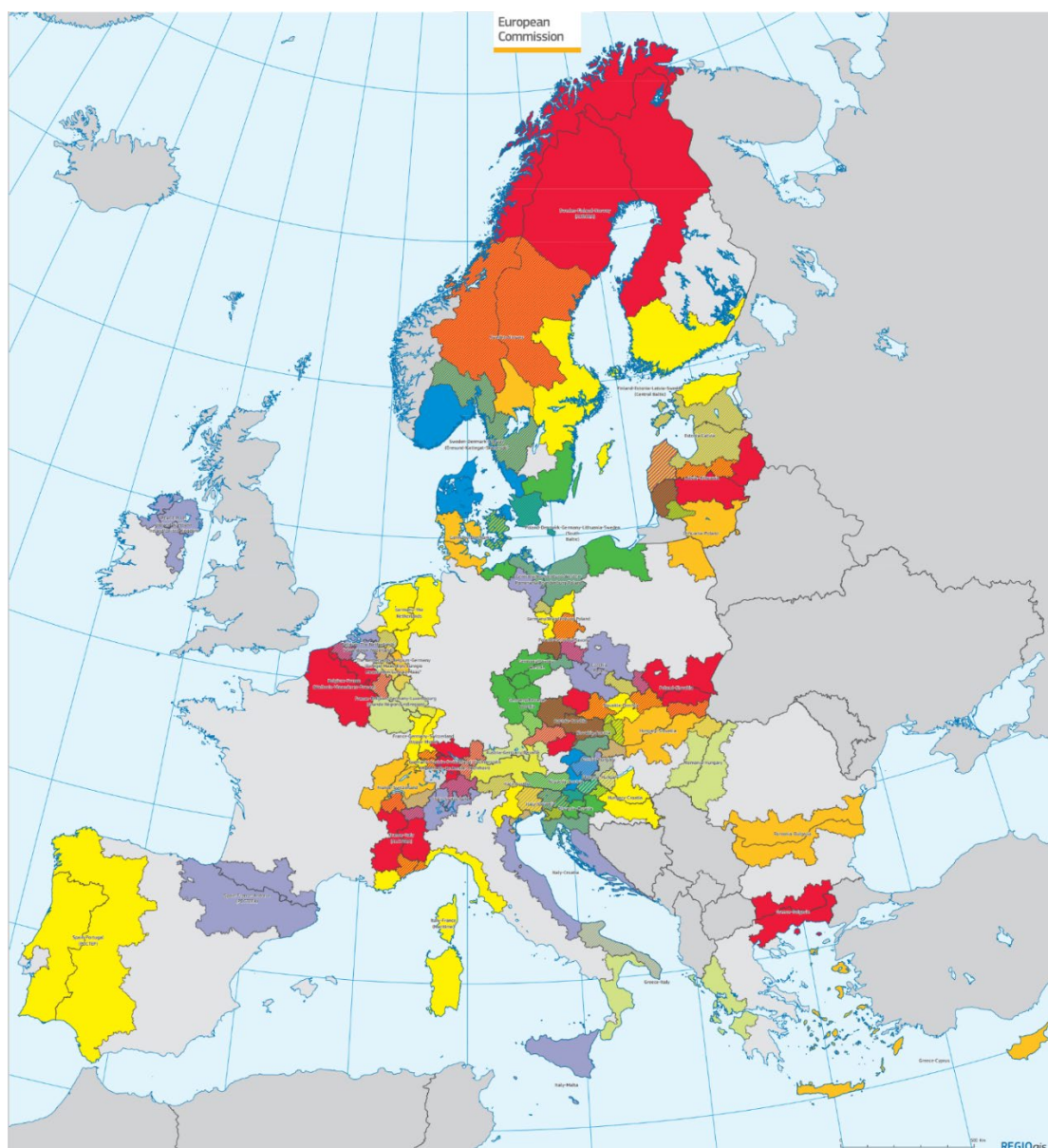
EGTC	
<p>European Groupings for Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) were set up to facilitate cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation between Member States or their regional and local authorities. EGTCs enable these partners to implement joint projects, share expertise, and improve coordination of spatial planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holds legal status at an EU level • Allows for stronger representation of microregional interests • Framework fulfils the conditions of EU funding e.g., Interreg and eases the administrative process of funding applications. • Formalises the commitment of relevant parties where informal commitment has persisted. • The framework allows or diversification of interests and regional focus • Disproportionate uptake and national monitoring across Europe • Legal basis of one state must persuade states with different political landscapes to participate • Not suitable for all forms of cooperation especially where longer precedents remain
Euroregions	
<p>A general term for transnational cooperative structures in Europe.</p> <p>Post WWII motivation for European cohesion to improve relations in border regions of western Europe i.e. Germany and Belgium.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revitalization with the fall of the iron curtain-Centre created under the Interreg IIIA project to improve cross-border communication and collaboration between regions of Austria, Slovakia, Czechia and Hungary. • Many Euroregions adopted the EGTC mechanism after it was introduced in 2006 with an increase in uptake following an amendment in 2013. • Various degrees of commitment and capability.
Straits Committee	
<p>Launched in 2020, involving territories in England, France, Belgium and the Netherlands, bordering Dover Strait and Channel – North Sea region. A multilateral forum for dialogue, providing a flexible framework for its members to work together within the boundaries of their responsibilities, and for extending cooperation to local stakeholders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible framework of cooperation addresses differences in local capacity. • Key areas for flow of trade and people • Climate and cultural issues • Events and conferences • Small funding pot, two projects a year
Irish Sea Framework	
<p>New territorially based initiative led by Welsh Government as a means to continue collaborative links around the Irish Sea, following the loss of the Ireland-Wales Interreg A Cross border programme</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible administrative and participation arrangement, • Visible commitment to ongoing territorial cooperation • Events and symposia • Limited financial resource • Complex political and institutional context





Regional territorial cooperation arrangements focus on narrower geographic areas along or around national administrative boundaries. Some have a tight geographic focus on regions either side of a border. Others cover a wider geographic area, covering territories from more than two countries.

Figure 2: Interreg A programme areas 2021-2027



Source: DG Regio [Interreg6A-CBC-A0.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

Best known are the EU's **Interreg A Cross Border Programmes**. Interreg cross border programmes have been in place for over 30 years. The current programmes operate according to their own regulation and, in addition to the Cohesion Policy Objectives, have two Interreg Specific Objectives: (i) a better cooperation governance; and (ii) a safer more secure Europe. For the 2021-2027 period, 64 programmes were planned with a budget of €6.5





billion, approximately 70 percent of the total Interreg funding, see Figure 2. The area for Interreg 2014-2020 programmes covered 66 percent of the EU territory and 51 percent of the population. Major geographical changes for the new period include the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from all but one Interreg Programme,²⁰ and suspension of cooperation with Russia and Belarus along the EU's external border.

Complimentary to Interreg A (and B) is Interreg NEXT cooperation, formerly ENI, funding for neighbour collaboration. For border regions of, for example, Finland, Poland, Romania and Hungary these programmes made up a notable resource for territories on the edge of the EU and facing substantial economic development challenges. However, as a result of the war in Ukraine, nine cross border NEXT programmes were halted,²¹ particularly affecting cooperation with Poland, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Funding originally, allocated to cooperative programmes with Russia and Belarus has been redistributed to support, e.g. EU projects concerning Moldova and Ukraine.²² For example, the Poland-Ukraine Interreg NEXT Programme focuses on short term emergency support and long-term restructuring.²³

Pre-dating Interreg and underlining the point that not all forms of territorial cooperation are driven by the EU are **Euroregions**. Euroregions are cooperation structures between two (or more) contiguous territories located in different European countries. The German-Dutch border area was a pioneer in setting up the first Euroregion in 1958 which brought together five border regions. Since then, Euroregions have proliferated, see Figure 3.

²⁰ The PEACE + programme is the successor to PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes supporting peace and cooperation across the Ireland and Ireland border. The 2021-2027 programme value is 1.1 billion euro. Following the withdrawal of the UK, the programme area has transitioned from an internal to external programme area.

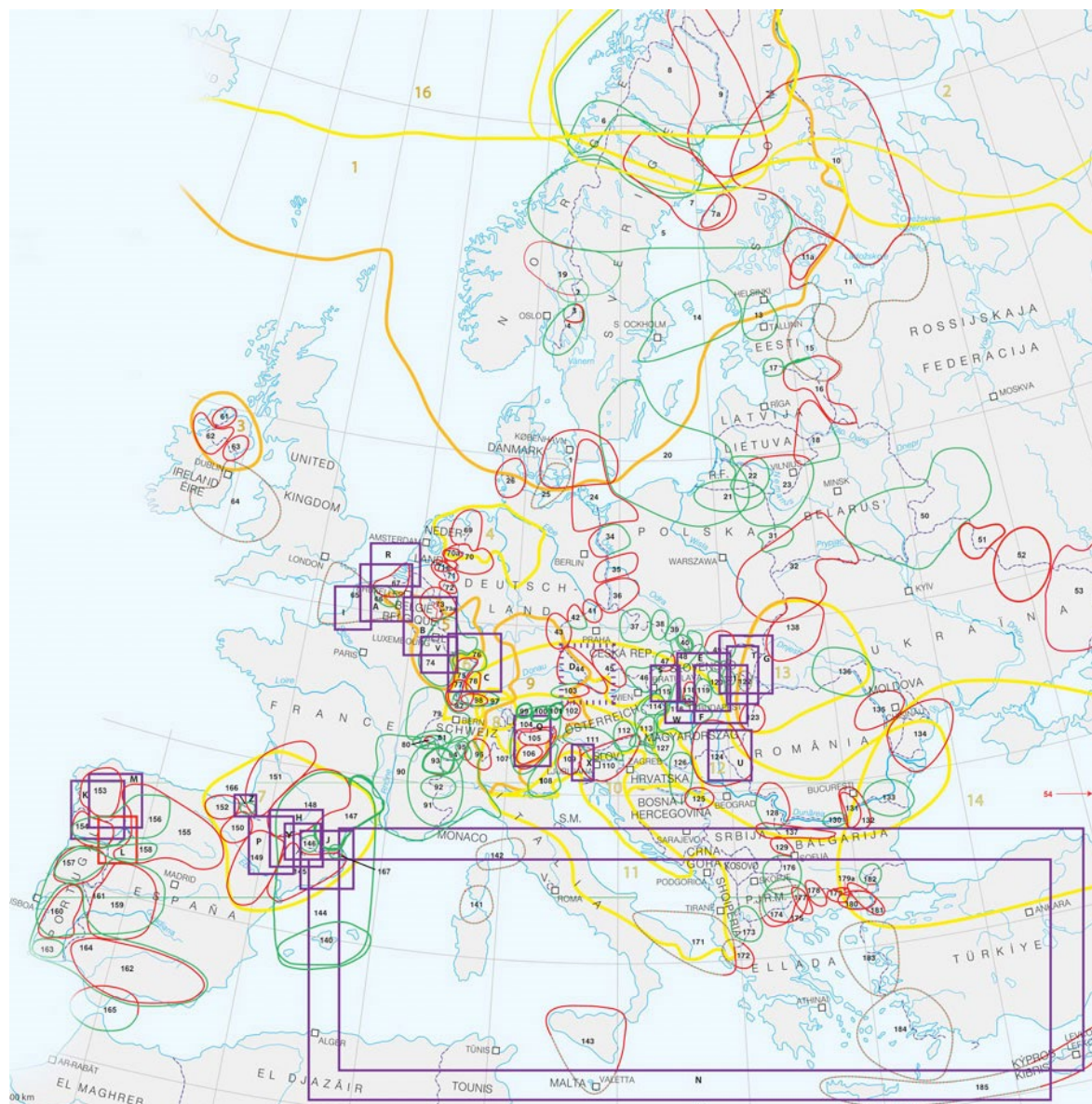
²¹ Cross border programmes involving Russia or Belarus: Kolarctic', 'Karelia', 'South-East Finland/Russia', 'Estonia/Russia', 'Latvia/Russia', 'Lithuania/Russia', 'Poland/Russia', 'Latvia/Lithuania/Belarus', 'Poland/Belarus/Ukraine'. In addition, Russia was involved in the Baltic Sea region transnational cooperation programme. Source: EC (2022) Commission suspends cross-border cooperation and transnational cooperation with Russia and Belarus. 4 March 2022 <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_1526>

²² CEC Cohesion (2023) 2021-2027: forging an ever stronger Union: Report on the outcome of 2021-2027 cohesion policy programming, Brussels, 28.4.2023 <https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/reports/2021-2027-programming-outcome/report-outcome-2021-2027-cohesion-policy-programming-part1.pdf>

²³ Interreg Next Poland-Ukraine (2022) CP for Interreg Poland Ukraine <https://www.pbu2020.eu/files/uploads/pages_en/pbu2021-2027/JOP%20zatwierdzony/Program_Interreg_NEXT_Polska_Ukraina_2021_2027_wersja_w_jezyku_angielskim_1.pdf>



Figure 3: Euroregions (as defined by the AEBR)



Source: Association of European Border Regions <<https://www.aebr.eu/>>

They vary in form, but the Association of European Border Regions sets the following criteria for their identification:

- an association of local and regional authorities on either side of the national border, sometimes with a parliamentary assembly;
- a transfrontier association with a permanent secretariat and a technical and administrative team with own resources;
- of private law nature, based on non-profit-making associations or foundations on either side of the border in accordance with the respective national law in force; and

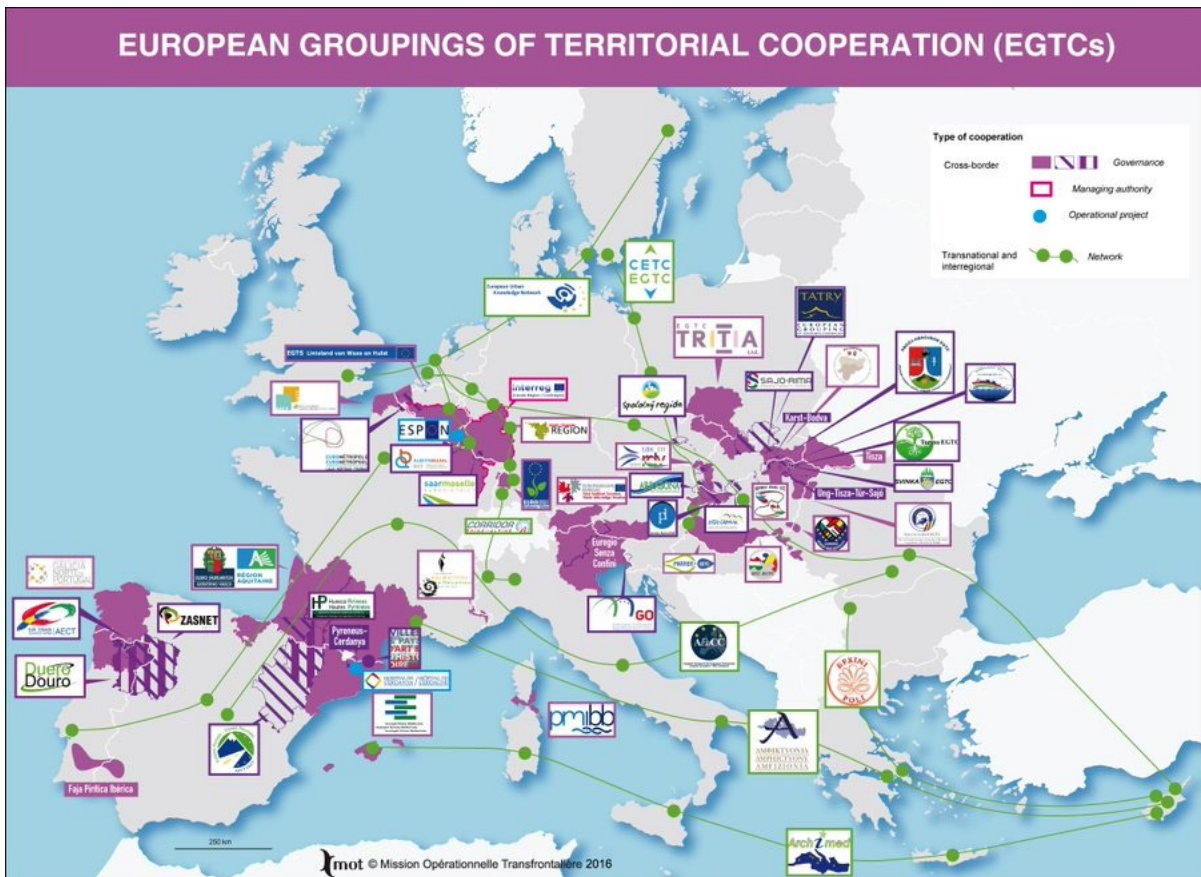




- of public law nature, based on inter-state agreements, dealing among other things, with the participation of territorial authorities.²⁴

The general aim is to create a coherent space, developed collectively by bringing together stakeholders, policies and projects. Within this framework and over time, beneficial links to other European policies and initiatives have emerged, for example, as will be discussed, the opportunity to become a European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

Figure 4: European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation



Source: <https://transfrontier.eu/members/mot-mission-operationnelle-transfrontaliere/>

Further cross border initiatives include European Groupings for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), implemented according to EU Council Regulation 1082/2006 of 5 July 2006. EGTC allows public entities of different EU Member States to come together under a new entity with full legal personality. Through an EGTC public authorities can set up a single joint structure to implement

²⁴ Council of Europe (date unknown). Local and Regional Democracy and Good Governance Website of the Council of Europe. Retrieved from http://www.coe.int/t/dgap/localdemocracy/Areas_of_Work/Transfrontier_Cooperation/Euroregions/What_is_en.asp.



projects, investments or policies, whether co-financed by the EU budget or not.²⁵ As of March 2023, 79 EGTC have been set up²⁶, see Figure 4. EGTC's role as a comparatively new initiative and step change in the legal foundations of territorial cooperation is important. However, connections and origins in other forms of cooperation are also worth noting. For example, a number of Euroregions adopted the EGTC mechanism, with an increase in uptake following an amendment in 2013, see Box 1.

Box 1: Kvarken Council – Institutional evolution

The Kvarken Council was founded in 1972 as a Nordic organisation focused on the facilitation of cooperation between 3 counties of Finland and 2 regions of Sweden across the Gulf of Bothnia. In December 2020, the Kvarken Council transitioned from an association to a legal entity within the EGTC framework. The decision was made to allow for an ease in access to European funding and cooperation. The Kvarken Council is one of 12 border regional committees supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers however, it is the only registered as an EGTC. As such the council retains recognition in two significant groups of territorial cooperation. The council addresses regional issues such as tourism and transport around the Gulf of Bothnia through the facilitation of reports and projects. Recent projects have addressed the benefits and feasibility of short distance electric flights, which could provide an international link and service the island communities residing within the Gulf.

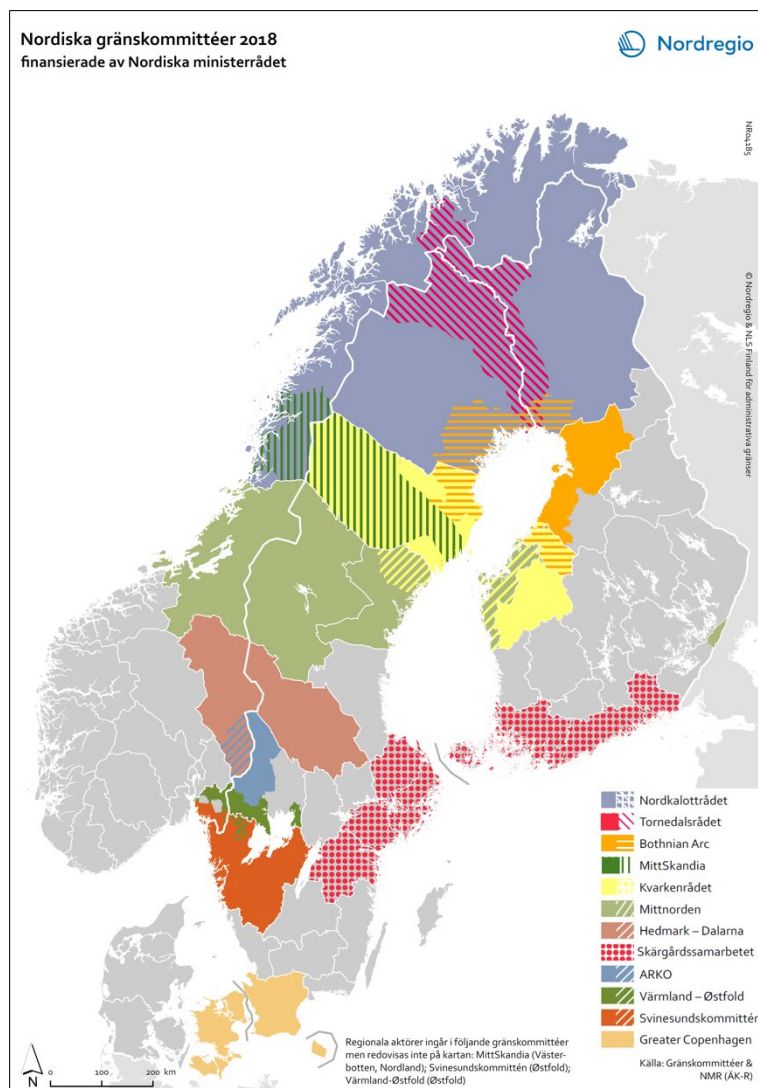
Source: <https://www.kvarken.org/en/the-kvarken-council/>

²⁵ DG Regio (2022) European Grouping of Territorial Development
<https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/european-grouping-territorial-cooperation_en>

²⁶ European Parliament EGTC Factsheet
<<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/94/european-groupings-of-territorial-cooperation-egtc->>



Figure 5: Regional Cross-border Committees



Source: <https://nordregio.org/maps/nordic-cross-border-co-operation-committees-2018/>

at least some regional links across what has been a very closely connected area. Efforts were further inspired by lessons from the Covid pandemic and the resulting disruption of already challenging border links.²⁸ Member authorities meet around four times per year. The aim is to promote good neighbourly relations, encourage cross-border discussions on matters of mutual

Nordic Cooperation is also conducted through cross-border links. **Regional cross-border committees** operate across national borders, and consist of municipalities, counties and local authority associations, see Figure 5. Like Euroregions, the committees date back to the 1960s.²⁷ The objective is to enhance growth and development across the cross border regions.

Cross border cooperation arrangements continue to evolve in response to changing policy contexts, opportunities and needs. For example, **Straits Committee is a voluntary partnership, launched in 2020**, between 2 UK County Councils (Kent and Essex) and neighbouring local authorities in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, see Figure 6. Following the loss of a number of Interreg programmes spanning the Channel, Straits Committee has a role as a means to maintain

²⁷ Nordregio (2018) Nordic cross-border co-operation committees 2018 <https://nordregio.org/maps/nordic-cross-border-co-operation-committees-2018/>; Berlina, A, Diş, A. and Hörnström, L. (2015) Added value of cross-border co-operation, Nordregio news No. 1 2015. <<https://nordregio.org/nordregio-magazine/issues/cross-border-co-operation/added-value-of-cross-border-co-operation/>>

²⁸ Straits Committee (2022) <<https://straitscommittee.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/A4-Detroit-Grand-public-EN-sept-2021-BD.pdf>>



interest, e.g. cross-border clusters, flooding and coastline management, and seek to create opportunities for working together. The Committee has an integrated vision and strategy document and is piloting an initiative to support local organisations either side of the Channel working together, offering small grants of up to £5,000 for UK partners.

Figure 6: Straits Committee Cooperation Area



Source: <https://straitscommittee.eu/>

Similarly, the Welsh Government has led work to develop an **informal 'Framework for Co-operation across the Irish Sea'**.²⁹ Recognising the political and financial barriers, an informal framework for cooperation based around a 'coalition of the willing' is evolving with strategic direction in the short-term and a course set towards more concrete medium term goals, based on coordinating, sign-posting, facilitating and influencing in areas of shared interest: sustainable blue economy, innovation strengths and communities & culture.³⁰

²⁹ Green, G., (2022) 'Proposal for an informal Framework for co-operation across the Irish Sea Space' presentation to the Welsh Government, Irish Sea Cooperation Workshop," on line 24 Nov 2022

³⁰ McMaster, I. and Vironen, H. (2023) Gone but not forgotten (yet): Interreg in post-Brexit UK, Contemporary Social Science, 18:2, 197-215, DOI: 10.1080/21582041.2023.2197874






3.3 Place-Based Territorial Cooperation



Place-based – direct territorially based cooperation between places across a national administrative boundary

Table 4: Place Based Cooperation

 Place-based	
ITI & CLLD	
<p>ITI, introduced under Article 36 of the CPR, as a means to deliver Cohesion Policy in a territorially integrated way in order to increase its effectiveness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver actions in any geographical area with similar territorial features, including in cross-border areas in the context of European Territorial Cooperation. • CP Managing Authorities (MAs) have the final responsibility for ITIs. However, Intermediate Bodies (IBs - local authorities, regional development bodies etc.) may be appointed to carry out delegated tasks.
B-Solutions	
<p>B-solutions and the successor B-solutions 2.0: Solving Cross-Border Obstacles are initiatives to tackle legal and administrative border obstacles along EU internal borders. The 2.0 programme will also look to address border obstacles between EU and EFTA, IPA and maritime border.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoted by DG REGIO as one of the actions proposed in the referred Communication Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions, adopted by the Commission on 20 September 2017. • The initiative is managed by the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR). • Technical tool used to improve and overcome border obstacles, builds on various forms of pre-existing collaboration
Twinning 2.0	
<p>Town and city twinning has been described as outdated, either focussed on cultural exchange or existing in name only. Yet, some places have found 'new life' in links and partnerships between towns with shared strategic priorities or on specific issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct local links can enable action, without relying on national government action • Educational exchange • Leeds and Liles experiences of urban Planning around the introduction of major rail links (HS2 and plans for HS2)³¹

Place-based territorial cooperation has gained increased attention. The need for territorial synergies and links across all levels of governance is highlighted in, for example, the Territorial

³¹ Wilson, S. (2020) A Century of Twinning <https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/interactive/twin-towns-yorkshire#main-page-section-2>, ONS (2020) Twinned towns and sister cities, Great Britain and Europe: September 2020, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/twinnedtownsandersistercitiesgreatbritainandurope/september2020>



Agenda 2030.³² Initiatives such as the Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) and Community Led Local Development (CLLD) promote the combination of various funding sources across multiple levels and sectors to best fit and benefit the relative territory. They provide a bottom-up approach to making the most of potential investment. In both cases, cooperation across domestic administrative boundaries lies at the heart of the investments. However, cooperation across national borders can also take place. For example, an ITI has been established within the Interreg A Italy Slovenia Programme, see Box 2, and the CLLD in the Interreg A Austria-Italy 'Terra Raetica'.³³ Looking to the future a newly forming ITI between the Alentejo and Algarve Regions in Portugal notes the potentially beneficial links and lessons from the Interreg Spain Portugal Programme which also covers the area.³⁴

Box 2: ITI Italy-Slovenia

The Interreg OP Italy-Slovenia applies the Integrated Territorial Investment approach to develop an integrated cross-border strategy for the twin cities of Nova Gorica Gorizia–Šempeter Vrtojba, which are also acting as EGTC since 2011. The ITI tool enables them to deliver a long-term territorial strategy aimed at facing common social and economic challenges for a well-defined geographical area that spans national borders. The ITI strategy includes two pilot projects from different priority axes of the Interreg OP. The first one aims at supporting the river Isonzo/Soča through sustainable tourism, environmental protection and green growth. The project develops an integrated cross-border network of cycling and walking paths to establish the first urban cross-border park. The second builds a network of integrated services providing a joint use of the healthcare services in the area.

Source: Interreg A IT-SI 2014-2020 [Link](https://euro-go.eu/en/programmi-e-progetti/piani-strategici/) <https://euro-go.eu/en/programmi-e-progetti/piani-strategici/> and Ferry, M. McMaster, I and Palenberg, D. (2020) *Territorial Agenda 2030 A handbook of Implemented examples of Territorial Cohesion at Work*.

Less formalised links also have a role. Across the Northern Ireland - Ireland border the strength of cross-border partnerships and place to place links are credited with cushioning negative impacts of Brexit, enabling some flexibility and resilience at a time when formal structures and processes were challenged.³⁵ The land border between Ireland and Northern Ireland remains the focus of numerous community and territorial cooperation initiatives. Ongoing cooperation covers numerous themes and includes a North West Gateway initiative, local authorities in the Newry and Dundalk signing of a Memorandum of Understanding. The Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN), a network of Councillor's, is also working together to respond to unique

³² TA 2030 (2019) TA 2030: A Future for All Places, <<https://territorialagenda.eu/ta2030/>>

³³ Interreg A Italy-Austria 2014-2020 <<https://www.terraetia.eu/de/terra-raetica/willkommen.html>>

³⁴ Comissão de Coordenação e Desenvolvimento Regional do Algarve (CCDR Algarve), Comissão de Coordenação e Desenvolvimento Regional do Alentejo (CCDR Alentejo) Trabalho desenvolvido com a consultoria e assistência técnica de EY-Parthenon (2022) Investimento Territorial Integrado do Algarve e Alentejo : Fundamentação estratégica dos pressupostos do ITI

³⁵ Creamer, C. and Hayward, K. (2023) Impact of Brexit on the Development of Irish Regions and their Cross-Border Cooperation, European Parliament Regi Committee, <[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2023/733128/IPOL_ATA\(2023\)733128_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2023/733128/IPOL_ATA(2023)733128_EN.pdf)>






economic and social needs of the central border region.³⁶ This more grassroots/bottom-up, point to point territorial cooperation is even leading to new perspectives on city and town twinning as a flexible means to engage in cooperation with related territories. For example, city twinning can promote cultural and educational exchange through events, projects, and academic cooperation. With simpler more flexible arrangements, twinning can avoid larger political tensions and challenges, as such as been considered as a means to maintain some exchange between EU and UK territories.

3.4 Interregional territorial cooperation

Associations and Interregional

Table 5: Associations and Interregional Cooperation

 <p>Associations</p>	
International Local networks	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Association of European Border Regions • Eurocities and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) • Congress of Local and Regional Authorities • Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have already supported and facilitated cooperation across borders • Role in supporting the development and implementation of initiatives such as EU-b solutions with DG Regio, which focuses on addressing legal and administrative barriers in cross border regions. • Remain open to EU and UK regardless of the impact of Brexit
Interregional Programmes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interreg Europe • Urbact • Interact • ESPON 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pan-European cooperation between EU regions³⁷ • Interact supports Interreg stakeholders and projects in their cooperation and communication. It thereby ensures the exchange of experience, information and innovation in order to promote best practice and to make cooperation easier. Interact doesn't provide funding opportunities, but supports actors via targeted events, publications and tools

³⁶ O'Keeffe, B. and Creamer, C. (2019) 'Models of Cross-Border Collaboration in a Post-Brexit Landscape – Insights from External EU Borders'. Irish Geography, 52(2), 153-173, DOI: 10.2014/igj.v52i2.1376;

³⁷ Briot, N., Boulineau, E., Coudroy de Lille, L. and Vaudor L (2021)

Mapping International Cooperation between European Cities: A Network Analysis of the Interreg C and Urbact Programs, Espace, Société, Territoire, 993 <<https://doi.org/10.4000/cybergeogeo.37538>





Working on a pan-European basis, interregional networks play a particular role in supporting and promoting territorial cooperation. Key roles commonly centre around networking, capitalisation, and support activities. For example, Interact supports Interreg stakeholders and projects in their cooperation and communication. The Interreg Europe Programme hosts policy learning platforms where European policy-making community can link into the know-how of regional policy experts and peers³⁸, with partner forms of cooperation informing efforts, e.g. project experience from other Interreg programmes.

3.5 Territorial cooperation formats: governance approaches

As well as scope and scale, **governance is a key variable differentiating forms of territorial cooperation**. In practice, arrangements are highly context-dependent, conditioned by regional and local identities, ideological discourses, and cooperation incentives. Differences are clear in terms of the following dimensions.

i Bottom-up and top down mobilisation



Some of the earliest institutionalised forms of territorial cooperation are based on bottom-up initiatives involving border municipalities.³⁹ Current territorial cooperation arrangements continue to be rooted in local, bottom-up action, which helps ensure local relevance, innovative partnerships and local buy-in.

At the same time as initiatives seek impact and influence, a strategic top-down dimension is important. Top-down engagement can help build legal and administrative frameworks, promote strategic approaches, ensure greater consistency and transparency. Engagement by central government can also help to boost capacity, integration and synergies between initiatives, providing critical strategic support for territorial cooperation. For example, a report on Interreg programmes in Norway proposed the strategic use of Interreg for activities that cannot be supported by national funds, giving greater attention to areas where cooperation with and knowledge transfer from partners in other countries would be beneficial in supporting Norwegian strategies and objectives.⁴⁰

³⁸ Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platforms <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policy-learning-platform>

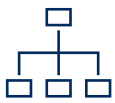
³⁹ Perkmann (2007) Policy Entrepreneurship and Multi-Level Governance: A Comparative Study of European Cross-Border Regions, Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy, Vol. 25, No. 6, pp. 861-879, 2007

⁴⁰ COWI Evaluering AV Interreg I Norge: Rapport, APRIL 2019 KOMMUNAL- OG MODERNISERINGSDEPARTEMENTET, April 2019





ii Structured vs 'soft' links



Territorial cooperation between EU Member States and their neighbours is increasingly structured and institutionalised, most notably through Interreg and EGTC. Highly structured, jointly delivered cooperation arrangements are widely viewed as 'advanced forms of cooperation'. The introduction of EGTCs was seen as a 'next step' in intensifying cooperation. Contemporary policy papers stress the achievements and value of deeper institutional cooperation, e.g. through -solutions and EGTC.⁴¹

However, in practice, **'soft collaboration' and looser, more dynamic links are still important**. Flexibility without 'heavy'/prescriptive formalised cooperation is key to enabling new connections, innovation and collaboration. In particular, 'soft' links through personal ties and networks remain critical to the success of territorial cooperation and are especially valuable at times of major change. Looser arrangements, for example, have enabled territorial cooperation initiatives to build direct links between territories and communities in ways that avoid some of the complexities of 'high-level intergovernmental exchanges', e.g. by working on a smaller-scale and based on practical actions in the Arctic and Barents. Looser arrangements and 'coalitions of the willing' post Brexit have also facilitated a number of territorially based cooperation initiatives, albeit with limited resources, e.g. Straits Commission, Irish Sea Framework and links between Orkney and NORA.

3.6 Evolution: not all moving in the same direction...



Evolution is an important dimension in an account of territorial cooperation. Territorial cooperation initiatives evolve, growing (and contracting) in terms of coverage, structures and formats. Cooperation memberships regularly expand, e.g., the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR) grew to include North Macedonia on 2 April 2020 and San Marino on 14 February 2022.⁴² In the Irish Sea area current efforts centre around an informal framework for cooperation⁴³ which aims to draw in additional partners in the future as the network develops.⁴⁴ The importance of allowing territorial cooperation

⁴¹ CEC (2021) Report on EU Border Regions: Living Labs of European Integration, Brussels 14.07.2021 <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=COM:2021:393:FIN&from=EN>>, p. 7; Mederios, E. (2023) Reinforcing territorial cooperation and addressing challenges on European integration, Final report June 2023, Report to Group of High-level Specialists on the Future of Cohesion Policy

⁴² CEC (2022) Report for the Commission to the European Parliament, The Council the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Implementation of EU macro-regional strategies Brussels, 9.12.2022, COM(2022) 705 final <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52022DC0705>

⁴³ Green, G. (2022) 'Proposal for an informal Framework for co-operation across the Irish Sea Space' presentation to the Welsh Government, Irish Sea Cooperation Workshop," on line 24 Nov 2022

⁴⁴ Green G, (2022) 'Proposal for an informal Framework for co-operation across the Irish Sea Space' presentation to the Welsh Government, Irish Sea Cooperation Workshop," on line 24 Nov 2022



initiatives scope to 'grow' and adapt is highlighted in the case of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Border. Under the overall framework of the Good Friday Agreement and 2013 Framework for Cooperation, the scope to build up cooperation through the co-creation of a number of collaborative links, including joint working groups, Memorandum of Understanding and partnership agreements reveals innovation and evolution along this border.⁴⁵ Growth through geographic flexibility is an increasingly visible element of territorial cooperation. For the 2021-27 period, Interreg programmes allow for functional geographies meaning cross border collaboration is not strictly limited to the administrative borders of the Programme and opening the way for organisations and institutions not based in the core programme area to be involved.

The evolution of territorial cooperation is not all 'one-way'. Efforts stall, lose momentum and even cease. In recent years, territorial cooperation along external borders has been severely affected by the **loss of cooperation partners**. Interreg programmes formerly with UK partners have 'lost' key partners, e.g. the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme, North Sea Programme, North West Europe Programme, and Atlantic Area. European borders with Russia and Belarus are also subject to major change. Until recently, territorial cooperation programmes involving regions along the Western borders of Russia and Belarus were maintained with neighbouring EU and Nordic territories over successive planning periods. Since the war in Ukraine, the cessation of these links is a major loss for these territories which have invested significant time and effort into building operational and personal networks through Interreg/ENI programmes, transnational cooperation, and wider Arctic cooperation initiatives.

More generally, European territorial cooperation initiatives can struggle to maintain commitment levels. In the case of the CPMR's area commissions, membership can fluctuate with territories leaving and joining, linked funding and territorial politics/priorities. Even Interreg programmes are not guaranteed support from one programme period to another. Programmes have to work to justify their resources to EU, national and regional stakeholders. As has been noted, clarifying and communicating the specific role of individual programmes is challenging, particularly where Member State engagement/knowhow about territorial cooperation is weaker, 'value' is considered solely in monetary terms, and/or in the face of substantial competing interests. The result is a perceived willingness to 'sacrifice' territorial cooperation funding in key budget negotiations and agenda setting.

Even where commitment to the principle of territorial cooperation is high, **not all new forms of territorial cooperation have been taken up**. At EU level, the European Cross-Border Mechanism (ECBM), proposed in 2018, aimed to offer ways to 'unlock' cross-border development potential

⁴⁵ O'Keeffe, B. and Creamer, C. (2019) 'Models of Cross-Border Collaboration in a Post-Brexit Landscape – Insights from External EU Borders'. *Irish Geography*, 52(2), 153-173, DOI: 10.2014/igj.v52i2.1376;



by creating a legal framework to resolve 'border obstacles'.⁴⁶ In theory, ECBM was an 'additional option' to existing frameworks and offered an 'off the shelf solution' for new arrangements.⁴⁷ Options include exploring joint 'border-proofing' tests when developing new legislation, application of TIAs to cross border areas, and enhancing mutual recognition of rules and standards. While the general idea was supported, major and highly critical questions were raised by Member States concerning a lack of clarity of the instrument's voluntary nature, its extra administrative burden, the recognition of existing mechanisms, and legal implications.⁴⁸ Subsequent progress with the proposal was, therefore, challenging due to lack of Member State support. However, the European Parliament has launched a legislative initiative revising the proposal with the aim of moving dialogue forward⁴⁹ and the European Commission's 2021 Report on Cross Border Regions reflects on the benefits that the ECBM would bring.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Sielker, F. (2018) The European Commission's proposal for a cross-border mechanism (ECBM): Potential implications and perspectives November 2018 Journal of Property Planning and Environmental Law 10(3)

>https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328770964_The_European_Commission's_proposal_for_a_cross-border_mechanism_ECBM_Potential_implications_and_perspectives<

⁴⁷ Sielker, F. The EU Commission's proposal for a European Cross-border Mechanism (ECBM) – What happened? <https://www.regionalstudies.org/news/the-commissions-proposal-for-an-ecbm/>

⁴⁸ Sielker, F. The EU Commission's proposal for a European Cross-border Mechanism (ECBM) – What happened? <https://www.regionalstudies.org/news/the-commissions-proposal-for-an-ecbm/>; European Parliament (2023) Proposal for a Regulation on a Mechanism to resolve legal and administrative obstacles in a cross-border context. In "An Economy that Works for People" <<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-new-boost-for-jobs-growth-and-investment/file-mff-mechanism-to-resolve-cross-border-obstacles>>

⁴⁹ European Parliament, (2022) Amending the proposed mechanism to resolve legal and administrative obstacles in a cross-border context <[https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2022/2194\(INL\)](https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2022/2194(INL))> .

⁵⁰ CEC (2021) Report on EU Border Regions: Living Labs of European Integration, Brussels 14.07.2021 <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=COM:2021:393:FIN&from=EN>>, p. 3



4 FOCUS AND FUNDING

4.1 Cooperation priorities and objectives: balancing focus, flexibility and inclusion



In terms of the specific priorities and objectives of territorial cooperation initiatives, shared and common territorial needs clearly lie at the heart territorial cooperation initiatives and are reflected in objectives and priorities. **The 'joint' nature of initiatives can automatically offer a clear focus.** For example, the Danube Macroregional Strategy includes a particular focus on the management of the Danube and its river basin, including waterways mobility and water quality. For territories facing shared geographical challenges, niche and specific issues for that territory can be addressed, e.g. a specific service or integrated transport solution. Increasingly, newer forms of territorial cooperation are established with a very specific purpose, e.g. an EGTC based around the development the provision of a service of general interest or b-Solution addressing a specific administrative barrier. Clear focus and objectives are keys to addressing criticisms regarding 'overlaps', 'all doing the same thing' and lack of focus in territorial cooperation efforts.

However, **recurring areas of thematic focus are a strong, even necessary, feature of territorial cooperation.** As Figure 7 illustrates, for EoRPA sponsor countries, energy clustering and economic development, community integration, tourism, SME support, social inclusion and sustainable development are substantial areas of cooperation through Interreg. Looking more broadly across Interreg programmes, innovation and competitiveness, resource efficiency and renewable energy, adaptation to climate change, and protecting the natural and cultural heritage are areas of strength. Particular successes are noted in relation to business relationships, entrepreneurial skills (particularly for youth), research and innovation, the labour market activities, university engagement, vocational training, environment, transport, tourism, culture and media, and "new governance" (e-government).

This experience reflects wider trends across territorial cooperation, with intense activity in relation to:

- **Innovation and R&D** in the form of supporting new ideas, approaches and processes, with a specific territorial focus, e.g. on blue growth around sea basins, flood prevention and management along major river courses, landscape and water management in vulnerable ecosystems. Successful innovation depends on interactions between a variety of public and private organisations. Territorial cooperation draws on diverse skills and capabilities across smaller and larger companies, universities, public agencies, business and innovation and financial intermediaries. Territorial cooperation has developed a role in facilitating the flow and exchange of information, which underpins





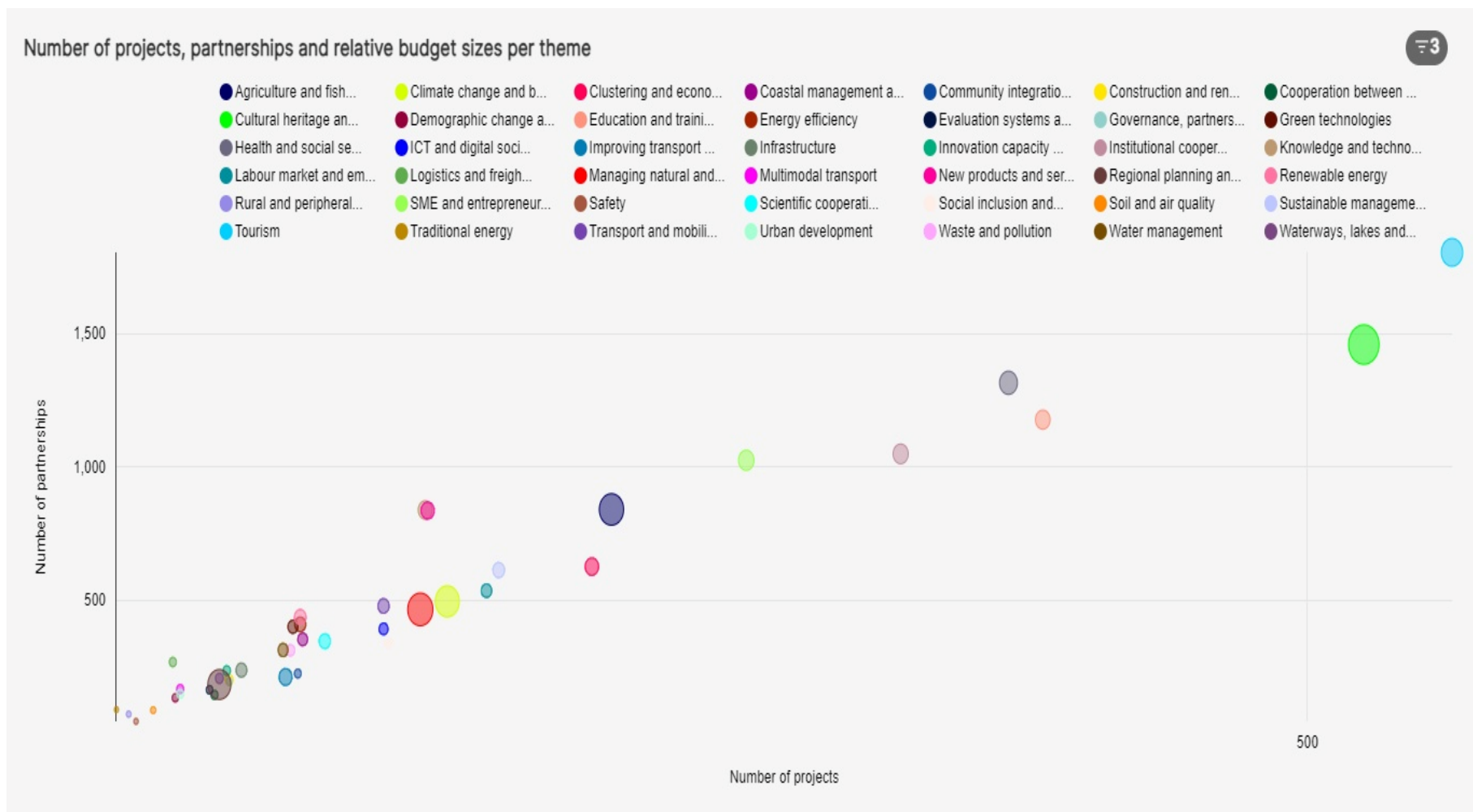
innovation. Additionally, initiatives are increasingly in a position to develop, apply and exploit that information.⁵¹

- **Support for SMES and micro enterprises** is the focus of numerous interventions, e.g. through start-up/entrepreneurship support; internationalisation; growth/ sustainability/ supply chains; access to R&D and innovation; work on region-specific /niche sectors. As will be discussed, the financial resources and stakeholder responsibilities are major factors informing this focus. As opposed to directly supporting businesses themselves, interventions more generally concentrate on strategies and actions to improve business support, e.g. through promoting R&D-business links; stimulating business to business cooperation, providing advisory services, concept/technology validation, supporting the development of supply chains, e.g. SME links to wider networks including public sectors HEIs and NGOs, development of clusters, mentoring activities and guidance; and develop/enhance agency/government support to SMEs.
- **Social inclusion and public service provision/access** have increased in prominence in recent years. The starting points for many initiatives are broad economic and social challenges linked to, for example, demographic ageing, youth unemployment and migration, transport, and pressures on public sector budgets, the rapid pace of development in ICT, and demands on public services. Some initiatives aim to support knowledge exchange or develop shared strategies. Others deliver direct services, tests and pilots for wider adoption/adaptation, or supply toolkits and resources. They offer an opportunity to 'try out' and test new approaches, policy transfer/learning, scope to specialise adapt solutions through joint working, service innovation, improved access to services and service effectiveness and efficiency.
- **Environmental concerns such as climate change, low-carbon economy**, pollution, and over exploitation of natural resources are global challenges that do not stop at borders, thus lending themselves to measures supported by territorial cooperation. In particular, territorial cooperation has offered an 'international' link to regional and community partners dealing with joint, similar, or related issues. Shared marine environments, promoting advances in the low carbon economy, mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change, and managing the pressure of societies on their surrounding environments are all shared concerns which are strongly reflected across the range of territorial cooperation. Some interventions deliver direct actions to improve, redevelop or protect areas. Others seek to secure broad commitments to, e.g. protected environments.

⁵¹ Pre-commercial research is undertaken in association with potential end users. Product innovation is a target for some projects, with a commitment to deliver a new marketable product. In many other cases, process innovation, involves developing more efficient, effective sustainable approaches are the objectives.



Figure 7: Comparison of thematic priorities by region EorPA countries- keep 2014-2020



Source: keep.eu





While cooperation programmes and initiatives work to make their own specific focus clear, **maintaining flexibility and a level of 'openness' in cooperation can be a necessary part of the cooperation process.**

- Some of activities 'lend' themselves to territorial cooperation and therefore 'recur', e.g. most notably cooperation around shared environmental issues.
- Working on shared, broad themes provides a solid basis for wider synergies and links across programmes and initiatives. For example, many forms of territorial cooperation are based on broad development goals, often with roots in wider strategies, e.g. the UN Sustainable Development Goals and EU Cohesion Policy priorities.
- Territorial cooperation initiatives can rely heavily on 'innovative', 'experimental', 'exploratory' actions which requires flexibility and openness to new ideas.
- Cooperation priorities and focus are often the result of substantial debate between partners and reflect resulting compromises.

In terms of the types of stakeholders involved, the nature of the issues addressed and the 'level' at which they are addressed informs the types of stakeholders involved. For example, the North Sea Commission works with subnational administrations across the area, but also seeks to lobby/engage with strategic stakeholders such as the European Parliament, Committee of the Regions and National Administration. Interreg programmes **draw together a wide range of partners**. Local, regional and national authorities and public sector organisations, higher and further education and NGOs are strongly represented. Maintaining networks of stakeholders and partnerships is a natural focus for cooperation. However, 'repeat customers', i.e. funding the same partners over a number of years or programme cycles, is a criticism levelled at territorial cooperation. Further, maintaining very tight networks and partnerships can isolate stakeholders and activities from the wider policy community.

With this in mind, initiatives also seek to extend their reach. **Work is ongoing to build greater private sector and community engagement**, e.g. with commitments made to triple and quadruple helix working between higher education, private business and public authorities. Focus on building more grassroots, place-based and people to people interaction in EU territorial cooperation is an emerging trend reflected in new cross border ITIs and in policy debate on future approaches.⁵² For example, civic engagement, new modes of public participation and community participation are the focus of capacity building efforts.

⁵² Böhm, H. (2023) Reinforcing Territorial Cooperation and Addressing Challenges on European Integration, Report to the Future of Cohesion Policy Group of High-Level Specialists



4.2 Funding: doing more with less?

In terms of what cooperation initiatives can expect to deliver against their priorities and objectives, funding is a clear determinant. As with all aspects of territorial cooperation, there is a diversity of funding approaches and availability which have a role to play.

i Little or no project funding resource

'Cooperation beyond funding' has a significant role to play by defining platforms and plans to inform/influence activity on the ground or facilitate synergies and links to other sources of funding.

Agreement on broad objectives, events and ongoing dialogue is as far as some territorial cooperation initiatives will go. In this case, efforts focus on informing, leveraging, and influencing other initiatives and sources of funding. For example, Area Commissions' direct project funding for cooperation is limited. Nevertheless, through events and working groups the Commissions develop joint strategies and position papers, host events, and maintain joint information resources. Through the North Sea Commission's Smart Regions working group participating territories aim to work together to strengthen the capacity to use S3 as a tool and coordinate resources across regions.⁵³ EU macroregional and sea-basin strategies do not have large-scale dedicated resources. Their implementation relies on synergies with other instruments. As opposed to financial resources, a key to their operation is capacity to ensure that EU, national, regional, and other public and private funds are aligned with the priorities of the strategy and finance the activities.⁵⁴

ii Project funding available & pressure to deliver



Interreg stands out in terms of funding and institutional resources. For the 2021-2027 period, Interreg has a budget of nearly €10 billion, involving around 100 programmes. Other forms of territorial cooperation have much more modest allocations, but also award funding to joint projects and initiatives. For example, Nora, which receives funding from the Nordic Council, can award grants DKK 500,000 (€67,100) up to DKK 1.5 million (€201,300) over three years. Project funding through the Alpine Convention contributes to the implementation of the Convention, aims to showcase the

⁵³ CPRR, North Sea Commission <https://cpmr-northsea.org/policy-work/attractive-sustainable-communities/smart-regions-working-group/>

⁵⁴ CEC (2022) Report for the Commission to the European Parliament, The Council the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Implementation of EU macroregional strategies Brussels, 9.12.2022, COM(2022) 705 final <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52022DC0705>





territory as a 'model for sustainable development', and complements the work of thematic working groups and events.⁵⁵

Where project funding is in place, various activities are undertaken. Some include capital investments which have led to, e.g. building and area redevelopment (locations within urban areas and villages, public and recreational spaces, public buildings, visitor destinations) and transport infrastructure provision (community roads, port and marina infrastructure, and small-scale public transport infrastructure). Others are more strongly based around knowledge exchange and the development of joint strategies on key issues. Rather than physical outputs, the main focus of the projects tends to be targeted at intangible solutions-based work focusing on innovation, and capacity/services, which help develop new and improved services.

iii Funding mix



Looking more closely into funding for territorial cooperation reveals multiple links across funding sources, notably to and from Interreg. Projects can act as **'preparatory/successor project' for Interreg funding**.⁵⁶ As part of its programme impact evaluation, the 2014-20 Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme (NPA) highlighted cases where NPA projects had led to successful subsequent activities funded through other sources and extending cooperation activities. For example, an NPA project RYE Connect inspired a related project funded through NORA cooperation, and NPA projects have gone on to obtain funding linked to wider Arctic cooperation networks.⁵⁷

Equally, wider cooperation initiatives can link into and inform Interreg cooperation. For example, areas of strategic interest set out in documents such as the North Sea Strategy are picked up and reflected in the North Sea Programme Interreg programme.⁵⁸ The North Sea

⁵⁵ Alpine Convention
<https://www.alpconv.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Organisation/AC/XVII/AC_MAP_2023-2030_en_web.pdf>

⁵⁶ Projects with Swiss participation can receive NRP funding if they meet the objectives of the NRP, i.e. promote innovation, entrepreneurship and value creation and strengthen regional competitiveness. In addition, the focus must be on the impact with regard to these goals. NRP funds can therefore also be used to support environmental or social projects if they add value to the regional economy and create jobs, for example. In addition, the cantons and third parties can support Interreg projects with their own funds and funds from other federal offices, municipalities, companies or foundations without making a contribution to the NRP goals, such as improving the transport infrastructure or cultural exchange. In addition, within the framework of Interreg B and URBACT, it is possible to support projects of national strategic importance through the NRP, even if they do not have specific NRP objectives. The priorities of the ETC programs in which Switzerland is involved in the 2021–2027 funding period are determined by the programs on the basis of the subject areas specified by EU regional policy.
<<https://www.are.admin.ch/are/en/home/international-cooperation/programs-projects/interreg.html>>

⁵⁷ McMaster I, Wergles, N. and Vironen, H. (2019) An Impact Evaluation of the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme 2014-2020 Final Report, EPRC, January 2019

⁵⁸ McMaster, I. and Vironen, H. (2023) Gone but not forgotten (yet): Interreg in post-Brexit UK, Contemporary Social Science, 18:2, 197-215, DOI: 10.1080/21582041.2023.2197874



Commission and North Sea Interreg programme share key partners and host joint annual conferences. A similar relationship is in place between the Internationale Bodensee-Konferenz and the Alpine Space Interreg programme, see Box 4.

Box 3: Internationale Bodensee-Konferenz - International Conference of Lake Constance (IBK)

The IBK was founded in 1972 to address regional issues linked to environmental protection and social development around Lake Constance in the Alps. The IBK acts as a platform for dialogue and cooperative coordination in connection with other regional networks and programmes, including Interreg Alpine Space Programme. As a longstanding institution, the IBK operating costs are covered by annual national contributions and receives an allocation in distributed EU funding.



Source: <https://www.bodenseekonferenz.org/leitbild-und-strategie>

The IBK also manages two small project funds.

	€ Max Funding	% Total Costs	Objective	Funding Source
IBK Encounter Projects	3000	60	Strengthening Cross Border Relationships	IBK Member Countries
Interreg Small Projects (2022-2028)	30000	60	Long term cooperation support: Improving Institutional Capacity; Foster mutual Trust	Interreg VI Alpenrhein Bodensee-Hochrhein

Interreg programme and project results can also help to drive new territorial cooperation efforts. An Arctic Cooperation network, led by the Interreg B NPA programme, has not only proved to be a fruitful exchange between Interreg programmes in the area but also **adds a 'regional development level' to EU Arctic Policy**.⁵⁹ The cooperation facilitates exchange of information, plans and coordinates calls for cluster projects, and runs an Arctic Award scheme. Programme efforts and collaboration between programmes also result in project clusters, e.g. the Arctic and North European Energy Cluster), see Figure 8.⁶⁰

⁵⁹Arctic Cooperation (2023) <<https://www.interreg-npa.eu/arctic-cooperation/>>

⁶⁰ Arctic Cooperation (2022) Arctic Cooperation: Lessons Learned <https://www.interreg-npa.eu/fileadmin/Arctic/Lessons_learned_from_the_Arctic_Cooperation_FINAL_August_2022.pdf>





Figure 8: Interreg programme - Arctic collaboration



In the preceding cases, **interrelationships are beneficial and mutually reinforcing, however they can also be challenging.** Macroregions were launched with no additional funding, no new legislation and no new institutions. As a result, transnational cooperation programmes became closely linked to the strategies as routes to mobilise actions. On the one hand, this connection 'elevated and extended the reach of the transnational programmes'. As the 2022 report on the implementation of macroregional strategies notes, "The four Interreg transnational programmes covering the MRS have played a positive catalytic role in supporting the strategies and will continue to do so during the programming period 2021-2027".⁶¹ A 2023 study of Alpine CBC programmes highlights areas of thematic, stakeholder and community matchmaking and 'active embedding' between the strategy and programmes to the benefit of both.⁶² However, on the other hand, at least initially in the 2007-13 period, the close connection obscured the independent role and function of the Interreg programmes and added another layer of complexity and overlap, leading to questions about the specific added value of territorial cooperation over other forms of funding and over complex networks.⁶³

In practice, maximising beneficial links requires capacity and takes time to develop. In the 2021-27 period, national and regional Cohesion Policy programmes are expected to embed a territorial cooperation dimension,⁶⁴ e.g. programmes are expected to set out their

⁶¹ CEC (2022) Report for the Commission to the European Parliament, The Council the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Implementation of EU macroregional strategies Brussels, 9.12.2022, COM(2022) 705 final

⁶² Rosanik and Partner and M&E Factors, (2023) embedding of Macroregional Strategies: Reflections Based on the Example of Interreg CBC Programmes, Presentation to Bundesministerium für Land- und Forstwirtschaft; Regionen und Wasserwirtschaft (Österreich), 14 June 2023

⁶³ McMaster, I., van der Zwet, A. (2016). Macro-regions and the European Union: The Role of Cohesion Policy. In: Gänzle, S., Kern, K. (eds) A 'Macro-regional' Europe in the Making. Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-50972-7_3

⁶⁴ DG Regio (2020) Issue paper 5 – Reinforcing territorial cooperation and its contribution to European integrations, Report to the Future of Cohesion Policy Group of High-Level Specialists.



contributions to macroregional strategies, sea basin strategies and interregional, cross-border and or transnational actions.⁶⁵ In this context there is potential for beneficial links between Interreg and national and regional development funding. However, it is also noted that country-specific programmes regularly lack a 'cooperation angle' and capacity on this issue.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Article 22(3) CPR requires setting out such expected contribution; Article 63(4) of the CPR on eligibility rules states that all or parts of a project may be implemented outside a Member State, or even outside the EU, provided the operation contributes to the programme objectives. Article 3(4), subparagraph 2 of the ERDF Regulation states that cooperation shall include cooperation with partners from cross-border regions, noncontiguous regions or regions in the territory covered by a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, a macro-regional or sea-basin strategy or a combination thereof.

⁶⁶ DG Regio (2020) Issue paper 5 – Reinforcing territorial cooperation and its contribution to European integrations, Report to the Future of Cohesion Policy Group of High-Level Specialists. p.,6





5 TERRITORIAL COOPERATION: WIDELY PURSUED AND WIDELY QUESTIONED

Contemporary territorial cooperation efforts are at a critical juncture, caught between conflicting considerations. On the one hand, **cooperation is seen as a key lever to support efforts to address Europe's major economic, political, social and environmental challenges, and border relations.** The OECD states stronger coordination and cooperation are crucial given the intrinsic cross border and transnational nature of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.⁶⁷ The European Commission's 8th Cohesion report states that addressing today's challenges requires better governance in border areas, stronger coordination of services, infrastructure and investments and exchanges of experience.⁶⁸ Crises including Covid and the war in Ukraine have amplified and added to the specific development challenges faced by border regions, particularly along Eastern external borders with Russia, Belarus and Ukraine.⁶⁹ **As such, territorial cooperation remains widely pursued internationally** as a means for areas with shared and common interests to address joint challenges and opportunities.⁷⁰

On the other hand, **current major economic and political pressures across Europe raise critical questions about territorial cooperation. 'What is it really for?', 'what does it do?' are persistent questions around territorial cooperation initiatives.** Reinforced state borders, increased border control and a greater inward focus, particularly stemming from the Covid crisis,⁷¹ challenge engagement in and the viability of territorial cooperation. At a time when domestic budgets and resources for policy initiatives and public services are tight, **how can 'extra' activities with, arguably, limited tangible impacts like territorial cooperation be justified?**

In assessing the value and potential future role of territorial cooperation, capturing the distinct 'added value' of this activity remains an ongoing challenge and is the subject of numerous

⁶⁷ OECD (2019) Territorial Wide Area Cooperation in the Adriatic-Ionian Region: Outlook on the Future Transnational Cooperation in the Region, OECD: Paris, April 2019 <<https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/OECD-ADRION-PHASE-II-Report.pdf>>

⁶⁸ DG Regio (2020) Issue paper 5 – Reinforcing territorial cooperation and its contribution to European integrations, Report to the Future of Cohesion Policy Group of High-Level Specialists.

⁶⁹ Böhm, H. (2023) Reinforcing Territorial Cooperation and Addressing Challenges on European Integration, Report to the Future of Cohesion Policy Group of High-Level Specialists. Novotný, L. Böhm, H. (2022). New re-bordering left them alone and neglected: Czech crossborder commuters in German-Czech borderland. *European Societies* 24(3): 333-353.

⁷⁰ Blatter, J.K. (2001) Debordering the World of States: Towards a Multi-level System in Europe and a Multi-Polity System in North America? Insights from Border Regions, *European Journal of International Relations*, 7 pp. 175–209; Ohmae, K. (1993) 'The Rise of the Region State', *Foreign Affairs* 72(1): 78-87; van Houtum, H. (2000) An Overview of European Geographical Research on Borders and Border Regions, *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, Vol. XV, No. 1; Perkmann, M. (2003) Cross-Border Regions in Europe: Significance and Drivers of Regional Cross-Border Co-Operation, *European Urban and Regional Studies*, Vol. 10, issue 2, pp. 153-171; Medeiros, E. (2018) *European Territorial Cooperation; The Urban Book Series*, Springer <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74887-0>

⁷¹ Setti, A (2022) Europe's Border Regions: Forgotten Regions, EURAC Research <<https://www.eurac.edu/en/blogs/eureka/europe-s-border-regions-forgotten-lands>>



reports.⁷² As territorial cooperation has evolved, expectations of what the interventions should deliver have increased. For some of the better funded, more established forms of cooperation the expectation is that they move from knowledge and relationship building to delivering tangible results. A sharpened focus on results has been further amplified by concerns about the administrative burdens of participating in territorial cooperation. Continued development of initiatives such as B-solutions, EGTC, and cross border programmes with narrow foci on specific border issues has the potential to deliver results through robust and meaningful cooperation in the future.

In this context, **a number of very important concerns and criticisms have been levelled at territorial cooperation initiatives.** Assessments note challenges such as the time it takes to build up relationships, technical/administrative issues, and weaknesses in delivery and capitalisation of results.⁷³ Despite efforts at simplification, **territorial cooperation remains complex** due to, e.g. the time taken to develop links, time and cost involved in maintaining partnerships, language and cultural barriers⁷⁴, and administrative complexities and delays. Related, **administrative complexity** is responsible for 'scaring away' participants, in particular private sector partners.⁷⁵ Even within participating organisations, knowhow on territorial cooperation can remain confined to a limited group of staff or an individual, which poses challenges for wider dissemination and capacity building.

A **lack of identifiable results** of initiatives is another major concern. Many cooperation outputs are criticised for being temporary, limited to vague 'visions' and joint reports/strategies, and

⁷² For example, a 2018 report on transnational cooperation programmes notes ten key areas of value, including role in helping to reduce territorial disparities in specific regions, building trust, enabling pooling of limited resources, supporting policy making. A similar exercise, focussed on programmes with German participation, identified impacts as increased capacity of key stakeholders to act through increased knowledge and skills, facilitation of political decision-making processes through joint action, more targeted communication of interests at regional, national and European level, more effective and efficient design of work processes, more frequent application of social and technological innovations and improved ecological, social and economic (living) conditions. Tangible results of economic impact are important in maintaining and motivating territorial cooperation Interact (2018) Ten Things to Know about Transnational Cooperation.

⁷³ Haarich, S. Salvatori, G. Toptsidou, M. (Evaluating Interreg Programmes. The Challenge of Demonstrating Results and Value of European Territorial Cooperation', Spatial Foresight 2019: 10; Panteia, (2010) 2000-2006 Interreg III Community Initiative Ex Post Evaluation, Report to the European Commission; CEC (2016) Ex post Evaluation of the ERDF and Cohesion Fund 2007-13, Commission working Document, Brussels 19.9.2016

⁷⁴ Administrative burden can be increased by the presence of significant language barriers, e.g. language is seen as a significant hinderance in cross border cooperation between Hungary and Croatia due to significant linguistic differences, but also discrepancy in attainment of English as a median language.

<http://www.huhr-cbc.com/uploads/editors/Situation%20Analysis%202020%20of%20the%20HU-HR%20Border%20Region.pdf>

⁷⁵ McMaster, I. (2017) Cross-Border and Transnational Cooperation: Experiences, Lessons and Future IM paper for the UK, European Policy Research paper No. 100





for lacking transferability.⁷⁶ The 'breadth' of the objectives and priorities and large geographic scales make it particularly difficult to clearly demonstrate 'concrete' results and impacts from territorial cooperation initiatives in all regions. Consequently, **direct contributions to regional development are viewed as limited**.⁷⁷ Scott (2013) concludes 'rarely has CBC/TC produced rapid results in terms of economic growth and regional development'.⁷⁸

In addition, where results are achieved, **shortcomings in monitoring systems and data collection** can further complicate their identification.⁷⁹ Complicating factors include:

- the need to take into account different national and regional statistical, monitoring and administrative practices in the participating countries and regions;
- gathering data from multiple partners in a number of countries; and
- key aspects of the 'qualitative' added value are extremely difficult to measure and have not been well-reflected in traditional indicator frameworks, as 'classic' economic development impact indicators do not capture the 'softer' integration-related aims of territorial cooperation⁸⁰ and baseline indicators are not always obtainable.

Any results of territorial cooperation also have to be considered against value for money. The financial resources attached to European territorial cooperation initiatives to date are not large compared to mainstream domestic regional development interventions and Cohesion Policy. These must be offset against the widely criticised administrative burden and complexity of developing and delivering territorial cooperation.⁸¹ Some argue that European experience would indicate that, ironically, cooperation practices have maintained an administrative, technocratic and 'official' character that has not yet sufficiently encouraged citizen action

⁷⁶ FORUM GmbH, (2009) Impacts and Benefits of Transnational Projects (INTERREG III B) Forschungen 138, Ed.: Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs (BMVBS) / Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning (BBR), Bonn.

⁷⁷ K. Böhme, 'The Ability to Learn in Transnational Projects' (2005) Informationen zur Raumentwicklung, 11/12, 691-700, p. 693.

⁷⁸ Scott, J.W. Territorial Cooperation - The Research State of the Art , pp. 15-26 in Gorzelak, G and Zawalinska, K. (eds) (2013) European Territories: From Cooperation to Integration? Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar Spółka z o.o., p. 25

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Interact, *Study on indicators for Monitoring Transnational and Interregional Cooperation Programmes*, Interact Programme Secretariat, Vienna, 2006; Taylor, Olejniczak and Bachtler, *A Study of the Mid Term Evaluations*, op. cit.

⁸¹ 11 Early critical observations of cross-border cooperation are provided in, for example:

European Parliament (1997), Mønnesland (1999), and Notre Europe (2001), as well as in evaluations of EU structural policies such as INTERREG (http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/p3226_en.htm).



and public sector participation.⁸² Further territorial cooperation has not guaranteed the establishment of new public and private-sector alliances to address regional and local development issues.⁸³ The resulting conclusion is that **territorial cooperation is not stimulating cooperation, but is often simply a means to enhance local budgets.**

Taken together, the high amount of effort and limited returns suggest an **overall high transaction cost involved.** Furthermore, at a time of serious pressure on budgets and concerns about excessive travel, potential stakeholders, particularly government officials and politicians, are increasingly aware of the risk of being perceived as 'on a junket' or pursuing non-core activities. For non-EU Member States additional questions are raised about the value of pursuing 'EU-focused projects', as many of the better funded forms of territorial cooperation are EU programmes which come with a specific 'agenda' and set of objectives.

Against this background is the argument that **much of the real added value of territorial cooperation may lie in 'softer' impacts and less tangible areas of activity.** Reflecting the diversity of approaches to territorial cooperation, the more intangible benefits are evident in a range of areas. Territorial cooperation can **offer a valued territorial focus for areas facing related or common development concerns**, such as remote and sparsely populated areas, depopulation and service provision, common environmental concerns, or niche sectoral developments.^{84,85,86} Territorial cooperation opens up opportunities to **work across multiple levels and sectors** and working through triple and quadruple helix partnerships, involving public authorities, industry, academia and citizens, is a common characteristic. Territories not only extend their networks and connections but **build critical mass to act** and/or gain profile at national and international levels as well as to develop, test and pilot specialised and tailored actions and activities in ways that would not have been possible working in isolation. For

⁸² Matthiesen, U (2002) Transformational pathways and institutional capacitybuilding: the case of the German-Polish twin city Guben/Gubin. In: G. Cars, P. Healey, A. Madanipour, and C. de Magalhães (eds.), *Urban Governance, Institutional Capacity and Social Milieux*. Aldershot: Ashgate, Scott, J.W. *Territorial Cooperation - The Research State of the Art*, pp. 15-26 in Gorzelak, G and Zawalinska, K. (eds) (2013) *European Territories: From Cooperation to Integration?* Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar Spółka z o.o;

⁸³ Scott, J.W. *Territorial Cooperation - The Research State of the Art*, pp. 15-26 in Gorzelak, G and Zawalinska, K. (eds) (2013) *European Territories: From Cooperation to Integration?* Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar Spółka z o.o;

⁸⁴ Berlina, A, Diş, A. and Hörnström, L. (2015) Added value of cross-border co-operation, *Nordregio news* No. 1 2015. <<https://nordregio.org/nordregio-magazine/issues/cross-border-co-operation/added-value-of-cross-border-co-operation/>>

⁸⁵ Berlina, A, Diş, A. and Hörnström, L. (2015) Added value of cross-border co-operation, *Nordregio news* No. 1 2015. <<https://nordregio.org/nordregio-magazine/issues/cross-border-co-operation/added-value-of-cross-border-co-operation/>>

⁸⁶ McMaster I and Vironen, H (2017) The Involvement of Non-EU Member States in European Territorial Cooperation Programmes, *European Structural and Investment Fund Journal*, Vol 5, Issue 3, p. 235-244; Laganà, G. (2020) The Added Value of the Ireland-Wales Cooperation Programme, 14 September 2020, <https://www.centreonconstitutionalchange.ac.uk/news-and-opinion/ireland-wales-programme>



example, cooperation is helping to fill specific knowledge gaps, enabling access to external expertise, or allowing a local authority to 'take a risk'/test/trial or draw on best practice. It is also important to point out that acting collaboratively is not always based on partnerships of equals with the aim of developing a single solution. In many cases it is the diversity within territorial cooperation partnerships that is the strength, e.g., through bringing small communities and place-based expertise together with international research knowhow, enabling territories to identify distinctive needs and strengths to adapt solutions, or identify a position of strength in an international context.

Collaboration can enable innovation and foresight. There are many examples of cooperation initiatives, particularly in the Interreg context, which have proved to 'early adopters' of work in areas such as the circular economy or remote public service provision prior to their prioritisation in more mainstream programmes. The benefits of this type of activity can become evident after their withdrawal - local authorities in Scotland, for example, have noted the loss of, in particular, scope to engage in innovation-linked activities following their exit from the 2021-27 Interreg programmes. There is important scope for **synergies between the experience and approaches of territorial cooperation initiatives and domestic forms of regional development support**,⁸⁷ or collaboration between programmes. While these positive interconnections are often not picked up on a consistent basis, they have the potential to offer valuable insights into the role and potential of territorial cooperation, the scope for initiatives to 'grow' from one intervention to another and the possibility of adding value to wider regional development efforts.

In more tangible financial terms, the **added value of territorial cooperation can be viewed in terms of the quantitative effects in leveraging additional resources for economic development through 'financial pooling'**. This can act as a catalyst for regeneration, and encourage partners to undertake sub-regional projects that might otherwise not have taken place.⁸⁸ With this perspective, assessments can involve measures of, for example, the scale of outputs/outcomes (where programmes have boosted the outputs and results of programmes or projects by increasing their scale) or the scope of outputs/outcomes (support allowing different types of outputs and outcomes that were not originally envisaged).⁸⁹ In this context, for example, the European Commission actually credited early Interreg programmes (Interreg

⁸⁷ Related to this are increased efforts to retain archives of activity and improve dissemination. For example, in relation to Interreg in Norway a report recommended improving project archives to ensure that the knowledge accumulated does not disappear but can be retrieved at a later stage. The keep.eu data base fulfils a similar role across the EU. COWI Evaluating AV Interreg I Norge: Rapport, APRIL 2019 KOMMUNAL- OG MODERNISERINGSDEPARTEMENTET, April 2019

⁸⁸ R. Martin and P. Tyler, 'Evaluating the Impact of the Structural Funds on Objective 1 Regions: An Exploratory Discussion' (2006), *Regional Studies*, 40(2), 201–10.

⁸⁹ Scottish Executive, *Adding Value, Keeping Value' Draft Report of the Scottish Structural Funds Value Added Group*, February 2006, p. 4.



III) with a significant leverage effect (€165 for every €100 invested).⁹⁰ Cooperation initiatives with dedicated resources have a clear role in funding action on the ground, mobilising and incentivising partners to act jointly. However, 'cooperation beyond funding' also has a role to play, where efforts focus on coordination, defining platforms and plans that can inform/influence activity on the ground, or facilitate synergies and links to other sources of funding.

Overall, many of the less tangible areas of added value associated with territorial cooperation **require a long-term perspective**. Learning and exchange of ideas across regional or national borders can be an important contributor to building social capital and working more effectively as local nuances and strengths are recognised and supported. Joint management of activities, programmes or projects can enhance organisational or policy learning of benefit to the participating organisations.⁹¹ As well as the formal links, the informal exchanges and interpersonal links are invaluable for building enthusiasm and 'excitement' in participants that they can bring back to their own organisations. Territorial cooperation partners have often noted that recognising and capitalising on such 'soft' outcomes, and ensuring their longer term retention and embedding, is particularly valuable. However, these processes are, by their nature, longer term in their evolution and can be sharply at odds with the push for short term results. The question is, in the context of major change, budgetary and development pressures, to what degree these outcomes are valued and weighted.

Territorial cooperation is associated with big ideas and ideals, but it is important to be realistic about what it can do well. Recent developments and innovations in the form of b-solutions, integrated services and tangible impact are leading to debate on a more 'intense' form of 'integration' and greater focus on administrative and legal obstacles particularly in terms of border obstacles to public services and planning.⁹² This would take territorial cooperation into a more procedural, planning, administrative direction, which could be of value along some highly integrated borders. However, the broader objectives of building 'cohesion', shared understanding, 'communities of common interest', and solidarity and resilience remain equally important. This is especially the case as links and relationships across borders are so variable and subjects to shifting pressures and change. The multitude of forms of territorial cooperation presents the potential for synergies and complementarities and policy learning. Moving forward, this could be relevant not just for strengthening the role and impact of territorial cooperation and its results but also for taking it out of its 'bubble' and considering its value

⁹⁰ CEC, *Growing Regions, Growing Europe*, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

⁹¹ <https://nordregio.org/nordregio-magazine/issues/cross-border-co-operation/added-value-of-cross-border-co-operation/>

⁹² Mederios, E. (2023) Reinforcing territorial cooperation and addressing challenges on European integration, Final report June 2023, Report to Group of High-level Specialists on the Future of Cohesion Policy



within wider policy debates as a way of supporting place-based, functionally-oriented regional development.





EoRPA RESEARCH

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