

EU Cross-Border Projects in Transport and Mobility

An Overview of 2014-20 Programming Period

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Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Programmes and Projects: A First Assessment of Cross-Border Cooperation – 3 Cross-Border Cooperation 2014-20: Some European Experiences – 4 Concluding Remarks.

1 Introduction

During the 2014-20 programming period, Interreg cross-border cooperation programmes have supported almost three hundred projects across Europe on the themes of transport and mobility, multimodality and improving connections. In this chapter, some experiences and useful data are presented in order to interpret the state of the art of cooperation between European neighbouring states. It also provides an initial assessment of the results of cross-border cooperation and of the issues that still need to be solved in order to eliminate regulatory, administrative and organisational barriers, improve accessibility and develop a well-planned and truly integrated public transport service.

The internal border regions of the European Union account for around 40% of the total territory of the Union and have 150 million residents, around 30% of the total population. The strategic value of these areas, in addition to the value of GDP generated, can also

be measured by the number of commuters between different states, calculated at around 2 million, 450,000 in France alone and 270,000 in Germany (European Commission 2017).

We can say that common internal borders – and also those with candidate or potential candidate states – have always been regarded as test cases for true European integration and the possible harmonisation of policies, practices, experiences, services and infrastructures. Efforts at integration and cross-border cooperation are the test case for a truly accomplished union and realised European citizenship in the various areas. In this respect, the fluidity and efficiency of transport and mobility represent the overcoming of the barriers of the ‘old’ states. Transport and accessibility, in all their forms, also play a fundamental role in the growth and harmonious development of cross-border regions in the context of cohesion policy, even though numerous technical analyses complain about the persistence of inefficiencies, inhomogeneity, lack of common services, fragmented or insufficient connections, and different legal and regulatory systems.

In September 2015, the European Commission launched a three-month public consultation on overcoming barriers and borders. As for transport, the analysis of the responses revealed a number of critical issues, such as the lack of homogeneous legislation, different systems for car registration, lack of infrastructures or inadequate maintenance and modernisation, traffic and long travel times, especially for commuters. The *cahiers de doléances* highlight, above all, the inadequate coverage of public transport, which is poorly integrated and fragmented, and the lack of connections, mainly by rail. The consultation also provided proposals for improving the sector, calling for increased investment – public and private – in connections and infrastructure, and for institutions to make a greater effort in planning common services and coordinating transport activities and systems (European Commission 2015).

The European Commission itself, in its 2017 Communication *Strengthening growth and cohesion in EU border regions*, highlights the need for “greater harmonisation and better coordination of technical and legal standards and the achievement of interoperability in the transport sector” (European Commission 2015). In this area, the importance of exchanging good practices and strengthening cooperation and exchange between different administrations is reiterated, especially as cross-border public transport services are almost always planned and managed by actors at different levels of government (local, regional, national).

2 Programmes and Projects: A First Assessment of Cross-Border Cooperation

Within cohesion policy, as far as ‘European territorial cooperation’ is concerned, Union financial support is targeted at cross-border cooperation to promote integrated regional development between regions with “maritime and land borders in two or more Member States or between regions bordering in at least one Member State and a third country on the Union’s external borders other than those covered by programmes under the Union’s external financing instruments” (European Commission 2013).

In the past, Interreg cross-border programmes have always considered transport and the interconnection of territories to be important issues. However, if we look at the projects funded in the programmes ranging from 2000 until 2013 we notice that the priority ‘accessibility’, including improving connections, multimodality, and mobility and transport represent 3.06% of the total (Medeiros 2018), i.e. 831 project proposals, with a higher concentration on improving interconnections and the mobility and transport theme, while the multimodal transport theme represents only 0.27% of the total projects with 74 partnerships over 13 years. Considering the thematic priorities, therefore, it is worth comparing the 3.06% of projects in the ‘transport’ area with the other topics, where we find 7,321 projects (29.96%) on social and cultural themes, 11,218 projects (41.31%) on economic and technological themes, 3,524 (12.98%) on capacity building and administrative cooperation and 3,754 (13.83%) proposals referring to environmental, climate and energy (Medeiros 2018).

In the 2014-20 programming period, the Commission reaffirms the need to address common challenges that hinder cohesion at cross-border level and slow down the capacity for development and growth. These include poor network coverage, the transition of declining productive sectors, the lack of communication between local and regional administrations, problems related to environmental pollution, research and entrepreneurship networks. With regard to mobility, poor accessibility, connection to efficient transport infrastructure, integration between labour markets, mobility of passengers (e.g. local tourism), students and workers, networking of easily accessible services, e.g. in the field of health. Cross-border cooperation is directly linked to the development and growth capacity of the territories and has the function of increasing the attractiveness of the geographical areas involved, playing a role in strengthening the economies and combating unemployment and possible depopulation. In this logic, cooperation must contribute to strengthening integrated territorial development and reducing the gaps between different areas. In particular, in 2014-20, more

than six and a half billion euros from the ERDF-European Regional Development Fund have been allocated to cross-border cooperation, which supports the following investment priorities: quality employment and worker mobility, social inclusion, education and training, and finally, as we have seen, the strengthening of the institutional capacity of public authorities is fundamental for the harmonisation of systems and services.

To summarise, 46 Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) programmes were supported for the 2014-20 programming period for the passenger transport theme in the extended sense and excluding logistics and freight (which in the same period covered a further 40 projects with 347 partners). These include 41 CBC programmes in Europe and the 5 Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) cooperation programmes, which support cooperation with candidate or potential candidate countries (IPA-IPA and other cross-border cooperation programmes under the European Neighbourhood Instrument with non-EU countries).

The data reported here - updated to 31 May 2021 - have been extracted from the Keep.eu portal, developed by Interact, which provides integrated information on the programmes, projects and partners of the Interreg and Interreg-IPA CBC programmes. The information and data on Keep.eu are constantly updated and the representativeness of the projects to date is about 90%. From Keep.eu, data were therefore extracted for the following themes: transport and mobility, improving connections, multimodal transport). These three categories include a total of 279 projects, representing an average of six project proposals per CBC programme.

The total number of partners amounts to 1,244 (an average of 4.5 partners per project), while the total project budget amounts to € 805,854,868, an average of about € 3.8 million per project and corresponding to about 12% of the total financial value (ERDF + national co-financing) of the CBC programmes considered for the 2014-20 period [table 1, fig. 1]. *Improving transport connections* and *Transport and mobility* are the main themes in terms of the number of projects funded as described in the Keep.eu database, while the theme of multimodality, as we saw before 2013, represents a more restricted and marginal area (it is worth about 1/3 of the other two thematic priorities in terms of the number of proposals).

Table 1 CBC projects 2014-20 and number of partners under the theme *Mobility and transport*

UE programmes	Projects	Partners	Total budget€	Average budget per project €
46	279	1244	805,854,868	2,888,368
Some projects include more than one topic. Including:				
	128	Transport & Mobility		
	119	Improving Transport Connections		
	45	Multimodal Transport		

Source: elaboration from <https://keep.eu>

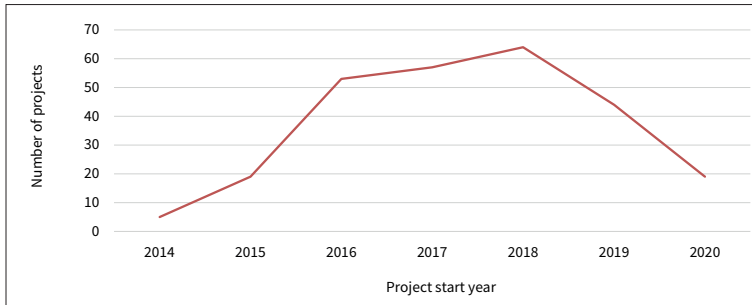


Figure 1 Number of projects per year of start of activities (source: <https://keep.eu>)



Figure 2 Geographical location of 2014-20 CBC project partners for Mobility and transport themes (source: <https://keep.eu>)

3 **Cross-Border Cooperation 2014-20: Some European Experiences**

In this section we present a short review of some of the most important projects, selected with the aim not to create an exhaustive list (it would be too long) but to provide an overview that takes into account the capacity of the Interreg programme: to finance ambitious initiatives, with a high amount of money, on a wide variety of issues involved (covering practically all areas of mobility and transport) in a widespread way on the territory of the Union.

Project name: eHUBS
Programme Interreg VB North West Europe
www.nweurope.eu

The project aims to increase the use of alternative and sustainable mobility options and to reduce the use of private cars. Partners from five cross-border countries, representing local governments, universities and companies, aim to set up and promote mobility hubs in six pilot cities, while providing a basis for replicability and scalability of the solutions adopted for the whole area. In total, 2,395 Light Electric Vehicles (LEVs) (e.g. eScooters, eBikes) will be available in the more than 92 hubs developed through the project. The hubs also include various means of transport in the vicinity of public transport stops. Environmental benefits are calculated with a reduction of about 1,500 kg CO₂ per year.

Project name: FinEst Smart Mobility
Programme Interreg Central Baltic
www.finestLink.fi/en/finest-smart-mobility

The project aims at a better interaction of different means of transport in the cross-border area by implementing alternative solutions, integrating ICT solutions and developing better SUMP planning (e.g. SUMP strategy for the Tallinn region until 2035). The starting point of the consortium was the development of user-centric solutions aimed at making traffic flow more smoothly and interconnection more sustainable; the connection between the city of Helsinki and Tallinn has more than eight million passengers and 300,000 freight trucks in a year and the project focuses also on the reduction of negative externalities caused by travel. The partners of the FinEst Smart Mobility project are: City of Helsinki, City of Tallinn, ITL Digital Lab, City of Vantaa, Estonian road administration, Forum Virium Helsinki LTD.

Project name: EMR Connect
Programme Interreg Belgium-Germany-The Netherlands

<https://www.interregemr.eu/projects/emr-connect-econ-en>

The project, financed with more than 2,300,000.00 euro from EU funds, has the ambition to improve cross-border mobility in the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion (Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands), in particular with regard to public transport, which has historically been hampered by various barriers. EMR Connect focuses on price harmonisation, digitalisation and interoperability of ticketing systems. Another important objective is to provide integrated information to passengers in the area. One of the most ambitious goals of the project is to study the creation of an electrified bus network with a series of fully interoperable charging stations and an ebike rental service at the border. The partnership also plans to implement a series of awareness-raising and knowledge exchange activities by organising training sessions, workshops and good practice seminars.

Project name: Elektrifizierung der Hochrheinstraße
Programme: Interreg Germany – Austria – Switzerland – Liechtenstein (Alpenrhein – Bodensee – Hochrhein)

<https://www.interreg.org/aktuell/interreg-projekt-elektrifizierung-der-hochrheinbahn-schreitet-voran>

The aim of the project is to develop the final and executive planning for the electrification of the 74 km section of the railway network on the Basel-Erzingen-Schaffhausen line. At the start of the project the trains between Basle Badischer station and Erzingen are to continue to run on diesel; in addition the electrification of the railway network will also allow the passage of INTERREGio express trains. The section in question is an important junction on the Swiss-German border, and the upgrading of the Upper Rhine route can help to make the border road junctions less congested and travel more sustainable. As with other cross-border projects, the level and quality of institutional cooperation between authorities from different countries will be crucial to ensure the success of the initiatives. The project has a significant European financial support of 5 million Euro, with a total budget of more than 10 million Euro; the activities will end at the end of 2022.

Project name: North West Region: Multimodal Transport Hub
Programme Interreg United Kingdom-Ireland (Ireland-Northern Ireland-Scotland)

<https://www.seupb.eu/iva-overview>

The project focuses on the creation of an innovative multimedia hub to strengthen the integration of cross-border public transport services. The hub is located on the site of the old Waterside Station in Derry and services will be supported and launched through a series of promotional initiatives and communications campaigns to encourage modal shift; integrated public transport services, rail links, active travel infrastructure are planned. The EU financial support amounts to almost € 20 million and the total budget to over € 32 million.

Project name: MOBIMART
Programme Interreg Italy-France (Maritime)

<http://interreg-maritime.eu/>

MOBIMART aims to develop a single infomobility tool for passengers (residents, tourists, commuters) travelling between Sardinia, Corsica, the Mediterranean region of France, Tuscany and Liguria. The information platform includes information on different means of transport (ship, train, bus and also air connections) and aims to provide immediate information to users regardless of administrative borders or service operators. The starting point is the harmonisation of information systems, databases and IT platforms.

Project name: Ferry in Neszmély-Radvaň
Programme Interreg Slovakia-Hungary

www.skhu.eu

The main objective of the project is to increase the cross-border crossing options between Hungary and Slovakia through the construction of a ferry connection, boarding access roads and a series of car parks on both sides of the border. The strategic objective is to strengthen the economic and social integration of the two areas concerned and to create more employment and cultural opportunities. The Community funding for the preparation of the area and the car parks and for the purchase of the ferry amounts to approximately € 4,5 million.

Project name: Fortis
Programme Interreg Italy-Slovenia

www.ita-slo.eu/it/fortis

The main objective of Fortis is to strengthen institutional cooperation in the field of sustainable public transport and motorisation. The challenge from which the project starts is to improve and harmonise the legislation and implementation of transport services between Italy and Slovenia, trying to exploit the dialogue between the competent institutional actors. The two main axes of the project concern the improvement of public transport networks and the exchange of knowledge and practices in the field of motor vehicle legislation. The aim of the consortium is to work on analysing gaps and areas for improvement and to establish a stable network for dialogue and joint work. The project ends in February 2022.

Project name: Transmobil
Programme Interreg France-Wallonia-Flanders

<https://www.transmobil.be/fr/portail/294/index.html>

Transmobil was launched in 2018 and has a duration of four years; the project aims to increase the accessibility of public transport in the cross-border area covered by the reference Programme and to strengthen connections and mobility services in rural border areas, especially with regard to certain categories of users (young people, elderly, disadvantaged groups). A network of cross-border mobility hubs and a common integrated platform form the backbone of the project.

Project name: Cycling route around the Tatra Mountains – stage II
Programme: Interreg Poland-Slovakia

https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects/Poland/tatras-mountains-cycling-route-provides-access-to-nature-and-culture

This is the second phase of a joint project between Poland and Slovakia which aims to build 60 km of cycle paths (out of a planned total of 250 km) in the Tatra Mountains. In addition to the infrastructure, the project includes the provision of 14 lay-bys along the route and a free park-and-ride facility. The partnership also developed a series of involvement and communication actions to increase the attractiveness of the area, which is enhanced by the presence of several UNESCO sites. The first phase of the project was funded in the previous programme and completed in 2015.

Project name: ERBIDEA
Programme: Interreg POCTEFA

www.poctefa.eu

ERBIDEA mainly plans to design a cycle path along the Bayonne-San Sebastian-Pamplona axis. The activities are developed from the involvement of decision makers, town planners and citizens focusing on the different needs and ideas of spatial planning. The objective is to develop multimodal connections in the border area, to provide integrated information and linked to economic activities and tourist destinations. The general approach of the project is to promote sustainable mobility and modal shift also for daily trips.

4 Concluding Remarks

Cross-border cooperation, within European territorial cooperation, is a major tool to help achieve the objectives of cohesion policy. The European Parliament in 2016, with its resolution *On European territorial cooperation-best practices and innovative measures*, and the Commission itself in 2017 with the aforementioned communication *Boosting Growth and Cohesion in Border Regions* reaffirm the strategic value of EU financial support to CBC projects and the importance of ever better connectivity and accessibility of border areas, with constant attention to economic and social growth and environmental sustainability.

The central theme in the discussion and action of EU institutions, which can also be found in the 2014-20 projects, is the need to create more homogeneous legal, regulatory, technical and administrative systems, where the starting point of Interreg projects – the exchange of practices and knowledge – is an essential element for greater integration. The emphasis on cooperation between different public and research institutions, between trade associations, between companies and transport companies at cross-border level should continue to be a focus of the new CBC programming with the aim of facilitating decision-making processes and pooling technical and organisational solutions.

In the field of transport and mobility, as we have seen, the best practices of harmonisation and joint development of services and infrastructures influence the growth of territories and help to reduce the gaps aggravated by territorial discontinuity and persistent administrative fragmentation.

The issue of accessibility and freedom of movement is central to many of the projects presented as well as in discussions on future funding programmes. The cross-cutting issues of legal and administrative harmonisation, together with the language barrier, are often a precondition for effective cooperation, but also for future planning of public transport between border areas. The key issues of multimodality and infrastructure and service planning are also crucial.

A further aspect present in almost all Interreg CBC projects is the idea of consulting, including, involving stakeholders and citizens in the identification of problems and the definition of services and infrastructures. In this respect, there is much room for manoeuvre and improvement of relations and results, starting with dialogue between partners and between public institutions.

In addition to efforts to reduce administrative barriers, cross-cutting mobility priorities should be increasingly taken into account, e.g. quality of life for cross-border workers, Eures services and EU employment and social innovation programmes.

In this sense, it is essential to strengthen the synergies between EU programmes and programmes developed in parallel at regional and national level. The undoubted value of territorial cooperation programmes in strengthening the networking capacity of those involved in the partnerships and the increased ability to plan and design, makes it possible to develop medium- to long-term initiatives that are relevant from a financial and strategic point of view. In this sense, it is worth considering the future of cross-border cooperation and the role of the programmes in relation to complementarity with Horizon Europe or the Connecting Europe Facility. Thus, the possible future scenario expressed in the Commission's impact assessment document, is also a question, where it states that, based on the positive impact of Interreg programmes: "Cross-border programmes should no longer serve primarily to manage and distribute funds, but should play the role of exchange bodies, facilitating cross-border activities and acting as a centre for strategic planning" (European Commission 2018a).

In conclusion, the outcome of the previous programmes is positive and has contributed to increasing exchanges and cooperation between neighbouring countries by working intensively on improving accessibility and on the search for a more homogeneous and functional management and regulatory framework, increasingly seeking to manage projects, services and infrastructures jointly. It remains to be seen how the joint efforts will also contribute to better plan-

ning and, above all, to reducing emissions and green mobility, challenges that can only be met with more efficient joint action and closer cooperation between public and private actors thanks to the direction of the EU institutions, the Commission and the cross-border cooperation programmes.

As final consideration, it is also worth reflecting on the degree of awareness of EU CBC initiatives among citizens and the effectiveness of communication by EU institutions, managing authorities, secretariats and beneficiaries themselves. If we take one of the latest available opinion polls, carried out by Gallup International for the European Commission between February and April 2020 in the regions covered by the Interreg cooperation programmes, we learn that less than a quarter of the respondents (24%) are aware of EU-funded cross-border cooperation activities; of these, only 9% have certain or direct knowledge of the project or activity, while the remaining 15% have only a general level of knowledge. The striking fact, however, is the comparison with the previous survey of 2015 regarding the level of awareness on Interreg cooperation activities, which in 2020 drops by 7 percentage points.

Overall, the large difference in response depends on the Country. The level of knowledge is much higher in Eastern European states, while on the contrary it is very low in the North, in France or in Cyprus, where it is at the lowest level. The dimension of communication, dissemination of results and capitalisation processes is undoubtedly a central node for further strengthening European cooperation and integration.

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