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**Actors, Mechanisms  
and Levels of Influence  
in the EU Decision-Making**

(Proceedings of the Jean Monnet International Conference,  
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(coordinators)

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# ACTORS AND LEVELS OF RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF CROSS-BORDER REGIONS. CASE STUDY: BIHOR AND HAJDU BIHAR COUNTIES

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**Abstract:** *At the level of border regions operate a series of models and structures of cross-border cooperation, all these being built on the basis of levels of relationships between various public, private or non-governmental actors. The construction of cross-border regions is thus closely linked to cross-border cooperation, which must be understood as cooperation between at least two entities located along a common border. The European Commission has advocated a long time for "cooperation for development" to support disadvantaged border regions, in the Centre and Eastern part of the continent. Despite the progress made, there are still some obstacles created by existing national legal and administrative frameworks that have a direct impact on the lives of border area residents. The new approach to regional development creates the promotion of networks between different urban centres and favours the complementarity and individualisation of each region, placing them at the centre of European strategies. In this context, the study aims to analyse the intensity of different types of cross-border relations and the involvement of regional actors in the deep integration of regions corresponding to NUTS III administrative territorial units, Bihor (RO), Hajdu-Bihar (HU), based on cross-border integration models and indicators developed by Castañer, Jańczak and Martín-Uceda.*

**Keywords:** *cross-border cooperation, border regions, actors, relationship levels*

## Introduction

The geo-political, economic and social realities of the immediate post-World War II period led, in 1951, to the emergence of the European Coal and Steel Community. Through their initiative, the six states sought to prevent a new war on the continent and to limit the negative effects of borders by coordinating their economic policies, by organising the free movement of these two important

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resources in the rebuilding of post-war economies and by freeing access to other sources of production (labour and capital)<sup>1</sup>. From the political point of view, the supra-state community fostered reconciliation and cooperation, paving the way for the EEC and EURATOM, established in 1957 by the Treaties of Rome. Thus, it was configured the main objective of European integration namely to create an integrated area in which peace and freedom were maintained through a set of policies and programmes to ensure economic and social progress, improved living and working conditions, balanced trade relations and fair competition, and a reduction in economic and social disparities between the various regions of the European Economic Community<sup>2</sup>. The first result of these policies and programmes was the emergence and gradual development of cross-border cooperation projects between public and private actors located mainly in areas on either side of the common borders<sup>3</sup>. Often the communities in these areas share common histories and cultures and were building their future not in "simple regions at the extreme of the sovereign territory of two or more neighbouring countries divided by jurisdictional demarcation lines", but in "areas of cultural, economic and political flows and exchanges, spaces where the development of common activities has taken place and where the type and intensity of transactions has evolved over time"<sup>4</sup>.

The growth of cross-border cooperation initiatives in the 1960s and 1970s, the establishment and consolidation of the European Association of Border Regions, experience exchanges and best practices, led to the inclusion of the CBC in other European initiatives. The adoption in Madrid in 1980 of the Framework Convention on Cross Border Cooperation encouraged cooperation between authorities in the border areas and allowed the development of models of collaboration between regions and municipalities whereby resources and services can be used jointly, interoperability is ensured through common standards, new transport and energy infrastructures can be built through cooperation or environmental problems and emergency situations can be managed jointly. Since the early 1990s, a number of cross-border relationships have been developed and sustained efforts have been made to facilitate political and economic exchanges with countries such as Switzerland, Norway and Central and Eastern European states, which led to the gradual dissolution of the internal borders of the European Union. This also led to changes in the EU's relations with neighbouring countries at its external borders. The process has also extended to pre-accession countries at the beginning of the 21st century, as well as to the Eastern Partnership and

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<sup>1</sup> *Treaty of Paris establishing the Economic Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)*, art. 2 and 3, available at [https://www.cvce.eu/obj/treaty\\_establishing\\_the\\_european\\_coal\\_and\\_steel\\_community\\_paris\\_18\\_april\\_1951-en-11a21305-941e-49d7-a171-ed5be548cd58.html](https://www.cvce.eu/obj/treaty_establishing_the_european_coal_and_steel_community_paris_18_april_1951-en-11a21305-941e-49d7-a171-ed5be548cd58.html), [Accessed in June 2022].

<sup>2</sup> *The Treaty of Rome establishing the European Economic Community. Summary*, available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/RO/legal-content/summary/treaty-of-rome-eec.html> [Accessed in June 2022].

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Reitel, Birte Wassenberg, Jean Peurony, "The INTERREG Experience in Bridging European Territories. A 30-Yar Summary", in *European Territorial Cooperation. Theoretical and Empirical Approaches to the Process and Impacts of Cross-Border and Transnational Cooperation in Europe* (Eduardor Medeiros (ed.), Springer, 2018, p. 8

<sup>4</sup> Luis De Sousa, "Understanding European Cross-border Cooperation: A Framework for Analysis", in *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 35, no. 6, 2013, p. 3.

Balkan countries. Today, in a united Europe of 4 million square kilometres and more than 500 million inhabitants - 30% of whom live in NUTS II level border regions - cross-border cooperation is widespread and characterised by joint activities in all day-to-day activities, involving partners in different fields on both sides of the border and at all levels - European, national, regional and local<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, border regions have become a fertile ground for territorial cooperation and institutional innovation, with the degree of cross-border networking varying considerably depending on a range of economic, political, cultural, historical and geographical factors. The EEC has put the base of this cooperation through the INTERREG programme, an instrument which integrates the three types of cooperation: cross-border, interregional and transnational. Since 2007, the new concept of European territorial cooperation links CBC to the objectives of European economic, social and territorial cohesion<sup>6</sup> and the creation of an institutional framework for cooperation through instruments such as the EGTC.

Evaluation studies have shown that border regions are the interface between political and administrative systems, between different cultures and socio-economic realities, and that CBC is driven at the European territorial level by public actors, operating at the interface between political-administrative systems that are historically evolved. Joachim Beck identifies two reference levels of the socio-economic and political environment in a border region: the first given by the political-administrative system; the second determined by cross-border socio-economic dynamics. At each level, CBC contributes to the effort of overcoming functional blockages between two neighbouring political-administrative systems and to solving cross-border problems<sup>7</sup>. In this context, the CBC connects the local and continental dimensions of governance.

### **Cross-border cooperation (CBC) - theoretical background**

Article 2.1 of the Madrid Outline Convention defines cross-border cooperation as any "concerted action designed to strengthen and develop neighbourly relations between communities or territorial authorities dependent on two or more contracting parties, and to conclude agreements and arrangements useful for that purpose"<sup>8</sup>. M. Perkman, offers a more specific definition than that established in Madrid, stressing that CBC is "a more or less institutionalised collaboration between neighbouring sub-national authorities across national borders", with the following characteristics<sup>9</sup>: the main protagonists are always public authorities, so therefore any cross-border activity

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Guillermo-Ramirez, "The Added Value of European Territorial Cooperation. Drawing from Case Studies", in *European Territorial Cooperation. Theoretical and Empirical Approaches to the Process and Impacts of Cross-Border and Transnational Cooperation in Europe*. Eduardor Medeiros (ed.), Springer, 2018, p. 31

<sup>6</sup> Bernard Reitel, Birte Wassenberg, Jean Peurony, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Joachim Beck, "Open Government and Cross-Border Cooperation – Perspectives for the Context of Transnational Policy-Making in Border-Regions", in *Central and Eastern European EDem and EGov Days 2021*, Vol. 341, no. 1/March 2021, pp. 143, 145.

<sup>8</sup> *European Outline Convention on Transfrontalier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities*, Madrid, 21.V.1980, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Markus Perkman, "Cross-Border Regions in Europe", in *European Urban and Regional Studies*, Vol. 10, Issues 2/2003, p. 156.

must take place within institutionalised frameworks; CBC involves collaboration between sub-national authorities from different countries, even if these actors are not normally subjects of international law. For this reason, CBC is often based on informal or quasi-legal arrangements between the participating authorities; CBC is more concerned with practical problem-solving in various areas of daily life; CBC implies a certain permanence of cross-border contacts that will eventually lead, in time, to the creation of institutions.

Operationalising, in turn, the definition in the Framework Convention, L. Sousa identifies some of the actors involved in CBC - public or private institutions located in border regions of two (or more) countries, but also the main categories of factors contributing to cooperation (geographical, economic, cultural-identity or political). For Sousa, cooperation mechanisms are set in motion when the actors involved want to solve common problems or jointly manage resources, therefore the context in which border regions make cooperative efforts or cooperation arrangements is determined by the existence of common interests and historical memory, strong interdependence due to economic and geographical factors, or political objectives for future joint actions<sup>10</sup>.

K. Czimre equates CBC with a "process of working and acting together for a common purpose or benefit across borders of two or more countries"<sup>11</sup>. From this perspective, territorial cooperation actions play an important role in European development and cohesion strategies, especially due to the implementation, since 1990, of the INTERREG programme, originally intended to prepare regions at the EU borders for economic convergence. Since 2007, the initiative has become one of the major objectives of Cohesion Policy, respectively it has been integrated into European territorial cooperation (INTERREG IV)<sup>12</sup>. In addition to the territorial dimension, CBC is also gaining a geo-political dimension, transforming a previously fractured area into one in which local and continental dimensions of governance connect<sup>13</sup>.

As a tool in the creation of a homogenous and borderless European economic area<sup>14</sup>, cross-border cooperation is often used by local authorities and private actors located on either side of the border, mainly to compensate for structural disadvantages imposed by the peripheral location of the areas in which they operate and the limitations imposed by the system (legal, economic, social, linguistic, cultural, religious, etc.)<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Luis De Sousa, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Klara DR. Czimre, *Development of cross-border regions*, University of Debrecen Press, 2013, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Eduardo Medeiros, "Introduction", in *European Territorial Cooperation. Theoretical and Empirical Approaches to the Process and Impacts of Cross-Border and Transnational Cooperation in Europe*. Eduardo Medeiros (ed.), Springer, 2018, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Margarita Castañer, Jarosław Jańczak, Javier Martín-Uceda, "Economic Development, (A)symmetries and Local Geopolitics: A New Approach to Studying Cross-Border Cooperation in Europe", in *Eurasia Border Review*, Vol. 9, No.1/2018, p. 73.

<sup>14</sup> Bernard Reitel, Birte Wassenberg, Jean Peyrony, "The INTERREG Experience in Bridging European Territories. A 30-Year Summary", in *European Territorial Cooperation. Theoretical and Empirical Approaches to the Process and Impacts of Cross-Border and Transnational Cooperation in Europe* Eduardo Medeiros (ed.), Springer, 2018, p. 8

<sup>15</sup> Luis De Sousa, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

Sousa states that usual cooperation practices require the following types of commitments from the parties involved<sup>16</sup>:

- Awareness-raising cooperation, which requires the lowest level of political involvement and consists of regular visits on both sides of the border to promote cultural and trade links (twin towns are the best known examples of this type of cooperation);

- Mutual aid cooperation, which consists of a commitment between emergency services on both sides of the border to assist each other in the event of joint risk or emergency management, with cooperation being initiated on an ad hoc basis or in the framework of long-term agreements between public authorities in the vicinity of the border;

- Functional cooperation requires permanent arrangements, more resources and a high degree of involvement of regional political-administrative authorities. Joint projects, funded by INTERREG, aim to solve problems, create business opportunities, promote cultural exchanges and reduce barriers to labour mobility. Since the first cooperation programmes between the Nordic countries (Fyn-Kem, Storstrom-Ostholstein, Oresund, Aland, Kvaren-MittSkandia), permanent regional or local cross-border structures have been set up, responsible for the practical and technical aspects of programme development and management. In the case of INTERREG South-European cooperation between Greece - Italy, Corsica - Sardinia, Corsica - Tuscany, there have been attempts to create permanent structures, but these have not resulted in institutional cross-border agreements. In Western Europe, the programmes between Ireland - Wales, Rives - Manche and Kent-Nord - Pas-de-Calais) followed intermediate scenarios where arrangements were made for INTERREG management only;

- cooperation for the joint management of public resources or services, for which various European or other public funds are used. Providing joint cross-border services to people living near the common border is a difficult objective to achieve, as the strategies developed by national governments are often not in line with cross-border needs. However, the regularity and complexity of cross-border relations can lead to the institutionalisation of cooperation arrangements in the form of Euroregions or EGCTCs, structures without direct political power, limited by the powers of the regional or local authorities that built them.

On closer examination of CBC in the European area, we can observe the process character of cross-border cooperation, which started from initial forms manifested at the local level, and then, stimulated by the diversification of interventions and the coordination of local and national priorities, led to the creation of cross-border structures and regional networks, which are effective only if they follow the 3 principles identified by Guillermo - Ramirez<sup>17</sup>:

- the principle of partnership, which is expressed on two axes: a vertical one, which calls on the mechanisms of multi-level governance; a horizontal one, based on equality between actors on either side of the border;

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<sup>16</sup> *Idem*, pp. 6-7, and Martin Guillermo-Ramirez, *op.cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> *Idem*, pp. 32-33.

- the principle of subsidiarity, on the basis of which regional and local players take the initiative and assume responsibility for finding the most appropriate level of cooperation, with the aim of strengthening and making regional and local bodies more flexible in order to balance asymmetries or integrate into new cross-border structures;
- the principle of the lead partner responsible for project management and implementation.

Castañer, Janczak and Martin-Uceda point out that to be a sustainable process, CBC "requires additional financial and institutional support", the main argument being the much stronger divisive nature of borders, despite the willingness of local or regional actors to respect the above principles. The non-functional paradigms underpinning the European integration process have led to the removal of barriers and the creation of an area of free movement for people, goods, services and capital, but the debordering process is only visible in isolated areas and is hampered by administrative and territorial realities generated especially during the latest crises on the continent (migrant crisis or the COVID-19 pandemic). In order to fully understand the processes of cross-border cooperation and the forms in which it manifests itself, the three researchers propose a geopolitical scan of CBC, in particular the actions of the agents involved, the alliances that are formed, the projects or conflicts, in order to measure the degree of cooperation between regions. This is as big as on both sides of the border there are: flexible local administrations; resources and technical capacity to implement a large number of projects; interest in cooperation; regional potential; spatial distribution of urban centres; delegation of power at local and regional level<sup>18</sup>.

In the context of the role and functions of cross-border cooperation in the process of European integration, Joachim Beck argues that borders continue to be barriers in the daily life of regional actors, due to the fact that CBC manifests itself in a "context of inter-institutional and inter-cultural logic" generated by different national, regional or local political-administrative systems, with relations taking place on the basis of micro-diplomacy and intergovernmentalism. The result identified is that at EU level, "intense internal and external approaches to CBC have developed between border regions" thanks to the INTERREG programme and institutional cooperation instruments (e.g. EGCT). Today the EU has a capacity of more than 21,000 people permanently involved in specially created institutions and administrative partners. The institutionalisation of cross-border cooperation has not been fully successful, as the "genesis and functionality of CBC" still depends on the "willingness of states to contribute to action". For a high degree of local cooperation and the construction of cross-border regions, the last barriers to cooperation, those between the political-administrative systems of the participating states, need to be overcome. To this end, the researcher proposes the use of modern tools to involve decision-makers, citizens and other groups in the decision-making process, implementation and evaluation of government measures, in a substantial change in the existing political-administrative culture on both sides of the border. The

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<sup>18</sup> Margarita Castañer, Jarosław Jańczak, Javier Martín-Uceda, *op.cit.*, pp. 68-88.



integration of ICT into this process will increase the transparency and accountability of local administrations, promote participatory governance and involve civil society at all administrative and sectoral levels<sup>19</sup>. This will considerably improve the quality of services provided by local authorities to citizens and increase neighbours' confidence in the capacity to manage joint projects. Furthermore, Beck recommends including the principles of open government and administrative digitalization in the approach to European territorial cooperation in order to bridge the gaps between systems, promote participatory development and increase cooperation<sup>20</sup>.

### **Research methodology and results**

In order to identify the actors and the levels at which they relate to each other in the process of intensifying cross-border cooperation, which aims at the construction of cross-border regions, we have to start from studies that identify the border as the main determinant of the development of border regions. A wealth of literature defines the border as a confrontation line, but also as a catalyst for ideas and innovation. The border is also the factor that delimits political and cultural systems or transforms border regions into laboratories of the European integration process. Reitel, Wassenberg and Peurony state that one of the basic objectives of European territorial cooperation is "to create narratives in which conflicting national histories are associated with a common vision", but also that the border is still an obstacle to the implementation of many European projects<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, the degree of border permeability directly influences the actual impact of CBC and the degree of homogeneity/integration of cross-border regions. In addition, Guillermo-Ramirez states that if cross-border integration is understood as territorial integration, then it should be the result of a debordering process. However, this process is conditioned by the economic and social cohesion existing between border regions, more specifically by: the extent to which there is a common identity in these areas; the intensity and quality of cross-border economic contacts; the existence of a cross-border labour market; the degree of institutionalisation of CBC between local and regional authorities and their legislative capacity; the scope of the actors involved and the range of needs covered by cross-border activities; access to EU support for cooperation; the involvement of cross-border structures in the management of European support programmes for CBC<sup>22</sup>.

European territorial, economic and social cohesion is therefore directly dependent on the way in which different actors, depending on their position and on the basis of objective choices, understand how to behave and interact in the context of different levels of relationships. In this respect, Svetlana Mytryayeva distinguishes the following levels and typologies of actors<sup>23</sup>:

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<sup>19</sup> Joachim Beck, *op.cit.*, pp. 142-145.

<sup>20</sup> *Idem*, p. 155.

<sup>21</sup> Bernard Reitel, Birte Wassenberg, Jean Peurony, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Guillermo-Ramirez, *op.cit.*, pp. 34-38.

<sup>23</sup> Svetlana Mytryayeva, "Classification of Cross-Border Cooperations actors", in *Geopolitics of Ukraine: History and Modern Times*, special issue *Methodology and tools for sociological analysis of transborder cooperation*. Institute for Transfrontalier Cooperation, Uzhgorod, 2013, pp. 53-57.

1. at the international level there are two categories of non-state actors: international intergovernmental organisations - created by states, which play an important role in providing funds for cooperation (e.g. the European Union); international non-governmental organisations - created by groups of individuals, business people or other social agents (multinationals, organisations generated by national and ethnic movements, communities of specialists and experts in a particular field, religious and humanitarian organisations, terrorist groups, etc.);

2. at national level, the state has jurisdiction over a territory, has a political and administrative apparatus and has a key role in establishing and improving the legislative framework and institutional mechanisms for policy implementation, as well as in implementing national, regional and local programmes and projects;

3. at the regional level, local governments and communities themselves act as a multiplier of economic development. Also at this level, civil society contributes to cooperative efforts and the development of social interactions, through the manifestation of individual or group freedom of action.

In addition to this taxonomy and based on the drivers of cross-border cooperation identified by Luis de Sousa<sup>24</sup>, at regional and local level we can add other categories of actors, namely:

- Local SME willing to expand. While large firms operate globally, have their own connections and are more directly linked to global markets and networks, SMEs benefit from the opportunities offered by the external economies of scale offered by proximity to borders;

- Local political actors, who tend to see cooperation agreements as a mechanism for accessing European funds for investment in infrastructure and business in their area of competence. They are accountable to their voters and political leaders and are challenged not to perceive the sectoral interests of their neighbours as a threat to their own interests, but rather as an opportunity for development and an increased quality of life. In the context of devolution of power to the local level, urban centres, where local and regional resources are concentrated, are structures that can shape the landscape of cross-border projects;

- Local associations, which support cooperation and involve citizens in micro and macro integration processes;

- Educational institutions, especially universities and research centres, which by their specificity are generators of knowledge and innovation, provide expertise and play an important role in many cross-border projects.

In order to have a more in-depth view of the actors involved in the cooperation processes between two regions located on either side of a land border, we will use data on projects implemented under the Interreg V-A Romania - Hungary Programme in the 2014-2020 budget year. Empirical analysis of data collected from official, public, numerical and non-numerical documents was carried out for the NUTS III territorial units Bihor and Hajdu-Bihar, neighbouring regions on the Romanian-Hungarian border, considered

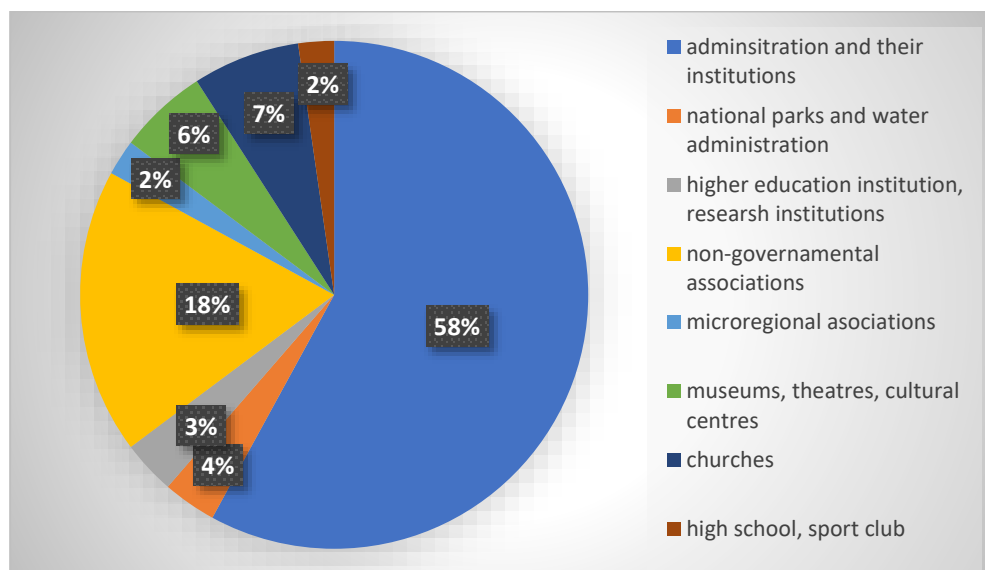
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<sup>24</sup> Luis De Sousa, *op.cit.*, pp. 12-14.

representative, as almost half of the funded projects were implemented jointly<sup>25</sup>. The results are as follows:

1. A total of 88 beneficiaries (local and county governments, administration and their institutions; national parks administration; higher education institutions, high school, research institutions, non-governmental associations; museums, theatres, churches, microregional associations) were involved as project leader or partner in the 53 implemented projects. From Graph 1 it can be seen that most beneficiaries (51) are in the category of local governments and their institutions, 35 being local and county governments (22 from Romania and 14 from Hungary) and 16 institutions subordinated to local public authorities (12 Romanian and 4 Hungarian).

**Graph no. 1.** *Categories of beneficiaries (leaders/parteners) that have implemented projects in INTERREG V-A program, in Bihor and Hajdu-Bihar counties*



Source: our representation, base on cross-border projects data

The next category of beneficiaries are the 18 non-governmental organisations that implemented projects as leader (5 organisations, all from Romania) or partner (13 organisations). Most projects (3 projects with a total value of more than 1.2

<sup>25</sup> The INTERREG V-A Programme, implemented in the period 2014-2020 at the level of the Romanian - Hungarian border, had a total budget of approximately 223 million Euros, of which approximately 189 million Euros were allocated from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). From this budget, 109 cross-border projects were financed (on average, 2 million Euros/implemented project), of which 53 projects, worth 78 million Euros, were implemented at the level of Bihor and Hajdu-Bihar counties (an average of 1700000 Euro per project). See the overview of the Interreg V-A Program Romania – Hungary available at <https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/programme-overview/>, [Accessed on June 2022].

million Euro) were coordinated by the Association of Business Promotion in Romania, a civil organisation whose aim is to help entrepreneurs in Bihor county to increase their competitiveness and added value<sup>26</sup>. The second organisation is Don Orione Beneficence Charity Society, which implemented 2 projects in the period under review for a total value of 1,257,583 Euros.

A separate category of eligible applicants are micro associations set up for joint management of resources to solve specific problems existing in the two counties. In the period 2014-2020, 3 such micro-associations (Transregio Intercommunity Development Association, Gúth-Keled Non-profit Association for Tourism and Nature Protection and Association "Service for Assistance in Special Situations" - SARTISS) implemented 3 projects (1 as leader and 2 as partner) responding to specific regional needs: Increased interconnectivity between the urban poles of Oradea and Debrecen to support sustainable urban development<sup>27</sup>; risk prevention and disaster management in the Romanian-Hungarian<sup>28</sup> border area; protection and conservation of natural heritage and cross-border national parks<sup>29</sup>.

From the category of higher education institutions, the University of Oradea and the University of Debrecen have developed a strong collaboration over the years through joint projects funded by various European cross-border cooperation programmes. In the budget year under review, the two universities are project leader in 2, respectively 1 project and partner in 3 (University of Oradea), respectively 1 project (University of Debrecen). Alongside the two universities, the Institute for Nuclear Research, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Érmelléki Folk-High School were also partners. The implemented projects aim at: conservation and protection of endangered ecosystems in the cross-border area; improving access to health services and increasing the quality of medical interventions in emergency situations; prevention, identification and treatment of cardiovascular and gynaecological diseases at cross-border level; transfer of know-how in the field of geographical horizon in Bihor and Hajdu-Bihar counties; use of computational intelligence at the basis of financial decisions of companies.

6 representatives of different religious denominations (5 from Romania and 1 from Hungary) from the analysed area jointly implemented a project with a total value of 2.718.105,8 euro, the project leader being the Destination Management Agency. The project, which will end in February 2023, aims to use the natural and human resources of Bihor and Hajdu-Bihar to increase employment in the cultural-tourism and hospitality sector<sup>30</sup>. Furthermore, 3 of the cultural institutions in Bihor

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<sup>26</sup> The official site of Association of Bussiness Promotion in Romania, available at <https://rove.ro/en/>, [Accessed on June 2022].

<sup>27</sup> The official site of TRANSBORDER Project, available at <https://www.trans-border.eu/en/project-2/>, [Accessed on June 2022].

<sup>28</sup> The official site of CRISSRISKS Project, available at <https://crossrisks.eu/en/>, [Accessed on June 2022].

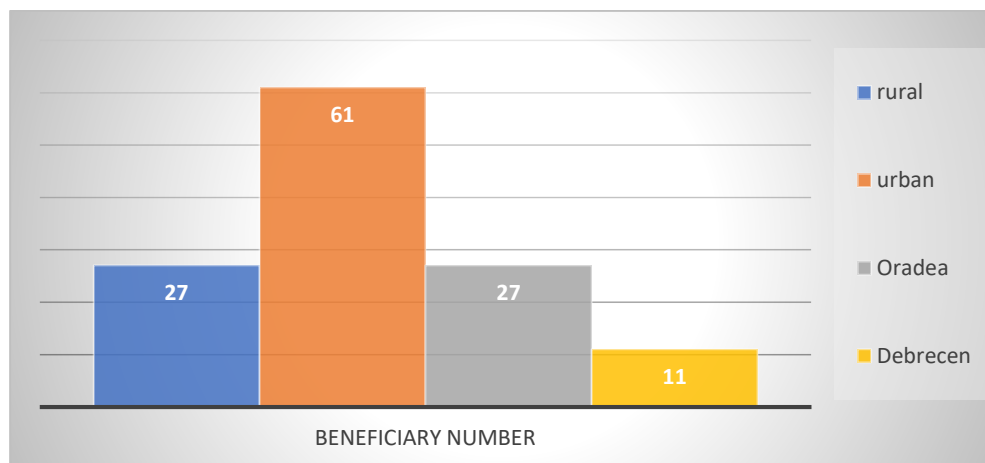
<sup>29</sup> The official site of the IRIS Project, available at <https://keep.eu/projects/20997/Joint-protection-of-cross-b-EN/>, [Accessed on June 2022].

<sup>30</sup> The official site of TOURJOB, available at <https://tourjob.eu/proiectul/>, [Accessed on June 2022].

and 2 in Hajdu-Bihar have joined forces to create a cross-border cultural and historical heritage centre and an incubator for performing arts.

Continuing the analysis and taking as an indicator the number of projects implemented by a beneficiary as a leader or partner, we can say that most beneficiaries have one project implemented (another 16 beneficiaries have implemented 2 projects, 3 have implemented 3 projects, 2 have implemented 4 projects and 4 beneficiaries have been involved in the implementation of 5 projects), which means that in the analysed area there is a quite intense cross-border cooperation that creates networks in which local actors interact and jointly implement projects to increase development indicators in the region. The fact that Oradea and Debrecen are the two poles of development in the region contributes to this, and the spatial distribution between rural and urban beneficiaries supports this statement. According to Graph 2, 69% of the beneficiaries are from urban areas and 31% from rural areas, and 21 of them are located in Oradea and 11 in Debrecen.

**Graph no. 2.** *Spatial distribution of rural-urban CBC actors from Bihor and Hajdu-Bihar*



Source: our representation, base on cross-border projects data

## Conclusions

De Sousa includes mechanisms of interregional cooperation and interdependence in the process of European integration. This is where the first level of relationship, at which cooperation manifests itself, emerges. The EU's policy of territorial, economic and social cohesion has brought profound changes to the state borders created after WWII, as a consequence, today we are witnessing a process of debordering in which cooperation underpins cross-border relations between states<sup>31</sup>. The abandonment of jurisdictional control of borders is not total, as Member States can change the degree of border permeability when crisis situations arise, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as long as peace is maintained or a crisis does not

<sup>31</sup> Luis De Sousa, *op.cit.*, pp. 4-5.

occur, opportunities and European funds have stimulated cross-border cooperation at macro-regional level. At the same time, the researcher points out, cooperation can also be a "voluntary process in which states or sub-national territorial units act together towards a common goal without abdicate sovereignty to a supranational body"<sup>32</sup>. In this case, cooperation can also take place in a context of bilateral or multilateral relations between different EU or non-EU Member States. At regional level, arrangements have emerged between different NUTS III territorial units whereby CBC is institutionalised in the form of Euro-regions, dependent on the financial cooperation instruments provided by the EU, or in the form of new associative entities with or without legal status. In these cross-border regions, local authorities on either side of a common border act together and are not so dependent on European CBC programmes.

For each level of relationship we have actors involved in the cooperation processes. If at macro-regional level, the European Union acts as a catalyst through its policies and programmes, at national level, governments set the legislative framework, strategies, policies and programmes for national development. States are also involved in cross-border territorial agreements, traditional bilateral agreements or other multilateral arrangements. At the regional level, the typology of actors involved in CBC is very diverse. Empirical analysis of the data collected in the case study showed that, in the area studied, local administrations are strongly involved in cross-border projects, while Romanian ones are more interested in cooperation opportunities and tools to increase the welfare of their communities. Civil society, represented by NGOs and micro-associations, is also proving to be a promoter of common cross-border goals. A special category of actors are the two higher education institutions, the University of Oradea and the University of Debrecen, which have pooled their resources in research and innovation activities, transferred expertise and know-how to the regional business environment and jointly contributed to regional human capital formation. Together with them, representatives of religious cults are involved in projects to disseminate information on the regional cultural and religious heritage and to perpetuate local crafts.

The analysis of the projects implemented in Bihor and Hajdu-Bihar counties in the period 2014-2021 showed that most of the beneficiaries are located in the urban centres of the area. This phenomenon was somewhat natural to occur, due to the fact that cities concentrate most of the human and financial resources in a region. In the case of Oradea and Debrecen, the two growth poles in the study area, the long-standing cooperation between different actors allows us to call them twin cities or cross-border cities, as the definition given to the two concepts by Lukasz Wroblewski<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Idem, p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Lukasz D. Wróblewski, „The integration of Border Regions in the European Union: A Model Approach”, in *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, Vol. 37, Issues 3/2022.