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**THE IMPORTANCE OF EUROPEAN  
CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION PROGRAMS  
OF POLAND WITH MEMBER STATES  
OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Doctoral dissertation summary

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## **Justification for the topic selection**

European cross-border cooperation programs (ECCPs) are commonly regarded as "added value" of the European Union's (EU) cohesion policy. The question is about the real meaning of this metaphor. After all, the mere undertaking of cooperation, the establishment of joint institutions, the efficient allocation of financial resources or the tangible effects of cooperation in the form of realized investments cannot be considered as a comprehensive explanation. It seems that in this case it is necessary to address the more fundamental issue – the role of the ECCPs, in particular their impact on the socio-economic development of the border regions covered by them. This research problem can be addressed in more detailed research questions. Do these programs contribute to the reduction of the negative impact of the national borders (NINBs) on the socio-economic development of border regions and thereby reduce the spatial, economic or social discontinuities that the national borders form? Does the ECCPs support the development opportunities of border regions that are based on the positive effects of cross-border cooperation, including the specific endogenous potential of these regions? What is the place (essence and importance) of those programs in the cross-border cooperation system on the Polish borders with EU Member States and what could be?

The answer to these research questions is important for the future programming of European cross-border cooperation, which refers to, firstly, the most appropriate and allowing achievement of the intended ambitious goals spending of public funds. Secondly, the progressive integration process in Europe should be taken into account, including possible further enlargements of the European Union, which will result in changes in border functions and the creation of new cross-border cooperation programs on the new internal borders of the EU. Thirdly, a proper ECCPs evaluation is necessary because of their role in cross-border cooperation systems in the areas covered by them. Determining their effects and weaknesses would make it possible to make the necessary changes not only within the programs itself but in the entire concept of the development of border regions located near the internal borders of the European Union.

The discussed issues are also cognitively attractive and require an interdisciplinary approach. The topics of national borders and their impact on the environment (border as a condition for development), border regions and cross-border cooperation are present in economics, political science, sociology, law, but in particular and to the greatest extent, given the traditions and accomplishments, in geography (mainly economic and political). Based on different disciplines of science, it was possible to define the above

mentioned basic concepts and to comprehensively analyze the research problem. It made it possible, first and foremost, to define the essence and nature of the studied ECCPs, whether they are purely redistributive instruments or whether they can be considered as modern instruments of regional development policy. It concerned, among others, the definition of the positive and negative (including NINB) conditions of cross-border cooperation within ECCPs and, moreover, the indication of the conditions that can be changed by the programs. Interdisciplinary approach was also needed in the formulation of the concept of cross-border region (CR), in which ECCPs are part of a strategic approach to socio-economic development of border regions.

### **The main objective of the dissertation**

The main objective of the dissertation was to determine the importance of the European cross-border cooperation programs of Poland with Member States of the European Union for the socio-economic development of border regions covered by them. The focus was mainly on analyzing and synthesizing the importance of ECCPs on the basis of: the program documents of studied ECCPs (Chapter II.), the EU legislation concerning these programs (Ch. III. and IV.) and the development strategies for the Polish border regions covered by the programs under investigation (Ch. V.).<sup>1</sup>

### **The thesis and research hypothesis**

With regard to the main objective the thesis of the dissertation is:

The European cross-border cooperation programs of Poland with Member States of the European Union were crucial for the socio-economic development of border regions covered by them.

To prove the thesis in chapters II.-V. the following research hypotheses have been falsified:

1. Exogenous conditions for cross-border cooperation within the ECCPs, including the negative impact of national borders, were not homogeneous at the examined borders of Poland. (Chapter II.)

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<sup>1</sup> Thus, in the dissertation the importance of ECCPs is not based on their *ex post* effects or impact, but the carried out research focused on the role of these programs attributed to them by the decision-makers programming specific ECCPs, forming on the regulation at EU level and by those preparing development strategies for border regions that the programs covered. This approach allowed to include in the research analysis of the current period (2014-2020) of the implementation of EU cohesion policy and enabled comparisons with the programs of the 2007-2013 financial perspective.

2. The European cross-border cooperation programs implemented on the borders of Poland were more targeted at overcoming the negative conditions of cross-border cooperation, including the negative impact of national borders, than to exploit the opportunities resulting from positive conditions of cross-border cooperation. (Ch. II.)
3. The evolution of the models of European cross-border cooperation programs, as the primary endogenous conditions of cooperation within ECCPs, has fostered closer cross-border cooperation in neighboring border regions. (Ch. III.)
4. European cross-border cooperation programs have fostered cross-border integration processes and a future formation of cross-border regions, with favorable developments in this respect in the subsequent programming periods of the EU cohesion policy. (Ch. IV.)
5. Contents of the strategy papers at national, macroregional and regional levels indicate that the ECCP's significant role in the socio-economic development of Polish border regions covered by them has been recognized. (Ch. V.)

### **The subject and time frame of the study**

The subject of the study was:

- cross-border cooperation programs implemented on Poland's land borders with the Member States of the European Union in the years 2004-2020, that is three programs of Poland-Mecklenburg, Poland-Brandenburg and Poland-Saxony along the Polish-German border, three programs Poland-Czech Republic and Poland-Slovakia and two Polish-Lithuanian programs;<sup>2</sup>
- EU legislation on European cross-border cooperation programs in the years 2000-2020;
- the current strategic documents relating to Polish border regions covered by the studied ECCPs.

### **The data sources and research methods**

Carried out empirical researches were based on secondary data from the four main sources:

- program documents of studied ECCPs;
- *ex post* evaluation reports on the implementation of the Community Initiative Interreg III and European Territorial Cooperation in Poland and the European Union;

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<sup>2</sup> The ECCPs with the participation of Poland implemented in the Baltic Sea basin have not been included in the study due to the nature of the maritime border, which gives them the character more of transnational or even interregional than cross-border cooperation programs.

- scientific books and articles, reports and expertises on border regions covered by the studied ECCPs;
- Polish- and English-language literature on cross-border cooperation and European cross-border cooperation programs.

The methods of verification of the subsequent hypotheses were of a qualitative nature, and were based respectively on:

1. elaboration of the typology of exogenous conditions of cross-border cooperation; on this basis specific types of conditions of cooperation on particular sections of the examined borders are determined (dependent, independent, positive, neutral, negative, negative resulting from the negative impact of the national border);
2. elaboration of tables in which, firstly, the conditions for cross-border cooperation within the ECCPs and the focus of this cooperation in the subsequent financial perspectives of the EU cohesion policy were set together; secondly, the importance of the different directions of spending funds in the examined ECCPs was shown;
3. designation of ECCPs models in the years 2000-2020, due to the typology of their constituents, on the basis of the provisions in the documents at EU level which these models have determined;
4. the presented concept of the cross-border region, including its three dimensions: institutional, relational and economic, which was paired with the ECCPs models in the years 2000-2020;
5. the characteristics of the currently in force strategic documents at national, macro-regional and regional levels concerning Polish border regions covered by the studied programs, in terms of their contents related to the studied ECCPs.

### **The structure and contents of the dissertation**

This dissertation consists of five chapters, of which chapters II.-V. are largely focused on the falsification of the above mentioned hypothesis, while Chapter I, predominantly theoretical, among others introduces the most important concepts and typologies that the author used in the later parts of the dissertation.

The starting point of this dissertation is the issue of national borders – an outline of their transformations over time and the main research approaches in a multidisciplinary perspective. Based on the characteristics of the theoretical approaches concerning the study of national border, positioning of the dissertation has been made as being largely a part of the cross-border cooperation approach (Ch. I.1). Next, the selected static definitions of borders

are presented, then to oppose them the dynamic aspect of the borders due to the transformations (changes) of their functions. Before characterizing the functions of the borders, their types and features were defined, which was necessary for further reflection on the subject of cross-border cooperation. An important topic discussed here was the issue of presenting the national border as a diverse barrier, as shown in the form of the typology of barriers. In the context of borders as barriers the negative impact of national borders (NINBs) was defined, examples of which were proposed in relation to each of the different kinds of the barriers (Ch. I.2). The next part of the work concerns different issues of cross-border cooperation (CC). Firstly, the definition, principles, types and forms of CC were proposed, of which European cross-border cooperation program was classified as the institutional and legal form (Ch. I.3). The conclusion of the first chapter was the discussion of the conditions and the evolution of cross-border cooperation in Europe in the process of integration, showing the importance of the ECCPs in view of the scope of their funding and their growing number (Ch. I.4).

The second chapter starts with the historical conditions of cross-border cooperation within ECCPs, that often explains the nature of cooperation during the period considered (2004-2020), of which cross-border cooperation under Phare programs was particularly important (Ch. II.1). Later in the chapter, the conditions for cooperation within ECCPs were divided into endogenous or exogenous, of which the latter were first examined. At the beginning, a typology of exogenous conditions was created and it was determined whether individual types could be influenced by ECCP (dependent conditions) or not (independent conditions). Subsequently, within each type of these conditions sample positive and negative conditions were determined, some of the negative conditions were defined as being a result of the negative impact of the national border (Ch. II.2.1). This allowed for the classification of the exogenous conditions of cross-border cooperation on particular sections of the studied borders, which made appropriate comparisons possible to falsify the first hypothesis (Ch. II.2.2). The third part of the chapter deals with the endogenous conditions of cross-border cooperation within the studied ECCPs – the concept of CC on the basis of the program documents of the studied ECCPs in terms of their objectives and priorities (Ch. II.3.1) and the distribution of funds allocated to them by the intervention category, which was dictated by verification of the validity of the second hypothesis (Ch. II.3.2).

The next chapter deals with the overriding endogenous conditions in the form of ECCPs models, which due to being anchored in the EU law, shaped the program documents of the studied ECCPs. Comparative analysis of the three ECCPs models from the periods of 2000-

2006, 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 according to the selected components, allowed the falsification of the third hypothesis (Ch. III.1-3).

The fourth chapter opens with an assessment of the ECCPs in the years 2000-2013, including the studied ECCPs implemented in the period of 2004-2013, on the basis of the quantitative and qualitative results described in the literature, subjectively defined (based on a survey) their impact on socio-economic development indicators and international flows indicators. Other types of effects were also considered, including the cross-border effects and their main determinants. On this basis, the reasons for the poor cross-border effects of the previously implemented programs were analyzed and proposed changes that would increase the efficiency of the ECCPs. Above all, the role of the strategic approach to the development of border regions and the need to change the institutional and organizational structure of the ECCPs were emphasized. Next, the distinction was made between two types of cross-border cooperation problems, of which the more complex and requiring changes not only within the ECCPs model but the whole cross-border cooperation system was considered possible to solve thanks to the implementation of the concept cross-border region (Ch. IV.1). Said concept, which consists of the definition of the cross-border region and its three dimensions (institutional, relational and economic) was presented in the second part of the chapter (Ch. IV.2), after which it was possible to refer to ECCPs models to verify the validity of the fourth hypothesis (Ch. IV.3).

In the last chapter of the dissertation the strategic documents of the transnational, national, macroregional and regional levels were analyzed for reference to cross-border cooperation, cross-border integration, cross-border regions and in particularly to the role of the studied ECCPs, which gave rise to the falsification of the fifth hypothesis.

## **Results and findings**

The most important objective of the dissertation was to determine the importance of European cross-border cooperation programs of Poland with the EU Member States for socio-economic development of the border regions they cover. Due to the highest ECCPs funding from all elements of cross-border cooperation system and the growing importance of European Territorial Cooperation in the EU cohesion policy, it was assumed in the thesis that European cross-border co-operation programs were crucial to the socio-economic development of the border regions covered by them. In order to prove the thesis, the research hypothesis were falsified, on the basis of which it can be stated that:

- the heterogeneity of exogenous cross-border cooperation conditions within studied ECCPs (confirmed hypothesis 1) demonstrates the potentially different importance of programs for the socio-economic development of the border regions covered by them; therefore, the possible crucial role of the ECCPs could mean something else for different programs and border regions; that's why there is a need for a bottom-up approach to programs and making them a part of socio-economic development strategies of borderlands;
- focusing the studied ECCPs cooperation more on breaking down the barriers associated with the existence of the national border and its negative impact than using the developmental opportunities associated with positive conditions for cooperation (confirmed hypothesis 2) or creating new opportunities based on the endogenous potential of the border region is of particular importance for the impact of programs on the socio-economic development of the regions concerned; in the long term bigger cross-border effects bring "bridge building" and cross-border integration rather than "removing barriers", which to some extent only creates preconditions for cross-border integration; against this background, and given the new regional policy paradigm described in Chapter IV., the studied ECCPs cannot be considered as the key factors in the development of the border regions covered by them;
- the ECCPs models evolution has progressed in the right direction, allowing more and more close cooperation between border regions covered by the programs (confirmed hypothesis 3), which means that the importance of ECCPs for socio-economic development of these regions is growing; particularly beneficial effects in this respect are identified in the growing role of the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation, whose formation might lead to large changes in cross-border cooperation in the EU, including the ECCPs and their significance for the European borderlands; at the same time the demonstrated weaknesses and limitations of European cross-border cooperation programs, that are largely associated with the shortcomings of the ECCPs models, do not allow to confirm that the studied programs played or play a key role in the socio-economic development of the border regions covered by them;
- the ECCPs models have increasingly fostered cross-border integration processes and a future formation of cross-border regions along the EU's internal borders (confirmed hypothesis 4), however it cannot be considered that they has been sufficiently favorable to the establishment of CRs, if we adopt the concept of a cross-border region as a reference; this concept demonstrates the new role of ECCPs as the main instrument of

regional development in integrating border regions, which is part of a cross-border cooperation system within an emerging or already emerged cross-border region, thus enabling these programs to play a key role in the socio-economic development of the border regions covered by them;

- the studied European cross-border cooperation programs are not seen in strategic documents at national, macro-regional and regional levels as significant for socio-economic development of the Polish border regions covered by them (not confirmed hypothesis 5), which proves that they cannot be considered a key factor in the development of these regions; this means that the studied programs lacked a strong attachment in strategic documents and were subordinated only to the EU cohesion policy purposes, which is currently financing projects consistent with the priorities of the EU development policy; ECCPs have the potential to become the key to the development of border regions, if they become the most important part of borderlands development strategies implemented within the institutional framework of the cross-border region.

In addition to the main topics and conclusions of the dissertation, the most important detailed findings, important from the point of view of future works on the issue of national borders, cross-border cooperation and integration, border and cross-border regions and European cross-border cooperation programs, can be considered:

- supplementing of the concept of theoretical approaches to internal borders of the EU and border regions by H. van Houtum with economic approaches, specifying a place of ECCPs issues in those theoretical approaches (Chapter I.1);
- defining the negative impact of the national borders (NINBs) and specifying its examples within the framework of the proposed, based on the literature, detailed typology of barriers that form the national borders (Ch. I.2);
- designation, based on the literature, of cross-border cooperation categories according to specified criteria (Ch. I.3);
- differentiation and definition of concepts: European cross-border cooperation programs, cross-border cooperation programs and close-to-border cooperation programs (Ch. I.3);
- division and definition of the conditions of cross-border cooperation within ECCPs into: historical, exogenous, endogenous, dependent, independent, positive, negative, neutral (Ch. II.1-2);

- characteristics of the conditions of cross-border cooperation within the studied ECCPs, which subsequently allowed to assess the orientation of the programs according to their objectives, main activities and intervention directions (Ch. II.3);
- defining the concept of the ECCPs model, which allowed for the analysis of the three models from the years 2000-2020, due to the assumed components of this model (Ch. III.);
- description, based on the literature, of the qualitative effects of the European cross-border cooperation programs and the effects of the ECCPs depending on the time of their occurrence (Ch. IV.1);
- based on the literature, setting of the criteria that define the cross-border region and definition of the related different understanding of CRs (Ch. IV.2);
- clarification of the meaning of the term cross-border integration and identification of three main types of it: economic, social and spatial (Ch. IV.2);
- formulation of the concept of a cross-border region, comprising the definition of CR and its three dimensions: institutional, relational and economic (Ch. IV.2);
- drawing up a scheme on the model of socio-economic development of border regions, underlining the key importance of the concept of a cross-border region for development processes (Ch. IV.2).

European cross-border cooperation programs have a positive impact on border regions covered by them, as evidenced primarily by their numerous and varied qualitative effects. Undoubtedly, one can talk about the "added value" of programs and thus the unique role of the EU in reducing the negative impact of borders between Member States. At the same time, the carried out research shows that the impact to date of ECCPs implemented at Polish land borders on the socio-economic development of the border regions covered by them was not significant enough to lead to a change in the development situation of these regions. The very essence of this state of affairs was the perception of the ECCPs by the decision-makers programming specific programs, forming on the regulation at EU level and by those preparing development strategies for border regions that the programs covered mainly as instruments of redistribution of EU funds to border regions of the EU, which are geographical, economic and political peripheries. Therefore there is a need, first and foremost, to change the approach to border regions, cross-border cooperation and the role of ECCPs, which would serve the comprehensive development concepts for borderlands, that would cover the cross-border cooperation system in a given territory. An example of such a new approach is the concept of a cross-border region, which is consistent with the new paradigm

of regional development. This is evidenced by the analysis of strategic documents, especially at the transnational and national level, which showed that their proposals for cross-border cooperation and border regions to a large extent coincide with the concept of a cross-border region. In this light, it seems that further evolution of the ECCPs models alone may prove to be an insufficient impulse for the growth of the importance of these programs for the socio-economic development of the border regions covered by them.