



Managing Cross-Border Projects Towards More Resilient Cooperation in Borderlands

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**Managing Cross-Border Projects
Towards More Resilient
Cooperation in Borderlands.
The Post-Pandemic Perspective**

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented example of a crisis that greatly affected in the recent years many areas of people's lives and many aspects of the functioning of public institutions, as well as other commercial or social organisations. Disruptions accompanying the pandemic, such as the introduction of social isolation, changes to office and team working conditions, e.g., in projects, restrictions on the organisation of meetings or events involving a large number of people, as well as travel and, above all, border crossing restrictions, are just a few examples of the negative consequences of this crisis, which also affected cross-border integration and cooperation, as well as implementing cross-border projects.

Despite measures taken over many years to strengthen the socio-economic convergence of the countries of the European Union, as well as the promotion of European Territorial Cooperation through, for example, INTERREG programmes, the outbreak of the pandemic quickly exposed the fragility of cross-border relations and even led to a resurgence of antagonism in such relations. In the face of the pandemic, the inadequacies of cross-border cooperation mechanisms and weaknesses in the management

of cross-border projects were quickly recognised, despite years of support for these activities through funds from the INTERREG programmes. In some borderlands, restrictions on border crossings or border closures even led to the cessation of cross-border cooperation and the suspension of many projects. Neighbourhood communities living together in the borderlands got separated and the bonds built between them began to loosen.

While the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border cooperation in projects has already been the subject of many studies, a comprehensive assessment of the issue only became possible in 2022–2023. A question thus appeared: how to strengthen the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises and disruptions, through the adequate management of cross-border projects. This issue, which is still rather poorly studied by the scientific community, was chosen by the authors as the research problem of the study.

The objective of this study is to identify factors related to the management of cross-border projects co-financed by the INTERREG programmes, as well as factors related to the cooperation of partners in these projects, which contribute to strengthening the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises and disruptions.

The authors posed the following research questions:

1. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the phases of cross-border projects co-financed by the INTERREG programmes?
2. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the management of cross-border projects co-financed by the INTERREG programmes?
3. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect cross-border partnerships cooperation in projects co-financed by the INTERREG programmes?

4. How relevant were the different types of skills involved in managing cross-border projects co-financed by the INTERREG programmes during the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. Which elements shape the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises?
6. How do the elements that shape the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises relate to the management of cross-border projects co-financed by the INTERREG programmes?

In order to answer the research questions, the authors analysed a number of theoretical issues and carried out empirical research. The first chapter, authored by E. Medeiros, presents, *inter alia*, the evolution of the European cross-border cooperation in borderlands with the involvement of INTERREG programmes, as well as the barriers to cross-border cooperation and the possibilities for their mitigation through, *inter alia*, the activities of Euroregions and European Groups of Territorial Cooperation. Chapter two and chapter three, authored by H. Böhm, discuss, among other things, the determinants of cross-border cooperation and the issue of borderland resilience to crises and disruptions, as well as the management of cross-border partnerships. The multidimensional impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border integration and cooperation in cross-border projects is also presented. Chapter four, authored by J. Kurowska-Pysz, presents the cross-border project environment, characterises cross-border project stakeholders and discusses the life cycle of a cross-border project. In the fifth chapter, J. Kurowska-Pysz presents the methodology of research conducted by her in the interpretative paradigm. The method of incomplete numerical induction was selected as the general method of investigation. The research used specific methods such as desk research analysis, survey, individual in-depth interview, as well as non-participant observation of the process of cross-border project management in the COVID-19

pandemic period. Advanced statistical methods were used to analyse the collected data. The results of the research are presented in the chapter six separately for the Franco-German and Polish-Czech borderlands, as well as in summary, to analyse the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on, among other things, the management of cross-border projects (e.g., project implementation phases and management activities in projects), on cross-border cooperation in these projects and on building the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises and disruptions.

The study focuses on cross-border micro-projects implemented in the borderlands of the European Union with the co-financing of INTERREG programmes during the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e., between 2020 and 2022. Due to budgetary constraints and objective difficulties in conducting research during the pandemic period, it was assumed that the study would include two internal borderlands of the European Union, presenting different characteristics and approaches to cross-border cooperation. These were the Franco-German borderland, where cross-border projects are being implemented with support from the INTERREG V Upper-Rhine 2014–2020 Programme, and the Polish-Czech borderland, where this support was provided by the INTERREG V the Czech Republic – Poland 2014–2020 Programme.

A total of 149 respondents took part in the quantitative survey, including 60 representatives of partners implementing cross-border projects in the Franco-German borderland and 89 representatives of partners implementing cross-border projects in the Polish-Czech borderland. The samples of respondents for this research were selected in a non-random manner. This was due to difficulties in reaching some project beneficiaries, as well as difficulties in ascertaining the actual implementation status of many projects during the pandemic period, as well as the special conditions for conducting research between January and June 2022,

including those related to travel restrictions, on-line communication and the interruption of many projects.

The seventh chapter, authored by J. Kurowska-Pysz, presents the conclusions of the research regarding, among other things:

- identification of the spheres of influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border project management against the background of the cross-border project life cycle;
- indication of the groups of skills important in managing cross-border projects during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- definition of relationships between phases of the cross-border project life cycle and factors explaining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border cooperation in projects;
- identification of the elements shaping the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises and the correlation between selected elements shaping resilience and skills relevant for managing cross-border projects in times of crisis - separately for each borderland studied.

The authors hope that the content can be an inspiration for theoreticians and practitioners involved in cross-border cooperation and cross-border project management who see the need to incorporate the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic into their future activities. The study may also be useful for all institutions and organisations operating in the borderlands that are aware of the risk of further crises and disruptions in the future and want to make efforts to strengthen the resilience of cross-border cooperation to such unexpected events. The conclusions of the work also clearly signal the need for competence development of professionals involved in cross-border project management and cross-border cooperation. Indeed, research shows that, in times of crisis, their knowledge and skills are crucial in strengthening relationships between partners and thus contributing to the objectives of the European Territorial Cooperation and the effective use of funds from INTERREG programmes.

EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL COOPERATION – THE NEW APPROACH TOWARDS COHESION IN BORDERLANDS

1.1. Introduction

Since the end of the 1970s, the idea of implementing multiannual and ‘integrated development programmes’ had been tested by the European Commission (EC). But it was only in 1988 that a multiannual framework procedure for European Union (EU) cohesion policy started to be implemented, with a view to increasing its efficiency. This novel strategic approach also improved the potential for engaging national, regional and local governments to achieve the overarching goal of EU cohesion policy: the promotion of a more balanced and sustainable development of Europe’s regions, across policies and country borders, towards EU territorial cohesion (European Commission, 2008).

Running parallel to this, the implementation of principles such as partnership, transparency, subsidiarity, as well as civil society participation, has contributed to cement the cooperation between the public and private sectors. Likewise, such principles have supported territorial decentralisation processes and a more

active involvement from regional and local authorities in policy implementation. Crucially, this place-based policy approach ends up giving a relevant role to each European territory ‘in the sense that it is not an obstacle to the optimal allocation of economic activity but can become a source of growth on its own’ (European Commission, 2008, p. 3).

Under this context, the INTERREG Community Initiative (CI) was introduced in 1990 as one of the 14 CIs (Table 1.1), used as special financing instruments for EU structural policy. Their main goal was to complement the Community Support Frameworks (CSFs), which were agreements negotiated between the Member-States and the EC, laying down priorities for the EU structural and cohesion funds interventions, at the regional and national level (European Commission, 1991).

In a nutshell, the first INTERREG-A was based on 14 pilot projects experience, designed to tackle the structural development difficulties of EU border areas, which took place in 1989 (European Commission, 2007). Initially, the INTERREG-A was intended to prepare the border areas for an EU without internal borders (European Commission, 2007), as well as to ‘compensate for the introduction of the Single Market and soften the blow for border regions, which, everyone thought, would suffer most from the abolition of economic borders’ (European Commission, 2015, p. 4).

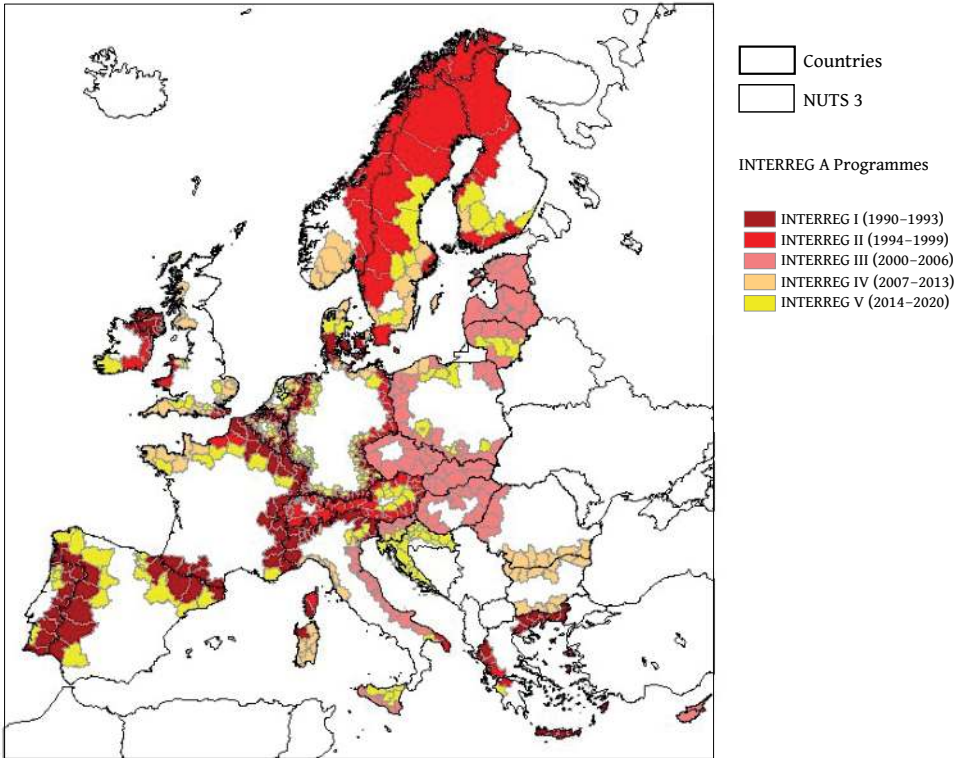
As seen in Table 1, right from the onset, the INTERREG (1990–1993) became the most well-financed Community Initiative. Basically, it was implemented through 31 Operational Programmes (OP), in its strand A (Cross-Border Cooperation – CBC). As expected, this first INTERREG-A covered the border areas (NUTS 3) of the older EU Member States (Fig. 1.1).

Table 1.1. Community Initiatives in 1989–1993

Name	Goal	Million Euros
INTERREG 1990–1993	Promoting the cooperation among border regions and revitalising those areas located at the furthest borders of the community.	800
NOW 1990–1993	Focusing on women who should take advantage of the equal opportunities in the field of employment and vocational training.	120
HORIZON 1990–1993	Promoting the economic, professional and social integration of the disabled people and certain underprivileged groups.	180
LEADER 1991–1993	Promoting the implementation of innovative solutions for the rural development.	400
STRIDE 1990–1993	Strengthening the innovative capacity and the technological development.	400
RECHAR 1989–1993	Diversifying the economic activities of the coal fields, promoting the creation of new activities, the development of those already existing, the improvement of the environment and the support to the vocational training.	300
ENVIREG 1990–1993	Promoting the improvement of the environment and the economic development of the less-developed regions.	500
KONVER 1993	Promoting the economic diversification of those regions depending on the defence sector.	130
REGIS 1990–1993	Intensifying the PCs in favour of the ultra-peripheral regions to promote the adaptation of their economy to the single market.	200
RETEX 1992–1993	Economic diversification of the areas depending on the textile and dress-making sectors.	100
PRISMA 1991–1993	Helping the companies of the less privileged areas to take advantage of the creation of the single market through the improvement of certain infrastructure and services.	100
REGEN 1990–1993	Facilitating the piping of natural gas and distribution of electricity in the less-developed regions.	300
TELEMÁTICA 1990–1993	Promoting the use of advanced telecommunication services in the less favoured regions.	200
EUROFORM 1990–1993	Developing new qualifications, skills and employment opportunities to promote their convergence on a community scale.	300

Source: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/funds/prord/prordc/prdc4_en.htm – Adapted.

Figure 1.1. Evolution of the INTERREG-A Programmes since 1990



Source: author.

In the following EU cohesion policy programming period (1994–1999), the INTERREG II supported 59 Operational Programmes (OPs), with a total budget of €3.5 billion (1996 euros), with the lion’s share (more than 70%) concentrated in the strand A. Afterwards, the INTERREG III (2000–2006) saw the available budget for the 79 programmes grow exponentially (around 5.1 billion Euros). For the following programming period (2007–2013) the Interreg IV became the third objective of the EU cohesion policy, under the name of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) objective. Again, the cross-border cooperation strand received a significant increase in funding (6.44 billion euros). In the fifth programming period (2014–2020), the ETC objective was maintained, but now as one of the two main goals of EU cohesion policy, yet with a financial package (6.6 billion euros) similar to the previous phase.

The ongoing Interreg-VI (2021–2027) is due to receive almost 10 billion euros, ‘shared between almost 100 Interreg programmes across the borders, in and outside the EU, which will contribute to implementing the EU’s cohesion policy main priorities’. One novelty in this sixth Interreg generation is the addition of a fourth strand (D: Outermost Regions Programmes) alongside the mainstream strands (A: Cross-Border Cooperation + B: Transnational Cooperation + C: Interregional Cooperation). The following sections discuss how ETC can be reinforced and address challenges to European integration for the post-2017 EU cohesion policy phase.

1.2. Main achievements of INTERREG-ETC programmes

As mentioned, EU cohesion policy aims to promote a more balanced, sustainable, and harmonious development of the EU territory. Indeed, since its first programming period, more than 70% of its total budget was allocated to the less developed regions of the EU, initially called ‘Objective 1’ regions, and since 2007 termed ‘convergence regions’. However, even though the INTERREG CI has been elevated into one of the main goals of the ETC of EU cohesion policy since 2007, the share of cohesion policy funding that both INTERREG and ETC have received has not changed significantly, as then as now representing less than 3% of the total EU cohesion policy funding (European Commission, 2014).

Also interesting is the fact that, for the most part, the INTERREG-A main goal was in promoting the socioeconomic development of EU cross-border regions, as well as unleashing their growth potential, while enhancing the cooperation process for the purposes of the overall harmonious development of the EU. For the 2007–2013 period, however, a concrete transversal emphasis was placed on the objective of reducing the negative effects of borders such as administrative, legal and physical barriers.

ers. Directly and indirectly, however, cross-border cooperation programmes have clearly contributed to reducing all sorts of cross-border barriers, since they have been implemented, in basically all EU cross-border regions (Medeiros, 2018).

In synthesis, the operationalisation of the INTERREG (now INTERREG-ETC programmes) can be seen as a success story within the panorama of EU cohesion policy, as they not only have survived the constant changes to this policy but have also prospered and gained significance within the EU policy agenda overtime. In concrete terms, many factors have contributed to such success. For one, they cover roughly 40% of the EU population and 60% of the territory (Fig. 1). Secondly, the exponential growth of the cross-border cooperation entities (Euroregions, Working Communities, European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), Eurocities, and others) has reinforced the institutional and vindication capacity of several European border regions. Finally, the opening of the borders implied growing flows of cross-border commuters and the consequent increasing of the awareness of persisting barriers and obstacles to the citizen's daily lives in the EU internal and external borders. Consequently, the EU political establishment was to a significant degree forced to take action to solve such problems with the legal and administrative (employment and social systems) incompatibilities being regarded by the EU citizens and entrepreneurs as the most prevailing obstacles to their daily lives, together with the language and the means for using cross-border transports (Medeiros, 2018b).

Besides the positive achievements in reducing legal-administrative, socio-cultural, accessibility, environmental and technological related cross-border barriers, the 30-year INTERREG-ETC experience has contributed to create a direct link between border regions and the European integration process, which is essential to instil both territorial development and cohesion in the EU. Moreover, this programme is regarded as an 'essential

instrument for legitimating a supranational approach, which has become a vector of European integration by disseminating best practices of multilevel governance between the EC, the Member States, and local and regional stakeholders' (Reitel et al., 2018, p. 15).

In a different perspective, the EU cross-border cooperation process was boosted by the implementation of the INTERREG-ETC programmes, because it contributed to increase the number of cross-border structures and strategies, and to promote the socioeconomic growth of EU border regions. Likewise, it contributed to the growth of: business relationships; entrepreneurial skills (particularly for youth); research and innovation processes; the cross-border labour market; collaboration between universities; vocational training; the environment; cross-border transportation; tourism related activities; the culture and media, and the 'new governance' (e-government) (Guillermo-Ramirez, 2018).

In a similar manner, the INTERREG-ETC programmes provided a fundamental platform to mitigate the growing territorial exclusion processes that tend to occur in border regions, vis-à-vis the EU policy goal of territorial cohesion (Medeiros, 2014). The main reason for this is its contribution for promoting socioeconomic cohesion within the EU territory, by supporting 'the regional productive fabric, the quality of life of citizens, the promotion of joint common research, the opening up of labour markets and harmonisation of professional qualifications, and the implementation of the principles of subsidiarity and partnership' (Medeiros, 2018, p. 75).

Equally, and based on concrete cross-border examples selected across the EU territory, a research paper by European Parliament highlights evidence of the contribution of INTERREG-ETC to a 'variety of areas, including, among many others, the creation of new cooperation and sales opportunities for small and me-

dium-sized enterprises; the establishment and improvement of public transport links; the setting up of joint facilities (e.g., waste management plants, libraries, energy and healthcare infrastructure and projects); the provision of bilingual professional training; the establishment of a cross-border labour market offering additional employment opportunities; and the implementation of joint touristic strategies. The research paper notes, however, that the potential of such territorial cooperation is far from being fully exploited, partly because of the sparse resources allocated to it' (European Parliament, 2018, p. 2).

Moreover, the EC, in a recent communication ('Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions'), highlighted the importance of the financial support given to the EU cross-border cooperation programmes to facilitate the improvement of the European integration process, as well as its role to improve trust, connectivity, environmental conditions, health and economic growth. Also, people-to-people projects have made a genuine difference to EU border regions through the infrastructure investments and the support to institutional cooperation initiatives (European Commission, 2017).

1.3. Persistent cross-border barriers in Europe

In his seminal chapter on EU border regions and cross-border cooperation in Europe, Lundén (2018, p. 109) concludes that 'Europe is a small part of the world, characterised by a large number of territorial states of varying languages, nations, and ethnic groups, and it has undergone significant changes in its territorial structure since the end of the First World War'. Indeed, Europe is a patchwork of small, medium, and large-sized states, forged by historical events (AEBR, 2008). For its part, the EU is a unique economic and political partnership between 28 Member States.

As such, the need to promote territorial cooperation, understood as the ‘process of collaboration between different territories or spatial locations’ (Medeiros, 2015, p. 100), is an inherent and essential part of the EU policymaking process.

Again, the cross-border cooperation process can be regarded as pivotal type of territorial cooperation for the EU. Indeed, for a long time, many European border regions have lived ‘back-to-back’ (European Commission, 1990). This resulted in a combined negative effect in the loss of economic competitiveness, in reduced efficiency (for instance, in making use of public services), and in increased obstacles of all sorts for the citizen’s lives, the economic activity, and the institutional relations.

Curiously, from the onset, the cross-border cooperation process was regarded by the EU institutions as a tool to instil cooperation between neighbouring administrative authorities adjacent to an internal or external frontier of the EU (Cranfield & Lucchese, 1996). Also important was the recognition of the existence of different levels of cross-border cooperation in Europe, with old and mature cross-border cooperation processes (Nordic and Western European countries) living hand in hand with more recent forms of cross-border cooperation (South and Eastern Europe).

Yet, recently (2015–2016), having recognised that cross-border obstacles in Europe require a deeper understanding, the EC launched a cross-border review titled ‘Overcoming Border Obstacles’, based on studies on persisting border obstacles. As a result, a study was produced by DG REGIO to provide an inventory of critical border obstacles in Europe, following from an extensive public consultation between September and December 2015 and several workshops with key stakeholders in 2015 and 2016 known as the EU cross-border review (AEBR, 2016).

On closer scrutiny, the deep analysis of the responses from the 2016 DG REGIO border obstacles, and a previous (2015) Eurobarometer survey, reveals that there still persists a large number of

border obstacles across EU internal and external borders. From these, one can highlight several legal and administrative barriers, mostly associated with differences in social security, pension and taxation systems, and also on the lack of recognition of education and qualifications, despite progress being made in harmonisation in this field (European Commission, 2016).

European citizens also regard language differences and economic, social and cultural disparities as fundamental barriers to their lives (Table 1.2). Also important is the lack or the inadequacy of cross-border physical accessibility. These include cross-border public transportation, which still present a significant problem for cross-border commuters, even in the more developed cross-border passages, such as the ones located in North-West Europe and Northern Europe (Medeiros, 2018c).

Table 1.2. Relevance of the border obstacles to the Europeans (%)

Border Obstacle	DG REGIO Survey Generic	Eurobarometer 2015	DG REGIO Survey (barrier effect dimensions)
Language	38	56	-
Legal and Administrative	53	45	-
Economic Disparties	29	47	-
Sociocultural Differences	20	32	-
Lack of trust	12	-	-
Public Authorities Interest	29	-	-
Accessibilities	32	30	24
Economy Technology	-	-	14
Social Culture	-	-	29
Institutional – Administrative	-	-	32
Environment	-	-	1

Source: Author's compilation from DG REGIO border obstacles survey, Eurobarometer on border obstacles 2015.

As regards potential solutions to mitigate persistent legal-administrative border obstacles, the EC report concludes that ‘an important role that should be fulfilled at the national level is the seeking of a closer alignment and harmonisation of regulations with neighbouring countries and their administrative implementation. In addition to institution building, the national level should provide relevant information, should increase the use of e-government and should contribute to awareness raising and to developing the political will to tackle obstacles. The main function at the EU level in easing legal and administrative obstacles is to support the counterparts’ efforts on the local, regional and national levels and to further increase the efficiency of the operation of existing EU instruments. The activities or instruments fall into the three broad categories: EU legislation, financial instruments, and coordination/information’ (European Commission, 2017b, p. 7).

1.4. Border areas in Europe and territorial cohesion – conclusion remarks

A universally agreed delimitation for the border area is yet to be achieved. In the EU, and for the EC, the border NUTS 3 is commonly used to identify border regions. Based on this criterion, the EU internal border regions cover around 40% of the EU territory, account for 30% of the population (150 million people) and produce 30% of the EU’s GDP (European Commission, 2017). If one extends the EU border areas to the whole of the territory of Europe covered by the INTERREG-A programmes, this will entail 50% (256 million people), and 64% of the EU territory (2,841,411 km²), respectively. These crude numbers reveal that it is of the utmost importance that EU border regions and the EU cross-border co-

operation programmes achieve the ultimate goal of EU cohesion policy: territorial cohesion.

Indeed, ‘article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union recognises the challenges faced by border regions and stipulates that the Union should pay particular attention to these regions when developing and pursuing actions leading to the strengthening of the Union’s economic, social and territorial cohesion’ (European Commission, 2017, p. 2). In concrete terms, since the early 1990s, the EU has played a crucial role in supporting local and regional cross-border cooperation programmes as a way to reduce territorial socioeconomic disparities ‘since these are seen to be important aspects of interstate integration and a mechanism for deepening relations with non-EU neighbours’ (Scott, 2009, p. 653).

The question is: were the more than 19 billion euros devoted to the INTERREG-A programmes sufficient to invert perennial tendencies of territorial exclusion that most EU border regions commonly face, vis-à-vis the European capital regions? The answer to this question requires a deeper analysis based on what is considered territorial cohesion. For us, this notion can be defined as ‘the process of promoting a more cohesive and balanced territory, by: (i) supporting the reduction of socioeconomic territorial imbalances; (ii) promoting environmental sustainability; (iii) reinforcing and improving the territorial cooperation/ governance processes; and (iv) reinforcing and establishing a more polycentric urban system’ (Medeiros, 2016, p. 10). Based on this definition, a recent survey on territorial cohesion trends in both the Scandinavian and Iberian peninsulas shows that, in the past two decades, the capital regions have generally seen the most positive changes in territorial development, in stark contrast with the cross-border regions of both European peninsulas (Medeiros & Rauhut, 2018).

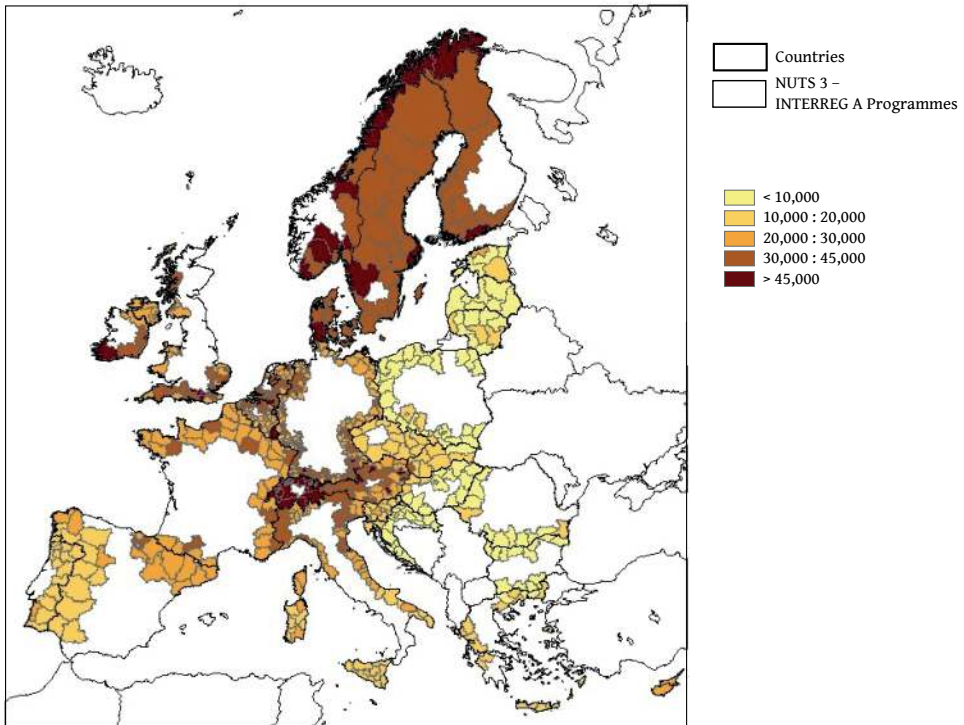
Similarly, ‘evidence gathered by the Commission demonstrates that border regions generally perform less-well economically than other regions within a Member State. Access to public services such as hospitals and universities is generally lower in border regions. Navigating between different administrative and legal systems is often still complex and costly. Individuals, businesses, public authorities and non-governmental organisations have shared with the Commission their at times negative experiences of interaction across internal borders’ (European Commission, 2007, p. 4). This scenario places many of the EU border regions as some of the less developed territories of the EU, namely in Southern and Eastern Europe.

At the same time, the wide socioeconomic disparities that are faced by several EU cross-border regions (Fig. 1.2) present challenges, namely, to accommodate increasing cross-border commuting flows, to stimulate cross-border commerce tourism and economic activities which can profit from such differences. For this, amongst other measures, it is important to reinforce the role of the hundreds of European cross-border entities, so they can continue their ‘lobbying for a continued interest in the territorial dimension of European policy in the future’ and to ‘be more proactive, defining their own agenda, based on their own challenges, and involving all the social actors in their cross-border communities’ (Lange & Pires, 2018, p. 135).

There are quite many different specific denominations and types of cross-border entities. For the most part, they are known as Euroregions. Others are named ‘working communities’, ‘euro-cities’, ‘binational cities’, etc. More recently (since 2009), however, a new EU legal figure, the EGTC, has become a central tool used by regional/local authorities to organise territorial cooperation in the EU. Indeed, ‘the number of EGTCs created over about a decade demonstrates that this instrument fills a gap in the legislative framework of territorial coopera-

tion (...). Most of the existing EGTCs are territorially bound organisations, set up on adjacent borders by local and regional authorities, a minority being interregional or transregional. Although they mostly have collective action resources and instruments and have identifiable objectives shared by their respective members, they follow a rather traditional pattern of cooperation where each individual member's core activities primarily relate to a (sub-) state authority and where the EGTC acts primarily as an agent relying on its members' (Evvard & Engl, 2018, p. 209).

Figure 1.2. GDP per capita in EU INTERREG-A programmes – 2015



Source: author.

Also noteworthy for promoting sound and effective territorial development processes for the European border regions is the notion of cross-border planning, which can be understood as a 'systematic preparation and implementation of a spatial-orient-

ed policy or plan, in a border region, with a view to anticipating spatial changes, and in order to have direct or indirect positive effects on spatial activities, with the ultimate goal of reducing the barrier effect and enhancing territorial capital' (Medeiros, 2014b, p. 368). In essence, these plans should, first and foremost, contribute to reducing the barrier effect and to promote the territorial capital valorisation of the border regions (Hagen & Andersen, 2018).

In a similar vein, Durand and Decoville (2018, pp. 241–242) recognise the merits of cross-border planning processes, even though they realise that they face significant obstacles, since they have 'to concentrate on establishing better coordination of policies horizontally across different sectors; vertically among different levels of government, and geographically across administrative boundaries'. This comes with particular challenges, 'since it presupposes that the actors in charge of spatial planning know the existing legal frameworks of both sides of the border, are plugged into various networks of governance, and have the political legitimacy and perfect knowledge of the different issues brought by the various sectoral requirements'.

As can be seen, there are countless challenges involved in promoting territorial development and cohesion processes for European cross-border regions. For one, the EU cohesion policy funds for these regions allocated through the INTERREG-A programmes need to be substantially increased, and they represent a very small (less than 3%) portion of the total funding of EU cohesion policy. Secondly, the available funding for the development of border regions needs to concentrate on reducing persistent border obstacles, including the improvement of cross-border transportation accessibility. At the same time, one suggests placing a particular emphasis on developing the medium-size towns located in cross-border regions, as development regional hubs for the entire cross-border region.

Furthermore, one suggests the implementation of bottom-up cross-border planning processes, to (Medeiros, 2018b):

- allow for a more strategic longer-term planning than the seven-year period of the ETC programmes,
- solidify institutional networking,
- improve the articulation with existing territorial development plans at all territorial levels,
- expand sources of financing,
- reinforce the principle of subsidiarity.

Finally, one suggests that the implementation of EU cross-border programmes be systematically evaluated with sound territorial impact assessment tools, such as TARGET_TIA, which allows for assessing both *ex-ante* and *ex-post* potential impacts. In the end, over time, these tools will allow to increase the programme implementation effectiveness and efficiency (Medeiros, 2018d).

RESILIENT COOPERATION IN BORDERLANDS – THE THEORETICAL APPROACH

2.1. Theoretical framework for the study of cross-border cooperation

In response to the devastation of World War II, there has been a significant focus on approaches aimed at fostering collaboration between entities across established national boundaries within Europe. This attention has been observed both in academic research and practical endeavours (Beck, 2019). The concept of cross-border cooperation, executed by public entities at regional and in general subnational levels, and the function of the consequent border shift from a closed filtration mechanism to an open gateway of interactions and opportunities, was initially conceptualised as a form of micro-foreign policy or paradiplomacy (Duchacek, 1988). This distinction was deliberately made to separate it from other cooperative forms that had gained momentum at the national level across Europe post-World War II (Beck, 2019).

The origins of such collaboration between neighbouring regions of adjacent countries can be traced back to the 1950s, with examples such as the German-Dutch Euroregion or Regio Basiliens-

sis in the tri-border region of Germany, France, and Switzerland (Beck, 2019). At the level of central states, cross-border cooperation began to receive official recognition and support around the 1970s, marked by the establishment of inter-governmental agreements and mixed government commissions. Specific legal acts, which took into account the fact that cross-border cooperation is both inter-organisational collaboration and international cooperation, followed the European Charter of Border and Cross-Border Regions, adopted on the border of Germany and the Netherlands on November 20, 1981, and amended in 2004. It defines cross-border cooperation as both neighbourly cooperation (border regions) and foreign cooperation (regional and local authorities, organisations, or institutions representing border areas). The European Framework Convention on Cross-Border Cooperation between Communities and Territorial Authorities, dated May 21, 1980, outlines cross-border cooperation as any joint action aimed at strengthening and further developing neighbourly contacts between the communities and territorial authorities of two or more states, as well as the conclusion of agreements and the adoption of necessary arrangements to realise such intentions. The European Charter of Local Self-Government, signed on October 15, 1985, sets forth principles related to inter-state agreements for supporting cross-border cooperation and regional cross-border agreements. Adopted on June 5, 1997, the European Charter of Regional Self-Government, developed by the Association of European Border Regions, grants regional authorities broad competences concerning cross-border cooperation matters.

By the latter half of the 1980s, the European communities addressed the matter of cross-border cooperation and initiated efforts to promote structural policy through a programmatic approach (Beck, 2019). This drive was bolstered by European funding policies that led to a consistent enhancement and diversification of cross-border strategies. The EU cohesion policy has been en-

dorsing cross-border cooperation through the INTERREG initiative, allocating a total of €30 billion to this cause. Residents of border regions have been encouraged to leverage the freedom of movement and actively participate in shaping cross-border living spaces, where everyday activities like living, working, studying, shopping, and leisure pursuits transcend national boundaries (Klatt, 2020). The expansion of the EU to the east also extended this opportunity to citizens residing in border regions of the new Member States. Territorial partnerships between adjacent regions, and local areas (mainly municipalities) play a crucial role in eliminating the barrier effect of national borders. In many European borderlands, these cross-border partnerships, often enjoying the financial support for their projects through the INTERREG programmes, projects and initiatives, became part of daily life (Böhm, 2022).

Cross-border cooperation has garnered attention in scientific analysis, yet is often treated as a secondary aspect (Beck, 2019). It wasn't until the 21st century that the interdisciplinary theory of border studies gained wide acceptance as a foundation for studying borders across various scientific disciplines (Brunet-Jailly, 2005). This theory is underpinned by the interplay of four analytical perspectives:

- market forces and trade flows;
- policy actions across multiple levels of adjacent governments;
- the distinctive political influence of borderland communities;
- the unique culture within borderland communities.

Border studies thus have attracted attention across scientific disciplines. Growing scholarly interest reflects the increasing significance of regions actively engaging in cross-border cooperation. Decoville et al. (2013) analysed cross-border flows within metropolitan regions, identifying four functions – structural,

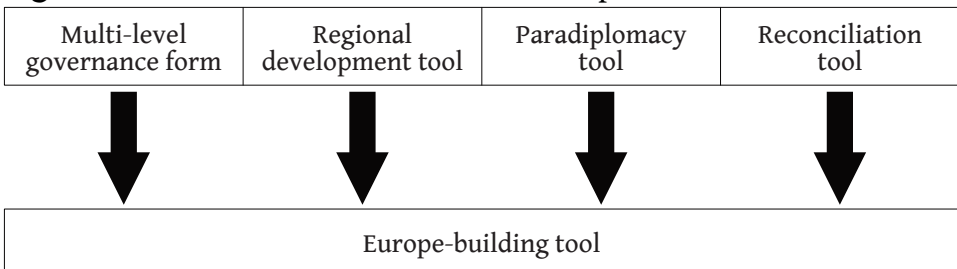
functional, ideational, and institutional – of cross-border cooperation in these areas. They outlined three models of cross-border integration: specialisation-based integration, polarisation-based integration, and osmosis-based integration. These models illuminate diverse spatial configurations of cross-border metropolitan integration in Europe and underscore their foundational principles (Decoville et al., 2013), which can also be adapted to non-metropolitan cross-border contexts.

Böhm (2022) furthered this approach by proposing a set of five principle roles/dimensions of cross-border cooperation, which could be used to explain its importance:

- multi-level governance form,
- regional development tool,
- para-diplomacy form,
- post-conflict reconciliation tool,
- Europe-building instrument.

Those five roles/dimensions cover and combine the functional, ideational and structural dimensions of cross-border cooperation (Fig. 2.1).

Figure 2.1. Dimensions of cross-border cooperation



Source: Böhm (2022).

Durand and Decoville (2019) recognised six primary patterns of macroregional cross-border integration. They identified the highest level of integration within the ‘EU core’, particularly along the Rhine River, and in the Nordic countries. The ‘Central European’ cross-border integration pattern exhibited a more one-sided

nature of cross-border flows. Conversely, the Eastern European pattern, along with the South-western European and maritime patterns, displayed lower levels of integration. This classification (Table 2.1), proposed by Durand and Decoville, cannot capture a variety of cross-border situations in their entirety, therefore two last categories were added.

Table 2.1. Territorial models of cross-border integration

Model	Characteristics
1. Eastern-European – Baltic countries, Romania, the northern and southern borders of Poland, the eastern borders of Hungary and Slovakia, and the Greek borders	Low mutual social trust between populations living on either side of the border, low interpenetration of neighbouring border territories by the populations (few cross-border activities are observed), and numerous Inter-reg-dependant actors
2. Northern European (Scandinavia)	Fairly strong cross-border cooperation dynamic, with emblematic cases such as Copenhagen-Malmö or Haparanda-Tornio, but low population density complicates the cooperation
3. Maritime model – Interreg A program areas located on the North Sea, the Baltic Sea, and the Adriatic Sea coasts	Low levels – on both sides of the border – of cross-border activities, trust toward foreign neighbours, and involvement in cross-border projects
4. Western Continental – the Rhineland countries Belgian, Luxembourg, and French border territories (north and east) as well as the German-Austrian borders	Strong functional symmetric integration, high level of confidence on both sides of the borders, low number of actors involved in cross-border cooperation
5. Central European model contact zone between the former Soviet bloc countries and the eastern regions of the German-speaking world	Relatively low mutual propensity of people to have social mutual trust in their neighbours, strong mobilisation of European cooperation tools, rather one-sided labour-force flows and density of actors involved in cross-border projects

Model	Characteristics
6. Southwestern Europe (Portugal, Spain, south of France, western Italy, Croatia)	weak cross-border activities, significant divergences on both sides of the borders with regard to the indicator of mutual social trust
7. Borders with Ukraine	Mainly Polish-Ukrainian, but to a certain extent also Hungarian/Romanian/Slovak-Ukrainian borderlands, with high levels of one-sided flows plus interactions consequent to 24/02/22. To a certain extent influenced by the application of kin-state/minority policies of PL and HU
8. Re-bordered zones after 24/02/22	Places with refrained cross-border integration, mainly bordering Russia, in some regions heavily hit by the sanctions imposed after 24/02/22 (for example Karelia)

Source: modification (last two categories were not part of the original paper) of Durand and Decoville (2020).

Numerous scholars have highlighted the connections between internationalisation (globalisation) and the growing emphasis on regionalism (e.g., Tömmel, 2003; Sunkel & Inotai, 1999). These parallel developments, often encapsulated in the term ‘glocalisation’ (e.g., Courchene, 1995), signify heightened interdependencies (Zumbusch & Scherer, 2019). The notion of interdependence is pivotal here, as the exploration of de-bordering is grounded in the classical neo-liberal theory of interdependence (Keohane & Nye, 1977; revised 2011). This theory contends that the era of nation-states as primary players in international relations has waned. The postmodern paradigm within border studies amalgamates theories of world systems and territorial identities, aligning with the concepts of neo-liberal interdependence (Böhm, 2019). The globalisation of economic activities and the rapid surge in transborder flows of people, information, goods,

capital, energy, and pollutants coincide with the growing influence of transborder entities in various spheres (ethnic and social movements, non-governmental organisations). Consequently, the national borders of states lose some of their barrier functions (Kolossoy, 2015).

This shift has paved the way for approaches that advance the process of debordering through the introduction of cross-border planning. The presence of border-related impediments necessitates the adoption of cross-border planning strategies to amplify potential synergies, harness territorial capital potentials, and alleviate enduring border hindrances (Braunerhielm et al., 2019). Planners from neighbouring countries collaborate to devise solutions to shared challenges, although they do so outside their established (national) legal and institutional frameworks (Dühr & Belof, 2020). In comparison to planning processes that pertain solely to one administrative system, the outcomes of cross-border planning frequently lack binding force (Faludi, 2018; Healey, 2007; Dühr et al., 2010), although they can contribute to the establishment of a functional joint (cross-border) public service (ESPON, 2018). As a facet of de-territorialisation processes, cross-border planning encourages the exploration of softer spaces rather than formalised administrative ones (Faludi, 2013 in Medeiros et al., 2020). These soft spaces have recently encountered challenges due to the resurgence of nationalistic ideologies and the resurgence of border-making tendencies.

Nonetheless, the debordering narrative – already undermined by the migration crisis and the Brexit situation – faced a challenge during the course of the coronavirus pandemic. The spectre of borders re-emerged in Europe; the sealing of internal borders contradicted the core narrative of European integration, specifically the concept of unhindered internal Schengen borders (Scott, 2016). Nation-states enforced these closures as questionable yet universal measures in response to the COVID-19 threat. The pan-

demic gave rise to a scenario where nation-states made autonomous decisions, bypassing coordination at both the European and regional levels (Medeiros et al., 2021; Opiłowska, 2021; Hennig, 2021). This development cast doubts on the EU's multilevel governance processes and its intricate hierarchical framework. Ruffí (2020) argues that the nation-state continues to wield influence in shaping national identity and global perceptions.

It thus became apparent that this crisis of rebordering coincided with an augmentation in the executive authority of the nation-state (Klatt, 2020; Ulrich et al., 2020). The nation-state substantially curtailed the operational efficacy of cross-border Euroregional partnerships, halted a significant number of cross-border initiatives, and underscored the limited capacity of Euroregions to navigate a crisis while safeguarding the everyday cross-border routines of residents (Unfried, 2020; Opiłowska, 2021; Novotný & Böhm, 2022). This ascendancy of the nation-state notably complicated daily life in certain cross-border regions and cast a more nuanced perspective on the outcomes of decades of cross-border cooperation and the endurance of collaborative frameworks. Over time, the series of events, which started with the 2015 migration crisis, resulted in an ongoing poly-crisis, which challenges the resilience of cross-border regions and interdependency as such.

2.2. Resilience

In the realm of social studies, which includes border studies, the concept of resilience stands as a relatively contemporary notion. Recent crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have demonstrated the pivotal role of resilience in the development of border regions (Chilla & Lambracht, 2022). The concept of resilience has seized the attention of both scholars and policymakers, shifting

the emphasis from reactive measures to proactive strategies that foster an all-encompassing ability to promptly rebound from setbacks, positively adjust to obstacles, and withstand the continuous strains that crises impose on individuals and communities (Laine, 2021). Boschma (2015) similarly suggests that resilience should be approached as an evolutionary process rather than a static attribute of a region. Consequently, the notion of resilience has gained substantial traction as a policy framework, addressing a diverse array of concerns across various policy domains, all centred around navigating a ‘world of rapid change, complexity, and unexpected events’ (Chandler, 2013). Rather than focusing solely on protection and prevention, resilience should incorporate adaptive risk management, as articulated by Bettini (2017, p. 89). While this has undeniably enhanced our comprehension of uncertainty, it’s evident that there are notable disparities in how resilience is conceptualised. A lack of consensus exists regarding the fundamental terms employed in different resilience models, which aim to capture the significance of contingency, vulnerability, security, and safeguarding (Laine, 2021).

Within the conventional framework of examining resilience, the term ‘bouncing back’ refers to the established viewpoint on resilience, which revolves around reverting to a prior state or condition subsequent to encountering challenges or crises. This stance assumes that the previous state was the desired objective and that the purpose of resilience is to promptly restore that condition. In contrast, the notion of ‘bouncing forward’ constitutes a more contemporary standpoint regarding resilience that underscores the potential for advancement and constructive transformation emerging from adversity or crises. Rather than merely returning to a preceding state, this stance acknowledges that resilience entails adjusting to novel circumstances and forging a novel, enhanced state. It regards challenges as opportunities for personal and societal metamorphosis and centres on nur-

turing resilience that empowers individuals and communities to flourish in the midst of perpetual alteration and unpredictability (Shaw, 2012; in Bettini, 2017, p. 89).

Laine (2021) posits that the prevalent notion of threats to borderland communities originating solely from external sources – such as sudden surges in refugee arrivals or unforeseen border closures – is deceptive. This insight underscores the significance of ‘internal stressors’. In this context, resilience must encompass both domestic and international concerns, as it faces risks from both internal and external triggers whether sudden or gradual. The concept of ‘slow burn’ (Pendall et al., 2010) is closely intertwined with these stressors. Regional challenges that develop over an extended period without effective mitigation strategies become a burden for the region (Martinho, 2021) – a situation exemplified recently by the Polish-Czech-(German) Turów case (Kurowska-Pysz et al., 2022).

It’s generally anticipated that borderlands ‘have limited capacity to respond positively to shocks and undergo transformative processes’ (Pascariu et al., 2020, p. 750), largely due to their location at interfaces and their susceptibility to political upheavals. Speculatively, the same principle could apply to their governance structures, as they often bring together different cultures, political systems, and economic traditions (Hippe et al., 2023). Koch (2021) contends that the resilience of borderlands is not solely tied to a confined geographical area; it can also be reinforced through interactions among institutions across borders.

Various cross-border connections play a pivotal role in nurturing resilience, whether through the movement of labour across borders, which contributes to regional stability and resilience-building (Koch, 2021), or by expanding one’s ‘cognitive space’ by involving the other side in the definition of ‘local’ identity (Svensson & Balogh, 2021; Andersen & Prokkola, 2021). Laine’s (2021) observations align with this, emphasising that cross-border flows are the fun-

damental ingredient for cross-border resilience. Prokkola (2019) outlines a research agenda for investigating the resilience of border-regional areas in the context of environmental, economic, and social changes and geopolitical events. She portrays cross-border cooperation as an opportunity and functional cross-border connections as an enhancer of (long-term) regional resilience.

The rationale behind the resilience of borderlands is intertwined with but distinct from the broader agendas that have become increasingly conspicuous amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The closure of borders and the intensified focus on state security have compelled populations in borderland regions to assert their identities in response (Lois et al., 2021). The task of managing the repercussions of external disruptions in their everyday lives falls largely on the shoulders of border communities themselves, who must navigate a perpetual state of instability and unpredictability (Jakubowski, 2022). However, each border community reacts uniquely to this situation, as the resilience of borderlands is profoundly contingent on their specific contextual factors (Prokkola, 2021). Yet, the need to achieve long-term sustainability of cross-border partnerships is common for all cross-border regions, as resilient partnerships create space for intense cross-border interactions.

Resilience in border regions can be influenced by a range of factors. Among these, the effectiveness of multi-level governance stands out as a significant contributor to resilience. Multi-level governance is rooted in productive horizontal, vertical, and cross-border partnerships and is recognised as a key driver of resilience improvement (as discussed by Bristow & Healy, 2014). The effectiveness of cross-border collaboration, the extent of institutional establishment, and the presence of a trustworthy rapport across all sectors are recognised as favourable conditions (Prokkola, 2019; Böhm, 2023). Political interactions, socio-cultural ties, informal networks, and well-established business re-

relationships also bolster resilience (Prokkola, 2019). Notably, all these connections need to be founded on partnership principles.

Consequently, and ideally, resilient cross-border partnerships are able to manage and overcome challenges stemming from the pandemic and poly-crisis, rebound from difficulties, and innovate their cooperative realms and/or structures. Only the fulfilling of all three consequent steps is expected to constitute a crucial prerequisite for fostering resilient collaboration in border regions in the post-pandemic era (Fig. 2.2).

Figure 2.2. Three steps towards resilient cross-border partnerships



Source: own elaboration

One of the future challenges in analysing resilience in cross-border cooperation could be the verification of the above-mentioned model and/or endeavours to define more elaborated suitable indicators/criteria capturing the different dimensions of resilience, such as robustness, adaptability, or transformability. The possible ways how to measure them could be the resilience of cross-border partnerships in relation to different types or levels of shocks or stresses.

2.3. Cross border partnerships and their management

Territorial cooperation can generate numerous multiplier effects for the borderlands. Most commonly, territorial cooperation contributes to the enhancement of socio-economic cohesion in the region and the improvement of the quality of the socio-economic environment. Territorial partnerships often encompass mechanisms for transmitting guidelines related to development policies to lower levels of the hierarchy (top-down policy), or provide entities at different hierarchical levels with influence and participation in developmental processes, including those initiated at the lowest cooperation levels – the so-called bottom-up approach (Geddes, 2007).

Cross-border cooperation is one of the pivotal forms of territorial cooperation. Historical identity, linguistic similarities, culture, governance, and economic systems are factors that should facilitate, among others, the collaboration of partners in border regions for the purpose of achieving common development goals (Jakubiec & Kurowska-Pysz, 2013). The increasing number of cross-border initiatives carried out in bilateral and networked partnerships serves to overcome shared challenges and synergistically harness the potential of neighbouring territories to invigorate their development. Thus, it can be asserted that cross-border cooperation aims to establish networks at the local and regional levels that extend beyond the boundaries of a single country. Through these networks, economic collaboration flourishes, and cultural and social barriers recede in local communities (Perkowski, 2010).

Forms of cross-border cooperation, in principle, have a rather flexible nature. One of these principle forms is a cross-border partnership, for instance with public authorities at various levels in other countries, as well as with other entities, includ-

ing non-governmental organisations, that are economic and social partners. Cross-border partnerships can take the form of an association, a civil law agreement, or an understanding (Szromnik, 2010). 80+ partnerships decided to establish EGTC, a single legal network umbrella for cross-border cooperation in the EU, considered to be the most mature form of cross-border cooperation (Ulrich, 2020).

The foundation for the functioning of a cross-border partnership is its mission and objectives, along with designated outcomes/indicators confirming their achievement. The effectiveness of inter-organisational collaboration in cross-border partnerships is based on the potential of the entities, institutions, and organisations on both sides of the border that form them. These entities strive to achieve shared and convergent goals that are significant in terms of their interests and in the context of the overall development of the border region.

The phenomenon of cross-border partnerships is linked to overcoming the stereotypical perception of borders as barriers and obstacles to multidimensional integration. Within the EU, the development of cross-border partnerships is important in at least two respects:

- at the micro-level, i.e., for the partners themselves and their immediate environment, i.e., all stakeholders in the cooperation undertaken and the cross-border environment in which it develops;
- at a macro level, i.e., from the point of view of the effectiveness of the European Union's cohesion policy and the overcoming of political and social divisions which prevailed in Europe until the end of the 1990s.

In some cases, cross-border cooperation is not always a permanent relationship. Often these are temporary configurations (e.g., in joint projects), resulting from the organisation's need to urgently acquire external resources or to exploit assets available

to other actors (e.g., competitive advantage, experience, better access to information). In cross-border partnerships, the ability to make synergic use of one's own resources and those made available by the cooperating organisations becomes particularly important (Kozminski, 2004). It is always an open question as to how much each party benefits from this cooperation. It is, therefore, necessary to seek answers to the question of how inter-organisational cooperation in cross-border partnerships should be shaped to take into account both the needs and expectations of all partners and the interests of the border regions in which these partnerships develop. Indeed, a key objective for the development of cross-border partnerships is not only the integration of neighbouring border communities but also the harmonious, sustainable development of these areas and the strengthening of their competitiveness vis-à-vis the more developed areas of the EU. The sustainable development of cross-border partnerships is therefore a desirable mechanism to meet the expectations of local communities regarding the possibilities of developing inter-organisational cooperation in border areas.

A cross-border partnership among distinct entities in terms of legal form is a typical example of a network relationship (Dołbłasz, 2018). The cooperating organisations constitute the nodes of the network, and the number of nodes determines the size of the network (examples of large cross-border networks include Euroregions). The arrangement of power and influence of individual nodes on the functioning of the network can vary. In a cross-border partnership, there are generally three types of zones (Szromnik, 2010):

- zone of balanced partnership;
- zone of partnership dominated by state and local government units;
- zone of partnership dominated by reference groups (stakeholders, clients).

Cross-border partnership develops in a defined cycle. The cycle of cross-border partnership development is a process that begins when cooperation is initiated between organisations from two sides of the border. It concludes with the formal cessation, fading, or transition to a higher level (more institutionalised) phase – in border studies, we can mention the EGTC to be the most advanced form of partnership, with respect to the legal-administrative stance (Ulrich, 2020).

The progression through the various phases of the cross-border partnership development cycle is shaped by specific conditions associated with the functioning of this type of relationship. In the initial conceptual phase, the overall objectives of cooperation and the proposed activities are determined and are then detailed in the planning phase. Initiators of cooperation can be entities interested in carrying out specific cross-border activities or entities established to animate such cooperation, for example, Euroregions. The formation of a partnership usually takes place after diagnosing the needs and expectations of the organisations interested in cooperation, which should be coherent.

The suitability of a potential partner for achieving their own goals is a significant precondition for establishing cross-border partnerships. This suitability should be assessed not only in relation to the short-term goals of a given organisation but also in the long-term horizon, with the aim of collectively improving the performance of cooperating organisations. The potential for achieving a high level of synergy and scale through a formed cross-border partnership should be the main determinant for its establishment. However, there are also situations where the motivation for cooperation has political or financial origins (Scott, 2000). The degree of formalisation of cooperation also varies. In any case, the crucial factor is mutual trust between partners, which is more important than the formal way of confirming cooperation.

The planning phase of a cross-border partnership primarily involves specifying the objectives and actions that the collaborating organisations intend to jointly pursue, as well as securing the cooperation in terms of required resources. These resources also include personnel who will be involved in the collaboration. The planning phase of the partnership should conclude with the development of a shared action plan, along with a final definition of the expected goals and outcomes.

In the subsequent implementation phase, the pre-planned activities are carried out on both sides of the border. These actions can mirror one another (analogous activities are carried out by partners on both sides of the border), or each partner undertakes complementary but diverse actions that collectively lead to the planned objectives. In most cases, partners seek non-repayable funds (e.g., from the European Union) to support jointly undertaken activities, primarily in the public sphere and the third sector. The phase of implementing cross-border cooperation is the stage of partnership where the most dynamic interactions occur between collaborating organisations and teams, and the individuals representing them. Sustained, cross-border communication and the building of good relationships at all the aforementioned levels are particularly important.

In the evaluation phase, partners conduct an individual assessment of cross-border cooperation, referring both to the extent of achieving the predetermined goals and the quality of jointly generated outcomes. While it is relatively straightforward to assess the tangible results of cooperation and relate them to the costs incurred by partners to obtain them, it is much more challenging to estimate the value of competencies and skills as well as the knowledge and experience partners gained through the undertaken cooperation. It can also happen that the benefits obtained by partners from cross-border cooperation vary. Differences between partners may also arise, for instance, institutions might

receive significantly smaller benefits from their cooperation than those enjoyed by teams collaborating on specific tasks on both sides of the border (or within one cross-border team), or the benefits of cooperation between individuals representing partners.

Therefore, the ability to genuinely assess the multidimensional results of cross-border cooperation is one of the more significant attributes of the learning curve of organisations. They can revise their needs and expectations, considering the dynamic nature of cross-border cooperation and its development in the cross-border environment shaped by various factors, including those beyond the control of partners.

In the transformation phase of the partnership, the final verification of the effectiveness of jointly undertaken actions and achieved objectives takes place, and partners make decisions about its continuation, development, or termination. Conditions beyond the control of partners can lead to the termination of cross-border cooperation, for instance, when the law changes on one side of the border, leading to a change in the partner's competencies. These conditions can also act as a catalyst for cooperation, such as when organisations gain external sources of funding for cross-border projects and want to use them jointly to achieve their goals.

It should be noted that good institutional cooperation is somewhat conditioned by good interpersonal relationships among representatives of partners on both sides of the border. If there is a lack of personal motivation for the development of cross-border cooperation within collaborating teams, it can diminish or become significantly limited. At the same time, even low-efficiency cross-border cooperation can develop if it is justified by the needs and expectations of collaborating organisations and teams.

The transformation phase of the partnership is the moment in the cooperation where a transition to a higher level is possible (for example by the means of establishing the EGTC), but it also

allows for the inclusion of other organisations or a reduction in the number of collaborating partners. A situation may also arise in which partners end their cooperation in one area while simultaneously initiating or continuing it in another area. Partners who end their cooperation can also leverage the knowledge and experience gained to initiate other cross-border partnerships. In each of these cases, as one cycle of partnership development concludes, collaborating organisations, in a sense, return to the conceptual phase, where they can initiate a new cycle together, with different goals and actions, or continue to collaborate in a different configuration.

During the described cycle of cross-border partnership development within the network of collaboration, various types of relationships between its members continually evolve. These relationships encompass information flows as well as material flows. The greater the number of such connections between nodes, the higher the network density, and at the same time, the lower its resource imperfection. The measure of network density is crucial for learning effectiveness, as it illustrates the relationship between the actual number of connections between nodes in the examined network and the maximum possible number of such connections, each of which can mediate information flow. The higher the network density, the better the distribution of information in the network. In the case of public organisations or third-sector organisations, due to the specific mission of these entities, a few partners often dominate in the networks created by them, around which other stakeholders gather, with less involvement in cross-border cooperation development, or, benefiting less from its effects.

Regardless of the model in which the network develops, information diffusion always occurs, promoting knowledge creation. A dense network learns quickly and generates knowledge, but research shows that negative effects of network density can also

occur, hindering control over the spread of knowledge, e.g., in local networks. Therefore, a conscious search for balance between the positive and negative effects of density on information flow, learning, and knowledge exploitation is necessary. Every network, including cross-border partnerships, should determine its optimal size. For organisational reasons and due to the specific geographical conditions of cross-border cooperation, such collaborative networks should not excessively expand.

FACTORS UNBALANCING CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION – THE CASE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

3.1. The COVID-19 pandemic as the most extensive rebordering in the history of the European integration

In the first weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the achievements of the cross-border integration in the EU seemed forgotten. The uncertainty and border closures substantially complicated the daily efforts of cross-border cooperation stakeholders, partnerships, and people living in borderlands, especially those profiting from the border, mainly cross-border commuters. The COVID-19 pandemic unbalanced cross-border cooperation unprecedentedly, as it was by far the most extensive rebordering in the history of European integration.

The COVID-19 pandemic slowed down most types of (physical) social interactions and flows, especially those crossing the national border. The spectre of borders re-emerged in Europe and the sealing of internal borders contradicted the core narrative of European integration, especially the concept of unhindered internal Schengen borders (Scott, 2016). Nation-states

enforced these closures as questionable yet universal measures in response to the COVID-19 threat. The pandemic gave rise to a scenario where nation-states made autonomous decisions, bypassing European and regional coordination (Medeiros et al., 2021; Opiłowska, 2021; Hennig, 2021). Ruffi (2020) argued that the nation-state continues to wield influence in shaping national identity and global perceptions. The pandemic introduced a new level of uncertainty in global affairs and led many to question whether citizens will be able to continue enjoying the freedom of movement once the crisis ended. Ironically, this resonates with the former UK prime minister Theresa May's popular quote in reference to the de facto Brexit, "If you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere" (Calzada, 2020).

Rebordering became one of 2020's buzzwords. According to Klatt (2017), European integration in principle has been a story of debordering; border regions demonstrate that borders have been quite persistent and have continued to be the physical expression of state sovereignty, reflecting the complicated reality of the EC/EU of shared sovereignty between member states and supranational institutions. Furthermore, debordering of the EU has been challenged by competing political elites, who construct otherness to demonstrate efficiency and strength of dealing with alleged threats to security'. In spite of the impact caused by the refugee crisis in 2015, which prompted rebordering actions such as implementing border controls and border militarisation (Klatt, 2017), the concern back then centred around a limited number of borders. This is in stark contrast to the breakdown of the Schengen system during the pandemic, where only a section of the German-Dutch border stayed accessible. In the first weeks of the pandemic closures, structures of cross-border cooperation, cross-border projects and their achievements seemed to be heavily questioned.

It thus became apparent that this crisis of rebordering coincided with an augmentation in the executive authority of the nation-state (Klatt, 2020; Ulrich et al., 2020). The nation-state substantially curtailed the operational efficacy of cross-border Euroregional partnerships, halted a significant number of cross-border initiatives, and underscored the limited capacity of Euroregions to navigate a crisis while safeguarding the everyday cross-border routines of residents (Unfried, 2020; Opiłowska, 2021; Novotný & Böhm, 2022). This ascendancy of the nation-state notably complicated daily life in certain cross-border regions and cast a more nuanced perspective on the outcomes of decades of cross-border cooperation and the endurance of collaborative frameworks.

The proposed and rejected the European Cross-Border Mechanism (ECBM), which was put forth by the EC as part of the 2021–2027 Cohesion Pack to enhance the lives of borderland residents, could have potentially alleviated the adverse effects of border closures. This initiative aimed to enable a member state to adopt the legal framework of an adjacent member state, facilitating solutions and projects across borders (Evrard & Engl, 2018; Sielker, 2018), particularly in situations where national legislation did not adequately address cross-border concerns. Despite its proposal, the ECBM was ultimately rejected by the Council of the European Union. Nonetheless, the rebordering prompted by the pandemic underscored the potential value of adopting the ECBM in managing border closures within the examined border contexts. As the ECBM cannot be employed to address border closures, stakeholders in cross-border cooperation must turn to alternative measures.

In the first weeks of pandemic closures, cross-border cooperation structures, projects, and achievements seemed to be heavily questioned. In 2023, the pandemic seems to be over, and the EU faces challenges caused by the aggression of the Russian Fed-

eration against Ukraine. However, it can be the right moment to look back and summarise the long-term pandemic impacts on cross-border cooperation. Therefore, based on the theory mentioned in the previous chapter one should ask the question of whether cross-border cooperation entities bounce forward and use the pandemic's potential for growth and positive change or whether they bounce back, to the pre-pandemic state (Makko-nen et al., 2019; Medeiros et al., 2021).

3.2. Impact of pandemic on borderlands

3.2.1. The border closures damaging the image of borderlands as a good place to live

The pandemic introduced significant uncertainty, particularly for individuals who rely on national borders as a resource (Sohn, 2014). Cross-border employees and residents continued to pose a significant challenge for national authorities, often struggling to accurately quantify the number of individuals working and/or residing on the opposite side of the border. The movement of daily commuters across borders effectively leveraged the opportunities provided by the common European market. The pandemic-induced restrictions on border crossings have also highlighted the presence of a distinct demographic numbering in the range of hundreds of individuals who reside on the opposite side of the border in many European borderlands – for example, Czech and Polish people living in Saxony or French people living on the German side of the Rhine in Kehl. This group, alongside daily commuters and representatives of municipalities highly engaged in cross-border cooperation, constitutes those most intensely immersed in the experience of ‘everyday cross-borderness’.

However, the pandemic led to considerably greater restrictions on these European citizens' rights who live in borderlands than those of them who permanently reside and work within one country. The closure of borders and the reinstatement of controls in various nations made border regions susceptible to cross-border mobility, adversely impacting daily cross-border commuters (Evrard et al., 2020).

It can be illustrated by the examples from two different European borderlands. An investigation in the French-German borderland showed incredible frustration for French people in Germany: 'I no longer want to work in this country'. In the Polish-Czech borderland, Polish agency workers working in Czechia felt they were 'second (worse) category Europeans': 'We face the choice whether to keep our pride or our work... Let us realise that we are currently somewhat toxic to Czech employers... Every rational manager is aware that such a situation can recur in several months... For Czech companies, it is significantly easier to employ Czechs than us, cross-border workers... I urge everyone not to abuse barriers to work or sick leave benefits and go to work... On our side, it will be difficult to find any non-seasonal work... And no one will help us, neither Czechia nor Poland... Head up, we can do it!' (Böhm, 2023).

It's essential to highlight that labour mobility across borders is pivotal in enhancing resilience and regional stability (Hannonen, 2022; Koch, 2022). When national governments swiftly intervened in the employment situations of these commuters, resulting in negative consequences, there was a bare minimum of institutions advocating for their interests. Drawing lessons from previous restrictions and regulations, it's crucial to establish predictable mechanisms that can be activated during times of crisis. Despite lacking direct jurisdiction in this domain, Euroregions and other entities responsible for facilitating cross-border coop-

eration should leverage their coordination capabilities and local presence to champion the concerns of cross-border commuters.

Although there has been ongoing cross-border cooperation in many European borderlands for a long time, a dearth of essential information persists, hindering an accurate diagnosis of the actual extent of cross-border movements within some borderlands. This surprising insufficiency of cross-border information probably prevents cross-border entities from addressing certain pressing cooperation issues – especially those linked to cross-border commuting. Consequently, the pandemic showed us that establishing cross-border information observatories, closely cooperating or being part of cross-border bodies, is advisable. This could improve the capacities of cross-border partnerships to actively monitor occurrences in border regions and respond by means of suitable interventions.

3.2.2. The pandemic as a chance (and challenge) to upgrade cooperation

The Euroregions and other cross-border entities have been actively operating within European borderlands for decades, contributing significantly to cross-border integration. However, the pandemic has underscored the necessity to re-evaluate certain cooperative undertakings and the structural framework of many of them. This adjustment aims to make the organisation more agile in addressing the evolving realities of the border regions and potential future challenges. Therefore, it is necessary to tackle the fact that cross-border cooperation entities are not instruments of sudden reaction, underline the need to open new cooperation themes and discuss the need to adapt cross-border cooperation structures accordingly. The three mentioned issues are considered in the following part of this chapter.

We contend that for numerous Euroregions and other cross-border cooperation stakeholders, the experiences of ‘covidfencing’ and the constraints on cross-border movements have highlighted the inadequacies within their cooperative priorities, organisational structures, processes, and the general resilience of cross-border collaboration itself. Even the post-COVID-19 pandemic, during this era characterised by multiple crises, border communities must navigate a continuous instability and unpredictability (Jakubowski, 2022). Cross-border cooperation presents an avenue, and effectively functioning cross-border connections are catalysts for bolstering long-term regional resilience (Prokkola, 2019).

As previously mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent pan-European covid-fencing presented unprecedented situations, not only for those institutions engaged in managing and mitigating pandemic effects. A crucial element of the efforts of cross-border cooperation bodies was communication and information dissemination, which, however, revealed significant deficiencies, unforeseen challenges, and abrupt hurdles. Swift, clear, intelligible, and comprehensive information in the languages of all neighbouring countries was lacking. The absence of coordinated border control measures and the lack of harmonisation in administrative protocols among the neighbouring nations’ territories paralysed mutual cooperation. Hindsight makes it evident that the communication model during pandemic crises largely faltered in nearly all border regions (Olszewski, 2021; Böhm, 2021a). Euroregions and other cross-border cooperation bodies are not tools of sudden reaction. This is to a major extent obvious, given that cross-border cooperation entities have their competencies defined by their founders – often subnational public actors also lacking direct competencies in disaster management.

In the vast majority of cross-border regions, it became evident that the existing cross-border cooperation governance struc-

tures were ill-prepared for a crisis period. The exigencies of the COVID-19 pandemic demanded swift action within days if not hours. Understandably, decisions had to be made on a precautionary basis, without the luxury of pondering all potential consequences. “For example, in the Franco-German borderland the crisis has brought significant visibility as a cross-border structure. Cross-border partners communicated very actively; they coordinated the transport of French patients to German hospitals. Many things were done physically first, the paper consecration took place ex-ante. Cross-border cooperation bodies have become a critical direct partner, for example, for firefighters or the German army. They have initiated regular meetings of the units responsible for crisis management on both sides of the border” (Böhm et al., 2023).

Enhancing functional cross-border information flow is a key prerequisite to managing crises on the border. Olszewski (2021) underscored the significance of efficient communication, particularly during times of crisis, drawing from exemplary practices in other European border regions. The closure of borders underscored the necessity for adjustments and enhancements in the communication processes and the flow of information. It becomes imperative to establish a procedural framework that distinctly outlines the steps to be taken in analogous crises within this cross-border territory. A proactive stance across all platforms is crucial for effective information dissemination. It’s imperative to sustain the high level of currency of information mainly during crisis situations. To amplify the positive impact of these measures, it’s recommended to collaborate with individuals who can serve as ‘cross-border cooperation ambassadors’ within their respective social circles – for example, administrators of Facebook groups gathering cross-border commuters, or individuals residing on the border who live in neighbouring countries.

There seems to be a pressing challenge for cross-border cooperation stakeholders to realign their attention towards novel cooperation priorities, strategically aimed at maintaining the appeal of their cross-border territory as a desirable locale for everyday life in the border region. The movement of commuters across borders serves to realise the opportunities provided by the European common market for its citizens. Nonetheless, the rights of these individuals, who contribute to this transborder workforce, were disproportionately curtailed during the pandemic compared to the rights of those who permanently reside and work within a single Member State. Additionally, this group lacked a distinct representative advocating for their interests. To this end, cross-border cooperation stakeholders should consider dedicating their attention to the matter of cross-border commuting, even if their primary activities may pertain to different domains. Particularly in the ‘new EU’ countries, involving employers (potentially through institutions like the Chamber of Commerce) would be a judicious step. Even though the members of these cross-border cooperation entities, such as municipalities and regions, don’t wield direct authority in this realm, they possess valuable insights concerning cross-border labour dynamics.

In the eastern region of the Czech-Polish border, the Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia Euroregion emerged as a pivotal advocate for the interests of cross-border workers, who otherwise lacked a dedicated institution to champion their cause (Opioła & Böhm, 2022). Backed by data highlighting the significance of cross-border employment in the Czech Republic for less-skilled workers from a substantial part of the Silesian Voivodeship (Kasperek & Olszewski, 2020), and with concerted efforts from Euroregions, they managed to mitigate the Polish government’s stringent testing requirements to more manageable levels.

The pandemic-induced border closures have illuminated a significant gap in advocacy for the interests of cross-border com-

muters, despite their substantial presence in many European borderlands. The ongoing predicament of cross-border employees and residents remains a considerable hurdle for national administrations, struggling to accurately quantify individuals working and/or residing on the opposing side of the border.

Unsurprisingly, the cross-border cooperation in healthcare has been – after the initial shock of all the closures during the first wave – part of response to the challenges posed by the pandemic. For example, Euroregion Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino, which spans Austria and Italy, established a joint task force to manage healthcare coordination and share resources during the crisis. The Trinational Eurodistrict of Basel, which covers parts of Switzerland, Germany, and France, worked on cross-border healthcare planning during the pandemic. Probably the most immediate reaction, which took the form of a project, was conducted in the German-Dutch-Belgian Maas-Rhine Euregio. This Euroregion had been focused on health cooperation long before the start of the pandemic; the COVID-19 pandemic just accelerated the effort toward more intense healthcare sector cooperation. The (Catalan) Cerdanya hospital, recognised as the first cross-border hospital in Europe, showcased the practicality and efficiency of cross-border collaboration in the healthcare sector during the peak of the health crisis. This unique cross-border hospital distinguished itself in its crisis management due to a significant advantage: its dual nationality. The hospital, founded as a binational institution for patients from both Spain and France, had to grapple with challenges such as the closure of the French-Spanish border, a shortage of protective gear for healthcare providers, and a lack of intensive care beds in reference hospitals for patients. The hospital's dual nationality emerged as a valuable asset in overcoming these hurdles. In response to the closure of the French-Spanish border, the hospital collaborated with both Spanish and French law enforcement agencies to establish a des-

ignated 'green' route, ensuring the unhindered movement of the hospital's healthcare workers and patients (Peyrony et al., 2021).

Moreover, in some European borderlands, chiefly in those with considerable pay gaps between neighbours, many medical professionals commute across the border. The restrictions at the border hugely complicated day-to-day functioning of many hospitals in borderlands – for example in Saxony, where Czechs and Poles work in medical professions.

The need to involve labour market as a cooperation field might be a pressing issue for less integrated borderlands chiefly. Although there has long been ongoing cross-border cooperation in many European borderlands. Yet a dearth of essential information persists, hindering an accurate diagnosis of the actual extent of cross-border movements. This could be a challenge for the vast majority of cross-border regions, therefore, acquiring more pertinent cross-border data is imperative. This surprising insufficiency of cross-border information probably prevents cross-border entities from addressing certain pressing cooperation issues – especially those linked to cross-border commuting. Consequently, the pandemic showed us that the establishment of Cross-Border Information Observatories, closely cooperating or being part of cross-border bodies, is advisable. This could improve the capacities of cross-border partnerships to actively monitor occurrences in border regions and respond by means of suitable interventions.

Although cooperation projects, often funded by programmes like INTERREG, have typically concentrated on cross-border crisis management within most of the studied entities, the pandemic revealed that a substantial portion of these efforts yielded limited results. On the contrary, it appeared that these endeavours inadvertently promoted a significant resurgence of national tendencies. The experiences gleaned from some more advanced border regions strongly advocate for a heightened level of institutionalisation as a proactive step. Such a move could potentially

thwart a decline in interest in cross-border cooperation. Furthermore, this would serve the purpose of effectively conveying the significance of the cross-border cooperation to central authorities, legislators, and other stakeholders beyond the realm of the cross-border cooperation.

In the French-German border region, cross-border areas endeavoured to utilise the pandemic as an opportunity to introduce novel elements into their cooperation. Experts stressed that the coordinating role of governance structures and the expertise of EGTCs/Euroregions' professional staff would prove pivotal in the years ahead. According to their insights, heightened institutionalisation would also translate to more stable financing for cross-border entities. The pandemic did not lead to any decline in interest in cross-border cooperation or membership of the EGTCs. This legal form ensures that members feel a greater degree of commitment to the collaboration than 'only' in a looser Euroregional structure. Therefore, one can say that both the crisis and the institutionalisation in EGTCs have strengthened their position vis-à-vis their members. For them, membership in an EGTC is much more compulsorily binding. The fact that their cooperation is much more institutionalised thanks to the existence of EGTCs has made it easier for us to negotiate that cross-border cooperation has been integrated into national (post-pandemic) recovery plans (Böhm et al., 2023).

The covid-fencing (Medeiros et al., 2021) effectively highlighted the shortcomings inherent in the existing Euroregional model, which relies on collaborating two/three distinct legal entities in the studied context. To this end, it would be a rational step to establish an EGTC and enhance cooperation protocols by adopting a unified legal entity to bolster cross-border planning and collaboration. While this legal cooperative framework does not completely eradicate occasionally differing national interests (Ulrich, 2020), it would undeniably compel cross-border cooperation

actors to function harmoniously. This holds particularly true for tri-lateral and multilateral entities.

For example, in well-institutionalised cross-border cooperation around Luxembourg, during the initial months of the pandemic, the cross-border movements within the Greater Region were relatively well-preserved when compared to the other examined cross-border areas. This was partly attributed to Luxembourg's significant involvement in the cooperative region, as it's strategically located in the heart of this territory, and the country was keen to sustain the influx of cross-border workers, which create a substantial part of the workforce of the country. Additionally, the relatively advanced level of cross-border cooperation institutionalisation played a role. Representatives from other cross-border regions also validated that a heightened degree of institutionalisation was advantageous for them in the wake of the crisis. The structure of the EGTC guarantees that members remain committed to collaboration even during more challenging periods, setting it apart from the dynamics within 'mere' Euroregions.

These findings hold particular relevance for regions within the EU that still operate under the 'Euroregional model'. In this model, different national parts collaborate under the 'Euroregion' banner without a unified legal framework. A clear example of this can be observed in the German-Polish-Czech Euroregion Neisse-Nysa-Nisa (ERN), where distinct responses from individual national parts of the ERN emerged during the pandemic and subsequent Turów crisis. While the Czech and German secretariats of the ERN proactively addressed the crisis and its consequences, the Polish office faced challenges due to changes in management and internal discrepancies. Despite the ERN Strategy, which was finalised by the end of 2022, well after the lifting of restrictions, it still struggles to break free from its past limitations. The proposed measures lack concreteness and ambition in addressing the issues highlighted during the pandemic.

For such regional groupings, it is advisable to initiate efforts aimed at ‘upgrading cooperation’ by pursuing the status of an EGTC. Specifically among Czech Euroregions, there may be prevailing reluctance and scepticism regarding the adoption of this legal framework for cooperation, influenced by factors that have become outdated. However, this persistent resistance is primarily a result of inertia and lacks a valid justification. On the contrary, in times of European integration challenges, embracing this legal form would act as a catalyst for further cross-border integration. Furthermore, adopting cooperation under this legal framework would likely create opportunities for additional collaborative initiatives and streamline engagement with EU funding mechanisms.

As mentioned in previous subchapters, so called borderlanders profiting from the border as a resource, daily commuters and representatives of municipalities highly engaged in cross-border cooperation, are those most intensely immersed in the experience of ‘everyday cross-borderness’. Additionally, they often serve as catalysts for cross-border endeavours and stand as representatives of an active civil society. Leveraging their potential and establishing a structure akin to a ‘cross-border parliament’ could yield favourable outcomes. This assembly could then assist in involving other residents of borderlands in cross-border interactions and collaborative initiatives, and provide cross-border cooperation professionals with valuable inputs.

3.3. Impacts of the pandemic on cross-border cooperation projects

Cross-border cooperation initiatives receive support from the ETC programmes, commonly known as INTERREG programmes, although their titles have varied in different programming periods. These bilateral programmes have played a significant role

in expanding the scope of cross-border cooperation initiatives, as noted by O'Dowd (2002), and have engaged a diverse range of stakeholders. While INTERREG programmes were initially introduced to facilitate the functioning of a single market, they have also created opportunities for local and regional entities to participate in supplementary foreign policy activities. Euroregions have been among the primary beneficiaries of EU funding for cross-border cooperation. The integration of cross-border cooperation with EU funds through the INTERREG programmes in the late 1980s significantly boosted the number of cross-border initiatives and the involvement of non-central governmental actors in secondary foreign policy endeavours, as highlighted by Perkmann (2003). Some scholars, like Scott (2000), view working with INTERREG programme as a primary mission of Euroregions.

Within the INTERREG programme, larger projects, usually spanning up to three-four years, have been instrumental in initiating numerous cross-border partnerships and engaging a substantial number of individuals in cross-border cooperation. Micro-projects, funded through the INTERREG programmes' instrument called Small Projects Fund (SPF), aim to support local communities, businesses, and Factors Unbalancing Cross-Border Cooperation. They address a wide array of topics, including tourism, environmental preservation, cultural heritage, education, and social inclusion. Typically, micro-projects under SPF are executed by local entities such as non-governmental organisations, public authorities, and educational institutions. These projects typically have a short duration, ranging from 6 to 18 months, with a maximum funding limit of €20,000 (covering a maximum of 85% of all expenses). Their emphasis lies in generating a significant local impact while contributing to the overarching goals of the INTERREG programme, which encompass enhancing regional competitiveness, fostering innovation, and promoting territorial cohesion. The SPF was deliberately in-

incorporated into the draft regulation for the 2021–2027 period in response to those who questioned the effectiveness of this tool. These reservations are predominantly expressed by the INTER-REG Managing Authorities, who have a preference for overseeing a limited number of larger projects rather than numerous smaller ones (AEBR, 2018). However, opting for this approach is highly likely to result in a significant reduction in international cooperation across numerous European border regions (Branda & Böhm, 2019; Böhm et al., 2021).

Especially in Central Europe, particularly in Czechia and Poland, Euroregions play a distinctive role as ‘European’ embassies within the border areas. Their primary mission is the development of cross-border cooperation, with the administration of microprojects being a secondary function. Their operations are closely tied to various projects, as they serve as project partners and oversee microprojects. However, during the pandemic, a significant number of Euroregions had to suspend numerous cross-border cooperation initiatives, projects, and partnerships. It was widely emphasised that these activities need to be promptly revitalised.

It is indeed crucial for the organisations traditionally engaged in cross-border cooperation projects to reinitiate their involvement in cross-border cooperation endeavours after periods of disruption, such as the pandemic. Furthermore, there should be proactive efforts to encourage new organisations to participate in these initiatives. To facilitate this, responsible entities should simplify the expense reporting process for project implementation. Implementing such streamlined project structures may particularly incentivise non-governmental entities to re-join INTER-REG-funded cooperation, as they often perceive it as excessively administratively burdensome.

The cross-border cooperation stakeholders stressed the importance of patiently revisiting even the most basic activities. In this

regard, many mentioned the role of SPFs. The reason behind this need for repetition is that the pandemic and border closures disrupted cross-border connections, which are inherently more delicate than those within a single nation. They also strained the mutual trust between individuals from different sides of the border. According to these stakeholders, none of these activities should be dismissed as trivial.

It is crucial to acknowledge that engaging in cross-border cooperation and making use of INTERREG programmes entails considerably more obstacles compared to participating in national initiatives. Potential project partners must navigate not only administrative barriers but also psychological challenges, which were exacerbated by the pandemic. Therefore, it is advisable to continue and expand the use of simplified procedures. Additionally, there should be a broader promotion of people-to-people (P2P) initiatives across various programs. These softer projects have the potential to address the common issues stemming from unfamiliarity or indifference (van der Velde & Spierings, 2010). Without ongoing efforts to address these primarily psychological hurdles, even with the implementation of recurring schemes and proven approaches, the level of trust across borders, which has been disrupted or at least complicated by the pandemic, is at risk of diminishing.

Considering the literature review and the analysis of the evidence from borderlands one can indicate the four crucial issues concerning the possible post-pandemic implications for cross-border entities which are presented below.

First, the closure of internal borders ran counter to the fundamental principles of European integration, notably the concept of unrestricted internal Schengen borders. These closures were implemented by nation-states and became a (doubtful) widespread response to the threat posed by the COVID-19. The pandemic created a scenario in which nation-states sidestepped co-

ordination at both the European and regional levels, which raised concerns about the effectiveness of the EU's multilevel governance processes and its complex hierarchical framework. The nation-state continues to exert influence in shaping national identity and global perceptions.

Second, the above-mentioned revival of territorial borders has demonstrated not only the power of national states but also how interwoven the border regions – in terms of using the border as an opportunity, for example in the field of labour or housing market – have become (Opiłowska, 2020). To this end, it makes sense to repair the image of borderlands as a good place to live.

Third, the Euroregions and other cross-border cooperation bodies should benefit from the lessons and adapt their scope of activities as well as internal structures to sustain cross-border cooperation resilience. Especially in the 'new EU', the topics such as cross-border commuting, advocating the interest of people leading their lives on two sides of the borderline, and cross-border healthcare should receive substantially higher attention. All this should be underpinned by more informed decision-making, based on reliable cross-border data. The pandemic also showed us that by no means are cross-border cooperation entities the tools of a sudden reaction. The experience of managing a global crisis such as the pandemic emphasised the deficiencies of cross-border crisis management mechanisms, which were insufficient and dominated by the measures taken at the level of central governments. The pandemic emphasised the importance of cross-border crisis management mechanisms, based on functional ongoing cross-border information flows.

The pandemic highlighted deficiencies inherent in the current Euroregional model, which relies on the cooperation of two or three separate legal entities, and is still by far the most common form of cross-border cooperation governance in the EU (Durand et al., 2018). In light of this, it would be a logical course of ac-

tion to establish an EGTC and refine collaboration procedures by adopting a unified legal entity to strengthen cross-border planning and cooperation. Despite the fact that an EGTC does not entirely eliminate occasional differences in national interests, it would undoubtedly compel participants engaged in cross-border cooperation to work together in a more coordinated manner. This is particularly applicable to tri-lateral and multilateral entities.

Fourth, the pandemic suspended and/or complicated many cross-border projects, often those co-funded by the INTERREG programmes. Given that those projects take care of a substantial part of cross-border interactions in many European borderlands (Durand & Decoville, 2020), and the disruption or potential complication for many cross-border projects, came in the period ‘between two programming periods’, the INTERREG Managing Authorities and administrators of microprojects should continue and expand the use of simplified procedures, which would ease the ‘comeback’ to cooperation and inclusion of new cooperation actors. A broader use of P2P initiatives, including microprojects, should help to work on furthering mutual trust.

Fifth, the pandemic re-iterated that one-size-fits-all solutions – such as border closures – cannot be applied in European borderlands, as they are very heterogeneous, with different level of cross-border trust, flows and design of cross-border governance. Yet, in all European borderlands, the pandemic underlined the necessity to focus on the resilience of cross-border partnerships.

MANAGING CROSS-BORDER PROJECTS IN THE FACE OF CHALLENGES AND CRISES

4.1. The borderland as the environment of cross-border projects

A borderland is a region that belong to at least two neighbouring states (Dołzbłasz & Raczyk, 2010, p. 16) whose area of contact is marked by a state border (Bański, 2010, pp. 489–508). Among other things, the type of a border determines cross-border flows between the neighbouring territories and the conditions in which such flows take place (Wieckowski, 2011, pp. 122–140). A border often functions in collective awareness as an institutional and natural barrier to the integration of neighbouring communities, creating an artificial sense of separation despite many similarities in terms of the language, culture or economy (Malendowski & Ratajczak, 2000, p. 9). At the same time, a border also plays the role of a link between such areas, which may be similar in many respects, or may differ, e.g., in terms of their political or administrative systems, cultural and social conditions, or economic systems (Jacquez et al., 2000, pp. 221–241). A border has a special filtering role that manifests itself in the selective attitude to the

flow of people, goods, services, capital, and workforce, as well as intellectual property, values, cultural trends and social changes, etc. It is around a border that delineates friendly or hostile relationships between neighbouring communities and around which institutional stakeholders such as public authorities, businesses, NGOs, academic centres, etc. can take shape. The degree of openness of the borders has a major impact on cross-border relations, and the specific characteristics of border regions determine the conditions and circumstances under which cooperation can develop there, for example, as an essence of cross-border projects.

A cross-border project can be most broadly defined as a one-time venture planned and executed jointly by two or more organisations operating on different sides of the common border. The management of such a project should consider the specific characteristics of the project environment that territorially extends to at least two border regions of neighbouring countries.

The project environment covers all phenomena, processes and factors as well as groups, organisations and individuals influencing the project or influenced by it. Therefore, the project environment is shaped by many factors of varying nature. One of them is the area of project implementation which can cover, for example, one or several countries, one or several regions, as well as the borderland territory. The larger and more varied the area where the project is being implemented, the more complex the project environment. The project environment can impact the project in a positive, neutral or negative manner; in addition, the intensity and nature of such impact may change over time (Joslin & Müller, 2016, pp. 364–388).

A project environment can be identified according to different criteria (Englund & Graham, 2019) that are most often divided into three areas. The first area, one that is closest to the project, is its internal environment. The organisation executing the project shapes it. Such environment includes all resources and

potentials of the organisation, including those directly used for the needs of the project, i.e., funding, human resources, physical resources, knowledge, information and know-how, organisational culture, public opinion, and interest groups within the organisation, such as the project team, labour unions, owners of the organisation and employed managers, or other employees not involved with the project. The second area of the environment that is located beyond the project is its external environment. It covers all components existing beyond the organisation that implements the project and can be divided into:

- the micro-external environment, which is most often identified as the region in which the project is being executed; it consists, among other things, of the socio-economic potential of the territory and its socio-cultural profile, the available resources including financial and human capital, interest groups operating in the area, as well as actors such as public institutions, local government units, enterprises, NGOs, schools and universities, the media or local communities with different attitudes towards the project (positive, neutral, or negative) and different impacts on the project (positive, neutral, negative);
- the macro-external environment that consists of, among other things, the demographic, economic, natural, technical and technological, political and legal, cultural, social or international conditions.

In the micro-external environment, there is a coupling of interactions between the organisations that implement projects and individual elements of their environment. Through the implemented project, an organisation is able to influence its micro-external environment at the same time that environment influences project implementation conditions. The macro-external environment equally impacts all organisations that implement project and, as a rule, none of these organisations can individual-

ly shape the determinants of such an environment. Cross-border projects are implemented on both sides of the border by design because, if they are co-funded under the INTERREG programme, the aim of their implementation is, *inter alia*, to intervene consciously in the environment on both sides of the border in order to integrate the communities and organisations living there and to solve common problems or exploit common opportunities.

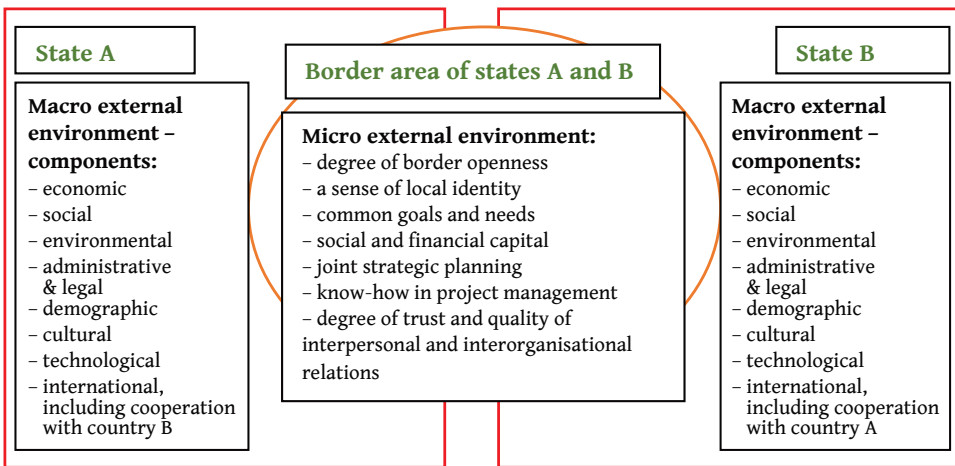
Although the need for contact between organisations and people from border regions is natural and obvious (Spierings & van der Velde, 2013, pp. 1–4), in practice, the development of cross-border cooperation may face a number of barriers to building mutual trust, communication, and integration, as well as to the transfer of resources such as information, knowledge, and human and intellectual capital (Castanho et al., 2016). Factors attributed to the macro-external environment, *i.e.*, social, economic, cultural, demographic and legal factors (Kurowska-Pysz et al., 2018), are the most prominent elements of the project environment that can also be a source of barriers. They are usually shaped on the national level, which means that they are objective conditions for territorial cooperation in border areas that are usually difficult to change. The alleviation or elimination of barriers to cooperation is often the direct objective of such cooperation and can take place through cross-border projects, but border regions do not often have sufficient endogenous potential to make significant progress in this area on their own. This results from the fact that borderlands are treated as transitory, often peripheral and marginalised areas, which places them at a disadvantage in terms of access to strategic national resources and potentials such as public funds, private investments, intellectual capital, etc., to name but a few. The poorer growth potential of borderlands is often also the result of historical and geopolitical conditions, *e.g.*, international tensions and conflicts (Wilson, 2012, pp. 163–180). It can also result from the impact of

geographical factors characteristic for borders, e.g., the existence of mountain ranges or rivers, etc. The resulting deficits have a constraining effect on the development of such areas, for example, in comparison with agglomerations. Border areas are often too weak to stimulate development processes effectively (Kosiedowski, 2005, p. 27), affected as they are by the outflow of strategic resources, such as human capital, to regions with faster growth rates (Kowalczewski, 2003, p. 23). In order to balance these difficulties, border areas that develop territorial cooperation with neighbouring areas of other states can count on special support under the EU cohesion policy. Such interventions are initiated through programmes such as INTERREG. As long as the stakeholders involved in the development of border regions have the knowledge, skills and resources and the will to work together to improve the situation in border regions, they have a range of instruments at their disposal to positively influence the development of these areas with the help of European funds, for example through the implementation of cross-border projects.

Cross-border cooperation through projects can be stimulated, for example with the support under the INTERREG programme (Chilla, & Lambracht, 2023, pp. 700–718), but it also strongly depends on the quality and components of the environment in which it develops. These components are primarily elements of the micro-external environment, which can be identified with the borderland, and elements of the macro-external environment identified with the macro conditions prevailing in neighbouring countries. In those border areas where there the openness of borders is low and many barriers to cross-border flows exist, one can speak of a more diverse micro-external environment of the project and an even more diverse macro-external environment. For the implementation of cross-border projects to be possible, at least the immediate external environment understood as the border region has to offer favourable condition

for the implementation. In those border areas where even a minimum degree of socioeconomic cohesion of neighbouring regions has been achieved, one can speak of a gradually-developing common cross-border micro-external environment of the project. Such an environment can similarly influence the organisations cooperating with each other under cross-border projects regardless of the side of the border on which they operate. They are presented in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1. Elements of the micro-external environment and macro-external environment of a cross-border project



Source: own work.

Project implementation is influenced by three elements of the macro-external environment that occur on the national level and impact all projects being implemented in a state in the same way (e.g., the legal component related to the way in which contractors are selected for publicly funded projects). These components will be different in each of the neighbouring countries where project partners come from and their actual influence on the implementation of the project will vary (e.g., the economic component may guarantee the availability of funds for own financial contributions in certain countries while such availability may be very limited in other countries). When analysing the

international component of this environment, one should consider, for example, the attitude to the cooperation with neighbouring states, which does not necessarily need to be symmetrical (e.g., some states support cooperation with neighbouring countries but it does not mean that the attitude to the cooperation will be equally positive in neighbouring countries). The macro-external environment may, therefore, have a positive or negative impact on the implementation of cross-border projects, but these elements are shaped on the national level with no direct connection to the border area.

Among the many elements of the micro-external environment with which the border region can be identified, there are at least a few that significantly influence the implementation of cross-border projects. They include:

- the degree of openness of the border, determining the dynamics of cross-border flows, e.g., in terms of the movement of people (for example, a visit to the neighbouring country, establishment of business and social contacts, conditions for the development of cross-border businesses and the cross-border labour market), which impacts the relational capital of organisations operating in border areas;
- a sense of local identity indicative of the degree to which neighbouring communities have grown closer to each other and the extent of their identification with the border region as a place with which they identify and want to ensure its development together;
- common goals and needs determining the degree of the stakeholders' interest in the opportunity to implement cross-border projects as ventures that allow them to attain common or individual goals in the most effective way, i.e., through cross-border cooperation that generates multiplier effects of such initiatives for the entire border area;

- the quality and availability of social and financial capitals that determine the stakeholders' capacity for the implementation of cross-border projects, for example, through the accessibility of funds under the INTERREG programme, funds for own contributions to projects or the availability of human resources able to design and execute ventures significant for the development of the border area;
- common strategic planning to agree on a hierarchy of goals and tasks to be jointly executed as part of cross-border projects, affecting the entire border area and serving the interests of project partners and target groups of the project;
- know-how in the management of cross-border projects encompassing the knowledge, skills and attitudes that ensure that cross-border projects can be properly planned, implemented, accounted for and sustainable in a way that achieves their objectives and planned results;
- the degree of mutual trust, which determines the motivation of the cooperating parties to intensify their contacts (build interpersonal relationships) and to build inter-organisational partnerships that undertake cross-border projects on the basis of the mutual trust developed.

4.2. Stakeholders of cross-border projects

One of the concepts applied in the analysis of a project environment is the concept of stakeholders developed by R. E. Freeman (2010), that refers to enterprises in its classic perspective. According to this approach, project management as an activity common for most organisations, including enterprises, has to consider the interests, views, aspirations, needs and goals of various individuals, groups and institutions, which are known as stakeholders (Trocki, 2018, pp. 9–25). In terms of project management, stake-

holders are all those who directly or indirectly benefit from the project implementation or incur costs as a result of the implementation of the project that impacts them (de Oliveira & Rabechini, 2019, pp. 131–144).

A fundamental assumption of the environmental analysis of a cross-border project is to take into account the stakeholders who operate on one or both sides of the border. They include public institutions, local and regional authorities at all levels and their associations, e.g., Euroregions and unions of communes, enterprises, NGOs, schools and universities, the media, etc. Such organisations can implement cross-border projects and can also be target groups to which such projects are addressed. Cross-border partnerships for the implementation of projects can be established within one sector (e.g., cooperation of universities operating on both sides of the border) or they can be cross-sectoral partnerships (e.g., cooperation between an NGO operating on one side of the border and a local government unit on the other side of the border). The same applies to the selection of target groups for cross-border projects that can be identical or vary on both sides of the border. Whether single-sector or cross-sector partnerships are formed and whether a project is addressed to identical or diverse target groups on both sides of the border, there may be differences between such stakeholders in terms of their motivations, needs or objectives for participating in a cross-border project. In addition, it should be noted that if INTERREG funding is obtained, the cross-border project must meet the eligibility criteria set by the INTERREG Managing Authority. These criteria refer, for example, to types of qualifying beneficiaries and target groups, planned objectives, activities and results, including the cross-border effect.

Stakeholders and organisations implementing cross-border projects may have a close or loose relationship. As a result of the development of such relationships, all or certain groups of stake-

holders remain affected by the organisation that implements the project (in a positive or negative way) or they themselves impact the organisation (in a positive or negative way) (Pedrini & Ferri, 2019, pp. 44–59). Recognising the impact of the project on stakeholders and the impact of stakeholders on the project is particularly important for the shaping of the relationship between the project organisations and the stakeholders, which is closely linked to the effectiveness of project management (Trocki & Gucza, 2009, pp. 369–382). Interactions occurring within cross-border projects have certain unique characteristics relating, e.g., to elements such as:

- the duration of an interaction, considering active and passive periods in the lifecycle of a project (the involvement of individual stakeholder groups is not necessarily continuous, and it can be related to selected project activities only);
- behaviours related to project implementation, e.g., activities supporting or hindering project implementation, which can be initiated by various stakeholder groups on both sides of the border;
- links and interdependencies between the organisations implementing the project, as well as between these organisations and the various stakeholder groups on both sides of the border;
- the degree of involvement with the project of individual stakeholder groups on both sides of the border.

These elements shape relationships within the project and entail the concept of an exchange, which can be of dual nature:

- positive, if it benefits the organisation and stakeholders who count on being able to attain their goals or satisfy their needs thanks to project implementation;
- negative, if it entails losses or deterioration of the situation of stakeholders affected by the project in an intentional or unintended manner (it is assumed that the organi-

sations implementing projects should gain the expected benefits from them, whereas project stakeholders can benefit or lose).

Even though bilateral relationships prevail in cross-border projects, stakeholders also increasingly undertake project cooperation in networks covering an entire border region, Euroregion or cross-border functional area (Sohn & Reitel, 2016, pp. 306–321). Decentralisation is another distinguishing feature of contemporary cross-border relations in addition to the networking (Pietrzyk, 2001, pp. 16–19). Decisions, resources and responsibilities are being transferred to lower levels of the public administration, and stakeholders operating there are gaining greater independence in their undertakings while the responsibility of regional and local communities for development policy and its consequences is increasing. This fact also determines the growing importance of regional administrations, especially those dealing with the management of EU funds, including cross-border funds (Trojanowska-Strzeboszewska, 2009, p. 94). One can state that border areas have obtained a strong mandate to implement cross-border projects to solve common transnational problems in recent years. Such projects are co-funded under the INTER-REG programmes among other things.

In the case of cross-border projects, the closest and most positive relationship is between organisations from both sides of the border carrying out a project together in a so-called cross-border partnership. The organisations working in partnership should influence each other in a positive and long-term way. There should also be a relatively strong relationship between organisations implementing a project with its target groups on both sides of the border, i.e., those stakeholder groups that should inherently benefit from its implementation. The project's impact on such target groups should also be positive even though it may gradually diminish over time. Target groups of the project can also have

a positive impact on it, which is essential for the achievement of the project's objectives and its cross-border effect. Much looser relationships, often hypothetical only, are possible between organisations implementing the project and other stakeholder groups operating in its environment on both sides of the border whom the project does not address directly. In that case, the influence on specific stakeholder groups may be potentially positive or negative while such stakeholder groups may also impact project implementation the same both ways. It is worth noting that organisations implementing cross-border projects are often unable to fully recognise all the potential stakeholder groups existing in the project environment and to comprehensively assess the impact of the project on such groups or their impact on the project.

The attainment of the cross-border effect is the key determinant of the effectiveness of a cross-border project implementation. It is only achieved if the project exerts a positive influence on its stakeholders on both sides of the border and joint cross-border activities make it possible for the partners to get the results they would not have been able to generate on their own. Therefore, cross-border partnership is a mechanism of cooperation between the organisations implementing the project on both sides of the border that also ensures the involvement of specific stakeholder groups on both sides of the border to whom the project is addressed and who are supposed to benefit from it. Cross-border partnership is one of the mechanisms supported by the EC for strengthening bilateral and networked territorial cooperation between different types of organisations operating in border areas. As forms of integration of neighbouring communities, modern cross-border partnerships are part of a networked economy, with a great variety of informal networks of processes taking place between people (Mikuła et al., 2007, p. 21) as well as

formalised cooperation in the form of, for example, clusters, networks, and various types of unions and associations.

Cross-border partnership in a project co-funded under the INTERREG programme manifests in four dimensions (*Regulation (EC) No. 1080/2006...*, 2006):

- joint preparation of the project – the project is a result of the work done by and agreements made by all partners; the partners, who are in constant contact, are actively involved in its preparation from the idea to the completion of the joint application with its annexes and submission for evaluation as part of the call for proposals for the INTERREG programme;
- joint implementation of the project – the partners jointly participate in the execution of activities provided for in the project on both sides of the border, contributing to the attainment of its goals and the cross-border effect;
- common staff of the project – joint project management by a project team that represents each of the partners and takes actions to attain goals and results planned within the project on each side of the border;
- joint funding of the project – the project has one common budget that contains the expenditure incurred by each of the partners on their side of the border; the project budget consists of at least the partners' own resources and funding from INTERREG programme.

In cross-border projects one can conventionally distinguish internal stakeholders, who are directly involved in the project on both sides of the border, and external stakeholders, who are not directly involved in the project but interact with the project's internal stakeholders on both sides of the border. The typology of these stakeholders is presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Typology of cross-border project stakeholders

No.	Stakeholder type	Examples of stakeholders	Type of involvement with a cross-border project
1.	Internal stakeholders – beneficiaries	Project partners, i.e., the organisations implementing the cross-border project on both sides of the border with the support of the INTERREG programme.	Entities responsible for the attainment of the planned project goals and outcomes, including the cross-border effect; they plan, organise, execute and control the project on both sides of the border, as well as co-fund the project with the support obtained from the INTERREG programme.
2.	Internal stakeholders – project team members and supervisors	Representatives of the beneficiaries, who take care of various tasks (e.g., executive, accounting and administrative, informational and promotional, reporting, etc.) as part of the project management (e.g., workers, external specialists and experts), members of steering and monitoring committees, etc.	Project workers directly responsible for the attainment all goals and all activities, including communication with target groups of the project to generate the planned project results.
3.	External stakeholders – project recipients	The INTERREG Managing Authority on the border, staff and associates of the beneficiaries not directly involved in the implementation of the project, local communities, public institutions, NGOs, entrepreneurs and other recipients of project results, e.g., the media.	Target groups of the project that should benefit from its results, including the cross-border effect.
4.	External stakeholders – regulators	Entities responsible for the border area development management, e.g., central and local public administration, EU institutions and other international institutions, Euroregions, EGTC, institutions responsible for the accounting of projects co-funded under the INTERREG programme, control institutions, etc.	Institutions interested in the execution of cross-border projects by beneficiaries to improve the conditions for socioeconomic development of the border area with the correct use of funds under the INTERREG programme.

No.	Stakeholder type	Examples of stakeholders	Type of involvement with a cross-border project
5.	External stakeholders – providers	Entities, having no organisational or capital relations with project beneficiaries, involved in the execution of individual tasks under the project, e.g., project documentation contractors, suppliers, contractors and subcontractors, financial and insurance institutions, consulting firms, law firms, etc.	Entities hired by the beneficiaries on the basis of the applicable legislation to carry out specific tasks in the project against payment.
6.	External stakeholders – direct competitors	Entities eligible for cross-border projects supported by INTERREG programme.	Project initiators competing to win co-funding for substitute cross-border projects under INTERREG programme.
7.	External stakeholders – indirect competitors	Entities implementing cross-border projects (in a comprehensive or phased manner) from funds other than those of the INTERREG programme.	Project initiators competing for the co-funding of substitute cross-border projects from various sources to achieve the planned objectives and results in a comprehensive or phased manner.

Source: own work.

The typology presented in Table 4.1 shows not only the differentiation of organisations that can be considered stakeholders of a cross-border project but also their various roles and areas of involvement with the project. In general, an interest in the participation in cross-border projects financially supported by the INTERREG programme results from the following conditions:

- the needs and interests of organisations operating in border areas (project beneficiaries, recipients and regulators);
- professional and social roles (project team members and supervisors);
- statutory tasks (regulators, providers);
- business goals (providers);
- competition for resources (direct and indirect competitors).

Catalysts for the development of cross-border relationships between different stakeholder groups include:

- the possibility of supplementing the lack of public, social and private capital invested in the development of the border region with funds from the INTERREG programme;
- strict focus of the support on strategic and priority areas in terms of the border area development policy, prevention of the dispersion of support through fragmented projects;
- the possibility to take advantage of the synergy and scale effects (Furmankiewicz & Foryś, 2006, pp. 109–128) in the implemented projects;
- growing popularity of territorial partnerships including cross-border ones as the direction of network cooperation development direction in a modern knowledge-based economy;
- developing know-how in building cross-border partnerships, improving the process of diagnosing the needs and expectations of stakeholders and professionalising tools and methods for cross-border project management and maintaining the required sustainability of their results.

Barriers to the development of cross-border relationships between different stakeholder groups potentially involved in cross-border projects include:

- low level of mutual trust;
- language, cultural, religious and philosophical differences;
- varied interests, goals and needs;
- insufficient motivation to deepen cross-border relations;
- insufficient know-how to implement cross-border projects;
- no funds for the implementation of cross-border projects.

4.3. Cross-border project lifecycle

Nowadays, projects are a key tool for improving modern organisations and achieving their goals (Skalik, 2014, pp. 29–39). Initiatives that at the same time pursue at least several of the objectives identified by the stakeholders involved are a special type of projects. One such initiative is a cross-border project that can be a separate initiative or part of the continuous cooperation between two or more organisations operating in border areas. The characteristics of such a project include its novelty and differentiation from routine activities (Pawlak, 2007, p. 17), specificity (fixed implementation timeframe and budget), uniqueness (unique products and results on both sides of the border), as well as set goals, objectives and expected results (Lewis, 2001, p. 5; Juran, 2003, p. 24; Project Management Institute, 2000, p. 10; Pawlak, 2007, p. 17). Projects are associated with various types of risks, mostly resulting from the complexity of the cross-border environment, and their implementation requires the commitment of specific resources on both sides of the border: human, material and financial resources and specialist knowledge (Trocki, 2007, pp. 14–15). A project is a coherent and coordinated operation designed to accomplish an indivisible task (Szot-Gabryś, 2011, p. 11), which may cause certain difficulties in the conditions of its implementation on both sides of the border at the same time. In addition, a cross-border project meets the following requirements:

- it is implemented jointly by at least two partners from neighbouring border areas of at least two states;
- it covers tasks executed on both sides of the border;
- it involves representatives of each cooperating organisation who comprise a joint cross-border project team;
- it includes activities in addition to those normally executed by the partners;

- its results not only benefit the partner organisations and target groups on both sides of the border but also generate a cross-border effect (Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego, n.d.). It should guarantee the sustainable impact of project results on the cooperating organisations and both parts of the border area, as well as the attainment of objectives of the INTERREG programme, i.e., beneficial changes in specific areas of development of the entire border area, e.g., culture, education, the economy, etc.

The co-funding from the INTERREG programme is of key importance in the process of preparing, implementing and controlling the implementation of a cross-border project, which imposes certain standards and management requirements on such a project. In particular, the goals and conditions of project implementation have to comply with the terms of use of the INTERREG programme, which provides non-reimbursable co-funding in the form of grants to beneficiaries while it poses specific challenges related to the achievement of the objectives of ETC (European Parliament, 2023) as part of the EU cohesion policy. Efficient spending of public funds, especially EU subsidies, on cross-border projects should not only serve the needs and expectations of the organisations cooperating in border areas and the target groups they support, it should also have a positive impact on the development of the border areas by tackling problems that transcend national borders and need to be solved jointly, and that enable the potential of various areas to be developed jointly (*Regulation (EU) 2021/1059...*, 2021). It is worth mentioning at this point that a cross-border project can also be financed from the partners' own funds and/or other external resources (reimbursable and non-reimbursable, public and commercial), e.g., in the form of subsidies from the EU funds (e.g., as part of Erasmus Plus programme or Horizon Europe programme); however, the main financial instrument of

the EU based on the resources from the European Regional Development Fund and financially supporting cross-border projects in keeping with the development objectives of the EU border areas is the INTERREG programme.

The planning of a cross-border project absolutely requires the equal involvement of each project partner and should respect the following principles (Kurowska-Pysz, 2018):

- the project responds to the needs of each partner and its stakeholders on both sides of the border; these needs are examined and assessed realistically, in relation to the activities and costs planned in the project;
- each partner enters the partnerships in an agreed manner adequate to its knowledge, skills, competencies and opportunities, considering the cost-benefit ratio;
- the project allows each partner to achieve the expected results;
- the project results from a genuine desire for cross-border cooperation and is not imposed by circumstances, e.g., availability of EU funds;
- the project leads to results from which the further development path of the partnership should follow, e.g., defined on the basis of the developed cross-border cooperation strategy;
- the project is being implemented in a way that promotes trust among partners and helps overcome barriers to the cross-border communication and cooperation;
- the project is managed in such a manner that the partners are still willing to cooperate and involve other organisations in cross-border cooperation after the project's completion.

Cross-border project planning and implementation require one to consider a range of assumptions, e.g., in terms of barriers to the development of cross-border cooperation (Kurows-

ka-Pysz et al., 2018, pp. 134–147), the initiative's compliance with border area development strategies, especially if the project is financed from public funds, including EU funds, or implemented by entities that create the development policy in an area.

While applying for funds from the INTERREG programme, the partners of a cross-border project complete an application form that includes the justification and description of the project, its goals and target groups, description of activities, compliance with the regional strategies and concepts, as well as with the EU policies, schedule, values of project indicators (outcomes), institutional and financial sustainability, cross-border cooperation and cross-border impact. Further implementation of the project after the EU support takes place in line with the assumptions adopted in the application form as well as with EU guidelines on the financing of cross-border cooperation.

The partners of a cross-border project co-financed from the INTERREG programme must meet not only the above-mentioned criteria of the joint preparation, implementation, financing and management of a cross-border project (*Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006...*, 2006) but also should select a leading partner from among themselves. The leading partner is one of the partners of the project who takes responsibility for the implementation of the entire cross-border project and its accounting, as well as for the sustainability of the project results over the declared period (at least 5 years) while other partners support the leading partner in these efforts. The duties of the leading partner in the implementation of a cross-border project are as follows (*Art. 20 of the Regulation...*, 2006):

- to establish relations with other project partners and stakeholder groups affected by the project;
- to submit the application for co-financing and potential supplements to it;

- to sign the project co-financing agreement on behalf of all the partners;
- to ensure the implementation of the entire project, including the management of crisis situation and preventing crises (Skalik, 2009, pp. 72–80);
- to monitor the expenditure of the partners participating in the project for compliance with the budget and executed tasks;
- to coordinate the approval of beneficiaries' expenditure and transfer of the contribution of the European Regional Development Fund to the partners participating in the project.

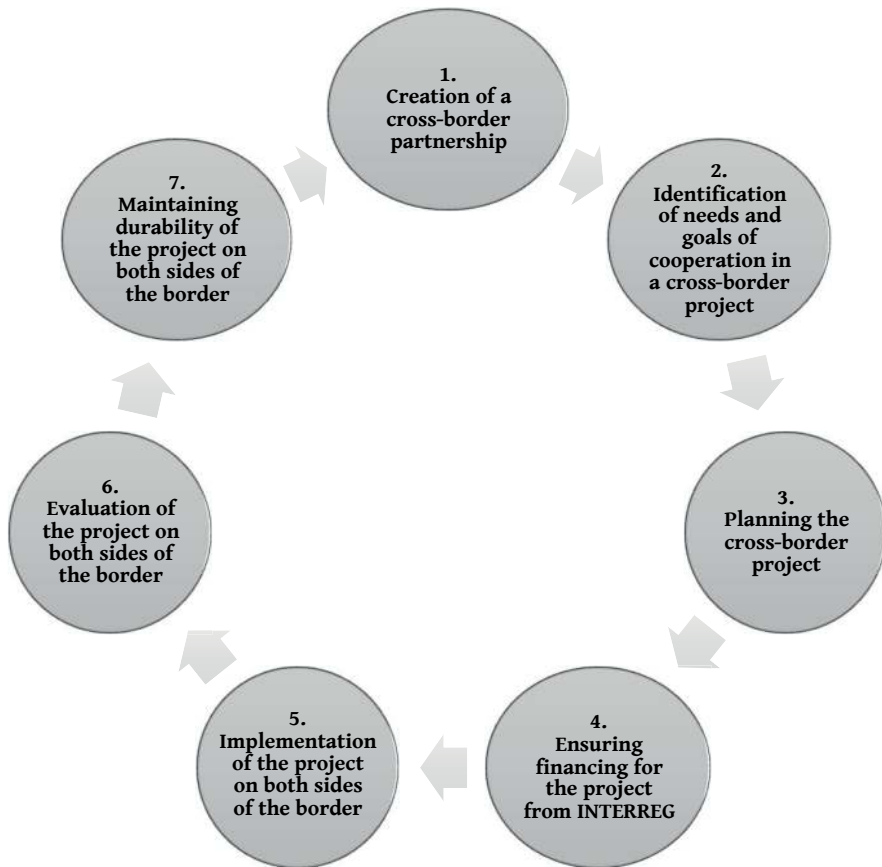
Other partners in a cross-border project execute their tasks in line with the scope of the project and the partnership agreement, and bear responsibility in the event of irregularities occurring in their declared expenses.

After the conclusion of the agreement on INTERREG co-financing, the project partners are obliged to continue to implement it in line with the conditions of support. Therefore, in addition to the tasks planned for the project on both sides of the border, they have additional duties resulting from the EU support rules, e.g., to provide information and promotion throughout the project implementation period, and to perform the reporting and monitoring activities. The main purpose of the project is to generate the planned and long-term cross-border effect. This is why, once the project has been completed, the partners are obliged to continue to develop or at least maintain cross-border cooperation for a further 5 years and to ensure that the results of the project are available in an undamaged condition for the target groups of the project. The partners report the status of these tasks to the INTERREG Managing Authority for up to 5 years after the end of the project and, more specifically, after its financial clearance.

In the context of ensuring effective management of a cross-border project, one can speak of a specific life cycle (European Com-

mission, 2007, p. 32) following the model adopted by the EC (Stowarzyszenie Project Management Polska, 2009, p. 54). Its phases are presented in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2. Cross-border project lifecycle



Source: Kurowska-Pysz (2020, pp. 47–76).

The cross-border project lifecycle is a sequence of stages a project goes through from the creation of a cross-border partnership for purposes of its implementation to the end of its sustainability phase. The completion of successive stages signals progress towards achieving the planned outcomes of the project (Stowarzyszenie Project Management Polska, 2009, p. 54). Descriptions of individual stages in the lifecycle of a cross-border project

co-financed from INTERREG programme from the perspective of its management are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. Lifecycle of a cross-border project co-financed from the INTERREG programme

Stage of a cross-border project lifecycle	Management considerations for subsequent stages of a cross-border project	Requirements resulting from the commitment of INTERREG programme
1. Creation of a cross-border partnership	Ensuring an agreement on cross-border cooperation between partners, e.g., through the implementation of joint cross-border projects co-financed by the INTERREG programme, which meet their needs and objectives and contribute to the development of the border area.	Documentation of the partners' cross-border cooperation as the basis for joint application for support from the INTERREG programme, fulfilment of eligibility requirements of the INTERREG programme for the implementation of future cross-border projects.
2. Identification of needs and goals of cooperation in a cross-border project	A realistic diagnosis of the needs of various stakeholder groups on both sides of the border, identifying the common problem that can be solved thanks to the implementation of the cross-border project.	Fulfilment of the project's eligibility requirement and target groups in relation to the thematic area of support provided for in the INTERREG programme and other grant application conditions.
3. Cross-border project planning	Planning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cross-border project goals, tasks and outcomes; - resources and potentials that partners contribute to the project; - communication tools of the project (including cross-border communication). 	Preparation of an application for INTERREG funding for the project, including the budget and timetable of activities. The application should meet all the eligibility criteria for a given call for proposals in the INTERREG programme.
4. Securing project funding from the INTERREG programme	Provision by the partners of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the financing of all costs related to project implementation including costs covered with the INTERREG grant and other project costs; - funds to maintain the project's liquidity in the course of its implementation. 	Selection of the project to be co-financed from INTERREG programme. Conclusion of a cross-border project co-financing agreement between the project partners and the INTERREG Managing Authority. Securing the partners' contribution to the project.

Stage of a cross-border project lifecycle	Management considerations for subsequent stages of a cross-border project	Requirements resulting from the commitment of INTERREG programme
5. Project implementation on both sides of the border	<p>Execution of the tasks planned in the project. Project management is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – managing the common staff (e.g., ensuring appropriate communication in the team, documentation of activities, monitoring); – risk management (e.g., monitoring risks on both sides of the border and minimising their occurrence in the project); – quality management for the project (e.g., monitoring project implementation indicators, internal evaluation of the project); – project budget management; – managing relations with project stakeholders (e.g., information and promotion activities). 	<p>Project implementation in line with the guidelines of the INTERREG programme.</p> <p>Progress reporting to the INTERREG Managing Authority.</p> <p>Meeting the information and publicity requirements of the INTERREG programme.</p> <p>Communicating with the project stakeholders on both sides of the border.</p> <p>Maintaining project documentation in line with the requirements of the INTERREG programme.</p>
6. Project evaluation on both sides of the border	<p>Project partners with the involvement of other stakeholders evaluate the project on both sides of the border by comparing the planned and the attained values, including in terms of the cross-border effect, and identify the added value of the project.</p>	<p>The INTERREG Managing Authority evaluates the project on both sides of the border in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – attaining the planned goals and outcomes; – spending resources on schedule and on budget, in an efficient, expedient and economical manner; – attaining the planned cross-border effect.
7. Maintaining project durability on both sides of the border	<p>Maintaining the objectives and results of the project and its cross-border effect in the long term.</p> <p>Strengthening and further developing cross-border partnerships, e.g., towards networking.</p>	<p>Monitoring and analysing the project's durability on both sides of the border for 5 years after its financial completion.</p> <p>Defining a strategy for further cross-border cooperation between the partners.</p> <p>Project control by competent institutions and agencies in terms of retaining the project's durability, cooperation between the partners, and the project's attained cross-border effect for 5 years after its completion.</p>

Source: Kurowska-Pysz (2018).

The organisations implementing cross-border projects and benefiting from INTERREG programmes should also consider the implementation of a control function in project management, taking into account the following assumptions:

1. Implementing the project so to ensure that each partner achieves the cooperation objectives and outcomes set, which must be in line with the objectives of the INTERREG programme and with the contents of the approved application.
2. Ensuring that the project has an appropriate input-output relationship acceptable to the partners (for all resources, including non-financial ones).
3. Fulfilment of all requirements related to the partnership and implementation of cross-border projects (eligibility, budget, implementation period, scope) resulting from the guidelines on the disbursement of EU funds for such initiatives, under pain of losing all or part of the funding.
4. Ensuring communication and cooperation between the partners, enabling them to manage the project together properly and to continue working together after its completion (e.g., developing a strategy for further cooperation), as well as minimising barriers to cooperation.
5. Agreement to ensure the durability of the project, with partners providing all the required resources (e.g., human, financial, material, etc.) to guarantee the maintenance or further development of cross-border cooperation and the maintenance of project objectives.

The use of resources from the INTERREG programme to provide financial support to cross-border projects significantly improves conditions for the development of cross-border cooperation but does not guarantee that the planned objectives will be achieved. In previous research, key prerequisites for the development of cross-border relations included linking the activities

of organisations implementing cross-border cooperation projects to external funding. For example, the INTERREG programme helps bring together cross-border partnerships to jointly solve problems in border areas and to build sustainable cooperation between neighbouring organisations in order to bridge development gaps and strengthen international competitiveness among other things. One cannot assume that this goal will be achieved exclusively through cross-border projects; therefore, it is expected that sustainable alliances of cooperating organisations involving various groups of external stakeholders as well will constitute an added value of such projects, which will improve the intensity of cross-border cooperation and the degree of integration of the neighbouring communities. In practice though, this approach contradicts the real motivations of many organisations that treat cross-border partnerships solely as arrangements for the joint use of grants to implement cross-border projects. However, requirements of cross-border projects applying for co-financing under the INTERREG programme are conducive to setting long-term partnership goals. Such goals are attainable provided that the cooperating organisations are adequately prepared, particularly from the point of view of the management of the partnerships they set up.

In many cases, a gap can be noticed between the formal requirements for cross-border partnerships in the INTERREG programme and the real partnership in projects. The effectiveness of the cross-border partnership, i.e., the result of the actions taken, described by the relation between the generated effects and the project's expenditures, can be referred to the degree to which the common objectives of the partners on both sides of the border are achieved thanks to their cooperation. In addition, the effectiveness of cross-border partnerships results, for example, from the project assumptions, both in terms of achieving the common objectives of the partners achieved through cooperation and in

terms of achieving the objectives of the INTERREG programme from which the project is co-financed. Cross-border partnerships between the cooperating organisations can develop both in accordance with the direction of cooperation set by the project and, additionally, in other directions, which is the added value of a cross-border project.

4.4. New challenges in the management of cross-border projects in the post-pandemic perspective

The management of a cross-border project can be defined as the entirety of actions taken to guarantee its effective implementation, leading to the attainment of the planned cross-border effect. This area requires interdisciplinary knowledge and a high level of competence in terms of management methods and techniques, especially for those organisations which implement multiple projects at the same time or are part of an inter-organisational partnership network (Marciszewska & Jokiel, 2019, pp. 9–14), as is the case for cross-border projects.

Project management uses the process-based approach that harmonises executive processes, i.e., the implementation of the tasks planned within the project, and supporting processes such as the administrative, legal and financial handling of the project by means of management processes, i.e., goal setting, planning, organising and controlling (Trocki, 2018, pp. 9–25). Methods and tools based on the INTERREG programme guidelines have already been developed in the approach to cross-border project management that facilitate the achievement of the required quality of project objectives and results, while maintaining the project budget and timetable. Project management entails the risk resulting from the need to make decisions regarding the future even though the available information is not complete. In stabi-

lised micro- and macro-external environments, project management considers standard risks whose occurrence is being prevented and, if they materialise, steps are taken to mitigate the effects of such negative events; however, in a turbulent project environment, unpredictable negative events or phenomena may occur, posing risks to the success of the project. In extreme cases, these can be considered ‘black swans’ or unexpected events or phenomena that entail huge consequences but, in hindsight, turn out to be explicable phenomena that could have been foreseen (Nassim, 2015, pp. 595–7955).

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic that started in Wuhan, China, and quickly spread throughout the world was such an event. The World Health Organization declared it a pandemic on 11 March 2020. Even though the world has had experience with epidemics since the time of the Roman Empire (Chróst, 2020, pp. 90–102), most countries received the news of the outbreak of the pandemic with caution, awaiting further developments rather than implementing appropriate interventions (Golinowska & Zabdyr-Jamroz, 2020, pp. 1–31). However, the phenomenon was spreading fast enough for them to gradually start introducing various types of restrictions, e.g., on cohabitation, assembly, public transport, etc., and ultimately most national borders were closed as well. The said preventive and protective actions, as well as other actions presented in Chapter Three, were designed, first and foremost, to limit the further spread of the pandemic. The consequences of travel restrictions and, above all, the difficulties in crossing borders have significantly complicated the daily and working lives of border communities and have affected all forms of cross-border cooperation and projects. Most projects were prolonged, postponed, cancelled or transferred online if their continuation was possible during the pandemic. Therefore, all the components of the internal and external environment, both micro and macro, in which cross-border projects were implement-

ed changed radically and rapidly. Prior research has proven that the COVID-19 pandemic hindered, at least temporarily, the implementation of cross-border projects, which resulted from, among other things, the following factors (Kurowska-Pysz, 2022):

- restrictions introduced by the national and regional authorities and by project partners themselves;
- changes in methods of implementing cross-border projects introduced by the INTERREG Managing Authorities;
- changes related to personal participation in project activities and changes of methods of communication within the project team and the communication with projects' target groups;
- changes of organisational behaviours related to the transfer of the majority of activities to online channels;
- changes of priority actions taken by project partners and target groups;
- project management staff shortages (e.g., sick leave), changes in the time needed for individual activities, and lack of digital competence to carry out certain tasks online.

It could be argued that the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the management of individual phases of a cross-border project during the period of pandemic restrictions and possibly also after the pandemic. Due to the requirement for projects to be implemented on both sides of the border, the restrictions introduced during the pandemic forced a change in project implementation methods and changed the need for specific managerial competencies necessary to manage cross-border projects during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research conducted in 2022 and 2023 (Pozytek, 2022; Miarecka & Wojtowicz-Żygadło, 2020, pp. 7–17; Fila et al., 2023, pp. 3301–3304; Danielak & Wysocki, 2022, pp. 7–20) indicates that at least some of the changes in the management of cross-border projects during the COVID-19 pandemic have already taken root and developed into new routines. Such organi-

sational behaviours include remote communication, remote work and development of digital products and services, which are available to target groups of the project in virtual space. These changes became permanent very quickly. It is possible to assume that they will contribute to an improvement of the project management process in the longer term and will help improve the resistance of cross-border cooperation to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1. Research problem and assumptions, research conception

The research problem of the study can be reduced to the question of how to shape the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises and disruptions, through the management of cross-border projects. Although the issues of cross-border cooperation and management of cross-border projects co-financed by the INTERREG programmes had been very well recognised by academics and practitioners, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences changed their perception by both groups. The inadequacy of cross-border cooperation mechanisms and the fragility of the cross-border relationships built were recognised, despite their anchoring in ongoing projects co-financed by the INTERREG programmes. Restrictions on cross-border flows and even periodic border closures between EU Member States, as well as other impediments to cross-border projects under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, revealed the high vulnerability of the cross-border project management and cross-border cooperation

itself to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This issue has not been analysed in depth so far, as the pandemic lasted in Europe from 2020 to 2022, and the first comprehensive assessment of its impact on cross-border project management and cross-border cooperation was not possible until 2022–2023.

The observed changes in cross-border cooperation and the management of cross-border projects as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the weakening of ties in some cross-border partnerships, the virtualisation of cross-border relations and even the tendency towards rebordering, confirm that there is a need to make cross-border cooperation more resilient to various types of crises and disruptions. One direction for such actions could be changes in the management of cross-border projects, which is strongly linked to the conditions for funding these projects from the INTERREG programmes. However, obtaining an answer to the question of how to shape the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises through cross-border project management requires both literature studies and empirical research.

The theoretical considerations carried out in Chapters One to Four enabled the authors to formulate the conclusions presented below. Based on these findings, the theoretical research assumptions and an empirical research design were defined for assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on selected issues related to cross-border project management and cooperation in cross-border partnerships, as well as identifying factors shaping the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Firstly, as Chapter One of the study shows, the implementation of principles such as partnership, transparency, subsidiarity, as well as the involvement of civil society helped to cement European cooperation in various dimensions, including cross-border cooperation. This process was strengthened by the establishment of the INTERREG programmes. The first edition of the INTERREG Pro-

gramme for all eligible borderlands took place between 1990 and 1993 and covered, among other things, the Franco-German borderland. In the Polish-Czech borderland, on the other hand, the possibility of participating in the INTERREG Programme only opened up with the accession of Poland and Czechia to the EU in 2004. It can therefore be said that there is a difference of 25 years of experience of cross-border cooperation among the partners using INTERREG programmes in the Franco-German and Polish-Czech borderlands. This important difference affecting the project maturity of the cooperating partners benefiting from the INTERREG programmes was considered as a factor potentially justifying the differences in the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the management of cross-border projects and building the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises in the two studied borderlands.

Secondly, the next chapter of the study presents further differences regarding the maturity of cross-border cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe (Polish-Czech borderland) and Western Europe (Franco-German borderland), which concern elements such as:

- the level of trust between cooperating partners (Franco-German borderland - high; Polish-Czech borderland - relatively low);
- intensity of cross-border flows (Franco-German borderland - very high; Polish-Czech borderland - moderate);
- number and extent of involvement of partners in cross-border cooperation (Franco-German borderland - low number of cooperating partners but deep integration; Polish-Czech borderland - high number of cooperating partners but weak integration).

Thirdly, borderlands are areas with a limited capacity to respond positively to shocks and undergo transformation processes, e.g., because of their location at the interface between separate socio-economic systems and the governance structures

belonging to them. The task of dealing with the effects of external disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic falls largely on border communities and their representatives, who must operate in a state of perpetual instability and unpredictability. The resilience of borderlands to crises can be strengthened through various types of linkages, interactions across borders, cross-border flows and various forms of cross-border partnerships, e.g., within the projects co-financed by the INTERREG programmes.

Resilient cross-border partnerships are able, among other things, to manage and overcome challenges arising from pandemics and crises, including through cross-border projects.

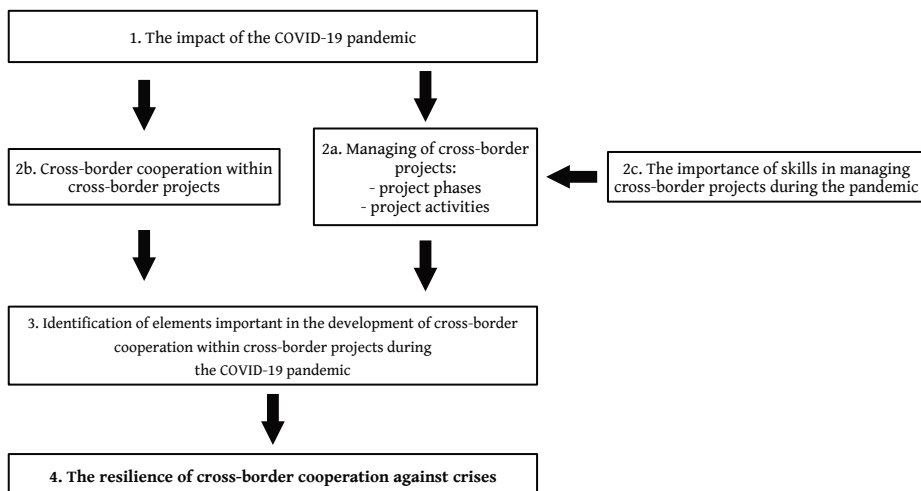
Fourthly, as shown in the Third Chapter, the COVID-19 pandemic had a stifling effect on cross-border integration and cooperation processes, including through its negative impact on the implementation of cross-border projects, but it is assumed that this impact was not equally strong in all borderlands of the EU. Factors that may have influenced such differences include the degree of maturity and scale of experience in cross-border cooperation or the preparedness for cross-border cooperation, e.g., the skills of the cross-border project management team.

Fifthly, the Fourth Chapter identifies elements of cross-border project management, such as the cross-border project life cycle, project activities, or cross-border cooperation in projects that were potentially exposed to the negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Preliminary conclusions were also formulated on new challenges in project management, in terms of strengthening the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The research concept shown in Fig. 5.1 is to analyse the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic (1) had on key aspects of cross-border project management, i.e., project life cycle stages and project activities (2a), and, on the one hand, its impact on the cross-border cooperation in these projects (2b). In line with the assump-

tions outlined above, it was assumed that building the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises (4) can take place through the appropriate management of cross-border projects and the strengthening of cooperation in cross-border partnerships in these projects (3). An assessment of the vulnerability of the various elements shaping cross-border project management and cross-border cooperation to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic made it possible to identify factors that have a significant impact on building the resilience of cross-border cooperation to such crises. The skills of project team members were tentatively identified as one such factor (2c); the suitability of these members regarding the management of cross-border projects during a pandemic was separately verified during the course of the research. The study takes into account both a comparative perspective (the issues described above were assessed separately in relation to the Franco-German and Polish-Czech borderlands) as well as a combined perspective based on a summary evaluation of the research results obtained in both studied borderlands.

Figure 5.1. Research concept



Source: own elaboration.

5.2. Methodological approach, research methods and procedure

This study's objective is to identify factors related to the management of cross-border projects co-financed by the INTERREG programmes, as well as factors related to the cooperation of partners in these projects, which contribute to strengthening the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises and disruptions.

In order to achieve the aim of the study and address the research problem outlined above, the following exploratory research questions were formulated:

1. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the phases of cross-border projects co-financed by the INTERREG programmes?
2. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the management of cross-border projects co-financed by the INTERREG programmes?
3. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect cross-border partnerships cooperation in projects co-financed by the INTERREG programmes?
4. How relevant were the different types of skills involved in managing cross-border projects co-financed by the INTERREG programmes during the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. Which elements shape the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises?
6. How do the elements that shape the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises relate to the management of cross-border projects co-financed by the INTERREG programmes?

Partial answers to the research questions posed above were obtained through a critical analysis of the literature and theoretical considerations. Providing complete answers to the re-

search questions was possible thanks to the empirical research carried out.

The empirical research was conducted in the interpretative methodological stream (Lisiński 2016), assuming that when solving the defined research problem, it is important to socially attribute meanings to the formulated conclusions. This means that the phenomenon under study can be interpreted in different ways, depending on the context. The method of incomplete numerical induction was identified as the general method of investigation. It is a method in which a general rule is derived from a limited number of details, following the principle of first observation, then generalisation. It involves moving from unitary empirical phenomena or processes, gleaned from observation, through their justification and construction of theory to the resolution of its value.

The study uses a triangulation of data sources, methods and research techniques, and a blended approach involving secondary research and primary research (qualitative and quantitative). This enabled different perspectives of information and data collection to be taken into account, and the knowledge gained from the triangulation effect proved more complete compared to using only one research method. This provided a holistic view of the research problem and consequently provided a better, more consistent empirical basis for inference (Teddlie, Tashakkori, 2010). In line with the interpretivist paradigm, no research hypotheses were set in the paper. This was justified by the impossibility of conducting the survey in a fully representative manner. The target groups of the study and the sampling method are described in detail in the next subsection.

The authors selected the following specific research methods:

- desk research analysis of documents relating to the implementation of cross-border projects co-financed by the

INTERREG programmes in the Franco-German and Polish-Czech borderlands,

- CATI (computer-assisted telephone interviewing) and CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview) surveys,
- IDI (Individual In-depth Interview),
- non-participatory observations on the COVID-19 pandemic cross-border project management process.

All detailed research methods were applied in an analogous way in the studies conducted in the Franco-German and Polish-Czech borderlands using the same research tools.

The survey form for the quantitative research (CATI, CAWI) consisted of seven metric questions and seven survey questions relating to the research questions formulated in the paper. The questions were either closed or open-ended, and were both single-choice and multiple-choice. The scenario of semi-structured IDI consisted of fifteen questions with themes linked to the research questions formulated in the study. Data for the desk research analysis was obtained from publicly available sources (e.g., INTERREG programmes websites and data published by INTERREG Managing Authorities). The non-participant observations, on the other hand, concerned cross-border educational projects carried out in the two surveyed borderlands between 2021 and 2022).

The characteristics of the survey respondents were developed using basic descriptive statistics methods. In addition to presenting distributions using absolute and relative numbers, descriptive statistics were used: mean (M), median (Me), standard deviation (SD).

In the next chapter of the study (subsections 6.1. and 6.2.), appropriate statistical tests were used to compare the issues analysed from the point of view of the characteristics of the cross-border project beneficiaries surveyed. The Mann-Whitney test was used to compare respondents' assessments of variables measured

on a Likert scale according to the respondent's country of origin (France, Germany, Poland or Czechia). In turn, the Kruskal-Wallis test was used to compare respondents' ratings of variables measured on a Likert scale according to the number of projects implemented (again within each country separately). A t-test for independent sample (t-test) was used to compare variables measured on a quantitative scale in the two populations (e.g. by country). Correlations between responses to questions measured on a Likert scale were measured by the rho-Spearman coefficient (rho). The significance of the correlation was assessed using the rank correlation independence test (t-test). Differences and statistically significant correlations were determined as follows: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$ (meaning, respectively, that the relationship is significant at the 0.01 / 0.05 / 0.10 significance level). Statistical analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0 (PS IMAGO PRO 8.0).

Subsection 6.3 of the study focuses on summary and comparative assessments of the Franco-German and Polish-Czech borderlands regarding factors related to the management of cross-border projects under the COVID-19 pandemic conditions. Key problems of the issue under study are those of resilience and cross-border cooperation. As these phenomena are not directly measurable, a set of questions was proposed to assess them. Once the metric properties of the indicators formulated in the survey questions were checked, they were used to measure resilience and cross-border cooperation. A similar approach was used for skills (which were examined based on a set of specific competences), as well as for project activities and project phases. Identical principles for the measurement of these phenomena were applied in the case of the two studied borderlands, where confirmation of the respective properties of the proposed tools was also obtained at the level of the entire studied population. In assessing the properties of the pro-

posed methods for measuring resilience, cross-border cooperation, skills, project activities and project phases, an analysis of the reliability and relevance of the proposed tools was carried out. The reliability of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. It was assumed that the scale will be considered reliable if this coefficient reaches a value of no less than 0.7 (Rószkiewicz, 2011, p. 28). In the next step, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to assess whether and which sub-scales of variables should be distinguished within a scale (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The sample size is adequate for this type of analysis (Hair et al., 1998) – total for both regions $n = 149$, thus exceeding the recommended threshold of $n = 100$. After checking the prerequisites, i.e., the correlation between the scale items, among other things using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy, which should exceed 0.5 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (in which $p < \alpha$ is expected) (Field, 2000), the parameters of the factor model were estimated using the principal components method (an adaptation of Hotteling's basic method for factor analysis) (Walesiak & Bak, 1997, pp. 75–87). The number of factors was confirmed using the Kaiser and Cattell criterion (scree graph), while in order to find a solution (indicating the items associated with a given factor), a factor rotation was performed (using the Varimax method recommended in the situation of orthogonal factors) (Wiktorowicz, 2016, pp. 299–301).

Once the relevant properties of the proposed measurement methods were confirmed, variables – summary indicators – were created to measure these phenomena in a holistic way. These variables, for each of the four issues analysed, were constructed as the average of the grades for each item (within a given group). More information on the variables obtained is presented for each of them separately in the following subsections. The distributions of the resulting summary variables are also present-

ed, using basic descriptive statistics. As the summary variables obtained have a quantitative level of measurement, the following were used: mean (M), median (Me), trimmed mean (M_T), standard deviation (SD), range (R), interquartile range (R_I), skewness (S) and kurtosis (K).

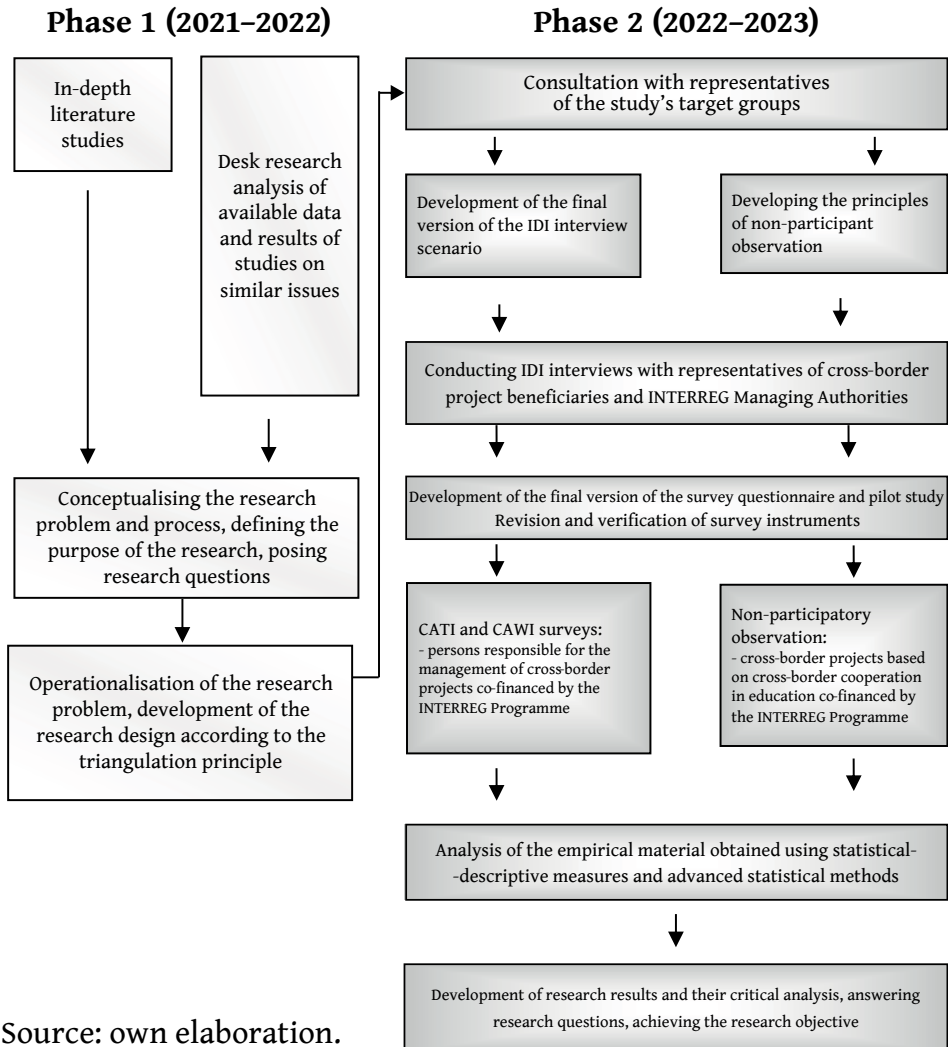
The links between resilience and cross-border cooperation, skills, as well as project phases and project activities were also assessed. Pearson's linear correlation coefficient (r) was used for this purpose.

In the next step, the results were collated across the two borderlands studied: both for individual issues and for summary variables. This allowed a comparison to be made between the management approaches of cross-border projects co-financed by the INTERREG programmes in the Franco-German and Polish-Czech borderlands. Comparisons of individual sub-indicators were made using the Mann-Whitney test. Summary indicators were compared using the t-test for independent samples. When there was a strong skewness in the distribution of the summary indicator and thus significant deviations from the normality of the distribution, the Mann-Whitney test was used instead of the t-test to compare also the summary indicators. Graphical representation of the differences between the borderlands studied is illustrated by box-plots. Separately for the two studied borderlands, correlations between resilience and cross-border cooperation, skills, as well as project phases and project activities were also assessed (using Pearson's linear correlation coefficient).

In assessing the significance of differences between the distributions of variables in the two populations, as well as in assessing the significance of correlations, the level of significance was assumed as follows: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Calculations were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0.

The procedure for carrying out all the described tests is shown in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2. Research procedure



Source: own elaboration.

The research procedure was divided into two phases. In the first phase (2021-2022), a literature search was carried out to identify the research area, identify the thematic scope, establish definitions relevant to the topic being undertaken, as well as the research methods and procedures used. The in-depth literature analysis carried out showed that the issue of linking cross-border project management with building the resilience of cross-border

der cooperation to crises is still niche and poorly recognised. At the same time, exploratory research was carried out by analysing found data and the results of other studies with similar themes in order to formulate the research problem and develop the research design.

In 2022, authors consulted the research procedure with the representatives of Eurodistricts (Franco-German borderland) and Euroregions (Polish-Czech borderland) who were engaged in making INTERREG programmes funding available to partners interested in submitting cross-border projects. Consultations aimed to determine whether it was possible and feasible to carry out the research with partners of cross-border micro-projects to capture the impact of the pandemic on the management of cross-border projects and cross-border cooperation and, ultimately, to identify factors for enhancing the resilience of cross-border cooperation in crises and disruptions.

In order to confirm the correct selection of variables describing respectively: phases of the cross-border project; cross-border project management activities; competences used in cross-border project management; factors potentially affecting resilience and cross-border cooperation; six interviews were each conducted with representatives of Eurodistricts in the Franco-German borderland and representatives of Euroregions in the Polish-Czech borderland, as well as with partners implementing cross-border projects in both borderlands. Following the drafting of the survey questionnaire, a pilot study (with 6 respondents) was carried out in both borderlands to verify the correctness of the preparation of the research tool. After the final approval of the research tool, a survey in both borderlands was carried out by specialised entities. At the same time, non-participatory observations were carried out on selected cross-border projects dedicated to education and co-financed by the INTERREG programmes (one project each on both surveyed borderlands).

The findings from the IDIs and the authors' observations, as well as the results of the quantitative research subjected to further in-depth statistical analyses, in conjunction with the conclusions from the literature analysis and the analysis of found data formulated in the theoretical part of the paper, were used to answer the research questions posed in the study.

5.3. Study area, target groups and sampling

5.3.1. Justification of the choice of study area and sampling

In general, cross-border projects carried out in the EU borderlands and co-financed by INTERREG programmes follow similar principles. However, in case of each individual INTERREG programme, the entities interested in using it for cross-border cooperation with the support of Managing Authorities of the programme, are free to define to a certain extent the specific conditions for the use of this fund. They can concern, for example, the thematic areas of support, the manner and principles of calls for proposals for projects, the specific conditions of eligibility of cooperation partners, activities and costs which can be funded, as well as the manner of accounting for projects. INTERREG programmes also differ in the specific requirements related to the ETC objectives.

Despite the differences indicated, the general conditions for the implementation and management of cross-border projects are similar throughout the EU. Much greater differences exist in the individual borderlands in terms of the way in which cross-border cooperation is developed as well as in terms of objectives eligible to co-fund by each INTERREG programme. Theoretical chapters of this study present several premises regarding the different level of maturity of cross-border cooperation and

experience in managing cross-border projects between the EU Member States, i.e. Western European countries as well as Central and Eastern European countries. These relate, among other things, to the period of access to INTERREG programmes, as well as to historical background and socio-political differences in Europe in the post-war period.

Regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the management of cross-border projects and cross-border cooperation in the EU, it can be assumed that there is a certain similarity in the restrictions and limitations the pandemic introduces across all borderlands. The changes resulting from the pandemic in the management of projects co-financed by the INTERREG programmes were agreed at the EC level (DG REGIO) and affected all EU borderlands and all INTERREG programmes to a similar extent.

It should be mentioned that, due to budgetary and other constraints related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the authors of the study did not have the opportunity to conduct research across the entire EU, so they planned to carry out comparative quantitative research in two EU borderlands that present different characteristics and approaches to cross-border cooperation. Given these differences and the assumption of a similar impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border projects in Western Europe as well as Central and Eastern Europe, the authors selected the Franco-German and Polish-Czech borderlands for quantitative research. It was assumed that the different level of maturity of cross-border cooperation and experience in managing cross-border projects are important factors that can influence the resilience of cross-border cooperation in these areas.


In order to ensure that similar cross-border projects can be compared, the study included only those actors who, during the period of the pandemic, i.e. from 2020 to 2022 inclusive, implemented the micro-projects, i.e. P2P projects with relatively low

budgets and local cross-border impact, but which have the strongest impact on the development of cross-border cooperation.

In the Franco-German borderland, cross-border cooperation partners implementing projects were able to benefit between 2014 and 2020 from the funds of the INTERREG V Upper-Rhine Programme 2014–2020. The programme was managed by the Grand Est Region based in Strasbourg. This public institution assessed, selected and accompanied to micro-projects co-financed by the Interreg Programme. The four Eurodistricts helped partners of micro-projects in the planning cross-border cooperation, application process and project implementation. They also have had an overview of cross-border cooperation on their territory. Characteristics of the Interreg V Upper-Rhine Programme in relation to micro-projects are shown in Table 5.1.

In the Polish-Czech borderland, partners of cross-border cooperation implemented micro-projects within the framework of a separate SPF within the INTERREG VA The Czech Republic – Poland Programme 2014–2020. The Programme was managed by the Czech Ministry of Regional Development based in Prague. The process of call for, selection, implementation and control of micro-projects supported by the INTERREG Programme was supervised by the Joint Technical Secretariat located in Olomouc (the Czech Republic), while the implementation of these activities was the responsibility of individual Euroregions, which organised calls for micro-projects within the framework of their so-called umbrella projects. In addition, they also took care to promote the Programme and encourage local stakeholders to develop cross-border cooperation through participation in projects. They also have had an overview of cross-border cooperation on their territory. Characteristics of INTERREG VA The Czech Republic – Poland Programme 2014–2020 in relation to micro-projects are shown in Table 5.2.

Table 5.1. The INTERREG V Upper-Rhine Programme 2014–2020 characteristics (micro-projects)


Supported area	
<p>Upper Rhine Area (Fig. 5.3) consisting of the Southern Palatinate, parts of Baden and Alsace.</p> <p>In Rhineland-Palatinate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landkreis Südliche Weinstrasse • Landkreis Germersheim, • Stadt Landau, • Verbandsgemeinde Hauenstein, • Verbandsgemeinde Dahner Felsenland. <p>In Baden-Württemberg:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stadtkreis / Landkreis Karlsruhe, • Stadtkreis Baden-Baden, • Landkreis Rastatt, • Ortenaukreis, • Landkreis Emmendingen, • Landkreis Breisgau-Hochschwarzwald, • Stadtkreis Freiburg-im-Breisgau, • Landkreis Lörrach, • Landkreis Waldshut <p>In Alsace:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Département du Bas-Rhin, • Département du Haut-Rhin. <p>In addition, there was an opportunity for partners from north-western Switzerland to participate in these projects.</p>	<p>Figure 5.3. Area supported by the programme</p>  <p>The map shows the Upper Rhine region, which is shaded in light blue. It covers parts of France (FRANKE), Germany (DEUTSCHLAND), and Switzerland (SCHWEIZ). The legend indicates that the blue area represents the 'Zone de programmation / Programmgebiet' (Zone of programming / Programme area). It also shows the 'Limite d'Etat / Staatsgrenze' (State boundary) and 'Département (F), Landkreis (D), Kanton (CH)' (Department in France, County in Germany, Canton in Switzerland). A scale bar at the bottom left indicates 0 to 50 km.</p> <p>Source: Manuel du Programme 2014-2020, Version 13 Adoptée par le Comité de suivi le 22 mai 2023, p. 7.</p>

Programme operators/managers
<p>Managing Authority – responsible for the management and implementation of the programme (Grand Est Region, France).</p> <p>Reference Eurodistrict – supports applicants submitting micro-project proposals in its assigned area. It gives its opinion on the selection of micro-projects for implementation through the Evaluation Committee</p> <p>Evaluation Committee – a structure at the Eurodistrict level responsible for evaluating micro-project applications.</p> <p>Steering Committee – responsible for selecting micro-projects for funding.</p>
Objectives of micro-projects
Greater identification of citizens with the cross-border Upper Rhine area, integration of civil society and intensified civic involvement in all cross-border cooperation issues.
Indicators to be achieved at the micro-project level (examples)
<p>New concepts, tools and facilities for administrative and civic cooperation;</p> <p>Users of new tools, instruments, facilities and services for administrative and civic cooperation;</p> <p>Promotional outcomes: e.g. participants in training; participants in a networking event; number of information media distributed; organisation of press conferences, etc.</p>
Eligible activities
Concrete and innovative, diverse activities based on meetings and exchanges between citizens and/or civil society.
Eligible entities
Only entities representing civil society, i.e. all legal entities governed by public or private law, non-profit, non-partisan, peace-oriented, which take action to advance common goals and ideals: political, cultural, social or educational. This definition includes, among others, public enterprises, associations, local authorities, schools, social economy structures, etc.

Eligible costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staff costs, i.e., salaries and voluntary service; • office and administrative costs. • travel, accommodation and food costs: • costs related to the use of external expertise and services, e.g. costs related to the organisation and implementation of events or meetings, translation; promotion, information, publicity. • costs of purchasing equipment and infrastructure.
Eligible project types
<p>The project partnership must be cross-border and provide one of the following financial dimensions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the partner incurring expenses: has its own budget to incur the expenses of the project, • co-financing partner: does not have own budget but financially contributes to another partner incurring expenditure within the partnership, • partner incurring expenses and providing co-financing: a partner that has its own budget in the project and provides additional resources, e.g. a grant, i.e. national co-financing to the project applicant for coordination.
Application, evaluation, implementation and control procedure
<p>The applicant draws up a grant application on the prescribed form, together with a budget and statements from partners. The applicant submits the application to the Managing Authority - Grand Est region. The application is evaluated in two phases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluation of the micro-project by the Evaluation Committee of the respective Eurodistrict; • selection of the micro-project by the Steering Committee. <p>The Managing Authority shall inform the micro-project applicant that the project has been selected for co-financing by the Steering Committee. A contract is signed by the Managing Authority and the Partners who are co-financing and/or incurring expenditure in the project. The implementation period of a micro-project defines the time frame during which all the planned activities are implemented. Expenditure (with some exceptions) must be incurred during the implementation period of the micro-project. The project leader is responsible for the proper implementation of the project and for keeping the Managing Authority and the Reference Eurodistrict regularly informed about the progress of the project, any changes and promotional activities undertaken. The Reference Eurodistrict should be invited to support the project partnership in activities of, for example, administrative, reporting and settlement nature. At the end of the project, a final report is submitted to the Managing Authority, which is prepared by the project leader in cooperation with all partners. European co-financing from the INTERREG Programme (up to 60%) is provided in the form of reimbursement of costs incurred and paid as part of the project, on presentation of supporting documents for all budgeted expenditure. Documentary control is carried out by the INTERREG Managing Authority. Reimbursement of expenditure is made on the basis of approved eligible expenditure at the request of the Managing Authority.</p>

Source: Manuel du Microproject, Version n° 3 du 5 décembre 2017.

Table 5.2. The INTERREG V-A The Czech Republic – Poland Programme 2014–2020 characteristics (micro-projects)

Supported area	
<p>Area supported by the programme (Fig. 5.4) includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on the Czech side, five regions: Liberec (districts: Liberec, Jablonec nad Nisou, Semily and Česká Lípa), Hradec Kralove (districts of Trutnov, Náchod, Rychnov nad Kněžnou, Hradec Králové and Jičín), Pardubice (districts of Ústí nad Orlicí, Svitavy, Pardubice and Chrudim), Olomouc (districts of Šumperk, Jeseník, Olomouc, Přerov and Prostějov) and Moravian-Silesian (districts of Bruntál, Karviná, FrýdekMístek, Ostrava, Opava and Nový Jičín); • on the Polish side, six sub-regions: Bielsko-Biała and Rybnik (Silesian Voivodeship), Jelenia Góra and Wałbrzych (Lower Silesian Voivodeship), Nysa and Opole (Opole Voivodeship), as well as Strzelin District (Wrocław sub-region in the Lower Silesian Voivodeship) and Pszczyna District (Tychy sub-region in the Silesian Voivodeship). 	<p>Figure 5.4. Area supported by the programme</p>  <p>Source: Applicant's Handbook Interreg V-A Programme Czech Republic-Poland, version 5</p>
Programme operators/managers	
<p>Managing Authority – responsible for the management and implementation of the INTERREG Programme (Ministry of Regional Development of the Czech Republic).</p> <p>Managing Partners of the Micro-Project Fund – Euroregions operating on the Polish-Czech border, i.e. Beskids, Cieszyn Silesia, Silesia, Pradziad, Glacensis and Nysa, implementing umbrella projects within the framework of which calls for micro-projects are organised according to the territorial jurisdiction of the Euroregions; they also evaluate and select micro-projects for funding, support and control their implementation in their area, and promote the Micro-Project Fund.</p> <p>Controller – responsible for checking the legality and regularity of expenditure demonstrated by the micro-project partners; the function of the Controller in Czechia is performed by the Centre for Regional Development of Czech Republic and in Poland by the voivodes (provincial governors).</p> <p>Euroregional Steering Committee – is responsible for selecting micro-projects for funding and monitoring progress in achieving the priority axes and objectives set out in the INTERREG Programme for the umbrella project in the given Euroregion, conducted under the SPF.</p>	

Objectives of micro-projects
The development of people-to-people cross-border relations, educational and cultural activities and social initiatives, and, where appropriate, the improvement of the area's infrastructure, in particular cross-border tourist infrastructure.
Indicators to be achieved at the micro-project level (examples):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of elements of cultural/natural heritage with improved attractiveness • Number of infrastructures providing access to/enhancing the use of the natural and cultural heritage • Number of joint mechanisms implemented in the field of cultural and natural heritage • Number of participants in joint educational and vocational preparation programmes to support cross-border youth employment, increase educational opportunities, higher education and vocational preparation • Number of partners involved in joint activities.
Eligible activities
<p>1. Promoting climate change adaptation, as well as risk prevention and management; 2. Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility; 3. Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning; 4. Strengthening the institutional capacity of public institutions and stakeholders and the efficiency of public administration.</p> <p>Micro-projects should address cooperation at local level and ensure that links between neighbouring communities are strengthened, e.g., within the people-to-people activity.</p>
Eligible entities
State (government), regional or local (municipal) institutions or associations of such institutions, or institutions established under public or private law for the specific purpose of meeting needs in the general interest, not having an industrial or commercial character and having legal personality, which are financed, for the most part, by the state, regional or local institutions or other bodies governed by public law, as well as non-governmental organisations having legal personality.

Eligible costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staff costs, i.e., salaries and voluntary service; • office and administrative costs; • travel, accommodation and food costs; • costs related to external expertise and services, e.g., the organisation and implementation of events; translation; promotion, information, publicity. • costs of purchasing equipment and infrastructure.
Eligible project types
<p>The partnership in a micro-project must be cross-border and can be implemented by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Partners incurring expenses, having their own budget to incur the expenses of the project; 2. Partners involved in the project implementation on their side of the border, without own budget, supported by the partner's budget. <p>The following types of projects are implemented under the Programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type A 'Joint' project – the leading partner applies for funding on behalf of both/all project partners. • Type B 'Partnership' project – funding is applied for separately by each partner. • Type C 'Independent' project – only one of the partners applies for funding.
Application, evaluation, implementation, and control procedure
<p>Partners prepare an application including a budget and statements of partners, which is submitted to the relevant Micro-Project Fund Managing Partner (Euroregion). The assessment of the application is carried out in two phases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluation by the Micro-Project Fund Managing Partner; • selection of the micro-project by the Euroregional Steering Committee. <p>The Micro-Project Fund Managing Partner shall inform the micro-project applicant of the co-financing granted by the Euroregional Steering Committee. Then, the project leader signs a contract with the respective Managing Partner of the Micro-Project Fund. The implementation period of a micro-project defines the time frame during which all the planned activities are implemented. Expenditure must be incurred during the implementation period of the micro-project. The project leader is responsible for the correct implementation of the project. The project leader undertakes to regularly inform the relevant Micro-Project Fund Managing Partner about the progress of the project, any changes and promotional activities undertaken. At the end of the project, a final report prepared by the project leader in cooperation with all partners is submitted to the Micro-Project Fund Managing Partner. This report, and in particular the spending of funds allocated as INTERREG Programme funding, is subject to verification by the Controller. European co-financing from the INTERREG Programme (up to 85%, 5% up to 85%, with an additional 5% from the state budget on the Polish side) is provided in the form of reimbursement of costs incurred and paid as part of the project, on presentation of supporting documents for all budgeted expenditure. Once the eligible expenditure has been audited and validated, it is reimbursed.</p>

Source: Applicant's Handbook The INTERREG V-A The Czech Republic Poland Programme 2014-2020, version 5.

In the Franco-German borderland, approximately 130 micro-projects were actively implemented during the pandemic period (2020–2022), and 60 respondents representing cooperating partners took part in the survey. Approximately 240 micro-projects were actively implemented in the Polish-Czech borderland between 2020 and 2022, and 89 respondents representing cooperating partners took part in the survey. Although the quantitative research was based on samples representative of the Franco-German and Polish-Czech borderlands as far as the COVID-19 pandemic period (2020–2022) is concerned, these samples were selected in a non-random manner. This was due to the specific conditions of conducting the survey between January and June 2022. The key obstacles to carrying out the survey on the full population of partners implementing cross-border micro-projects in both borderlands were:

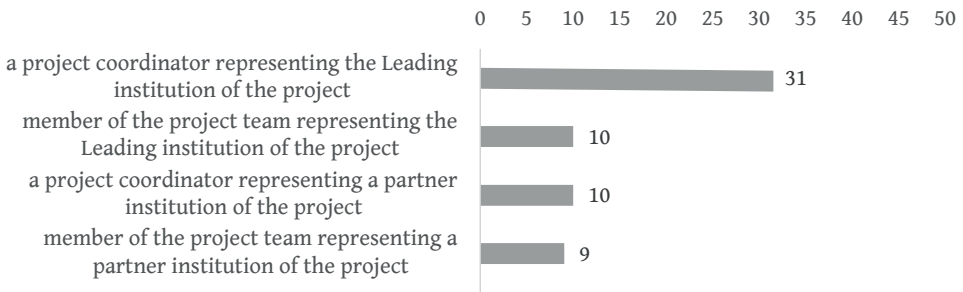
- low responsiveness of some micro-project partners during the pandemic or lack of response to the invitation to participate in the survey (this problem mainly affected NGOs in the Polish-Czech borderland, but also many partners on the French, German and Polish sides);
- difficulties in determining whether a micro-project was actually implemented during the pandemic period or whether project activities were suspended or postponed;
- lack of interest in participating in the survey from partners who have completed the implementation of micro-projects and the staff responsible for these activities have already changed their place of employment,
- numerous restrictions and limitations brought by the pandemic causing uncertainty for many partners about the possibility of continuing the micro-project and discouraging them from participating in the survey.

5.3.2. Characteristics of the research sample – Franco-German borderland

The survey involved 60 respondents representing partners implementing at least one cross-border micro-project within the framework of the INTERREG V Upper Rhine Programme 2014–2020: 31 respondents represented the French partners of the projects, and 29 of them represented the German partners.

The majority of respondents (totally, 68%) worked for the project lead partner. Most respondents ($n = 31$, 51.6%) were project coordinators representing the lead partners, and 16.7% ($n = 10$) were members of project teams representing the lead partners. Another 16.7% ($n = 10$) were coordinators representing other partners of the projects, and 15% ($n = 9$) – were members of teams representing other partners of the projects (Fig. 5.5).

Figure 5.5. Sample by type of the projects' participants ($n = 60$)



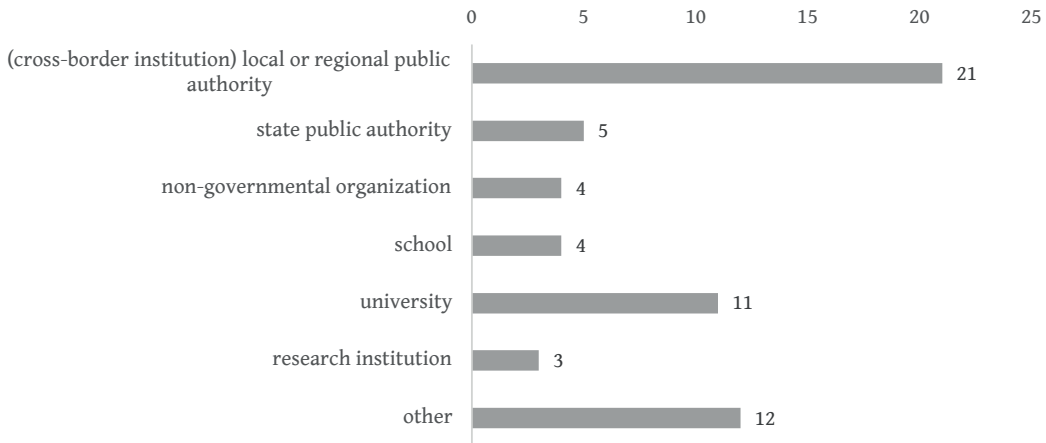
Source: own elaboration.

Project coordinators representing the lead partner institution were predominant among those representing projects implemented by both French and German institutions.

Local or regional public authorities represented one in three projects, one in six – by universities or other institutions (Fig. 5.6). Only single institution was represented by state public author-

ities, NGOs, research institutions or schools (number of them – from 3 to 5).

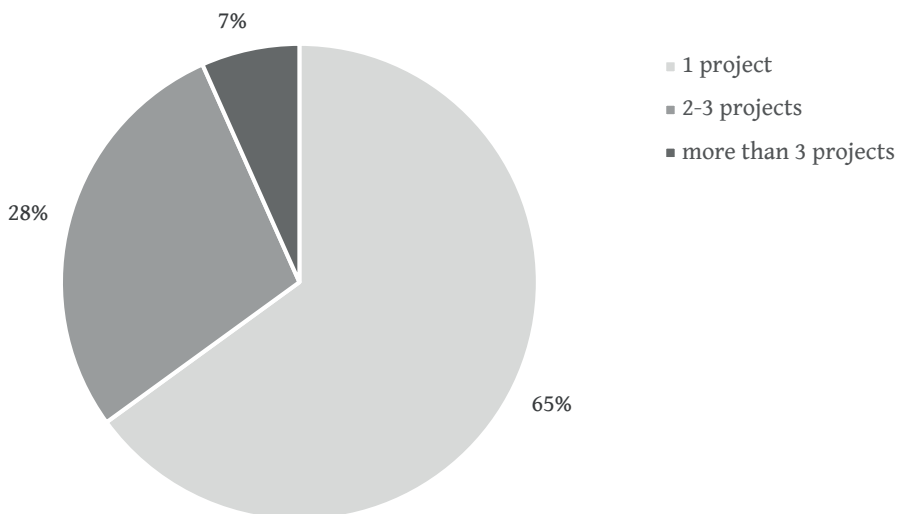
Figure 5.6. Sample by type of institution (number of respondents)



Source: own elaboration.

Most of institutions and organisations represented by respondents (two in three) implemented only one project co-funded by the INTER-REG Programme, and one in four implemented 2–3 projects (Fig. 5.7).

Figure 5.7. Sample by number of projects



Source: own elaboration.

Table 5.3. Projects by thematic area (number of respondents)

Thematic area	Total	France	Germany
Research, innovation, technology transfer	18	8	10
Natural heritage, biodiversity, pollution control	12	4	8
Public service, administrative cooperation	10	5	5
Bilinguism	10	7	3
Culture	10	7	3
Mobility, transport	8	5	3
Citizens cooperation	7	4	3
Training, Education	6	4	2
Sustainable economy, clean energy, energetic efficiency	6	5	1
Health	6	3	3
Employment	3	2	1
Heritage protection and promotion	3	3	0
Tourism	3	1	2
Risk prevention and management	3	2	1
Economic development	2	1	1
Local / regional development	2	2	0
Other	2	2	0

Source: own elaboration.

Most partners implemented projects covering five thematic areas: research, innovation, technology transfer ($n = 18$) or natural heritage, biodiversity, pollution control, public service, administrative cooperation, bilinguism or culture (n from 10 to 12). The less popular thematic areas were economic and local/regional development ($n = 2$). This structure was different in particular countries – in France, the most popular were projects related to research, inno-

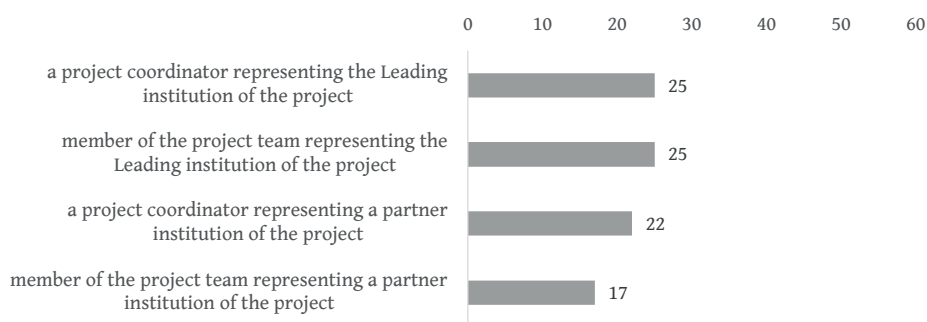
vation, technology transfer, bilingualism or culture (7–8 responses), in Germany – research, innovation, technology transfer or natural heritage, biodiversity, pollution control (8–9) (Tab. 5.3). Regarding other thematic areas to which the Interreg projects belong to, 2 responses were given: inclusive growth and climate protection.

5.3.3. Characteristics of the research sample – Polish-Czech borderland

The survey involved 89 respondents representing partners implementing at least one cross-border micro-project within the framework of the INTERREG V-A The Czech Republic – Poland Programme 2014–2020: 53 respondents represented the Czech partners of the projects, and 36 of them represented the Polish partners of the projects.

The majority of respondents (in total, 56.2%) worked for the project lead partner. Part of respondents ($n = 25$, 28.1%) were project coordinators representing the lead partners, and another 28.1% ($n = 25$) were members of project teams representing the lead partners. 24.7% ($n = 22$) were coordinators representing other partners of the projects, and 19.1% ($n = 17$) – were members of teams representing other partners of the projects (Fig. 5.8).

Figure 5.8. Sample by type of the projects participants ($n = 89$)

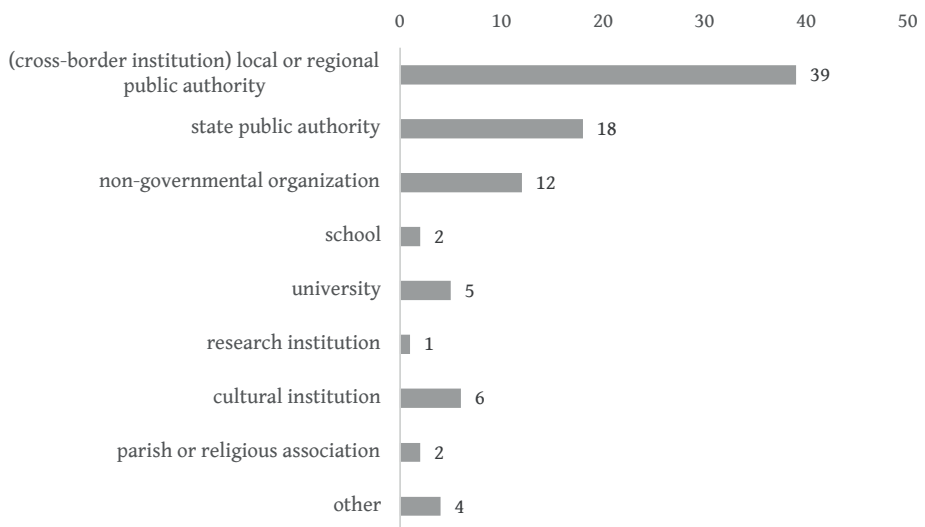


Source: own elaboration.

Project coordinators representing cross-border project leaders outnumbered those representing projects implemented by both Czech and Polish partners.

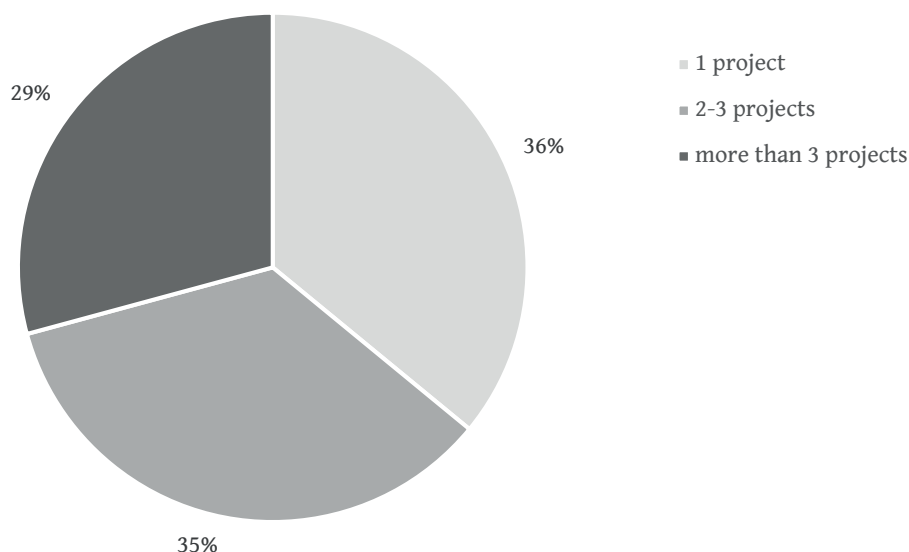
Two in five projects was represented by local or regional public authorities (including – cross-border institutions), one in five – by state public authority, and 13.5% – by non-governmental organisations. Only single institution was represented by universities, research institutions, schools, cultural institutions, parish or religious associations or other institutions (number of them – from 1 to 6) – Fig. 5.9.

Figure 5.9. Sample by type of institution (number of respondents)



Source: own elaboration.

The sample structure by the number of projects is rather balanced – approx. 1/3 project partners institutions implemented only one or 2–3 projects or more than 3 projects (Fig. 5.10).

Figure 5.10. Sample by number of projects

Source: own elaboration.

Most partners implemented projects covering seven thematic areas: tourism ($n = 34$), citizens cooperation or culture ($n = 29$), training, education ($n = 25$), local or regional development ($n = 23$) or heritage protection and promotion ($n = 21$) and sport ($n = 16$). The less popular thematic areas were: sustainable economy, clean energy, energy efficiency and mobility and transport ($n = 1$). This structure was a bit different in particular countries - in Czechia the most popular were projects related to tourism, local or regional development, citizens cooperation and culture (16–20 responses), in Poland – tourism, training and education, culture, citizens cooperation and heritage protection and promotion (10–14 responses). In Poland, definitely less popular than in Czechia are projects related to local and regional development (only 5 institutions declared them), but also to sport (5 vs. 4). Regarding other thematic areas to which the Interreg projects belong to, 2 responses were given: ‘administration of the program in the Liberec region – regional subject’ and ‘Cooperation of local educational institutions’.

Table 5.4. Projects by thematic area (number of respondents)

Thematic area	Total	Czechia	Poland
Tourism	34	20	14
Citizens cooperation	29	17	12
Culture	29	16	13
Training, Education	25	11	14
Local / regional development	23	18	5
Heritage protection and promotion	21	10	11
Sport	16	11	5
Public service, administrative cooperation	9	4	5
Natural heritage, biodiversity, pollution control	6	4	2
Risk prevention and management	6	4	2
Employment	4	2	2
Bilinguism	4	1	3
Research, innovation, technology transfer	3	2	1
economic development	3	3	0
Health	3	3	0
Sustainable economy, clean energy, energetic efficiency	1	0	1
Mobility, transport	1	0	1
Other	3	2	1

Source: own elaboration.

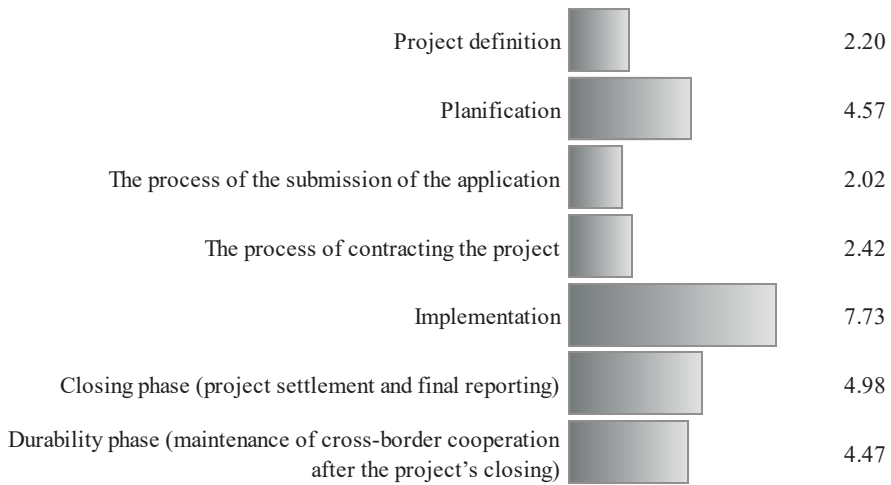
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IMPACT ON CROSS-BORDER PROJECTS – EVIDENCE FROM THE EUROPEAN BORDERLANDS

6.1. The case of Franco-German borderland – key figures

Considering the research approach presented in Chapter Five, the analysed area, where the project maturity level is relatively high, is the Franco-German borderland. The French and German respondents assessed the general influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the phases of the cross-border projects by answering the question as follows: ‘To what extent did the COVID-19 pandemic generally influence the phases of the project (projects) in which you participated?’ Respondents used the assessment scale from 0 (not at all) to 10 (extremely). The results are presented below (Fig. 6.1).

The COVID-19 pandemic had the most significant influence on the implementation phase of the projects ($M = 7.7$, $SD = 2.5$), and half of the beneficiaries rated that impact on this phase was no lower than eight points ($Me = 8$) (Table 6.1). The next project phases most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic were as follows: closing phase ($M = 5.0$, $SD = 3.5$, $Me = 5.5$), the planification phase ($M = 4.6$, $SD = 3.9$, $Me = 4.5$) and durability phase ($M = 4.5$, $SD = 3.3$, $Me = 5.0$).

Figure 6.1. The assessment of the COVID-19 pandemic impact on different phases of the cross-border projects (mean, 0–10)



Source: own elaboration.

According to the cross-border projects' beneficiaries, who participated in the research, the pandemic had the lowest impact on the process of submitting the application ($M = 2.0$, $SD = 2.7$). They presented similar opinions on the project definition phase ($M = 2.3$, $SD = 3.2$, $Me = 1.0$), as well as on the process of contracting the project ($M = 2.4$, $SD = 2.9$). However, 55% of respondents answered that the COVID-19 pandemic did not influence the submission and contracting phases. It should be noted that answers regarding these three phases were highly differentiated. Standard deviations (SD) are even over means, and some respondents assessed their impact as extremely high. Detailed information are presented in Table 6.1.

The results of the survey indicate that opinions in this respect do not differ significantly when considering the country of origin of the respondent. The only thing that varies is the durability phase. This phase was more strongly influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic on the German side than on the French side ($p = 0.026$).

Table 6.1. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border projects on particular project phase (number of responses and descriptive statistics)

Points	Project definition	Planification	The process of the submission of the application	The process of contracting the project	Implementation	Closing phase (project settlement and final reporting)	Durability phase (maintaining cross-border cooperation after the project's closing)
n							
0	33	19	33	28	3	15	16
1	2	1	1	3	1	0	0
2	5	3	5	5	0	3	4
3	4	5	3	3	0	3	2
4	2	2	7	7	0	1	3
5	4	2	4	5	4	8	10
6	0	2	2	2	3	5	6
7	2	6	3	1	9	5	7
8	2	9	0	4	14	11	5
9	4	2	0	1	10	3	3
10	2	9	2	1	16	6	4
Descriptive statistics							
M	2.30	4.57	2.02	2.42	7.73	4.98	4.47
Me	0.00	4.50	0.00	1.00	8.00	5.50	5.00
SD	3.25	3.89	2.72	2.90	2.50	3.53	3.34

M – mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation. Source: own elaboration.

The difference reaches as much as 2 points on a 10-point scale. Slightly lower (not statistically significant), but also noticeable, are the differences in assessments of the impact of the pandemic on the planification phase (assessments of French respondents are higher) and closing phase (assessments of German respondents are higher).

When analysing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border projects by project phase and country (Table 6.2), there are no significant differences if we consider the scale of activity measured by the number of projects (in the Kruskal-Wallis test, $p > 0.05$ for each phase). Also, in each country (France and Germany) the number of implemented cross-border projects is not a significant factor.

Table 6.2. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border projects – descriptive statistics by project phase and country

Project phase	France			Germany			p
	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	
Project definition	2.06	0.00	2.99	2.64	0.50	3.57	0.523
Planification	5.29	7.00	3.82	3.79	2.50	3.95	0.187
The submission of the application	1.68	0.00	2.15	2.46	0.00	3.24	0.550
The process of contracting the project	2.32	1.00	2.70	2.61	1.50	3.15	0.767
Implementation	7.55	8.00	2.80	7.86	8.00	2.16	0.988
Closing phase	4.19	5.00	3.61	5.75	5.50	3.34	0.115
Durability phase	3.45	3.00	3.15	5.46	5.50	3.26	0.026**

M – mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation, p – probability in Mann-Whitney test, ** $P < .05$

Source: own elaboration.

Table 6.3. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border projects – descriptive statistics by project phase and type of institution

Project phase	Local, regional and state public authorities			Other			p
	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	
Project definition	1.38	0.00	2.58	3.00	1.50	3.56	0.048**
Planification	3.04	2.00	3.39	5.74	7.00	3.89	0.008***
The process of the submission of the application	1.77	0.00	2.37	2.21	0.00	2.97	0.793
The process of contracting the project	2.23	0.50	3.13	2.56	2.00	2.74	0.528
Implementation	7.04	8.00	3.24	8.26	8.00	1.58	0.290
Closing phase	4.38	5.00	3.65	5.44	6.00	3.43	0.273
Durability phase	3.73	4.50	3.09	5.03	5.00	3.45	0.153

M – mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation, p – probability in Mann-Whitney test, * $P < .10$, ** $P < .05$, *** $P < .01$

Source: own elaboration.

Analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border projects implemented separately by the local, regional, and state public authorities and other INTERREG Programme beneficiaries (Table 6.3), indicates that the first group of respondents was much less affected by the pandemic in the project definition phase. Although the average result in both groups is not high, in the case of public authorities it is more than twice as low as for other beneficiaries (1.4 vs 3.0, $P = .048$).

Additional analyses showed that respondents' opinions on the impact of the pandemic on the cross-border project phases did not differ significantly with respect to the respondent's country of origin. The only exception is the durability phase, in which the pandemic had a stronger impact on cross-border projects on the German side than on the French side ($p = 0.026$). The difference reached 2 points on a 10-point scale. Slightly lower (not statistically significant), but also visible, were the differences in assessments of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the planifica-

tion phase (assessments of French representants were higher) and closing phase (assessments of German respondents were higher).

When assessing the impact of the pandemic on specific activities implemented within the cross-border projects (Table 6.4), respondents mainly pointed to significant problems especially with regard to: ‘compliance with the timetable, budget, indicators’ ($M = -1.98$, $SD = 1.93$). Half of the respondents rated this element at no more than (-3) and nearly three-quarters rated it at no more than (-2). No impact was declared by eight respondents and only three respondents saw a positive impact. An equally low median was also recorded for the element: ‘communication with the project target groups’ ($M = -1.67$, $SD = 2.31$). Here again, the evaluation of half of the respondents was no higher than (-3) and the evaluation of two-thirds was no higher than (-2). Only eight respondents felt that the pandemic had no impact on this aspect of project implementation, while, on the other hand, one in ten saw a beneficial effect of the pandemic in terms of communication with target groups. Low results were also noted for elements such as: ‘implementation of the activities according to the project methodology’ ($M = -1.79$, $SD = 2.12$, $Me = -2$). In this case, as many as 10 respondents chose the answer (-4). Further elements negatively affected by the pandemic are: ‘budget, timetable and planning of the project activities’ ($M = -1.54$, $SD = 1.82$, $Me = -2$), ‘promotion of the project’ ($M = -1.42$, $SD = 2.02$, $Me = -2$), and ‘cooperation with the partners’ ($M = -1.41$, $SD = 1.98$, $Me = -2$). In these areas, the COVID-19 pandemic brought far more problems than positive changes. Negative evaluations appeared in every area assessed. Nevertheless, for the following four elements: ‘creation of the idea of the project’, ‘searching for the cross-border partners’ and ‘cooperation with INTERREG Authority’ as well as ‘project evaluation and ongoing control’, the most frequent answers pointed to the lack of impact of the pandemic. None of the aspects were attributed the lowest score (-5).

Table 6.4. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border projects on particular project activities

Points	Creation of the idea of the project	Searching for the cross-border partners	Budget, timetable and planning the project activities	Cooperation with the partners	Communication with the project target groups	Cooperation with INTERREG Authority	Project promotion	Implementing activities according to the project methodology	Project evaluation and ongoing control	Compliance with the timetable, budget, indicators
n										
-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
-4	0	2	6	5	8	1	4	10	2	8
-3	2	2	14	12	20	2	18	16	5	16
-2	4	6	10	11	6	4	12	10	11	11
-1	1	0	1	6	2	4	5	3	10	1
0	50	44	19	9	8	39	12	9	26	8
1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
2	2	1	1	3	4	2	1	2	1	1
3	0	1	0	1	1	3	2	1	2	1
4	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	0
5	0	0	1	1	2	0	1	1	0	1
n.a.	1	4	8	11	9	2	3	7	3	13
Descriptive statistics										
M	-0.19	-0.38	-1.54	-1.41	-1.67	0.00	-1.42	-1.79	-0.82	-1.98
Me	0.00	0.00	-2.00	-2.00	-3.00	0.00	-2.00	-2.00	0.00	-3.00
SD	0.84	1.20	1.82	1.98	2.31	1.46	2.02	2.12	1.43	1.93

The scale of assessment: from -5 = extremely negatively; 0 = not at all; to 5 = extremely positively. Source: own elaboration.

Table 6.5. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on particular project activities – descriptive statistics by country

Project activities	France			Germany			p
	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	
Creation of the idea of the project	-0.16	0.00	0.82	-0.22	0.00	0.89	0.665
Searching for the cross-border partners	-0.66	0.00	1.26	-0.08	0.00	1.09	0.095*
Budget, timetable and planning of the project activities	-1.42	-1.50	1.65	-1.60	-2.00	2.02	0.576
Cooperation with the partners	-1.84	-2.00	1.70	-0.87	-1.00	2.18	0.091*
Communication with the project target groups	-1.73	-2.50	2.29	-1.54	-3.00	2.41	0.756
Cooperation with INTERREG Authority	0.16	0.00	1.44	-0.19	0.00	1.52	0.626
Promotion of the project	-1.62	-2.00	1.80	-1.15	-2.00	2.25	0.579
Implementation of the activities according to the project methodology	-2.04	-2.50	2.09	-1.50	-2.00	2.20	0.282
Project evaluation and ongoing control	-0.57	0.00	1.30	-1.04	-1.00	1.51	0.200
Compliance with the timetable, budget, indicators	-2.00	-3.00	2.17	-1.90	-2.00	1.65	0.405

M – mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation, p – probability in Mann-Whitney test, * $P < .10$

Source: own elaboration.

There are no significant differences in the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on particular project activities in France and Germany if we consider the scale of activity measured by the number of project (in the Kruskal-Wallis test, $P > 0.05$ for each activity). Also, in each country (France and Germany) number of projects is not a significant factor (Table 6.5).

Comparing the evaluations formulated by respondents representing public authorities with those of other INTERREG Programme beneficiaries (Table 6.6), it can be seen that in the case of institutions other than public authorities problems with promotion of the projects ($P = .030$) were significantly more serious.

Regarding other activities, respondents representing public authorities and other institutions had similar opinions.

Table 6.6. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on project activities – descriptive statistics by type of institution

Project phase	Local, regional and state public authority			Other			p
	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	
Creation of the idea of the project	-0.12	0.00	0.82	-0.24	0.00	0.87	0.435
Searching for the cross-border partners	-0.19	0.00	1.06	-0.53	0.00	1.31	0.127
Budget, timetable and planning of the project activities	-1.13	-1.00	2.16	-1.86	-2.00	1.46	0.235
Cooperation with the partners	-0.87	-2.00	2.30	-1.88	-2.00	1.53	0.145
Communication with the project target groups	-1.43	-2.00	2.33	-1.86	-3.00	2.32	0.322
Cooperation with INTERREG Authority	-0.24	0.00	1.39	0.18	0.00	1.51	0.342
Promotion of the project	-0.64	-1.00	2.45	-2.03	-2.00	1.36	0.030**
Implementation of the activities according to the project methodology	-1.54	-2.00	2.35	-2.04	-3.00	1.89	0.506
Project evaluation and ongoing control	-0.80	0.00	1.55	-0.84	-0.50	1.35	0.956
Compliance with the timetable, budget, indicators	-1.75	-2.00	1.97	-2.15	-3.00	1.92	0.430

M – mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation, p – probability in Mann-Whitney test, ** $P < .05$

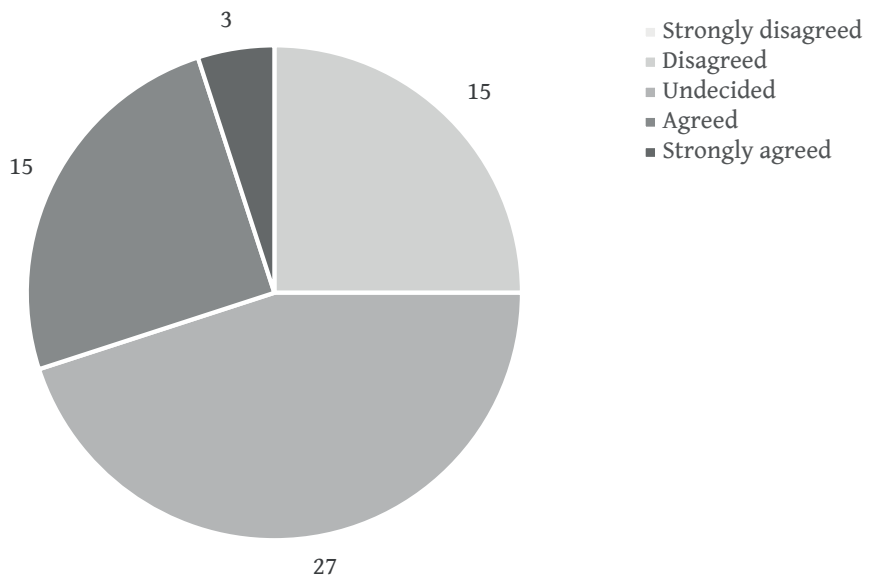
Source: own elaboration.

For both types of beneficiaries, opinions were similar (not statistically significantly different – in the Mann-Whitney test $P = .535$). The scale of participation in the INTERREG Programme (the number of projects) is also not statistically significant (in Kruskal-Wallis test, $P = .015$).

Based on the other analysis one can say that the opinion was significantly higher ($P = .027$) when it comes to the cross-border

projects led by French institutions rather than German ones (France: $M = 3.35$, $Me = 3$, $SD = 0.92$; Germany: $M = 2.86$, $Me = 3$, $SD = 0.65$).

Figure 6.2. Answer for the question ‘Do you agree that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused long-term changes in the priorities (thematic priorities of partnerships) in INTERREG V Upper Rhine projects in the following years?’ (number of respondents)



Source: own elaboration.

Regarding the forecasted long-term changes in thematic priorities of partnerships in the cross-border projects co-funded by the INTERREG Programme caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly one in three respondents confirmed that the pandemic would cause such changes in the following years. When answering this question, none of the respondents chose ‘strongly disagree’. On the other hand, nearly half of them were undecided. In the opinion of one in four respondents, there was no such relationship (Fig. 6.2).

The COVID 2019 pandemic impact on the critical issues related to cross-border cooperation within the projects was assessed ambivalently (Table 6.7). A negative mean (but no higher than 1) was observed for seven of ten aspects. The lowest assessment concerned 'administrative burden caused by cross-border activities' ($M = -0.75$, $Me = -1$), 'interpersonal relations between people jointly managing cross-border cooperation in the region' ($M = -0.66$, $Me = -1$), and 'quality of cross-border cooperation' ($M = -0.52$, $Me = -1$). For these three issues, negative assessments were carried out by 28–32 persons, but the number of negative assessments was also high for the issue 'dynamism of cross-border cooperation' ($n = 30$, but for the positive assessments $n = 19$). No impact was recognised for issues: 'economic importance of cross-border projects implementation' (29 persons with assessment 'zero') and 'interest in finding new partners for cross-border cooperation' (24 persons with assessment 'zero'). On the other hand, the most positive assessments were related to 'the importance of cross-border cooperation' ($M = 2$, $Me = 2$, 40 persons with positive assessments, only 10 – with negative assessments). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was (on average) assessed positively, as was 'the interest in maintaining cross-border cooperation after the end of the project' ($M = 0.56$, 24 positive answers) and 'economic importance of cross-border projects implementation' ($M = 0.44$, 18 positive answers). Other analysis show that these opinions were similar in France and Germany. Only the issue of 'administrative burden caused by cross-border activities' in the cross-border projects led by German partners was assessed more pessimistically than in the projects led by French partners (in the t-test $P = .018$). The type of organisation and number of projects were not significant factors in each aspect.

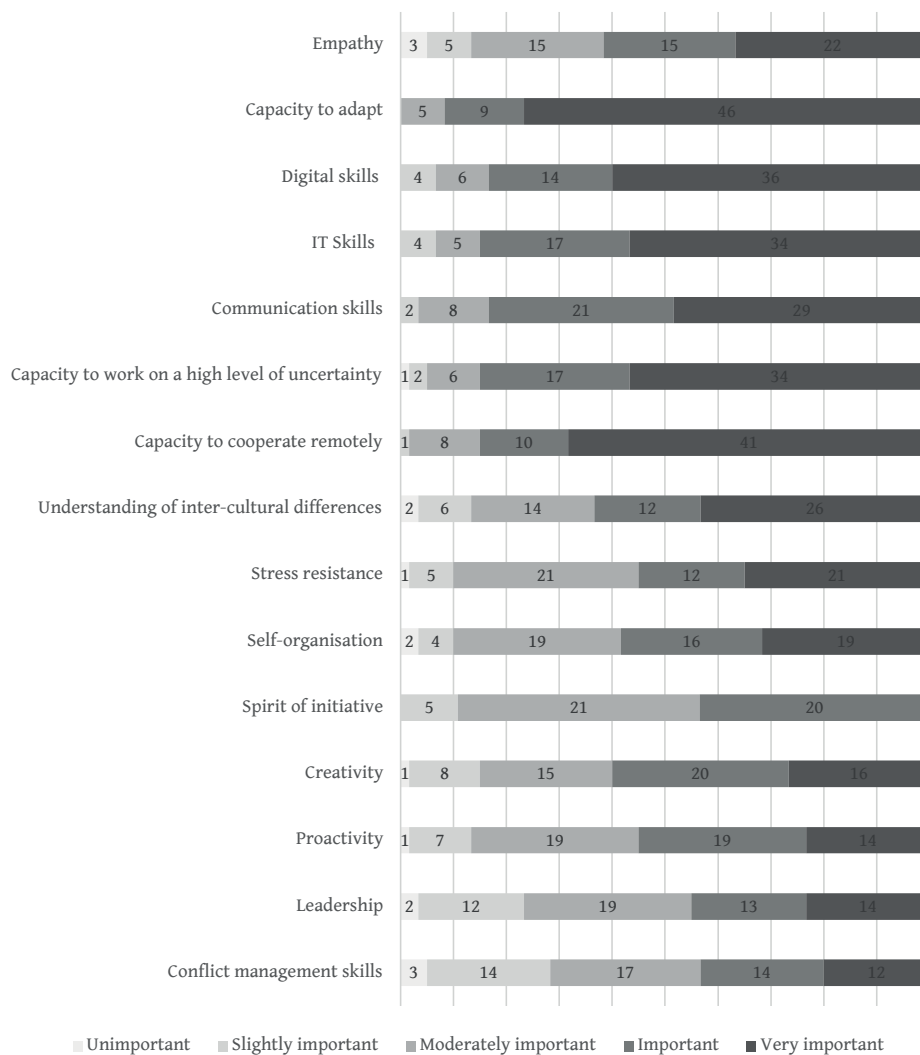
Table 6.7. Answers for the question ‘How did the COVID-2019 pandemic impact the following issues related to cross-border cooperation?’ (scale of assessment: from -5 = extremely negatively; 0 = not at all to 5 = extremely positively)

Points	Interest in finding new partners for cross-border cooperation	Motivation to extend cross-border cooperation in existing partnerships	The realisation of joint cross-border missions, plans and strategies	Importance of cross-border cooperation	Dynamism of cross-border cooperation	Quality of cross-border cooperation	Interpersonal relations between people jointly managing cross-border cooperation in the region	The interest in maintaining cross-border cooperation after the end of the project	Economic importance of cross-border projects implementation	Administrative burden caused by cross-border activities
n										
-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
-4	3	1	2	2	4	0	4	0	1	5
-3	3	6	7	1	11	14	9	7	6	10
-2	11	8	9	1	6	8	9	4	2	8
-1	5	12	9	6	9	7	6	3	3	9
0	24	18	12	9	8	13	14	21	29	15
1	5	1	2	3	4	6	3	6	4	1
2	6	5	6	9	5	5	2	6	2	2
3	0	4	6	9	6	2	1	4	5	3
4	0	1	1	6	1	2	3	5	3	2
5	1	2	2	13	3	1	2	3	4	2
n.a.	2	2	4	1	3	2	7	1	1	3
Descriptive statistics										
M	-0.45	-0.22	-0.18	2.00	-0.33	-0.52	-0.66	0.56	0.44	-0.75
Me	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	-1.00	-0.50	-1.00	0.00	0.00	-1.00
SD	1.71	2.03	2.27	2.48	2.53	2.10	2.33	2.21	2.18	2.30

M – mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation. Source: own elaboration.

The importance of skills in implementing cross-border projects was evaluated at a quite high level (Fig. 6.3).

Figure 6.3. Assessment of the importance of selected skills in implementing the cross-border projects under the COVID-19 pandemic (number of respondents)



Scale of assessment: unimportant = 1; slightly important = 2; moderately important = 3; important = 4; very important = 5

Source: own elaboration.

Table 6.8. Assessment of the importance of selected skills in implementing cross-border projects under the COVID-19 pandemic – descriptive statistics by country

Skills	Total			France			Germany			p
	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	
Empathy	3.80	4.00	1.18	3.68	4.00	1.17	3.89	4.00	1.20	0.429
Capacity to adapt	4.68	5.00	0.62	4.65	5.00	0.71	4.71	5.00	0.53	0.998
Digital skills	4.37	5.00	0.92	4.19	4.00	0.95	4.54	5.00	0.88	0.085*
IT Skills	4.35	5.00	0.90	4.23	5.00	0.96	4.46	5.00	0.84	0.325
Communication skills	4.28	4.00	0.83	3.97	4.00	0.87	4.61	5.00	0.63	0.002***
Capacity to work on a high level of uncertainty	4.35	5.00	0.92	4.48	5.00	0.72	4.18	4.50	1.09	0.333
Capacity to cooperate remotely	4.52	5.00	0.79	4.52	5.00	0.77	4.50	5.00	0.84	0.993
Understanding of inter-cultural differences	3.90	4.00	1.17	3.58	4.00	1.18	4.21	5.00	1.10	0.027**
Stress resistance	3.78	4.00	1.08	3.65	4.00	1.05	3.89	4.00	1.10	0.398
Self-organisation	3.77	4.00	1.08	3.71	4.00	1.04	3.79	4.00	1.13	0.745
Spirit of initiative	3.72	4.00	0.92	3.68	4.00	0.87	3.71	4.00	0.98	0.842
Creativity	3.70	4.00	1.06	3.52	4.00	1.12	3.86	4.00	0.97	0.243
Proactivity	3.63	4.00	1.02	3.45	3.00	1.03	3.79	4.00	0.99	0.229
Leadership	3.42	3.00	1.15	3.13	3.00	1.12	3.68	4.00	1.12	0.080*
Conflict management skills	3.30	3.00	1.18	3.16	3.00	1.24	3.39	3.00	1.10	0.527

M – mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation, p – probability in Mann-Whitney test, ** $P < .01$, * $P < .05$, * $P < .10$

Source: own elaboration.

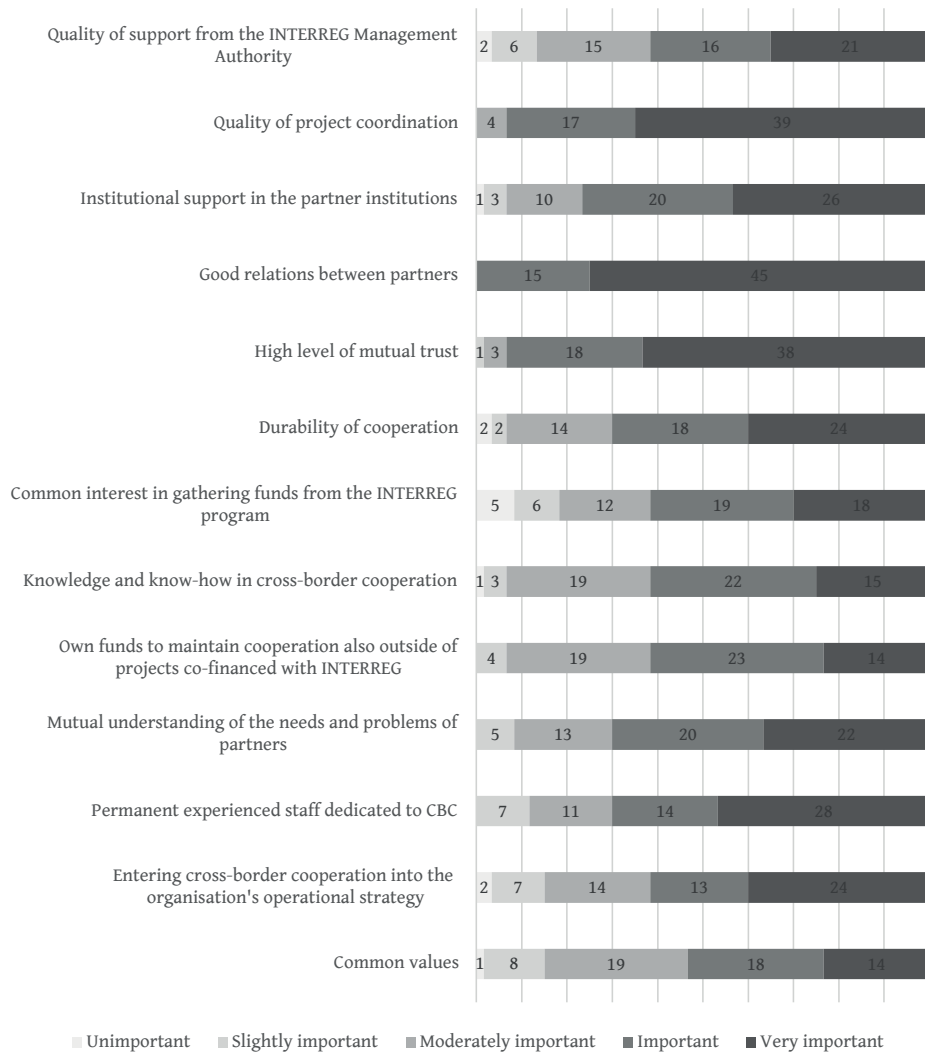
When evaluating the selected skills useful in implementing cross-border projects under the COVID-19 pandemic by country, the highest results were observed for ‘capacity of adapt’ (M = 4.68), ‘capacity of cooperate remotely’ (M = 4.52), as well as ‘digital skills’, ‘IT skills’ and ‘capacity to work on a high level of uncertainty’ (mean approx. 3.5). For each of the listed skills the

median reached the maximum value (5), which means that a half of respondents assessed these skills no lower than 5. On the other hand, for two skills – ‘leadership’ and ‘conflict management skills’ – the median of the importance was only 3, and the mean is approx. 3 (3.3 – 3.4) – Table 6.8.

Statistically significant differences between the two countries only regarding four skills were observed. At first, the assessment of the skill ‘understanding of inter-cultural differences’ was significantly higher in Germany ($M = 4.21$) than in France ($M = 3.58$) – $P = .027$. Similarly, the importance of ‘leadership’ ($P = .080$), ‘communication skills’ ($P = .002$) and ‘digital skills’ ($P = .085$) were statistically different according to the evaluation in both countries, but according to the German respondents their importance was perceived as higher than that reported by the French respondents (Table 6.8).

When it comes to cross-border cooperation resistant to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the most important were ‘good relations between partners’ (all assessments confirmed its importance; for 45 persons it is very important), ‘quality of project coordination’ (respectively, 54 and 39 assessments), and ‘high level of mutual trust’ (respectively, 56 and 38 assessments) (Fig. 6.4). On average, the evaluation of these aspects exceeded 4.5 (with a maximum of 5), and the median evaluation reached 5. At the same time, this evaluation was fairly homogeneous across the group of projects in question (Table 6.9). Much less importance was given to ‘common values’ ($M = 3.60$, $Me = 4$) and ‘common interest in gathering funds from the INTERREG Programme’ ($M = 3.65$, $Me = 4$). The opinions of cross-border project beneficiaries in France and Germany do not differ significantly in this regard: only ‘entering cross-border cooperation into the organisations’ operational strategy’ received a significantly higher evaluation in Germany than in France ($P = .082$).

Figure 6.4. Importance of the different issues on cross-border cooperation resistant to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic; number of respondents



The scale of assessment: unimportant = 1; slightly important = 2; moderately important = 3; important = 4; very important = 5

Source: own elaboration.

Table 6.9. Importance of the different issues on cross-border cooperation resistant to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic – descriptive statistics by country

Issues	Total			France			Germany			p
	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	
Quality of support from the INTERREG Management Authority	3.80	4.00	1.13	3.90	4.00	1.14	3.64	3.50	1.13	0.301
Quality of project coordination	4.58	5.00	0.62	4.52	5.00	0.63	4.64	5.00	0.62	0.339
Institutional support in the partner institutions	4.12	4.00	0.98	4.19	4.00	0.98	4.00	4.00	0.98	0.378
Good relations between partners	4.75	5.00	0.44	4.81	5.00	0.40	4.68	5.00	0.48	0.264
High level of mutual trust	4.55	5.00	0.67	4.52	5.00	0.77	4.57	5.00	0.57	0.929
Durability of cooperation	4.00	4.00	1.04	3.97	4.00	1.17	4.00	4.00	0.90	0.786
Common interest in gathering funds from the INTERREG program	3.65	4.00	1.25	3.65	4.00	1.25	3.61	4.00	1.26	0.906
Knowledge and know-how in cross-border cooperation	3.78	4.00	0.94	3.77	4.00	0.92	3.75	4.00	0.97	0.670
Own funds to maintain cooperation also outside of projects co-financed with INTERREG	3.78	4.00	0.88	3.58	4.00	0.85	3.96	4.00	0.88	0.104
Mutual understanding of the needs and problems of partners	3.98	4.00	0.97	3.87	4.00	0.88	4.07	4.00	1.05	0.296
Permanent experienced staff dedicated to CBC	4.05	4.00	1.06	3.84	4.00	1.16	4.25	5.00	0.93	0.170
Entering cross-border cooperation into the organisation's operational strategy	3.83	4.00	1.18	3.55	4.00	1.26	4.11	4.50	1.03	0.082*
Common values	3.60	4.00	1.04	3.58	4.00	0.81	3.57	3.50	1.26	0.975

M – mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation, p – probability in Mann-Whitney test, * $P < .10$

Source: own elaboration.

Regarding cross-border cooperation resilience to crises, a statistically significant and positive relation was observed only for 'durability of cooperation', moderate correlated with 'importance of cross-border cooperation' and 'economic importance of cross-border projects implementation' (Table 6.10). The highest resilience is declared by beneficiaries of the cross-border projects with higher assessment on the importance of the listed cross-border cooperation aspects. For the other dimensions of resilience to crises, evaluation are not significantly associated with assessments on the importance of the listed cross-border cooperation aspects ($P > .05$).

Positive relation between the resilience to crises and many skills is observed. For most skills, greater importance was attributed to the given skill from the perspective of resilience to crisis when the skill was rated higher in the COVID-19 pandemic conditions (Table 6.11). This relationship is strongest in relation to skills such as: 'proactivity', 'leadership', 'conflict management skills', 'empathy', and 'spirit of initiative'. Strong correlations can be noted between the elements described below:

- 'knowledge and know-how in cross-border cooperation' and 'self-organisation' ($\rho = 0.578$, highest correlation), 'stress resistance' ($\rho = 0.471$) and 'proactivity' ($\rho = 0.462$),
- 'durability of cooperation' and 'proactivity' ($\rho = 0.546$) and 'spirit of initiative' ($\rho = 0.436$),
- 'common interest in gathering funds from the INTERREG program' and 'leadership' ($\rho = 0.549$), 'empathy' ($\rho = 0.520$), 'understanding of intercultural differences' ($\rho = 0.412$),
- 'permanent experienced staff dedicated to CBC' and 'conflict management skills' ($\rho = 0.504$), 'spirit of initiative' ($\rho = 0.449$), 'empathy' ($\rho = 0.432$), 'creativity' ($\rho = 0.426$) and proactivity ($\rho = 0.415$).

For some areas, the correlation is negative. This applies especially to ‘digital skills’, as well as ‘capacity to cooperate remotely’ and ‘work on a high level of uncertainty’. However, these correlations are low and not statistically significant.

With regard to the relationship between resilience and skills, it can also be noted that statistically significant relationships are observed in particular for ‘leadership’ and ‘conflict management skills’ (significant relationship with eight out of the thirteen issues examined), as well as ‘proactivity’, ‘self-organisation’ and ‘empathy’ (6 out of 13 pairs of variables), while ‘digital skills’ are not significantly related to any of the dimensions considered in the resilience analysis (Table 6.11).

Analysing the relevance of the COVID-19 pandemic in the different phases and activities of the project (Table 6.12), it can be seen that in these two areas the evaluations are, in general, weakly correlated.

Table 6.10. Correlation between the assessment of the cross-border cooperation resilience to crises and the COVID-19 pandemic impact on cross-border cooperation aspects (Spearman's rho)

Cross-border resilience to crises / Cross-border cooperation aspects	Quality of support from the INTERREG Management Authority	Quality of project coordination	Institutional support in the partner institutions	Good relations between partners	High level of mutual trust	Durability of cooperation	Common interest in gathering funds from the INTERREG program	Knowledge and know-how in cross-border cooperation	Own funds to maintain cooperation also outside of projects co-financed with INTERREG	Mutual understanding of the needs and problems of partners	Permanent experienced staff dedicated to CBC	Entering cross-border cooperation into the organisation's operational strategy	Common values
Interest in finding new partners for cross-border cooperation	-0.032	0.097	0.080	-0.095	-0.034	-0.007	-0.206	-0.115	-0.093	-0.157	-0.067	-0.039	-0.164
Motivation to extend cross-border cooperation in existing partnerships	0.009	0.030	0.045	-0.001	-0.023	0.164	-0.215	0.131	0.017	-0.116	-0.037	0.024	0.013
The realisation of joint cross-border missions, plans and strategies	0.069	0.073	0.172	-0.013	0.056	0.062	-0.238	0.123	-0.024	-0.021	-0.040	-0.010	-0.022
Importance of cross-border cooperation	0.172	0.220	0.244	0.125	0.214	0.259**	-0.089	0.169	0.123	0.044	0.208	0.143	0.196
Dynamism of cross-border cooperation	-0.009	-0.022	0.244	-0.060	0.196	0.153	-0.057	0.101	-0.069	0.036	0.042	-0.016	0.042
Quality of cross-border cooperation	-0.041	-0.162	0.016	-0.112	0.131	0.120	0.048	0.056	-0.045	0.093	-0.012	-0.075	0.104
Interpersonal relations between people jointly managing cross-border cooperation in the region	0.086	-0.120	0.057	-0.125	-0.011	-0.024	-0.019	0.033	0.163	0.162	0.136	0.071	0.096
The interest in maintaining cross-border cooperation after the end of the project	0.112	-0.098	0.097	-0.143	-0.080	0.159	0.130	0.209	-0.026	-0.033	0.081	0.000	0.223
Economic importance of cross-border projects implementation	0.027	-0.010	0.024	-0.122	0.149	0.277**	0.027	0.067	0.221	0.080	0.148	0.188	0.205
Administrative burden caused by cross-border activities	0.047	-0.206	0.033	-0.135	0.135	-0.038	-0.124	-0.039	-0.133	-0.083	-0.103	-0.242	0.006

** $P < .05$, *** $P < .01$. Source: own elaboration.

Table 6.11. Correlation between the assessment of the cross-border cooperation resilience to crises and skills assessment (Spearman's rho)

Cross-border resilience to crises \ Skills	Empathy	Capacity to adapt	Digital skills	IT Skills	Communication skills	Capacity to work on a high level of uncertainty	Capacity to cooperate remotely	Understanding of intercultural differences	Stress resistance	Self-organisation	Spirit of initiative	Creativity	Proactivity	Leadership	Conflict management skills
Quality of support from the INTERREG Management Authority	0.210	0.098	0.110	0.151	0.134	0.323**	0.110	0.160	0.309**	0.200	0.098	0.134	0.048	0.257**	0.283**
Quality of project coordination	-0.018	0.327**	0.155	0.199	0.180	0.166	0.363***	0.087	0.245	0.338***	0.162	0.212	0.165	0.086	0.229
Institutional support in the partner institutions	0.170	0.190	0.159	0.326**	0.403***	0.398***	0.240	0.167	0.180	0.259**	0.106	0.242	0.171	0.184	0.216
Good relations between partners	0.110	0.305**	0.089	0.191	0.148	0.182	0.195	-0.096	0.148	0.085	0.359***	0.305**	0.216	0.255**	0.190
High level of mutual trust	0.166	0.103	0.066	0.137	0.305**	0.182	0.073	0.095	0.034	0.099	0.223	0.250	0.296**	0.229	0.246
Durability of cooperation	0.355***	0.313**	0.140	0.242	0.140	0.139	0.043	0.069	0.230	0.307**	0.436***	0.354***	0.546***	0.344***	0.365***
Common interest in gathering funds from the INTERREG program	0.520***	0.022	0.241	0.397***	0.230	0.123	-0.035	0.412***	0.314**	0.245	0.376***	0.355***	0.247	0.549***	0.486***
Knowledge and know-how in cross-border cooperation	0.255**	0.111	-0.001	0.096	0.051	0.023	0.170	0.213	0.471	0.578***	0.197	0.236	0.462***	0.359***	0.255**
Own funds to maintain cooperation outside of projects co-financed with INTERREG	0.152	0.011	0.200	0.302**	0.340***	0.031	0.312	0.320**	0.071	0.179	0.171	0.090	0.129	0.166	0.142
Mutual understanding of the needs and problems of partners	0.235	0.080	-0.051	0.013	0.090	-0.078	0.073	0.367***	0.288**	0.345***	0.207	0.243	0.286**	0.322**	0.301**
Permanent experienced staff dedicated to CBC	0.432***	0.289**	0.092	0.035	0.134	0.224	0.073	0.313**	0.367***	0.368***	0.449***	0.426***	0.415***	0.323**	0.504***
Entering cross-border cooperation in the organisation's operational strategy	0.264**	0.161	-0.093	-0.082	0.215	-0.050	-0.012	0.195	0.205	0.241	0.343***	0.259**	0.323**	0.406***	0.354***
Common values	0.337**	0.267**	0.064	0.072	0.107	0.282**	0.113	0.077	0.219	0.195	0.028	0.123	0.027	0.174	0.289**

** $P < .05$, *** $P < .01$. Source: own elaboration.

Table 6.12. Correlation between the assessment of the COVID-19 pandemic impact on particular projects phases and activities (Spearman's rho)

Cross-border resilience to crises	Project phases						
	Project definition	Planification	Submitting the application	The process of contracting the project	Implementation	Closing phase	Durability phase
Creation of the idea of the project	-0.048	-0.130	-0.137	-0.139	-0.011	0.013	-0.084
Searching for the cross-border partners	-0.168	-0.128	-0.228	-0.220	0.173	-0.063	-0.103
Budget, timetable and planning of the project activities	-0.115	-0.384***	-0.093	-0.104	-0.096	0.009	0.025
Cooperation with the partners	0.080	-0.040	-0.057	0.066	-0.043	-0.186	-0.068
Communication with the project target groups	0.154	0.057	0.115	0.010	-0.053	-0.092	-0.062
Cooperation with INTERREG Authority	0.257	0.331**	0.191	0.140	-0.011	-0.204	0.075
Promotion of the project	-0.130	-0.176	-0.087	-0.036	-0.262**	-0.099	0.063
Implementation of the activities according to the project methodology	0.032	-0.053	0.144	0.149	-0.385***	-0.161	-0.027
Project evaluation and ongoing control	-0.073	0.076	-0.112	-0.120	-0.002	-0.092	0.058
Compliance with the timetable, budget, indicators	-0.108	-0.154	0.004	-0.018	-0.225	-0.251	-0.049

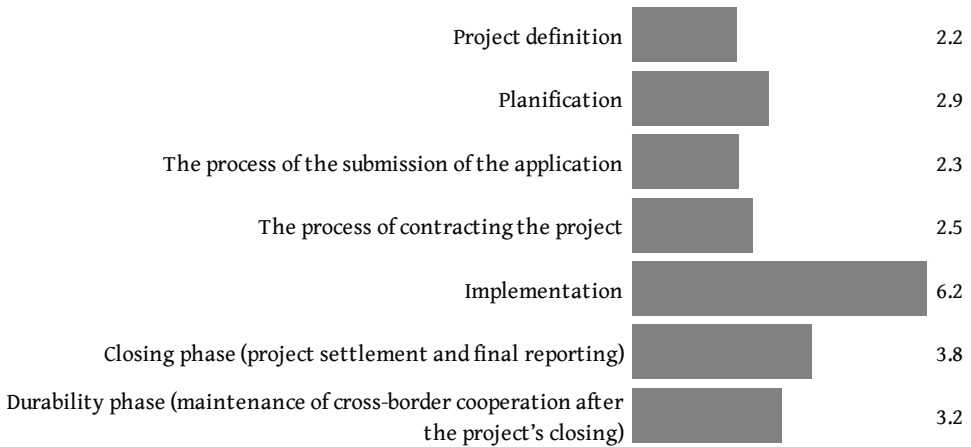
** $P < .05$, *** $P < .01$. Source: own elaboration.

Respondents perceiving the relevance of the COVID-19 pandemic to the ‘planification’ stage rated significantly lower its impact on elements such as: ‘budget, timetable and planning of the project’ ($\rho = -0.384$), while being more positive about ‘cooperation with INTERREG Authority’ ($\rho = 0.331$). Negative correlation is observed between implementation phase and activities related to promotion ($\rho = -0.262$), and implementation of the activities according to the project methodology ($\rho = -0.385$). Respondents who perceived a stronger impact of the COVID-19 pandemic for the implementation phase were also more negative about the indicated INTERREG project activities (Table 6.12).

6.2. The cases of Polish-Czech borderland – key figures

The Polish and Czech respondents assessed the general influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the phases of the cross-border projects by answering the question as follows: ‘To what extent did the COVID-19 pandemic generally influence the phases of the project (projects) in which you participated?’ Respondents used the assessment scale from 0 (not at all) to 10 (extremely so). The results are presented below (Fig. 6.5). According to them, the pandemic impacted mostly the implementation phase ($M = 6.2$, $SD = 2.8$), and half of the respondents rated that impact as no lower than eight points ($Me = 7.0$). The next phases with the significant impact of the pandemic were as follows: closing phase ($M = 3.8$, $SD = 3.2$, $Me = 4.0$), durability phase ($M = 3.2$, $SD = 3.1$, $Me = 2.0$) and planification phase ($M = 2.9$, $SD = 3.0$, $Me = 2.0$), but that impact was rather low and strongly differentiated. According to the respondents, the pandemic had also a low impact on the project definition phase ($M = 2.2$, $SD = 2.7$, $Me = 1.0$), process of submission of the application ($M = 2.3$, $SD = 2.6$, $Me = 1.0$) and process of contracting the project phase ($M = 2.5$, $SD = 2.5$, $Me = 2.0$).

Figure 6.5. The assessment of the COVID-19 pandemic impact on different phases of the cross-border projects (mean, 0–10)



Source: own elaboration

Approx. 40% of respondents answered that the COVID-19 pandemic did not influence project definition and submission phases. It should be noted that assessments on these three phases are also highly differentiated (Table 6.13).

It is worth noting that opinions regarding the impact of the pandemic on project phases differ significantly when considering the country of origin of the respondent. This applies in particular to the planification phase ($P=.039$) and implementation phase ($P=.042$), but also the contracting process ($P=.056$) and closing phase ($P=.072$). Higher impact was perceived by representatives of the projects led by Czech partners (Table 6.14). Other analyses indicate that project size plays a significant role in assessing the importance of the pandemic for cross-border projects for three phases, primarily the closing phase ($P<.001$), and durability phase ($P=.005$), but also for the implementation phase ($P=.068$). The COVID-19 pandemic had the strongest impact on the activities of beneficiaries implementing 2 or 3 projects. Half of these respondents rated its impact on the implementation phase with at least an 8 on a 10-point scale.

Table 6.13. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border projects on particular project phase

Points	Project definition	Planification	The process of the submission of the application	The process of contracting the project	Implementa-tion	Closing phase (project settlement and final reporting)	Durability phase (maintenance of cross-border cooperation after the project's closing)
n							
0	36	31	34	27	5	23	25
1	10	7	10	11	3	6	9
2	8	6	6	8	3	6	9
3	6	7	9	12	4	5	6
4	6	8	8	9	9	11	8
5	7	9	8	7	4	4	7
6	3	4	3	3	9	7	6
7	3	2	0	3	10	5	4
8	2	4	3	3	16	11	3
9	3	5	3	2	16	5	5
10	0	1	0	0	5	1	2
Descriptive statistics							
M	2.20	2.88	2.26	2.54	6.23	3.77	3.15
Me	1.00	2.00	1.00	2.00	7.00	4.00	2.00
SD	2.66	3.01	2.59	2.54	2.85	3.22	3.06

M – mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation

Source: own elaboration.

For beneficiaries with more than 3 projects, this evaluation reached at least 7. For respondents who had completed one project, it was 5.5 at the lowest (Table 6.15). Interestingly, the number of projects significantly differed the assessment of the importance of the pandemic for the areas mentioned above only for projects with leaders on the Czech side (for the Polish leaders, the differences were not significant).

Table 6.14. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border projects – descriptive statistics by project phase and leading country

Project phase	Czechia			Poland			P
	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	
Project definition	2.42	1.50	2.81	1.87	1.00	2.42	0.403
Planification	3.42	3.00	3.16	2.03	0.00	2.59	0.039**
Submitting the application	2.52	2.00	2.59	1.87	0.00	2.62	0.137
Contracting the project	2.94	3.00	2.64	1.90	1.00	2.29	0.056*
Implementation	6.69	8.00	2.73	5.42	6.00	2.95	0.042**
Closing phase	4.17	4.00	3.09	3.00	1.00	3.35	0.072*
Durability phase	3.17	2.50	2.98	3.23	2.00	3.22	0.905

M – mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation, p – probability in Mann-Whitney test, * $P < .10$, ** $P < .05$

Source: own elaboration.

Table 6.15. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border projects – descriptive statistics by project phase and number of projects

Project phase	1 project			2-3 projects			More than 3 projects			P
	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	
Project definition	2.07	1.00	2.49	2.27	0.50	2.85	2.27	1.00	2.69	0.918
Planification	2.79	1.50	3.22	2.73	1.50	3.00	3.15	3.00	2.88	0.696
Submitting the application	1.86	0.00	2.76	2.43	2.00	2.53	2.50	2.00	2.52	0.299
Contracting the project	2.25	1.00	2.65	2.63	2.00	2.50	2.73	2.50	2.54	0.613
Implementation	4.86	5.50	3.63	7.00	8.00	2.21	6.81	7.00	1.96	0.068*
Closing phase	1.96	0.50	2.76	5.40	6.00	3.00	3.85	3.00	2.99	<0.001***
Durability phase	1.93	1.00	2.58	4.43	4.00	3.05	3.00	2.00	3.06	0.005***

M – mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation, p – probability in Mann-Whitney test, * $P < .10$, ** $P < .05$, *** $P < .01$

Source: own elaboration.

Comparing the evaluation of respondents representing public authorities with other respondents representing beneficiaries of the cross-border projects (Table 6.16), it is noticeable that the first group of respondents felt the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the planification phase much more strongly. The average evaluation in both groups of respondents is not high, although it is more than 1 point higher for public authorities than for other respondents (3.35 vs 2.13, $P=.052$). The differences regarding durability phase are even stronger: again, the pandemic had a stronger impact on projects implemented by public authorities (mean 3.77 vs 2.16, and median is 3.5 times higher, $P=.008$). Also, implementation phase was more influenced by the pandemic in cross-border projects implemented by public authorities than by other respondents (mean 6.73 vs 5.41, $P=.084$).

Table 6.16. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border projects – descriptive statistics by project phase and type of institution

Project phase	Local, regional, and state public authority			Other			p
	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	
Project definition	2.44	2.00	2.73	1.81	0.50	2.53	0.252
Planification	3.35	3.00	3.05	2.13	0.50	2.84	0.052*
Submitting the application	2.42	2.00	2.48	2.00	1.00	2.77	0.293
Contracting the project	2.75	2.50	2.57	2.19	1.00	2.49	0.267
Implementation	6.73	7.00	2.50	5.41	6.00	3.21	0.084*
Closing phase	3.94	4.00	3.04	3.50	3.00	3.52	0.425
Durability phase	3.77	3.50	3.01	2.16	1.00	2.91	0.008***

M – mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation, p – probability in Mann-Whitney test, * $P<.10$, ** $P<.05$, *** $P<.01$

Source: own elaboration.

As can be seen from Table 6.17, when assessing the impact of the pandemic on specific cross-border project activities in general, respondents pointed mainly to problems concerning various elements of project implementation.

The pandemic had the most negative impact on 'compliance with the timetable, budget, indicators' ($M = -2.08$, $SD = 1.69$). Half of the respondents rated this aspect at no more than (-2) and nearly three-quarters rated it at no more than (-1). No impact was declared by 16 respondents (about one in five) and only three respondents saw a positive impact. An equally low median was also recorded for the element 'communication with the project target groups'. In this case, the rating for half of the beneficiaries is also no higher than (-2), and for two thirds, the rating is no higher than (-1), while $M = -1.67$, $SD = 2.31$. One in five respondents felt that the pandemic had no impact on this aspect and, on the other hand, roughly only one in ten saw its beneficial effects on communication with the project's target groups. Low ratings also apply to the element: 'implementation of the activities according to the project methodology' ($M = -1.44$, $SD = 1.71$, $Me = -1$). A median reflecting 1 applies to only one more element, namely 'cooperation with the partners' ($M = -1.05$, $SD = 1.94$, $Me = -1$). In these areas, COVID-9 brought far more problems than positives, although negative evaluations did appear for every element assessed. Nevertheless, with respect to 'creation of the idea of the project', 'searching the cross-border partners', 'budget, timetable and planning of the project activities', 'promotion of the project' and 'cooperation with INTERREG Authority' it was most often indicated that the pandemic had no affect (Table 6.17). At the same time, there are no significant differences between the evaluation of projects by Polish and Czech respondents (Table 6.18).

Table 6.17. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border projects on particular project phase

Points	Creation of the idea of the project	Searching for the cross-border partners	Budget, timetable and planning of the project activities	Cooperation with the partners	Communication with the project target groups	Cooperation with INTERREG Authority	Promotion of the project	Implementation of the activities according to the project methodology	Project evaluation and ongoing control	Compliance with the timetable, budget, indicators
n										
-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
-4	5	4	5	7	15	0	2	11	1	23
-3	5	6	7	12	15	2	5	13	8	12
-2	11	2	14	16	17	8	12	15	14	8
-1	12	9	13	14	8	9	15	12	17	11
0	35	59	36	21	19	55	40	22	39	16
1	3	0	2	3	5	3	2	3	2	3
2	5	0	1	2	0	1	4	2	1	0
3	3	0	0	2	1	1	2	0	1	0
4	1	1	1	2	0	2	1	1	0	0
5	1	1	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Descriptive statistics										
M	-0.47	-0.46	-0.79	-1.05	-1.65	-0.12	-0.51	-1.44	-0.80	-2.08
Me	0.00	0.00	0.00	-1.00	-2.00	0.00	0.00	-1.00	0.00	-2.00
SD	1.78	1.40	1.71	1.94	1.83	1.27	1.44	1.71	1.23	1.69

M – mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation. Source: own elaboration.

Table 6.18. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on particular project activities – descriptive statistics by country

Project activities	Czechia			Poland			p
	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	
Creation of the idea of the project	-0.69	0.00	1.84	-0.13	0.00	1.69	0.150
Searching for the cross-border partners	-0.50	0.00	1.39	-0.42	0.00	1.46	0.549
Budget, timetable, and planning of the project activities	-1.12	-1.00	1.38	-0.23	0.00	2.04	0.101
Cooperation with the partners	-1.13	-1.00	1.81	-0.87	-1.00	2.14	0.826
Communication with the project target groups	-1.88	-2.00	1.69	-1.23	-1.00	1.98	0.135
Cooperation with INTERREG Authority	-0.14	0.00	1.34	-0.10	0.00	1.19	0.853
Promotion of the project	-0.49	0.00	1.46	-0.48	0.00	1.43	0.779
Implementation of the activities according to the project methodology	-1.45	-1.00	1.75	-1.39	-1.00	1.67	0.763
Project evaluation and ongoing control	-0.75	0.00	1.28	-0.84	0.00	1.16	0.894
Compliance with the timetable, budget, indicators	-2.17	-3.00	1.73	-1.94	-2.00	1.67	0.536

M – mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation, p – probability in Mann-Whitney test, * $P < .10$

Source: own elaboration.

The size of the project is relevant for assessing the impact of the pandemic on the implementation of only some project activities. This concerns above all ‘implementation of the activities according to the project methodology’ ($P = .004$), ‘searching for the cross-border partners’ ($P = .049$), but also ‘project evaluation and ongoing control’ ($P = .088$). The COVID-19 pandemic had the strongest impact on the activities of beneficiaries with more than 3 projects (Table 6.19). This was reported by both Polish and Czech respondents.

Table 6.19. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on project activities – descriptive statistics by number of projects

Project activity	1 project			2-3 projects			More than 3 projects			p
	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	
Creating the project's idea	-0.28	0.00	1.57	-0.80	-0.50	1.79	-0.27	0.00	1.97	0.393
Searching for the cross-border partners	-0.04	0.00	0.96	-0.40	0.00	0.97	-0.96	0.00	1.97	0.049**
Budget, timetable and planning of the project activities	-0.50	0.00	1.39	-0.90	0.00	1.82	-0.96	-1.00	1.89	0.373
Cooperation with the partners	-0.77	-1.00	2.10	-1.03	-1.00	1.95	-1.36	-2.00	1.75	0.556
Communication with the project target groups	-1.19	-1.00	1.77	-1.57	-2.00	1.99	-2.24	-2.00	1.59	0.113
Cooperation with INTERREG Authority	0.12	0.00	1.24	-0.47	0.00	0.94	0.04	0.00	1.56	0.393
Promoting the project	0.04	0.00	1.72	-0.60	0.00	1.22	-0.96	-0.50	1.22	0.135
Implementing the activities according to the project methodology	-0.73	-0.50	1.87	-1.32	-1.00	1.61	-2.32	-2.00	1.25	0.004***
Project evaluation and ongoing control	-0.48	0.00	1.16	-0.73	0.00	1.34	-1.19	-1.00	1.10	0.088*
Compliance with the timetable, budget, indicators	-1.56	-1.00	1.76	-2.21	-3.00	1.85	-2.55	-3.00	1.19	0.190

M – mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation, p – probability in Mann-Whitney test, * $P < .10$, ** $P < .05$, *** $P < .01$

Source: own elaboration.

Comparing the evaluations of respondents representing public authorities and other respondents (Table 6.20), it can be seen that public authorities evaluated significantly higher the problems with budget, timetable and planning of the project activities ($P=.051$). Regarding other activities, respondents from public authorities and other respondents had similar opinions.

Table 6.20. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on project activities – descriptive statistics by type of institution

Project phase	Local, regional and state public authority			Other			P
	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	
Creation of the idea of the project	-0.55	0.00	1.85	-0.33	0.00	1.69	0.210
Searching for the cross-border partners	-0.49	0.00	1.62	-0.42	0.00	0.96	0.495
Budget, timetable and planning of the project activities	-0.96	-1.00	1.94	-0.50	0.00	1.20	0.051*
Cooperation with the partners	-1.20	-2.00	2.02	-0.81	-1.00	1.80	0.203
Communication with the project target groups	-1.82	-2.00	1.84	-1.39	-1.00	1.82	0.255
Cooperation with INTERREG Authority	-0.10	0.00	1.50	-0.16	0.00	0.78	0.555
Promotion of the project	-0.65	0.00	1.48	-0.26	0.00	1.37	0.202
Implementation of the activities according to the project methodology	-1.67	-2.00	1.56	-1.10	-1.00	1.89	0.206
Project evaluation and ongoing control	-0.90	-1.00	1.32	-0.61	0.00	1.05	0.148
Compliance with the timetable, budget, indicators	-2.27	-3.00	1.62	-1.79	-2.00	1.78	0.250

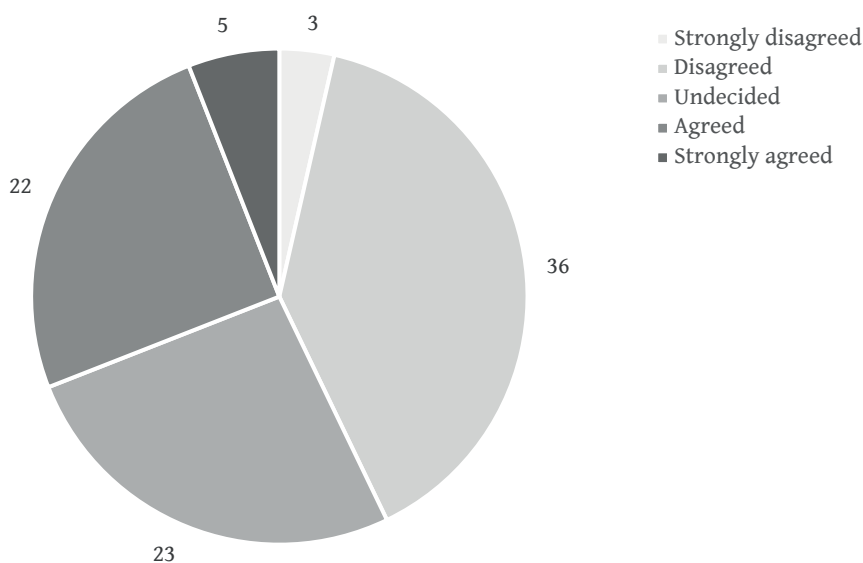
M – mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation, p – probability in Mann-Whitney test, ** $P<.05$

Source: own elaboration.

Regarding the forecasted long-term changes in thematic priorities of partnerships in the cross-border projects co-funded by the INTERREG Programme, one in three respondents confirmed that the COVID-19 pandemic would cause such chang-

es in the following years. When answering this question, three respondents chose 'strongly disagree'. On the other hand, according to the opinion of nearly half of the respondents, there was almost no such relationship. One in four beneficiaries was undecided (Fig. 6.6). This opinion is similar in both countries (in the Mann-Whitney test, $P=.859$), as well as for public authorities and other entities ($P=.923$) and by number of projects (in Kruskal-Wallis test, $P=.141$).

Figure 6.6. Answer for the question 'Do you agree that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused long-term changes in the priorities (thematic priorities of partnerships) in INTERREG Czechia-Poland projects in the following years?' (number of respondents)



Source: own elaboration.

The COVID-19 pandemic impact on the critical issues related to cross-border cooperation was assessed ambivalently (Table 6.21). A negative mean (but no higher than -1), excluding 'dynamism of cross-border cooperation', was observed for most aspects. Only 'the interest in maintaining cross-border cooper-

ation after the end of the project' had a positive mean ($M = 0.13$). The lowest assessment concerned the following issues: 'dynamism of cross-border cooperation', as well as 'administrative burden caused by cross-border activities' ($M = -0.98$, $Me = -1$), 'quality of cross-border cooperation' ($M = -0.73$, $Me = -1$) and 'realisation of joint cross-border missions, plans and strategies' ($M = -0.78$, $Me = 0$). For these four aspects, negative assessments were done by 43–50 persons. No impact was recognised, especially for the following aspects: 'the interest in finding new partners for cross-border cooperation' (51 persons with answers of 'zero'), 'motivation to extend cross-border cooperation in existing partnerships' (48 answers of 'zero'), as well as 'importance of cross-border cooperation' and 'the interest in maintaining cross-border cooperation after the end of the project' (44–45 answers of 'zero'). None of the aspects had more positive than negative assessments.

According to another analysis, these assessments are similar for Polish and Czech respondents. Only regarding the issue: 'interpersonal relations between people jointly managing cross-border cooperation in the region', were the assessments of the Polish respondents more pessimistic than the Czech ones (in the t-test $P = .060$). Regarding type of organisation, one can observe statistically significant differences in assessments of: 'importance of cross-border cooperation' ($P = .037$), 'economic importance of cross-border projects implementation' ($P = .037$) and 'the interest in maintaining cross-border cooperation after the end of the project' ($P = .076$). Each aspect of the cross-border projects was assessed lower by the representatives of the public authorities than other respondents. The number of projects is not significant factor in each aspect.

Table 6.21. Answers for the question ‘How did the COVID-2019 pandemic impact the following issues related to cross-border cooperation?’ (Scale of assessment: from -5 = extremely negatively, 0 = not at all, to 5 = extremely positively)

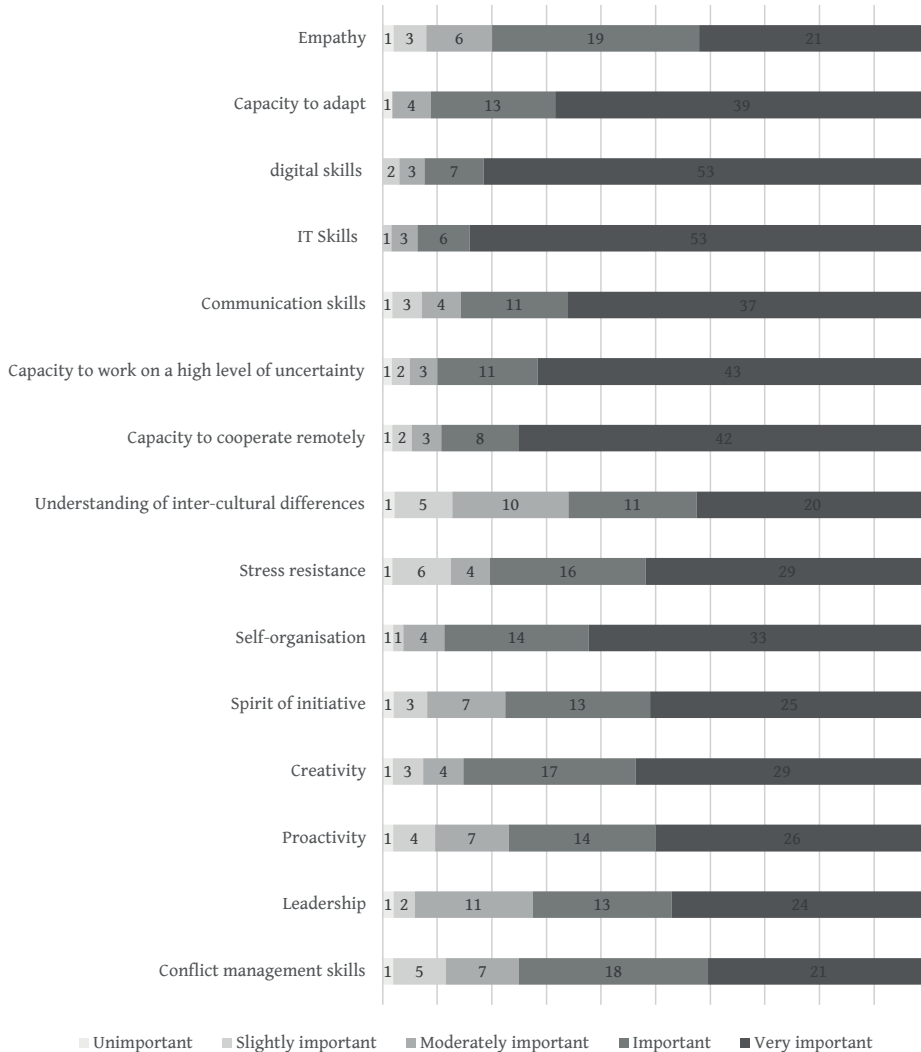
Points	Interest in finding new partners for cross-border cooperation	Motivation to extend cross-border cooperation in existing partnerships	The realisation of joint cross-border missions, plans and strategies	Importance of cross-border cooperation	Dynamism of cross-border cooperation	Quality of cross-border cooperation	Interpersonal relations between people jointly managing cross-border cooperation in the region	The interest in maintaining cross-border cooperation after the end of the project	Economic importance of cross-border projects implementation	Administrative burden caused by cross-border activities
n										
-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
-4	1	4	4	2	5	5	2	1	6	6
-3	8	6	10	6	13	8	5	4	8	10
-2	8	6	17	5	18	11	10	8	9	13
-1	7	9	8	8	14	21	8	9	5	14
0	51	48	32	45	17	26	41	44	36	34
1	4	6	4	3	5	5	6	2	7	2
2	2	1	4	6	4	2	4	6	3	2
3	0	2	0	4	3	3	4	3	5	1
4	1	1	3	3	1	2	3	6	2	1
5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Descriptive statistics										
M	-0.48	-0.45	-0.78	-0.06	-1.04	-0.73	-0.10	0.13	-0.43	-0.98
Me	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	-1.00	-1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	-1.00
SD	1.30	1.48	1.75	1.67	1.82	1.73	1.75	1.79	1.90	1.59

M – mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation. Source: own elaboration.

The importance of skills in implementing cross-border projects was evaluated at quite a high level (Fig. 6.7). The highest assessments were carried out for the following skills: 'IT skills' (M = 4.76) and 'digital skills' (M = 4.71), as well as for 'capacity to cooperate remotely' (M = 4.57), 'capacity to adapt' (M = 4.56) and 'capacity to work on a high level of uncertainty' (M = 4.55). A mean over 4.4 also for self-organisation and communication skills was observed (4.43–4.45). For each of listed skills the median reached the maximum value (5). That means half of the respondents assessed these skills no lower than 5. It was observed that the median is five also for 'creativity' and 'the spirit of the initiative'. Only 'understanding of intercultural differences' had a mean below 4 (M = 3.94), and for 'conflict management skills', it was slightly higher than 4 (M = 4.02) – Table 6.22.

Statistically significant differences between the two countries for most skills were observed. The most significant differences concerned the following skills: leadership – in Czechia the mean was M = 4.63, whereas in Poland it was only 3.77. Also, 'the capacity to adapt' was assessed higher in Czechia (M = 4.84) than in Poland (M = 4.32). Similarly, 'importance of self-organisation', 'spirit of initiative', 'stress resistance', 'empathy', 'proactivity', 'creativity', 'conflict management skills', and 'capacity to work on a high level of uncertainty' were assessed significantly higher in Czechia. Only five other skills were assessed similarly in both countries (Table 6.22).

Figure 6.7. Assessment of the importance of following skills in implementing the INTERREG V projects under the COVID-19 pandemic (number of respondents)



Scale of assessment: unimportant = 1; slightly important = 2; moderately important = 3; important = 4; very important = 5

Source: own elaboration.

Table 6.22. Assessment of the importance of selected skills in implementing cross-border projects under the COVID-19 pandemic – descriptive statistics by country

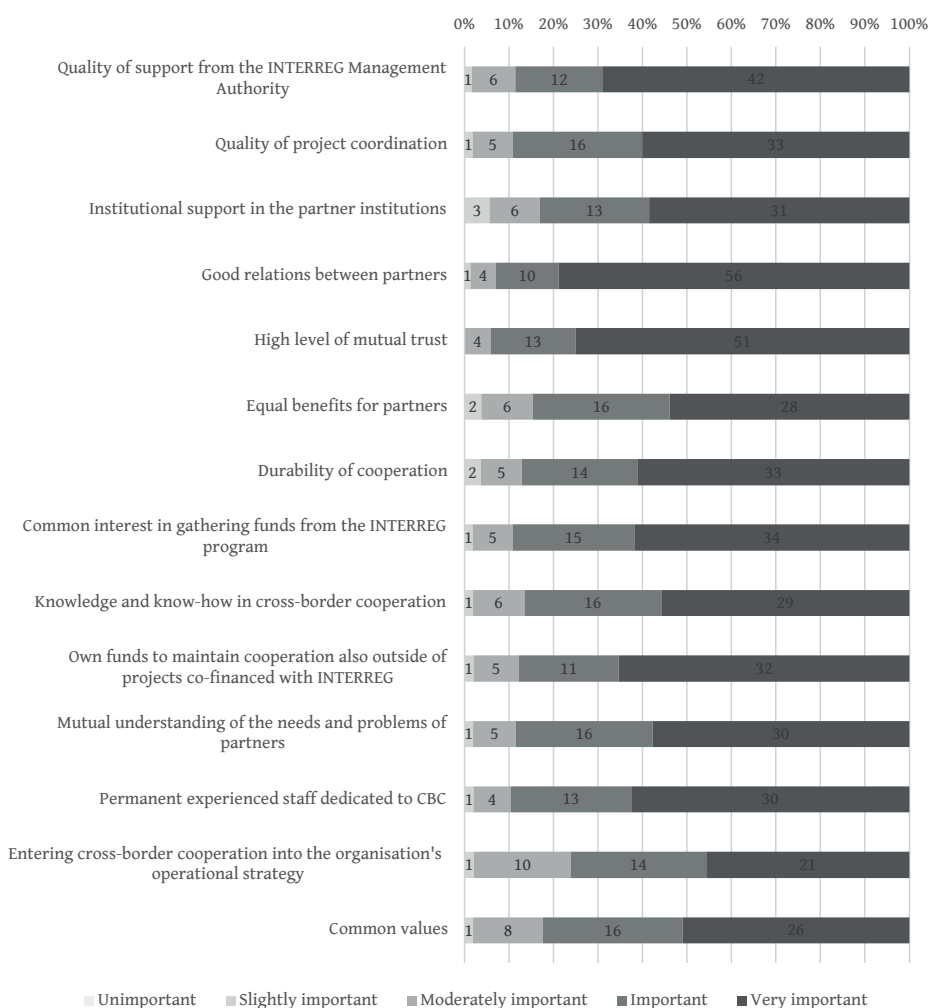
Skills	Total			Czechia			Poland			P
	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	
Empathy	4.12	4.00	0.98	4.32	5.00	1.20	3.97	4.00	0.81	0.025**
Capacity to adapt	4.56	5.00	0.78	4.84	5.00	0.55	4.32	4.00	0.87	0.002***
digital skills	4.71	5.00	0.70	4.70	5.00	0.85	4.71	5.00	0.53	0.277
IT Skills	4.76	5.00	0.61	4.77	5.00	0.72	4.74	5.00	0.51	0.248
Communication skills	4.43	5.00	0.97	4.46	5.00	1.10	4.39	5.00	0.88	0.208
Capacity to work on a high level of uncertainty	4.55	5.00	0.87	4.64	5.00	0.91	4.45	5.00	0.85	0.059*
Capacity to cooperate remotely	4.57	5.00	0.89	4.58	5.00	0.97	4.55	5.00	0.85	0.339
Understanding inter-cultural differences	3.94	4.00	1.13	4.00	5.00	1.37	3.87	4.00	1.01	0.424
Stress resistance	4.18	5.00	1.08	4.36	5.00	1.19	4.00	4.00	0.98	0.021**
Self-organisation	4.45	5.00	0.87	4.68	5.00	0.84	4.27	4.00	0.87	0.009***
Spirit of initiative	4.18	5.00	1.03	4.41	5.00	1.12	4.03	4.00	0.98	0.062*
Creativity	4.30	5.00	0.96	4.43	5.00	1.12	4.17	4.00	0.83	0.026**
Proactivity	4.15	4.50	1.06	4.35	5.00	1.18	4.00	4.00	0.97	0.052*
Leadership	4.12	4.00	1.01	4.63	5.00	0.90	3.77	4.00	0.96	<0.001***
Conflict management skills	4.02	4.00	1.06	4.20	5.00	1.28	3.87	4.00	0.88	0.048**

M – mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation, p – probability in Mann-Whitney test, ** $P < .01$, * $P < .05$, * $P < .10$. Source: own elaboration.

The assessment of the importance of different issues for cross-border cooperation resistant to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic is generally high. Considering that the maximum rate is 5, the means are between 4.20 and 4.70 (none of respondents chose the answer ‘unimportant’). For respondents, the most important was the issue of ‘good relations between partners’. Almost all answers, excluding 5 of them, confirmed its importance, for 56 respondents, it was very important, ‘high level of mutual trust’ (respectively, 64 and 51 answers), ‘quality of support from

the INTERREG Management Authority’ (respectively, 54 and 42 answers), and ‘quality of project coordination’ (respectively, 49 and 33 answers) – Fig. 8. The highest importance was observed for issues: ‘good relations between partners’ (M = 4.69) and ‘high level of mutual trust’ (M = 4.70) (Table 6.23).

Figure 6.8. Importance of the different issues on cross-border cooperation resistant to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic; number of respondents



Scale of assessment: unimportant = 1; slightly important = 2; moderately important = 3; important = 4; very important = 5

Source: own elaboration.

Table 6.23. Importance of the different issues on cross-border cooperation resistant to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic – descriptive statistics by country

Issues	Total			Czechia			Poland			p
	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	
Quality of support from the INTERREG Management Authority	4.56	5.00	0.74	4.77	5.00	0.73	4.33	4.00	0.71	0.002***
Quality of project coordination	4.47	5.00	0.74	4.70	5.00	0.82	4.29	4.00	0.64	0.003***
Institutional support in the partner institutions	4.36	5.00	0.90	4.41	5.00	1.14	4.32	4.00	0.70	0.148
Good relations between partners	4.70	5.00	0.64	4.82	5.00	0.64	4.55	5.00	0.62	0.005***
High level of mutual trust	4.69	5.00	0.58	4.89	5.00	0.46	4.45	5.00	0.62	<0.001***
Equal benefits for partners	4.35	5.00	0.84	4.67	5.00	0.86	4.10	4.00	0.76	0.001***
Cooperation durability	4.44	5.00	0.82	4.57	5.00	0.99	4.33	4.00	0.66	0.032**
Common interest in gathering funds from the INTERREG program	4.49	5.00	0.74	4.71	5.00	0.81	4.30	4.00	0.65	0.003***
Knowledge and know-how in cross-border cooperation	4.40	5.00	0.77	4.67	5.00	0.86	4.20	4.00	0.66	0.003***
Own funds to maintain cooperation also outside of projects co-financed with INTERREG	4.51	5.00	0.77	4.61	5.00	0.92	4.43	5.00	0.68	0.113
Mutual understanding of the needs and problems of partners	4.44	5.00	0.75	4.67	5.00	0.86	4.27	4.00	0.64	0.005***
Permanent experienced staff dedicated to CBC	4.50	5.00	0.74	4.59	5.00	0.94	4.43	4.50	0.63	0.111
Entering cross-border cooperation into the organisation's operational strategy	4.20	4.00	0.86	4.53	5.00	0.99	4.00	4.00	0.74	0.014**
Common values	4.31	5.00	0.81	4.63	5.00	0.90	4.10	4.00	0.70	0.003***

M – mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation, p – probability in Mann-Whitney test, ** $P < .01$, *** $P < .05$, * $P < .10$

Source: own elaboration.

High assessments (mean approx. 4.5) were also recognised for the following issues: ‘quality of support from the INTERREG Management Authority’, ‘own funds to maintain cooperation also outside of projects co-financed with INTERREG’, ‘permanent experienced staff dedicated to CBC’, ‘common interest in gathering funds from the INTERREG program’, ‘quality of project coordination’. The lowest assessments were recognised for the issue ‘entering cross-border cooperation into the organisation’s operational strategy’ ($M = 4.2$). It should be noted that the opinions of Polish and Czech respondents differ significantly in relation to almost all issues (Table 6.23). Only three aspects: ‘institutional support in the partner institutions’, ‘own funds to maintain cooperation also outside of projects co-financed with INTERREG’, and ‘permanent experienced staff dedicated to CBC’ were similarly assessed by Polish and Czech respondents (in Mann-Whitney test, $P > .05$). All other aspects were assessed higher by the Czech respondents than by the Polish ones. The most significant differences concerned two issues: ‘equal benefits for partners’ and ‘entering cross-border cooperation into the organisation’s operational strategy and common values’.

Regarding cross-border cooperation resilience to crises, a statistically significant relationship was observed only for the following elements (Table 6.24):

- ‘entering cross-border cooperation into the organisation’s operational strategy’ and ‘the interest in finding new partners for cross-border cooperation’ ($\rho = -0.333$),
- ‘institutional support in the partner institutions’ and ‘dynamism of cross-border cooperation’ ($\rho = -0.298$), and ‘quality of cross-border cooperation’ ($\rho = -0.275$),
- ‘good relations between partners’ and ‘dynamism of cross-border cooperation’ ($\rho = -0.277$).

These correlations are moderate and negative: the higher the assessment for listed cooperation aspects, the lower the assess-

ment for resilience issues. For the other dimensions of resilience to crisis, evaluations are not significantly associated with assessments on the importance of the listed cross-border cooperation aspects ($P > .05$).

Statistically significant relationships between resilience to crises and most skills were observed. Regarding the following six issues: 'high level of mutual trust', 'equal benefits for partners', 'durability of cooperation', 'mutual understanding of the needs and problems of partners', 'entering cross-border cooperation into the organisation's operational strategy', and 'common values', the relationship was statistically significant for each skill. Also, from the perspective of skills, the relationship was statistically significant for each aspect of resilience. This applies to qualities such as 'empathy', 'capacity to adapt', 'IT skills', 'capacity to cooperate remotely', 'stress resistance', 'self-organisation', 'creativity', 'leadership', and 'conflict management skills'. For each of skills and resilience aspects, correlations are positive. Greater importance was attributed to the given issue from a resilience to crisis perspective when the given skill was attributed with a higher score in the COVID-19 pandemic conditions (Table 6.25). In some aspects of resilience to crisis, notably 'high level of mutual trust', 'mutual understanding of the needs and problems of partners', and 'durability of cooperation', a high correlation ($\rho > 0.5$) was recorded for as many as two-thirds of the skills analysed. Also for skills such as: 'common values', 'equal benefits for partners', 'knowledge and know-how in cross-border cooperation', and 'entering cross-border cooperation into the organisation's operational strategy' the correlation with elements characterising crisis resilience is high. 'Leadership' is strongly correlated with almost all elements of resilience to crisis. A weaker, but also significant relationship applies only to 'quality of support from the INTERREG Management Authority' ($\rho = 0.327$).

Table 6.24. Correlation between the assessment of the cross-border cooperation resilience to crises and the COVID-19 pandemic impact on cross-border cooperation aspects (Spearman's rho)

Cross-border resilience to crises / Cross-border cooperation aspects	Quality of support from the INTERREG Management Authority	Quality of project coordination	Institutional support in the partner institutions	Good relations between partners	High level of mutual trust	Equal benefits for partners	Cooperation durability	Common interest in gathering funds from the INTERREG program	Knowledge and know-how in cross-border cooperation	Own funds to maintain cooperation also outside of projects co-financed with INTERREG	Mutual understanding of the needs and problems of partners	Permanent experienced staff dedicated to CBC	Entering cross-border cooperation into the organisation's operational strategy	Common values
Interest in finding new partners for cross-border cooperation	-0.069	-0.201	-0.157	-0.127	-0.053	-0.068	-0.202	-0.070	-0.185	-0.177	-0.152	-0.216	-0.333**	-0.069
Motivation to extend cross-border cooperation in existing partnerships	-0.108	-0.117	-0.066	-0.060	-0.077	-0.039	-0.078	-0.103	-0.162	-0.179	-0.093	-0.246	-0.213	-0.108
The realisation of joint cross-border missions, plans and strategies	-0.220	-0.251	-0.190	-0.217	-0.118	-0.109	-0.221	-0.233	-0.142	-0.186	-0.203	-0.230	-0.224	-0.220
Importance of cross-border cooperation	0.016	-0.132	-0.094	0.014	-0.034	0.007	0.018	-0.157	0.048	0.077	0.020	-0.274	-0.020	0.016
Dynamism of cross-border cooperation	-0.226	-0.261	-0.298**	-0.277**	-0.122	-0.102	-0.182	-0.117	-0.114	-0.074	-0.147	-0.232	-0.186	-0.226
Quality of cross-border cooperation	-0.087	-0.174	-0.275**	-0.133	-0.072	-0.060	-0.159	-0.082	-0.063	-0.067	-0.002	-0.261	-0.132	-0.087
Interpersonal relations between people jointly managing cross-border cooperation in the region	0.025	0.028	0.035	0.100	0.162	0.171	0.049	0.097	0.104	0.031	0.151	-0.063	0.132	0.025
The interest in maintaining cross-border cooperation after the end of the project	0.039	0.000	-0.034	0.059	0.071	0.025	0.058	0.028	0.041	-0.069	0.089	-0.198	0.088	0.039
Economic importance of cross-border projects	0.031	-0.015	-0.157	-0.030	0.020	-0.047	-0.078	-0.093	-0.112	-0.015	-0.017	-0.324**	-0.013	0.031
Administrative burden caused by cross-border activities	-0.157	-0.258	-0.204	-0.159	-0.174	-0.091	-0.149	-0.231	-0.162	-0.098	-0.210	-0.211	-0.012	-0.157

** $P < .05$, *** $P < .01$. Source: own elaboration.

Table 6.25. Correlation between the assessment of the cross-border cooperation resilience to crises and skills assessment (Spearman's rho)

Cross-border resilience to crises	Skills														
	Empathy	Capacity to adapt	Digital skills	IT Skills	Communication skills	Capacity to work on a high level of uncertainty	Capacity to cooperate remotely	Understanding of intercultural differences	Stress resistance	Self-organisation	Spirit of initiative	Creativity	Proactivity	Leadership	Conflict management skills
Quality of support from the INTERREG Management Authority	0.354*	0.414**	0.358**	0.398**	0.332*	0.555**	0.394**	0.149	0.361*	0.311*	0.331*	0.283	0.226	0.368*	0.327*
Quality of project coordination	0.476**	0.401**	0.324*	0.356*	0.386**	0.442**	0.421**	0.057	0.426**	0.346*	0.469**	0.313*	0.396**	0.460**	0.464**
Institutional support in the partner institutions	0.395**	0.482**	0.363*	0.324*	0.388*	0.435**	0.424**	0.068	0.453**	0.300	0.555**	0.432**	0.509**	0.569**	0.551**
Good relations between partners	0.421**	0.582**	0.354**	0.345**	0.118	0.384**	0.428**	0.169	0.361**	0.481**	0.499**	0.504**	0.483**	0.510**	0.536**
High level of mutual trust	0.632**	0.625**	0.406**	0.505**	0.363**	0.516**	0.597**	0.251	0.425**	0.646**	0.728**	0.513**	0.591**	0.671**	0.625**
Equal benefits for partners	0.542**	0.454**	0.333*	0.318*	0.364*	0.539**	0.486**	0.314*	0.318*	0.504**	0.699**	0.404**	0.396**	0.536**	0.516**
Durability of cooperation	0.384*	0.518**	0.377**	0.488**	0.430**	0.614**	0.622**	0.275	0.583**	0.535**	0.593**	0.627**	0.606**	0.617**	0.631**
Common interest in gathering funds from the INTERREG program	0.383*	0.287	0.193	0.294*	0.269	0.439**	0.441**	0.040	0.288	0.460**	0.496**	0.408**	0.452**	0.523**	0.422**
Knowledge and know-how in cross-border cooperation	0.329*	0.387*	0.283*	0.391**	0.313*	0.531**	0.537**	0.183	0.440**	0.462**	0.547**	0.578**	0.541**	0.643**	0.628**
Own funds to maintain cooperation also outside of projects co-financed with INTERREG	0.430**	0.442**	0.203	0.297	0.327*	0.496**	0.515**	0.178	0.346*	0.333*	0.481**	0.484**	0.500**	0.558**	0.489**
Mutual understanding of the needs and problems of partners	0.569**	0.504**	0.342*	0.456**	0.367*	0.577**	0.589**	0.299	0.596**	0.512**	0.633**	0.476**	0.548**	0.596**	0.516**
Permanent experienced staff dedicated to CBC	0.458**	0.428**	0.309*	0.339*	0.181	0.243	0.340*	0.167	0.391**	0.440**	0.532**	0.324*	0.430**	0.506**	0.516**
Entering cross-border cooperation into the organisation's operational strategy	0.529**	0.458**	0.452**	0.537**	0.360*	0.362*	0.498**	0.287	0.548**	0.380*	0.518**	0.516**	0.586**	0.661**	0.604**
Common values	0.589**	0.477**	0.423**	0.484**	0.462**	0.456**	0.568**	0.358*	0.609**	0.431**	0.611**	0.547**	0.646**	0.731**	0.706**

** $P < .05$, *** $P < .01$. Source: own elaboration.

Strong relationships were also reported for ‘conflict management skills’ (for ten of the fourteen resilience elements) and ‘spirit of initiative’ (for nine of the fourteen resilience elements). In contrast, for ‘digital skills’, ‘communication skills’ and ‘understanding of intercultural differences’, there are no strong correlations with elements of crisis resilience.

The strongest correlation is reported between:

- ‘high level of mutual trust’ and ‘spirit of initiative’ (rho = 0.728), ‘leadership’ (rho = 0.671), ‘self-organisation’ (rho = 0.646), ‘empathy’ (rho = 0.632), ‘conflict management skills’ (rho = 0.625), and ‘capacity to adapt’ (rho = 0.625),
- ‘common values’ and ‘leadership’ (rho = 0.731), ‘conflict management skills’ (rho = 0.706), ‘proactivity’ (rho = 0.646), ‘spirit of initiative’ (rho = 0.611), ‘stress resistance’ (rho = 0.609),
- ‘equal benefits for partners’ and ‘spirit of initiative’ (rho = 0.699),
- ‘durability of cooperation’ and ‘conflict management skills’ (rho = 0.631), ‘creativity’ (rho = 0.627), ‘capacity to cooperate remotely’ (rho = 0.622), ‘leadership’ (rho = 0.617), ‘capacity to work on a high level of uncertainty’ (rho = 0.614), ‘proactivity’ (rho = 0.606),
- ‘knowledge and know-how in cross-border cooperation’ and ‘leadership’ (rho = 0.643), ‘conflict management skills’ (rho = 0.628),
- ‘mutual understanding of the needs and problems of partners’ and ‘spirit of initiative’ (rho = 0.633), as well as ‘leadership’ and ‘stress resistance’ (rho = 0.596),
- ‘entering cross-border cooperation into the organisation’s operational strategy’ and ‘leadership’ (rho = 0.661) and ‘conflict management skills’ (rho = 0.604).

Table 6.26. Correlation between the assessment of the COVID-19 pandemic impact on particular projects phases and activities (Spearman's rho)

Project phases	Project definition	Planification	The process of the submission of the application	The process of contracting the project	Implementation	Closing phase	Durability phase
Cross-border resilience to crises							
Creation of the idea of the project	-0.085	-0.178	-0.140	-0.328***	-0.273*	-0.207	-0.259**
Searching for the cross-border partners	-0.228*	-0.136	-0.277**	-0.285***	-0.086	-0.134	-0.265**
Budget, timetable and planning of the project activities	0.009	-0.153	-0.091	-0.165	-0.333***	0.003	-0.156
Cooperation with the partners	0.006	-0.004	0.009	-0.154	-0.317***	-0.194	-0.173
Communication with the project target groups	-0.034	-0.124	-0.084	-0.251**	-0.398***	-0.285***	-0.189
Cooperation with INTERREG Authority	-0.099	-0.091	-0.257**	-0.309***	0.044	-0.172	-0.205
Promotion of the project	-0.003	-0.029	-0.090	-0.149	-0.273**	-0.220**	-0.137
Implementation of the activities according to the project methodology	0.060	-0.081	-0.073	-0.156	-0.456***	-0.250**	-0.100
Project evaluation and ongoing control	-0.032	-0.060	-0.104	-0.108	-0.201	-0.303***	-0.260**
Compliance with the timetable, budget, indicators	0.176	0.068	0.208	0.036	-0.486***	-0.201	-0.092

** $P < .05$, *** $P < .01$. Source: own elaboration.

Analysing the relevance of the pandemic in the different phases and project activities (Table 6.26), it can be seen that the scores obtained are, in general, moderately strongly correlated. The strongest relationships apply to the implementation phase – especially in terms of ‘compliance with the timetable, budget, indicators’ ($\rho = -0.486$) and ‘implementation of the activities according to the project methodology’ ($\rho = -0.456$). On the other hand, the score for the planification phase is not significantly associated with the score for any of the project activities, with the definition phase being significantly associated only with ‘searching for the cross-border partners’ ($\rho = -0.228$), and ‘the process of the submission of the application phase’ being associated with ‘searching for the cross-border partners’ ($\rho = -0.277$) and ‘cooperation with INTERREG Authority’ ($\rho = -0.257$). The correlation between all these aspects is negative: respondents who perceived a stronger impact of the pandemic on a particular stage of the project also rated cross-border project activities more negatively (Table 6.26).

6.3. Cross-border project management under COVID-19 pandemic conditions – selected summary and comparative assessments

6.3.1. Factors related to the management of cross-border projects under COVID-19 pandemic conditions – summary assessments

Regardless of the analysis presented in the previous subsections, and concerning both selected borderlands separately, another part of the study is devoted to the summary assessment of factors related to managing cross-border projects during the pandemic. The first issue analysed was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on various aspects of cross-border cooperation in cross-border projects. An overall (summary) assessment of cross-border cooperation

examined how the COVID-19 pandemic affected various aspects of this cooperation. Reliability is high for this scale – Cronbach’s alpha coefficient equals 0.899. Exploratory factor analysis showed high relevance of this measurement tool. KMO = 0.840, as well as Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity ($p < 0.001$) confirm that the adopted set of questions is adequate. It explains a total of 66.2% of the variance in the latent variable (cross-border cooperation) – Table 6.27.

Table 6.27. Exploratory factor analysis results – the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border cooperation within cross-border projects

Specification	Factor	
	C1	C2
Interest in finding new partners for cross-border cooperation	0.855	0.038
The realisation of joint cross-border missions, plans and strategies	0.842	0.246
Motivation to extend cross-border cooperation in existing partnerships	0.834	0.249
Dynamism of cross-border cooperation	0.688	0.471
Importance of cross-border cooperation	0.583	0.469
Administrative burden caused by cross-border activities	0.463	0.387
The interest in maintaining cross-border cooperation after the end of the project	0.229	0.841
Interpersonal relations between people jointly managing cross-border cooperation in the region	0.032	0.818
Economic importance of cross-border projects implementation	0.370	0.749
Quality of cross-border cooperation	0.423	0.654
KMO	0.840	
Sphericity test	$\chi^2 (45) = 725.3; p < 0.001^{***}$	
Degree of explained variance: for the component cumulated	53.186	12.975
	53.186	66.161
Cronbach’s alpha coefficient	0.855	0.839

Source: own elaboration.

The tool has high theoretical relevance and two sub-areas can be distinguished within it, each with a high reliability. The first covers six variables: interest in finding new partners for cross-border cooperation; the realisation of joint cross-border missions, plans and strategies; motivation to extend cross-border cooperation in existing partnerships; dynamism of cross-border cooperation; importance of cross-border cooperation, and administrative burden caused by cross-border activities. Considered together, they can be described as the driving force behind the development of cross-border cooperation. This factor is the most important for assessing cross-border cooperation in the context of the pandemic: it explains 53% of the variance in the latent variable. The second factor, explaining 13% of the variance of the latent variable, includes four variables: the interest in maintaining cross-border cooperation after the end of the project; interpersonal relations between people jointly managing cross-border cooperation in the upper rhine region; economic importance of cross-border projects implementation; quality of cross-border cooperation. Together, these variables can be described as a stabilising factor for the cross-border cooperation. Factor loadings are high, with the lowest value (0.463) recorded for the aspect of administrative burden caused by cross-border activities.

The adopted set of variables can therefore be used to measure cross-border cooperation (in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic). A summary measurement was made of all ten items representing an average of the results for each item. The cross-border cooperation variable can therefore take values between -5 and 5, whereas the lower the result, the more negative the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the cross-border project cooperation (the higher the result, the more positive the assessment).

Table 6.28. Descriptive statistics for cross-border cooperation variable

Statistics	M	M _T	Me	SD	Min	Max	R	R _I	S	K
Cooperation	-0.30	-0.33	-0.38	1.43	-3.45	4.00	7.45	1.45	0.544	0.611

M – mean, M_T – trimmed mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation, R – range, R_I – interquartile range, S – skewness, K – kurtosis

The assessment of cross-border cooperation (in terms of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its level) is, on average, negative. The study therefore proved the negative impact of the pandemic on cross-border cooperation in the form of projects. The results, by the way, are quite highly variable, ranging between -3.45 and 4, with a standard deviation of up to 1.4. For half of the respondents, the result was no higher than -0.38. The skewness is to the right but it is weak. The flattening of the distribution of this variable is not significantly different from the normal curve (Table 6.28).

The second issue analysed was the resilience of cross-border cooperation in projects in the face of crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In carrying out an overall (summary) resilience assessment, the reliability of the measurement tool was checked, firstly. Reliability is high for this scale – Cronbach's alpha coefficient equals 0.968. The exploratory factor analysis carried out indicates that this scale is homogeneous (one-dimensional). The high KMO value (Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin measure), i.e., 0.8, indicates the relevance of the developed tool. Also, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p < 0.001$) confirms the good measurement properties of the proposed scale. The 14 items adopted explain 71% of resilience. In addition, all factor loadings are high: for ten items they exceed 0.8, for the other two they reach 0.75-0.80 (Table 6.29).

Table 6.29. Exploratory factor analysis results – resilience of cross-border cooperation in cross-border projects against the COVID-19 pandemic

Specification	R
Knowledge and know-how in cross-border cooperation	0.899
High level of mutual trust	0.897
Mutual understanding of the needs and problems of partners	0.896
Durability of cooperation	0.875
Common interest in gathering funds from the INTERREG Program	0.873
Quality of project coordination	0.866
Institutional support in the partner institutions	0.851
Own funds to maintain cooperation also outside of projects co-financed with the INTERREG Programme	0.846
Permanent experienced staff dedicated to cross-border cooperation	0.833
Equal benefits for partners	0.820
Good relations between partners	0.813
Common values	0.806
Quality of support from the INTERREG Management Authority	0.794
Entering cross-border cooperation into the organisation's operational strategy	0.747
KMO	0.800
Sphericity test	$\chi^2 (91) = 594.7;$ $p < 0.001^{***}$
Degree of explained variance: for the component	71.427
cumulated	71.427

Source: own elaboration.

The set of variables adopted is adequate and can be used to measure resilience (in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic). A summary measurement was made of all fourteen items representing an average of the results for each item. The resilience variable can therefore take values between 1 and 5, whereas the higher the result, the higher the level of resilience (the relevance of the issues analysed for building resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic is higher).

Table 6.30. Descriptive statistics for Resilience variable

Statistics	M	M _T	Me	SD	Min	Max	R	R _I	S	The
Resilience	4.30	4.35	4.31	0.68	2	5	3	1.08	-0.938	0.687

M – mean, M_T – trimmed mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation, R – range, R_I – interquartile range, S – skewness, K – kurtosis
Source: own elaboration.

The assessment of resilience is high, with the average reaching 4.3, and for half of the respondents the grade was no lower than 4.31. The results, by the way, are fairly homogeneous, ranging from 2 to 5, with an average deviation from the mean of 0.68. Maximum result (resulting from an assessment of 5 for all issues) applies to 30% of respondents. The skewness is to the left (there are respondents with unusually low resilience scores), albeit it not very strong. The flattening of the distribution of this variable is not significantly different from the normal curve (Table 6.30). It is important to note that respondents referred to the issues studied when assessing their relevance to building the resilience of cross-border projects in the face of crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the high averages, it can be said that beneficiaries of cross-border projects in the surveyed borderlands believed that the potential to build resilience of cross-border cooperation in projects to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic remains highly influenced by external and internal factors, which are considered in Table 6.27. The unidimensionality of this scale confirms that all these factors are understood as different dimensions (components) of the same phenomenon. This may confirm that building the crisis resilience of cross-border cooperation is perceived holistically by respondents, taking into account all the factors analysed (rather than with a focus on only some selected factors), and collectively their importance for the crisis resilience of cross-border cooperation in cross-border projects is rated highly.

Guided by the research assumption of the importance of project team competencies in cross-border project management, competencies related to this process were identified and the extent to which each is important for the implementation of cross-border projects during the COVID-19 pandemic was examined. Reliability is high for this scale – Cronbach's alpha coefficient equals 0.914. Exploratory factor analysis showed high relevance of this measurement tool. KMO = 0.862, as well as Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p < 0.001$) confirm that the adopted set of questions is adequate. It explains a total of 74.9% of the variance in the latent variable (Skills) – Table 6.31.

The tool has high theoretical relevance and four sub-areas can be distinguished within it, each with a high reliability. The first sub-area includes six skills: proactivity, creativity, spirit of initiative, self-organisation, stress resistance, leadership. These are self-management skills and social competences, which explain 46% of the variance in the latent variable. The second sub-area comprises social competences falling (according to the ESCO classification) under communication skills in the broadest sense. These are: communication skills, understanding of inter-cultural differences, conflict management skills and empathy. This group of competences explains approximately 13% of the variance in the latent variable. Another group of competences is the capacity to work in risk – to adapt, to cooperate remotely and on a high level of uncertainty. It explains approximately 8% of the variance in the latent variable. The last group includes ICT skills: digital and IT skills. This group of competences explains approximately 7% of the variance in the latent variable. It has to be emphasised that all factor loads are high, above 0.5 (the lowest is 0.556).

Table 6.31. Exploratory factor analysis results – the importance of skills for managing cross-border projects during the COVID-19 pandemic

Specification	Factor			
	S1	S2	S3	S4
Proactivity	0.834	0.263	0.172	0.020
Creativity	0.830	0.162	0.204	0.164
Spirit of initiative	0.798	0.262	0.074	-0.023
Self-organisation	0.697	0.097	0.410	0.091
Stress resistance	0.692	0.165	0.403	0.064
Leadership	0.687	0.537	-0.049	0.161
Empathy	0.320	0.780	0.087	0.088
Understanding of inter-cultural differences	0.153	0.750	0.224	0.053
Conflict management skills	0.556	0.670	0.071	0.171
Communication skills	0.177	0.556	0.427	0.328
Capacity to cooperate remotely	0.207	0.013	0.802	0.250
Capacity to work on a high level of uncertainty	0.219	0.149	0.741	0.297
Capacity to adapt	0.179	0.406	0.698	-0.095
IT skills	0.107	0.175	0.138	0.940
Digital skills	0.056	0.077	0.210	0.934
KMO	0.862			
Sphericity test	$\chi^2 (105) = 955.0; p < 0.001^{***}$			
Degree of explained variance: for the component	45.874	13.361	8.412	7.208
cumulated	45.874	59.236	67.647	74.856
Cronbach's alpha	0.913	0.819	0.784	0.960

Source: own elaboration.

The adopted set of variables can therefore be used to measure skills (in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic). A summary measurement was made of all fifteen items representing an average of the results for each item. The skills variable can take values between 1 and 5, whereas the higher the result, the greater the importance of the skills in the group for the implementation of cross-border projects during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 6.32. Descriptive statistics for Skills variable

Statistics	M	M _T	Me	SD	Min	Max	R	R _I	S	The
Skills	4.22	4.28	4.27	0.77	1.53	5.00	3.47	1.20	-0.985	0.849

M – mean, M_T – trimmed mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation, R – range, R_I – interquartile range, S – skewness, K – kurtosis

Source: own elaboration.

The assessment of skills (in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic) is high, with an average of 4.22 (with a max. 5), and an overwhelming proportion of respondents rated them no lower than 4.27. A maximum grade was recorded for 29% of respondents and a grade of less than 3 applies to only 6% of respondents. The results, by the way, are fairly homogeneous (SD = 0.77). The skewness is moderately strong, to the left, and the flattening of the distribution of this variable is not significantly different from a normal curve (Table 6.32). The results of the study indicate that skills were important in managing cross-border projects during the pandemic period.

Following the research objectives, the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic affected the implementation phases of cross-border projects and the various types of activities involved in managing these projects was also verified.

The assessment of the project phases focused on the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic affected each phase of the cross-border project. Reliability is high for this scale – Cronbach's alpha coefficient equals 0.771. Exploratory factor analysis showed high relevance of this measurement tool. KMO = 0.697, as well as Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p < 0.001$) confirm that the adopted set of questions is adequate. It explains a total of 65.8% of the variance in the latent variable (Phases) – Table 6.33.

Table 6.33. Exploratory factor analysis results – the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the individual phases of cross-border projects

Specification	Factor	
	P1	P2
Project definition	0.858	0.110
The process of the submission of the application	0.855	0.126
Planification	0.793	0.188
The process of contracting the project	0.759	0.069
Implementation	0.181	0.648
Closing phase	0.075	0.819
Durability phase	0.082	0.648
KMO	0.697	
Sphericity test	$\chi^2 (21) = 376.5; p < 0.001^{***}$	
Degree of explained variance: for the component	43.948	21.898
cumulated	43.948	65.846
Cronbach's alpha coefficient	0.839	0.693

Source: research results.

This tool has high theoretical relevance as well and two sub-areas can be distinguished within it, each with a high reliability. The first sub-area covers preliminary phases such as: project definition; process of the submission of the application; planification; and process of contracting the project. This factor explains 44% of the variation in the latent variable. The second factor involves the implementation and maintenance of project sustainability. It explains approximately 22% of the variation in the latent variable and covers project phases such as the implementation of project activities, the project completion phase and the post-project collaboration maintenance phase. All factor loads are high, no lower than 0.648.

The adopted set of variables can therefore be used to measure project phases (in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic). A summary measurement was made of all seven items representing an average of the results for each item. The project phases variable

can take values between 1 and 10, whereas the higher the result, the greater the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border project phases.

The assessment of project phases (in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic) is low, with an average of 3.62 (with a max. 10, although no respondent in the survey decided for such a rating). Half of the respondents formulated a rating of no less than 3.64. The results are quite highly variable (SD = 1.97). The skewness is weak, to the right and the flattening of the distribution of this variable is not significantly different from a normal curve (Table 6.34). It can therefore be concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic did not have a significant impact on the implementation phases of the cross-border project.

Table 6.34. Descriptive statistics for Phases variable

Statistics	M	M _T	Me	SD	Min	Max	R	R _I	S	The
Phases	3.62	3.56	3.64	1.97	0.00	9.00	9.00	2.96	0.339	-0.328

M – mean, M_T – trimmed mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation, R – range, R_I – interquartile range, S – skewness, K – kurtosis

Source: own elaboration.

This was followed by the examination of the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic affected the different types of cross-border project management activities. Reliability is high for this scale – Cronbach's alpha coefficient equals 0.851. Exploratory factor analysis showed high relevance of this measurement tool. KMO = 0.823, as well as Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p < 0.001$) confirm that the adopted set of questions is adequate. It explains a total of 60% of the variance in the latent variable (Activities). All factor loadings are high (only for the variable: budget, timetable and planning of the project activities, is it slightly lower than 0.5, but it is still higher than the threshold value of 0.4 in exploratory analyses) (Table 6.35).

Table 6.35. Exploratory factor analysis results – the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the individual activities related to management of cross-border projects

Specification	Factor	
	A1	A2
Implementation of the activities according to the project methodology	0.863	0.091
Communication with the project target groups	0.850	0.098
Cooperation with the partners	0.805	0.209
Compliance with the timetable, budget, indicators	0.777	-0.077
Promotion of the project	0.758	0.207
Project evaluation and ongoing control	0.720	0.202
Searching for the cross-border partners	0.022	0.791
Creation of the idea of the project	0.105	0.784
Cooperation with INTERREG Authority	0.107	0.593
Budget, timetable and planning of the project activities	0.458	0.463
KMO	0.823	
Sphericity test	$\chi^2 (45) = 447.3; p < 0.001^{***}$	
Degree of explained variance: for the component	44.128	15.898
cumulated	44.128	60.026
Cronbach's alpha	0.887	0.619

Source: own elaboration.

As in the previous cases, this tool also has a high theoretical relevance, and two sub-areas can be distinguished within it. The first has high reliability (Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.887, the second is acceptable: 0.619). It includes activities such as: implementation of the activities according to the project methodology; communication with the project target groups; cooperation with the partners; compliance with the timetable, budget, indicators; promotion of the project; project evaluation and ongoing control. This factor explains 44% of the variation in the latent variable and is related to the ongoing management of the cross-border projects. The second factor concerns activities re-

lated to planning and preparing cross-border projects for implementation and includes: searching for the cross-border partners; creation of the idea of the project; cooperation with INTERREG Authority; and budget, timetable and planning of the project activities. This factor explains approx. 16% of the variation in the latent variable.

The adopted set of variables can be used to measure project activities (in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic). A summary measurement was made of all ten items representing an average of the results for each item. The project activities variable can take values between -5 and 5, whereas the lower the result, the more negative the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the cross-border project activities (the higher the result, the more positive the assessment).

Table 6.36. Descriptive statistics for project activities variable

Statistics	M	M _T	Me	SD	Min	Max	R	R _I	S	The
Activities	-1.21	-1.29	-1.40	1.34	-4.00	3.50	7.50	1.75	0.935	1.138

M – mean, M_T – trimmed mean, Me – median, SD – standard deviation, R – range, R_I – interquartile range, S – skewness, K – kurtosis
Source: own elaboration.

The evaluation of project activities (in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic) is, on average, negative. The results, by the way, are quite highly variable, ranging between -4 and 3.5, with a standard deviation of up to 1.34. For half of the respondents, the result was no higher than -1.4. The skewness is moderately strong, to the right, and the flattening of the distribution of this variable is not significantly different from a normal curve (Table 6.36). In general, research proved the negative impact of the pandemic on the cross-border project management activities.

When assessing the association of resilience with the other issues analysed above in relation to cross-border project management, it can be seen that it is only significantly (in a statistical sense) associated with the assessment of the importance of skills in cross-border project management ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$). The correlation is strong, positive – significantly higher resilience scores were reported for those respondents who perceived greater importance of skills in managing cross-border projects under COVID-19 pandemic conditions (Table 6.37).

Table 6.37. Correlation between resilience and cooperation, skills, and project phases and activities

		Cooperation	Skills	Project phases	Project activities
Resilience	r	0.019	0.720	-0.117	-0.073
	p	0.827	<0.001***	0.173	0.397

r – Pearson’s linear correlation coefficient, *** $p < 0.01$

Source: own elaboration.

In contrast, the resilience of cross-border projects in the face of pandemic is not significantly related to elements such as cross-border cooperation, cross-border project phases (project phases variable) or cross-border project management activities (project activities variable) (Table 6.37).

6.3.2. Comparative assessment of factors involved in the management of cross-border projects under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic: the Franco-German and Polish-Czech borderlands

When it comes to assessing the relevance of individual elements shaping the resilience of cross-border projects to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, a wide variation in the assessments of respondents from the two surveyed borderlands was noted. These

are statistically significant differences: both overall ($p < 0.001$) and for most of the components that make up resilience (Table 6.38). In general, the importance of all analysed elements in building the resilience of cross-border projects to such crises was rated higher by respondents from the Czech-Polish borderland. The assessment looked at elements such as: quality of support from the INTERREG Management Authority; durability of cooperation; common interest in gathering funds from the INTERREG Programme; knowledge and know-how in cross-border cooperation; own funds to maintain cooperation also outside of projects co-financed with INTERREG; mutual understanding of the needs and problems of partners; permanent experienced staff dedicated to cross-border cooperation; common values. However, it is also possible to identify elements whose relevance was assessed at a similar level in both analysed borderlands, namely: quality of project coordination; institutional support in the partner institutions; good relations between partners; high level of mutual trust; entering cross-border cooperation into the organisation's operational strategy (Table 6.38).

Table 6.38. Comparison of relevance assessments of elements shaping the resilience of cross-border projects to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic in the Franco-German and Polish-Czech borderlands

Specification	Test	Statistics	p	Region with higher results
Quality of support from the INTERREG Management Authority	M-W	-4.064	<0.001***	PL-CZ
Quality of project coordination	M-W	-0.678	0.498	n.a.
Institutional support in the partner institutions	M-W	-1.506	0.132	n.a.
Good relations between partners	M-W	-0.284	0.776	n.a.
High level of mutual trust	M-W	-1.363	0.173	n.a.
Durability of cooperation	M-W	-2.483	0.013**	PL-CZ
Common interest in gathering funds from the INTERREG programme	M-W	-3.970	<0.001***	PL-CZ

Specification	Test	Statistics	p	Region with higher results
Knowledge and know-how in cross-border cooperation	M-W	-3.650	<0.001***	PL-CZ
Own funds to maintain cooperation also outside of projects co-financed with INTERREG	M-W	-4.374	<0.001***	PL-CZ
Mutual understanding of the needs and problems of partners	M-W	-2.626	0.009***	PL-CZ
Permanent experienced staff dedicated to CBC	M-W	-2.166	0.030**	PL-CZ
Entering cross-border cooperation into the organisation's operational strategy	M-W	-1.391	0.164	n.a.
Common values	M-W	-3.679	<0.001***	PL-CZ
Overall assessment of the relevance of elements shaping the resilience of cross-border projects to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (mean)	M-W	-5.009	<0.001***	PL-CZ

FR-DE – Franco-German borderland, PL-CZ Polish-Czech borderland; n.a. – not applicable; M-W – Mann-Whitney test, t – t test for independent sample, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$, n.a. – not applicable

Source: own elaboration.

A comparative analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border cooperation in the Franco-German and Polish-Czech borderlands does not yield clear results. The overall assessment (both based on the average of the ten aspects studied and on an analysis of the responses to the question ‘To what extent has the COVID-19 pandemic caused long-term changes in the thematic priorities of partnerships in cross-border projects in the following years?’) does not differ significantly in the two borderlands studied (Table 6.39).

Table 6.39 shows that the different aspects of cross-border cooperation are mostly rated similarly in terms of the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on them in the two borderlands analysed. On the other hand, respondents' assessments indicate that elements such as: ‘the importance of cross-border cooperation’, as well as ‘the economic importance of cross-border projects implementation’ were more strongly influenced by the pan-

demic in the Franco-German borderland than in the Polish-Czech borderland.

Table 6.39. Comparative analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border cooperation in French-German and Polish-Czech border projects

Specification	Test	Statistics	p	The region with higher grades
The thesis: 'The COVID-19 pandemic has caused long-term changes in the thematic priorities of partnerships in cross-border projects in the following years.'	M-W	-1.333	0.182	n.a.
Cross-border project cooperation				
Interest in finding new partners for cross-border cooperation	M-W	-0.088	0.930	n.a.
Motivation to extend cross-border cooperation in existing partnerships	M-W	-0.377	0.706	n.a.
The realisation of joint cross-border missions, plans and strategies	M-W	-1.219	0.223	n.a.
Importance of cross-border cooperation	M-W	-5.107	<0.001***	FR-DE
Dynamism of cross-border cooperation	M-W	-1.352	0.176	n.a.
Quality of cross-border cooperation	M-W	-0.403	0.687	n.a.
Interpersonal relations between people jointly managing cross-border cooperation in region	M-W	-2.136	0.033**	PL-CZ
The interest in maintaining cross-border cooperation after the end of the project	M-W	-1.450	0.147	n.a.
Economic importance of cross-border projects implementation	M-W	-2.150	0.032**	FR-DE
Administrative burden caused by cross-border activities	M-W	-0.100	0.920	n.a.
Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border projects cooperation - overall result (mean)	t	1.626	0.106	n.a.

FR-DE – Franco-German borderland, PL-CZ Polish-Czech borderland; n.a. – not applicable; M-W – Mann-Whitney test, t – t test for independent sample, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$, n.a. – not applicable

Source: own elaboration.

For the element: ‘interpersonal relations between people jointly managing cross-border cooperation in region,’ the situation is inverse. The impact of the pandemic on this element was rated higher by respondents from the Polish-Czech borderland than from the Franco-German borderland (Table 6.39).

Another element of the comparative assessment was the importance of project team members’ skills in managing cross-border projects during the pandemic. In general, the role of skills in managing cross-border projects during this crisis was valued more by respondents from the Polish-Czech borderland than the Franco-German borderland (overall result significantly different – $p < 0.001$). Beneficiaries of cross-border projects in the Czech-Polish borderland rated the following skills highest: digital and IT skills, as well as stress resistance, spirit of initiative, self-organisation, creativity, proactivity, leadership and conflict management skills (Table 6.40).

Table 6.40. Comparison of the importance of skills in cross-border project management during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Franco-German and Polish-Czech borderlands

Specification	Test	Statistics	p	The region with higher grades
Empathy	M-W	-1.386	0.166	n.a.
Capacity to adapt	M-W	-0.932	0.351	n.a.
Digital skills (abilities to use digital devices, communication applications, and networks to access and manage information)	M-W	-2.607	0.009***	PL-CZ
IT skills (abilities to use the software and hardware of an information technology-based device such as a personal computer, laptop, or tablet)	M-W	-3.262	0.001***	PL-CZ
Communication skills	M-W	-1.588	0.112	n.a.
Capacity to work on a high level of uncertainty	M-W	-1.630	0.103	n.a.
Capacity to cooperate remotely	M-W	-0.745	0.456	n.a.
Understanding of inter-cultural differences	M-W	-0.093	0.926	n.a.

Specification	Test	Statistics	p	The region with higher grades
Stress resistance	M-W	-2.167	0.030**	PL-CZ
Self-organisation	M-W	-3.723	<0.001***	PL-CZ
Spirit of initiative	M-W	-2.805	0.005***	PL-CZ
Creativity	M-W	-3.277	0.001***	PL-CZ
Proactivity	M-W	-2.866	0.004***	PL-CZ
Leadership	M-W	-3.266	0.001***	PL-CZ
Conflict management skills	M-W	-3.268	0.001***	PL-CZ
The importance of skills in managing cross-border projects during the COVID-19 pandemic (mean)	M-W	-4.685	<0.001***	PL-CZ

FR-DE – Franco-German borderland, PL-CZ Polish-Czech borderland; n.a. – not applicable; M-W – Mann-Whitney test, t – t test for independent sample, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$, n.a. – not applicable

Source: own elaboration.

Perception of the impact of the pandemic on the management of cross-border projects in the Franco-German and Polish-Czech borderlands were assessed differently in many aspects. The situation in the two regions, in terms of, for example, pandemic restrictions or the conditions for implementing projects co-financed by the INTERREG Programme, was so different that the implementation of cross-border projects during the COVID-19 pandemic was assessed, although not in all areas, in a varied way. Table 6.41 presents the summarised results of the Mann-Whitney test (for the individual phases and activities of cross-border project management) and the t-test (for the overall result of assessing the impact of the pandemic on cross-border project management). This allowed a comparative assessment of individual aspects of the management of these projects in the Franco-German and Polish-Czech borderlands. The overall assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the different phases of cross-border projects differs significantly ($p = 0.019$). Significantly higher

grades for this impact were recorded for the Franco-German borderland (in the samples, $M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.89$). For the Czech-Polish borderland, the impact of the pandemic on the implementation phases of cross-border projects was found to be weaker ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 2.00$). Similarly, the differences are statistically significant (in favour of the Franco-German border region) when it comes to four of the seven project phases, i.e., planification, implementation, closing phase and durability phase.

Table 6.41. Comparison of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border project phases and different types of cross-border project management activities in the Franco-German and Polish-Czech borderlands

Specification	Test	Statistics	p	The region with higher grades
Phases of cross-border projects				
Project definition	M-W	-0.641	0.522	n.a.
Planification	M-W	-2.409	0.016**	FR-DE
The process of the submission of the application	M-W	-1.034	0.301	n.a.
The process of contracting the project	M-W	-0.796	0.426	n.a.
Implementation	M-W	-3.513	<0.001***	FR-DE
Closing phase (project settlement and final reporting)	M-W	-1.992	0.046**	FR-DE
Durability phase (maintenance of cross-border cooperation after the project's closing)	M-W	-2.236	0.025**	FR-DE
Impact of the pandemic on cross-border project phases - overall result (mean)	t	2.372	0.019**	FR-DE
Cross-border project management activities				
Creation of the idea of the project	M-W	-1.854	0.064*	FR-DE
Searching for the cross-border partners	M-W	-0.965	0.335	n.a.
Budget, timetable and planning of the project activities	M-W	-2.450	0.014**	PL-CZ
Cooperation with the partners	M-W	-1.248	0.212	n.a.
Communication with the project target groups	M-W	-0.715	0.475	n.a.

Specification	Test	Statistics	p	The region with higher grades
Cooperation with INTERREG Authority	M-W	-0.738	0.461	n.a.
Promotion of the project	M-W	-3.785	<0.001***	PL-CZ
Implementation of the activities according to the project methodology	M-W	-1.707	0.088*	PL-CZ
Project evaluation and ongoing control	M-W	-0.248	0.804	n.a.
Compliance with the timetable, budget, indicators	M-W	-0.181	0.856	n.a.
Impact of the pandemic on cross-border project management activities - overall result (mean)	t	-0.841	0.402	n.a.

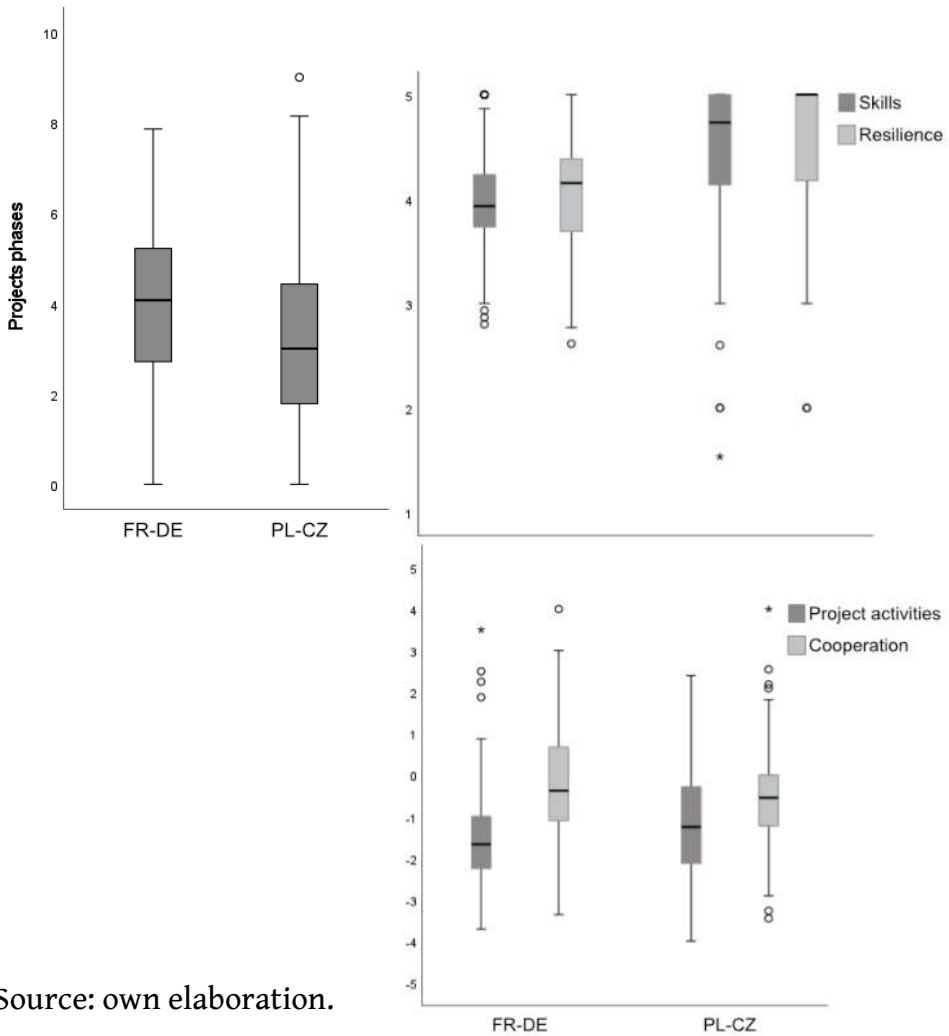
FR-DE – Franco-German borderland, PL-CZ Polish-Czech borderland; n.a. – not applicable; M-W – Mann-Whitney test, t – t test for independent sample

When it comes to individual cross-border project management activities, the overall assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is similar in both regions (differences are not statistically significant - $p = 0.402$), while when it comes to the individual assessment of each activity, the results are not so unequivocal. For example, according to the respondents, activities concerning the ‘creation of the idea of the project’ were more strongly influenced by the pandemic in the Franco-German borderland than in the Polish-Czech borderland. On the other hand, in the Polish-Czech borderland, the impact of the pandemic was felt more strongly than in the Franco-German borderland on such elements of project management as: budget, timetable and planning of the project activities; promotion of the project; and implementation of the activities according to the project methodology (Table 6.41). Other aspects were rated similarly in both borderlands.

The diagram below (Fig. 6.9) presents an aggregation of the summary assessments of the selected areas analysed above, i.e.: resilience, cross-border cooperation, skills and project phases and project activities. Higher resilience and skills scores can be con-

firmed for projects in the Polish-Czech borderland. In this group, the median for resilience reaches maximum level. Scores on the Skills scale are also high for both the Franco-German and the Polish-Czech borderland, although they are significantly higher for projects from the Polish-Czech borderland. Most grades (on a 5-point scale) are higher than 3, although there happened to be respondents perceiving these two issues unusually low (Fig. 6.9).

Figure 6.9. Comparison of overall evaluation of the results for resilience, skills, project activities and cross-border cooperation on the COVID-19 impact measurement scales on different aspects of cross-border project implementation in the Franco-German and Polish-Czech borderland



Source: own elaboration.

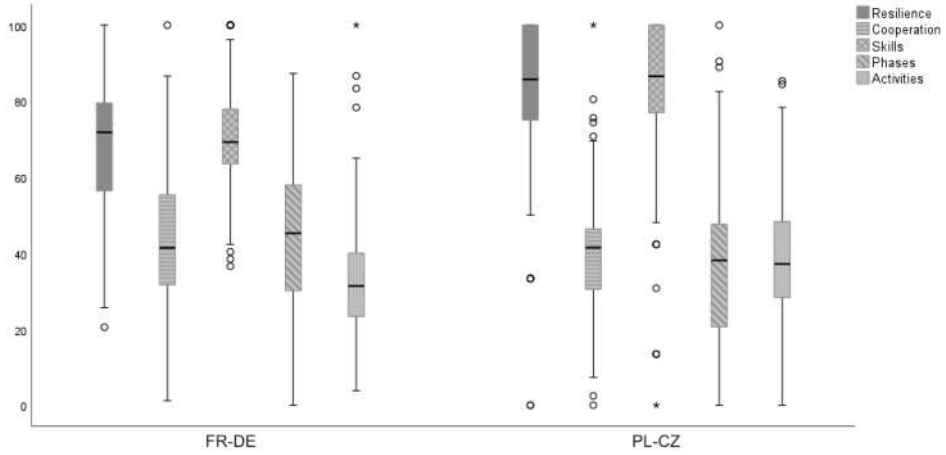
Resilience was rated slightly lower than skills in both borderlands studied. Cross-border cooperation and project activities were rated on a different scale - from -5 to 5. In both borderlands the median for cross-border cooperation is close to 0. Slightly lower than for cross-border cooperation (which, on average, is negative) is the evaluation of project activities, with similar levels.

Due to the incomparability of the five analysed indicators (with their different ranges of variability), they were rescaled to a range of 0-100 (Fig. 6.10). The results give a picture of the high importance of resilience for implementing cross-border projects under crises (median of around 80), slightly lower in the case of the Franco-German borderland. The importance of skills for implementing projects under the COVID-19 pandemic was rated equally highly (with also a slightly lower assessment for the Franco-German borderland). Clearly lower in comparison to skills is the cross-border cooperation result for implementing cross-border projects in the COVID-19 pandemic (median around 40). The lowest assessment in this respect was given for project activities (median of approx. 30-37), especially in projects in the Franco-German borderland (Me = 31). On the other hand, the assessment of project phases is moderately high (median of 3-4 on a scale of 0-10), with lower assessments in projects implemented in the Czech-Polish borderland (Fig. 6.10).

Also, when broken down according to the borderland studied, the assessment of the resilience in cross-border cooperation projects is only significantly (in a statistical sense) related to the assessment of the importance of skills in the management of cross-border projects ($p < 0.001$), with this correlation being slightly stronger for projects from the Polish-Czech borderland ($r = 0.645$) than from the Franco-German borderland ($r = 0.709$).

The correlation is strongly positive, with significantly higher resilience scores in both regions for those respondents who perceived the greater importance of the project team's skills for project implementation under COVID-19 pandemic conditions.

Figure 6.10. Comparison of overall evaluation results of resilience, skills, project phases, project activities and cross-border cooperation in the Franco-German and Polish-Czech border projects – data rescaled to 0–100



Source: own elaboration.

In contrast, there is no significant relationship between resilience and cross-border cooperation, as well as between resilience and project phases and resilience and project activities in the two surveyed borderlands (Table 6.42).

Table 6.42. Correlation between resilience and cooperation, skills, and project phases and project activities by borderland

		Cross-border Cooperation	Skills	Project phases	Project activities
Resilience	FR-DE projects				
	r	0.104	0.645	0.106	-0.179
	p	0.433	<0.001***	0.420	0.172
	PL-CZ projects				
	r	0.054	0.709	-0.158	-0.058
	p	0.644	<0.001***	0.173	0.616

FR-DE – Franco-German borderland, PL-CZ Polish-Czech borderland; r – Pearson’s linear correlation coefficient, *** p < 0.01

Source: own elaboration.

BUILDING MORE RESILIENT COOPERATION IN BORDERLANDS THROUGH CROSS-BORDER PROJECTS

7.1. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the management of cross-border projects co-financed by the INTERREG Programme

The research found that in the Franco-German borderland, the COVID-19 pandemic had the strongest impact on the management of cross-border projects during the implementation phase, including the closure phase and the project durability phase. The impact was also felt in cross-border projects that were in the planning phase at the time. Apart from the durability phase of the project, where the impact of the pandemic was felt more strongly on the German side, it can be assumed that for the rest, the location of the project (French or German part of the borderland) was not relevant in this respect. Public entities managing cross-border projects (local, regional and state public authorities) were much less affected by the pandemic in the project definition phase than other types of beneficiaries. Elsewhere, all types of beneficiaries were similarly affected by the pandemic in terms of project management.

In the Polish-Czech borderland, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the project phases was generally felt less strongly than in the Franco-German borderland. It was felt most strongly by those beneficiaries from Poland and Czechia who implemented project activities during the pandemic period, but again the impact was much weaker than in the case of cross-border projects from the Franco-German borderland. As in the case of the Franco-German borderland, the Polish-Czech borderland also experienced a relatively high impact of the pandemic in the closing and durability phases of the project and, in the second place, in the project planning phase. In the case of the Polish-Czech borderland, however, there was considerable variation in the assessment of the impact of the pandemic on the management of cross-border projects in terms of the criterion of where the projects were implemented. The impact of the pandemic on project planning, implementation and closing was felt more strongly by the Czech beneficiaries than by the Polish beneficiaries. In-depth analyses showed that in the Polish-Czech borderland, the pandemic was felt most strongly by those beneficiaries who implemented two or three projects. They rated the impact of the pandemic on the management of cross-border projects more negatively than beneficiaries with more than three projects and beneficiaries with one project. As in the case of the Franco-German borderland, also in the Polish-Czech borderland, public entities managing cross-border projects were more strongly affected by the pandemic in the project planning phase, but also in the project durability phase and, secondarily, in the project implementation phase.

An analysis of the impact of the pandemic on specific cross-border project activities showed that in the Franco-German borderland beneficiaries experienced the greatest problems in this respect in relation to ‘compliance with the timetable, budget, indicators’ and ‘communication with the project target groups’. Significantly negative impact was also noted for issues such as:

'implementation of the activities according to the project methodology', 'budget, timetable and planning of the project activities', 'promotion of the project' and 'cooperation with the partners'. Some issues, such as the 'creation of the idea of the project', were considered to be outside the influence of the pandemic. Nor was there any differentiation in terms of the impact of the pandemic on the management of cross-border projects on the French and German sides, in terms of the type of project beneficiary (public institutions and other entities). Only in the case of project promotion during the pandemic, greater difficulties were reported by non-public entities. In assessing the impact of the pandemic on project management activities, there was no variation by the number of projects implemented.

Partners from the Polish-Czech borderland pointed in particular to the impact of the pandemic on various elements related to the implementation of the cross-border projects. As in the case of beneficiaries in the Franco-German borderland, the impact of the pandemic was assessed as the most negative in the case of issues such as: 'compliance with the timetable, budget, indicators', 'communication with the project target groups' and 'implementation of the activities according to the project methodology'. As in the Franco-German borderland, several cross-border project management activities were shown to be unaffected by the pandemic, including 'creation of the idea of the project', 'searching the cross-border partners' and 'promotion of the project'. In assessing the impact of the pandemic on individual project management activities, differences between Czech and Polish beneficiaries were noted. On both sides of the border, the pandemic had the strongest impact on the management of cross-border projects for partners with at least three projects. When it comes to the management of cross-border projects by public entities and other types of entities, the only difference in the assessment of project activities concerns 'compliance with

the timetable, budget, indicators'. This issue was more affected by the pandemic in the case of projects implemented by the public entities.

In summary, irrespective of the diversity of the studied borderlands in terms of partners' experience of cross-border cooperation, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the cross-border project phases in the two analysed areas was assessed in a similar way. What emerges from the analysis is the strong negative impact of the pandemic primarily on the implementation phase of the project, which is crucial for the execution of project activities in accordance with the project budget and timetable, as well as the achievement of the expected project results. Secondly, the difficulties resulting from the pandemic affected partners continuing cross-border cooperation after the end of the projects, which involved sustaining the cross-border effect and taking further joint initiatives to consolidate and expand cooperation. An overall assessment of the impact of the pandemic on the project phases clearly shows that the greatest difficulties were encountered by those beneficiaries who had planned their project activities before the pandemic and were then forced to make them more flexible and change their approach to the way certain activities were carried out, e.g., cross-border mobility, communication between project partners or promotional activities. Difficulties were also piling up for organisations with more than one project.

Confirmation of the more negative impact of the pandemic on the project implementation phase is also found in the assessment of its impact on project management activities. In the case of the two borderlands analysed, the research showed that the biggest number of difficulties and problems arising from pandemic constraints and restrictions concerned those management activities that we can link to the project implementation phase, i.e., 'compliance with the timetable, budget, indicators', 'communication with the project target groups' and 'implementation of the ac-

tivities according to the project methodology'. Regardless of the differences in the assessment of individual management activities, the research found that the initiation of cross-border cooperation in projects, i.e., conceptual and communication activities between partners, were much less likely to be negatively affected by the pandemic than management activities directly related to project implementation. It can therefore be concluded that, in the long term, crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic do not significantly limit the planning of new cross-border projects, but rather complicate the management of those projects that were started before the crisis. This is due, *inter alia*, to the limited scope for making changes to, e.g., the budget, project timetable, etc. At the same time, the management of a cross-border project in the implementation phase during such disruptions is more susceptible to the negative effects of crises such as a pandemic, especially in connection with the need to ensure the durability of cross-border cooperation once the project has been completed. Taking into account all the negative conditions described above for the implementation of cross-border projects during a pandemic, it can be assumed that the ongoing difficulties resulting from, among other things, pandemic restrictions made it objectively difficult to maintain the durability of the project, and this was further influenced by the reduced motivation of the partners to continue cooperation under conditions of high uncertainty.

The results of the factor analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border project management presented in subsection 6.3 indicate that there are two spheres of impact. These drivers co-create the factors covering the relevant phases of cross-border projects and the factors covering the related management activities in the projects. Relating these conclusions to the discussion presented in subsection 4.3., i.e., the life cycle of a cross-border project, a matrix was developed

showing the relationship between these spheres and their elements (Table 7.1).

Table 7.1. Identifying the spheres of influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border project management against the background of the cross-border project life cycle

Sphere of influence	Sphere 1. Planning of the cross-border project	Sphere 2. Cross-border project implementation and maintenance of its durability
Project life cycle stages	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creation of a cross-border partnership 2. Identification of needs and goals of cooperation in a cross-border project 3. Planning a cross-border project 4. Ensuring financing for the project from the INTERREG Programme 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implementation of the project on both sides of the border 2. Evaluation of the project on both sides of the border 3. Maintaining durability of the project on both sides of the border
Project phases	Factor: preliminary phases	Factor: project implementation and maintenance of its sustainability
	Factor components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – project definition – process of the submission of the application – planification – a process of contracting the project 	Factor components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – implementation – closing phase – durability phase
Project management activities	Factor: preparing projects for implementation	Factor: project implementation management
	Factor components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – searching for the cross-border partners – creation of the idea of the project; – cooperation with INTERREG Authority – budget, timetable and planning of the project activities 	Factor components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – implementation of the activities according to the project methodology – communication with the project target groups – cooperation with the partners – compliance with the timetable, budget, indicators – promotion of the project – project evaluation and ongoing control

Source: own elaboration.

Table 7.1 implies that, in seeking to mitigate the impact of crises and disruptions on cross-border projects, it is generally necessary to consider two distinct spheres, corresponding both to specific stages of the life cycle of a cross-border project and to the respective phases of project management and related management activities. In the specific case of a cross-border project

co-financed by the INTERREG Programme, the sphere concerning project planning is separated from the one concerning project implementation and durability by the phase of waiting for the project to be evaluated and awarded funding. All stages of the project life cycle attributed to the first sphere, as well as the corresponding project management phases and related activities, are carried out by the project partners on a voluntary basis and are generally not resource-intensive (with the exception of the time spent on developing the INTERREG Programme application documentation and the expenditure on technical, design, cost estimates and permits).

Once a project is selected for funding and a contract with the INTERREG Managing Authority is signed, the project partners make a joint and mutual commitment to implement the project and ensure its durability. In a crisis situation, this may mean for all or some of the partners, among other things, incurring higher costs, postponing the implementation of activities, inability to achieve the planned indicators, insufficient interest of the project's target groups, inability to obtain reimbursement of part of the costs incurred for the project, and the occurrence of other circumstances that may hinder project implementation. During the course of a project there may be only a few circumstances that allow it to be discontinued without financial consequences, i.e., without the obligation to return the funding awarded to the project. In all the other spheres, any management errors resulting in additional project implementation costs require the project implementer to provide additional own funds for this purpose. A natural consequence of completing a project, in accordance with the grant contract, is to maintain the durability of the project, i.e., to maintain or further develop the cross-border cooperation of the partners in at least the same area as the one of the project. The occurrence of crises and disruptions during the project implementation or durability phases results in much more

serious consequences for the cooperation partners than the occurrence of such situations during the project planning phase. This conclusion also follows from the survey results presented at the beginning of this subsection, where project partners from both research areas clearly identified the project implementation phase and then the project completion and durability phase as those most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The first sphere, related to the planning of the cross-border project, which is carried out on a voluntary basis and can be discontinued at any time if crisis conditions prove too severe for the continuation of the project work, was only indicated by respondents from the Franco-German and Polish-Czech borderlands on the second place. This confirms the validity of the thesis that the implementation phase of a project and the resulting obligations of the partners are closely linked to the partners' perception of the risks associated with the occurrence of a crisis situation. Partners in both surveyed borderlands confirmed this by indicating that the COVID-19 pandemic had the most negative impact on elements such as: compliance with the timetable, budget, indicators, communication with the project target groups and implementation of the activities according to the project management methodology.

Mitigating the impact of a crisis situation and various types of disruption on the management of cross-border projects first requires a realistic assessment of the risks arising from the possible impact of this phenomenon on a given stage of the cross-border project life cycle and its subsequent stages. The decision to proceed with the project should be based on measures such as:

- ensuring partnerships based on high-quality cross-border cooperation,
- strong motivation for partners to work on project development under conditions of uncertainty,
- full conviction in the value of the project and the validity of its continued implementation,

- ensuring an experienced team and a flexible approach to tasks, project timetable and budget,
- creation of a project risk management plan,
- cooperation with the INTERREG Managing Authority to take into account any circumstances that may affect the future implementation of the project under crisis conditions.

7.2. Importance of skills in managing cross-border projects during the COVID-19 pandemic

The importance of skills in managing cross-border projects during the pandemic was rated quite highly in both the Franco-German and the Polish-Czech borderlands. The rating concerned skills that proved particularly relevant in an uncertain environment and the many restrictions and limitations put in place during the pandemic by individual governments, regional and local authorities and even by the partners involved in cross-border projects themselves.

In both of the surveyed borderlands, the same management skills, such as capacity to adapt, capacity to work remotely, digital skills, IT skills, capacity to work on a high level of uncertainty and communication skills, were generally considered essential. Moreover, in the Polish-Czech borderland, self-organisation, creativity and the spirit of the initiative were also given a high rating.

Regarding the separate assessment of these skills by the French and German partners, significant differences were found only in certain skills, which were rated significantly higher in Germany than in France, specifically: understanding of inter-cultural differences, leadership, communication skills and digital skills.

A comparative analysis of the importance of skills related to the management of cross-border projects during the pandemic in Czechia and Poland showed that most skills were rated high-

er in Czechia than in Poland, in particular leadership and capacity to adapt.

The differences in the assessment of the importance of individual competences in the management of cross-border projects during the pandemic in the two studied borderlands may be due to various conditions, not necessarily related to cross-border cooperation, e.g., differences in organisational culture, differences in the applicable pandemic restrictions and the human resource management systems used, including systems for the development of competences and skills.

The factor analysis presented in subsection 6.3 showed that it was possible to identify four groups of skills that were important in the management of cross-border projects during the pandemic period. Key importance was given to skills relating to self-management. This group included: proactivity, creativity, spirit of initiative, self-organisation, stress resistance, and leadership. The relational skills group, including communication skills, understanding of inter-cultural differences, conflict management skills and empathy was considered the second most important. The third group included skills related to working under conditions of risk caused by the COVID-19 pandemic: capacity to cooperate remotely, capacity to work on a high level of uncertainty and capacity to adapt. The last group relates to the so-called virtual competences, which, in the conditions of working and communicating remotely due to the pandemic, proved to be indispensable to sustain the implementation of many cross-border projects and the conversion of some stationary activities into the on-line form. These are digital skills and IT skills.

It is worth noting that, of the four groups identified, as many as three represent the so-called soft competences and one represents hard competences. Breakdown of the competences identified in the survey is shown in Table 7.2. Soft competencies define how people are expected to conduct themselves in order to

do their job well. The importance of these competences is particularly relevant in connection with working in cross-border project teams, consisting of representatives of different organisations coming from different countries. Hard competences, on the other hand, communicate what people need to know in order to do their job well (Steward & Brown, 2009, p. 134). In the case of cross-border project management, these are not only skills associated with applying the guidelines for subsidising project costs from the INTERREG Programme budget, but also, for example, the ability to use a project application generator, a reporting system or other specialised software.

Table 7.2. Groups of skills important in managing cross-border projects during the COVID-19 pandemic

Soft competences			Hard competences
Self-management skills	Relational competences	Ability to work under conditions of risk	Virtual competences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - proactivity - creativity - spirit of initiative - self-organisation - stress resistance - leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - communication skills - understanding of inter-cultural differences - conflict management skills - empathy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - capacity to cooperate remotely - capacity to work on a high level of uncertainty - capacity to adapt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - digital skills - IT skills

Source: own elaboration.

Soft competences are related to psychological and social or personal skills (Armstrong et al., 2016, pp. 241–243). These competences are of a type that can be understood to belong to the self-management skill set, relational competences and skills related to working under the risk(s) identified in the research. Soft competences materialise when a person has the right predispositions and mental skills to cope individually and in collective settings in various social situations. The assessment of the management of cross-border projects under crisis conditions, with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic used as an example, identified

a specific group of skills among the soft competences for working under conditions of risk, directly related to acting during a crisis. Relational and self-management competences are essential for effective project management under all conditions, whereas if a cross-border project is implemented in a crisis situation such as the COVID-19 pandemic, this situation generates additional risks of failure. Difficulties in the management of cross-border projects observed in the COVID-19 pandemic example included the timely completion of tasks, the achievement of planned objectives and results, or reaching target groups. Avoiding these difficulties is facilitated by the cross-border project management team that possesses the ability to adapt to working in new conditions, the skills associated with working and communicating remotely and the ability to work under high uncertainty. This group of skills proved to be crucial in view of the change in the way some cross-border projects were implemented, forced by the pandemic, i.e., switching from stationary to virtual activities, in terms of communication between partners, communication with project target groups and other activities related to the management of cross-border projects.

The last group identified – virtual competences – was included in the so-called hard competences, i.e., the ability to apply knowledge in new work situations. These are competences related to the type of work performed (Salman et al., 2020, pp. 717–742). Hard competences therefore represent a body of knowledge and skills, reflecting the qualifications to perform specific tasks. A group of hard competences, i.e., virtual competences, strongly linked to the above-described competences to work under risk, which in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic materialised primarily in connection with the transition from a stationary workplace to a hybrid or on-line mode, was clearly distinguished in the case of the two borderlands studied. In these circumstances, digital

skills and IT skills became crucial, as confirmed by the research carried out.

7.3. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border cooperation

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border cooperation in the two analysed borderlands was assessed as inconclusive. For some elements characterising cross-border cooperation, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was assessed to be strongly negative, for other elements no such impact was found, and for several elements the impact was assessed to be partially positive.

In the Franco-German borderland, the impact of the pandemic was assessed as negative for most elements determining the cross-border cooperation. The strongest negative impact concerned elements such as: administrative burden caused by cross-border activities, interpersonal relations between people jointly managing cross-border cooperation in the region, and quality of cross-border cooperation. No negative impact of the pandemic was found for such elements of cross-border cooperation as the economic importance of cross-border projects implementation and interest in finding new partners for cross-border cooperation. For some elements characterising cross-border cooperation, the impact of the pandemic was generally assessed as positive. This group included:

- the importance of cross-border cooperation,
- the interest in maintaining cross-border cooperation after the end of the project,
- the economic importance of cross-border projects implementation.

The in-depth analyses showed virtually no variation in assessments of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border cooperation on the German and French sides. However, the ele-

ment: 'administrative burden caused by cross-border activities in the cross-border projects led by German partners' was given a more pessimistic assessment more than was the case with the projects led by French partners.

In the Polish-Czech borderland, the distribution of assessments of the impact of the pandemic on various elements of cross-border cooperation was similar to that of the Franco-German borderland. The impact of the pandemic was assessed as negative for most elements determining cross-border cooperation. The strongest negative impact was identified for the following elements: dynamism of cross-border cooperation; administrative burden caused by cross-border activities; quality of cross-border cooperation; and realisation of joint cross-border missions, plans and strategies. The negative impact of the pandemic was not identified for such elements of cross-border cooperation as: the interest in finding new partners for cross-border cooperation; motivation to extend cross-border cooperation in existing partnerships; the importance of cross-border cooperation; and the interest in maintaining cross-border cooperation after the end of the project. In contrast, no element positively affected by the pandemic was identified.

Analysis of assessments of the impact of the pandemic on cross-border cooperation based on the criterion of the country of the respondents (Poland or Czechia) did not reveal any differences, with the exception of the element 'interpersonal relations between people jointly managing cross-border cooperation in the region'. The impact of the pandemic on this issue was assessed more negatively on the Polish side. In addition, there were statistically significant differences between the assessments of the impact of the pandemic on certain elements of cross-border cooperation formulated by representatives of public authorities and by representatives of other actors implementing cross-border projects. These included elements such as the importance of

cross-border cooperation, the economic importance of cross-border projects implementation, and the interest in maintaining cross-border cooperation after the end of the project. Representatives of public actors rated the impact of the pandemic on these elements higher than did the representatives of other cross-border project actors.

A comparative analysis shows that two elements were identified in both study areas as those most affected by the pandemic, namely 'administrative burden caused by cross-border activities', and 'quality of cross-border cooperation'. The two elements identified have a critical impact on the management of cross-border projects and are strongly interlinked. Administrative burdens discourage cross-border projects, especially when the low quality of cross-border cooperation demotivates partners' efforts to prepare and implement a project and subsequently maintain its sustainability. Even under stable conditions, when the project implementation is not threatened by any crisis or disruption, the management of a cross-border project co-financed by the INTERREG Programme requires a high degree of competence in terms of correct expenditure, reporting of activities, and communication with target groups on both sides of the border. Taking into account, in addition, the negative impact of the pandemic restrictions and limitations on these activities, one can get a very clear picture of the difficulties accompanying the implementation and sustainability of the results of cross-border projects during this crisis situation. The focus of each partner on solving their administrative problems resulting from the implementation of the project under pandemic conditions, as well as restrictions such as travel restrictions and even border closures have at the same time had an impact on the deterioration of cross-border cooperation between partners, e.g., less frequent meetings, substitution of 'real life' interpersonal relations by on-line (virtual) commu-

nication, restrictions on the implementation of cross-border activities requiring travel to a neighbouring country, etc.

It is worth mentioning that in the case of the Franco-German borderland there was a recognition of some of the positive impact of the pandemic on elements related to appreciating the importance of cross-border cooperation during border crises and disruptions, which was not identified at all in the case of the study related to the Polish-Czech border. The resulting differences in assessment can be attributed, among other things, to the long-standing experience of the German and French partners in cross-border cooperation and its deep anchoring in bilateral relations between the two countries, which has not yet been achieved in the Polish-Czech borderland. Thus, in the case of elements such as the importance of cross-border cooperation, the interest in maintaining cross-border cooperation after the end of the project, and economic importance of cross-border projects implementation, the negative impact of the pandemic on the quality of cross-border cooperation, among other things, also highlighted its vital importance in stabilising relations between neighbouring borderlands.

Factor analysis identified two spheres to elucidate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border projects cooperation. The first and dominant factor stimulates the development of cross-border cooperation. It includes elements such as:

- interest in finding new partners for cross-border cooperation;
- the implementation of joint cross-border missions, plans and strategies;
- motivation to extend cross-border cooperation in existing partnerships;
- dynamism of cross-border cooperation;
- importance of cross-border cooperation,
- administrative burden caused by cross-border activities.

The second factor, of lesser importance, can be linked to the sustainability of cross-border cooperation and includes elements such as:

- the interest in maintaining cross-border cooperation after the end of the project;
- interpersonal relations between people jointly managing cross-border cooperation;
- economic importance of cross-border projects implementation;
- quality of cross-border cooperation.

The relations between these factors and the cross-border project life cycle presented in subsection 4.3 is shown in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3. Relationships between phases of the cross-border project life cycle and factors explaining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border cooperation in projects

Project life cycle stage	Linking to factors explaining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border projects cooperation	
	Factor 1. Development of cross-border cooperation	Factor 2. Sustainability of cross-border cooperation
1. Creation of a cross-border partnership	✓	
2. Identification of needs and goals of cooperation in a cross-border project	✓	
3. Planning a cross-border project	✓	
4. Ensuring financing for the project from the INTERREG Programme	✓	
5. Implementation of the project on both sides of the border		✓
6. Evaluation of the project on both sides of the border		✓
7. Maintaining durability of the project on both sides of the border		✓

Source: own elaboration.

The first four stages of the life cycle of a cross-border project can be linked to Factor 1, responsible for the development of cross-border cooperation, while the subsequent three stages of the project life cycle can be linked to Factor 2 related to sustainability of cross-border cooperation (Table 7.3). In the final stage of the project life cycle, there is a state of sustainability of cross-border cooperation, resulting at least from the obligation to preserve the durability of project results, and often also from the joint further development by the partners of what they jointly developed in the project. The potential motivation or need for a new project acts like a driving force for further development of the partners' cross-border cooperation, e.g., due to new circumstances. Thus, the impact of Factor 1 becomes apparent again and a new life cycle begins for the cross-border project, which at some stage in its development will come under the influence of Factor 2 and sustainability. As shown by the previous analyses, under crisis conditions such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the continuation of cross-border cooperation in a subsequent project may not take place if the cooperation is of low quality (poor alignment of partners' interests, objectives and needs; insufficient cross-border contacts; lack of competence to manage cross-border projects, especially in high-risk conditions). Another reason may be the excessive administrative burden of project implementation, which discourages staff representing partners from embarking on further cross-border joint undertakings.

7.4. Towards building more resilient cross-border cooperation in borderlands

The objective of the research was, among other things, to identify the elements which have the greatest impact on the resilience

of cross-border cooperation in projects to crises and disruptions, both in the case of a borderland with a long tradition of neighbourly relations (the Franco-German borderland) and a borderland where cross-border cooperation has not yet reached maturity (the Polish-Czech borderland). Elements identified by more than 1 per 3 respondents as very important for building the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises were considered as key (Table 7.4).

Table 7.4. Rankings of elements shaping resilience in cross-border cooperation in crises and disruptions

Franco-German borderland		Polish-Czech borderland	
1	Good relations between partners	1	Good relations between partners
2	Quality of project coordination	2	High level of mutual trust
3	High level of mutual trust	3	Quality of support from the INTERREG Management Authority
4	Permanent experienced staff dedicated to cross-border cooperation	4	Common interest in gathering funds from the INTERREG Program
5	Institutional support in the partner institutions	5	Durability of cooperation Quality of project coordination
6	Entering cross-border cooperation into the organisation's operational strategy	6	Own funds to maintain cooperation also outside of projects co-financed with INTERREG Programme
		7	Institutional support in the partner institutions

Source: own elaboration.

Table 7.4 shows that, despite differences in the level of maturity of cross-border cooperation between the borderlands studied, the key elements shaping resilience remain the same. Both in the Franco-German borderland and in the Polish-Czech borderland, factors related to the partners' positive attitude towards each other, i.e., good relations and a high level of mutual trust, are a priority.

In the Franco-German borderland, the other important elements shaping the resilience of cross-border cooperation in pro-

jects are related to institutional support. On the one hand, it is necessary to legitimise the importance of cross-border cooperation in the partners' strategy (e.g., regional, municipal etc. development strategy) and, on the other hand, to provide organisational support for people responsible for developing cross-border cooperation under crisis conditions, e.g. the launch of an on-line communication platform. The latter is also about the quality of project coordination, which can be combined with the skills of cross-border project managers. Tasks related to the implementation of cross-border projects should be carried out by the staff permanently assigned with them. It is then possible to speak of deepening specialisation for the development of cross-border cooperation, i.e. improving skills and gaining experience that may prove useful in managing cross-border projects, for example in times of crisis.

In the Polish-Czech borderland, the elements shaping resilience of the cross-border cooperation to crises, which are related to securing funding for this cooperation in difficult times, were also highly rated. Polish and Czech research participants largely link the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises with access to funding for joint activities. As many as three factors identified by respondents are related to this aspect: quality of support from the INTERREG Management Authority; common interest in gathering funds from the INTERREG Programme, and own funds to maintain cooperation also outside of projects co-financed with INTERREG Programme. This indicates a far-reaching identification of cross-border projects with mechanisms for jointly raising EU funds, e.g., for infrastructure development. It is clear that in addition to institutional support for cross-border cooperation, which is important for all groups of project partners surveyed, there is a very strong attachment to using the INTERREG Programme in the Polish-Czech borderland. This is confirmed by the high assessment of the impact of the pandemic on

the durability of cooperation, due to the awareness of the obligation to maintain the results of the project for a period of 5 years after its completion. This condition stems from the INTERREG Programme's cross-border project management model.

The assessment of the interrelationships between the elements shaping cross-border cooperation in projects and the elements shaping the resilience of this cooperation to crises revealed several important correlations present in the studied borderlands.

In the Franco-German borderland, one strong positive correlation was identified between: durability of cooperation, and importance of cross-border cooperation, and economic importance of cross-border projects implementation. It demonstrates respondents' conviction of the need to build the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises primarily on the basis of sustainable and forward-looking relationships, the development of which is justified by the interests of the partners, including the economic interests. This approach is also in line with the individual assessment of the different elements shaping the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises, where the key importance is attributed to the high quality of this cooperation, which should be based on trust and good relations.

In the Polish-Czech borderland, several strong negative correlations were identified. Respondents who indicated that entering cross-border cooperation into the organisation's operational strategy was important in building resilience to crises, at the same time felt that the pandemic had not affected interest in finding new partners for cross-border cooperation. This means that it is important for Polish and Czech actors implementing cross-border projects to take this into account in their strategies and policies. The lack of concern about the negative impact of the crisis on, for example, attracting project partners, is due to the fact that they base the development of cross-border cooperation on the projects included in their strategies. Polish and

Czech survey participants also pointed to another factor shaping the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises, i.e., institutional support in the partner institutions. The same respondents also considered that the pandemic had not reduced the dynamics and quality of cross-border cooperation. It can therefore be deduced that the project partners in the Polish-Czech borderland are counting on strengthening the resilience of their project cooperation also thanks to institutional support from the organisations that carry out these projects, which should make it possible to maintain the appropriate dynamics and quality of the cross-border cooperation.

In summary, in the Franco-German borderland, the resilience of cross-border cooperation in projects should be strengthened primarily on the basis of effective interaction at the level of cross-border project teams that understand its purpose and its relationship to the pursuit of the interests of their organisations, including those of economic nature. In the Polish-Czech borderland, building the resilience to crises of the cross-border cooperation is linked to anchoring this cooperation in the strategic documents of the project partners by, *inter alia*, including specific cross-border projects, their budgets and timetables, as well as providing institutional support for the implementation of cross-border projects. According to research participants from the Polish-Czech borderland, this task-based approach provides a guarantee that cross-border cooperation in projects will be sustained even in times of crisis. This is because the expectations of these institutions and organisations for the implementation of the planned projects are the best motivation to maintain cross-border cooperation, enabling them to be co-financed, for example, by the INTERREG Programme.

It can therefore be concluded that in the Franco-German borderland, where a more mature model of cross-border cooperation prevails, building the resilience of this cooperation to crises can

be identified with a bottom-up approach, and in the Polish-Czech borderland, where cross-border project partners have less experience in cooperation but are more oriented towards using the INTERREG Programme as a source of investment funding, with a top-down approach.

The research carried out highlighted the relationships of elements that shape the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises relate to the management of cross-border projects co-financed by the INTERREG Programme. The analysis concerned, among other things, the relationship of resilience to cross-border project phases and cross-border project management activities, as well as the skills required to manage cross-border projects during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The detailed analyses presented in subsection 6.3 proved that the resilience of cooperation to crises and disruptions is only linked to the ability to manage cross-border projects under such specific conditions. The elements selected for evaluation that strengthen the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises were rated highly, above all by those respondents who simultaneously recognised the importance of skills in managing cross-border projects under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. The identified correlations therefore speak to which skills contribute to strengthening the resilience of cross-border cooperation in projects to crises in the two studied borderlands. These are shown in Tables 7.5 and 7.6.

Considering the management of projects in the Franco-German borderland, one can say that skills such as proactivity, spirit of initiative and empathy simultaneously strengthen all the elements that shape the resilience of the cross-border cooperation which are listed in Table 5. These skills relate to self-management and relational competence. The most frequently mentioned skill: proactivity is important for shaping both knowledge and know-how in cross-border cooperation,

as well as durability of cooperation and for strengthening the commitment of the permanent staff responsible for cross-border cooperation in the given organisation.

Table 7.5. Correlations between elements shaping the crisis resilience of cooperation in cross-border projects and skills relevant for managing cross-border projects in times of crisis – the Franco-German borderland

Resilience shaping element	Related skills important in managing cross-border projects in times of crisis
1. Knowledge and know-how in cross-border cooperation	self-organisation
	stress resistance
	proactivity
2. Durability of cooperation	proactivity
	spirit of initiative
3. Common interest in gathering funds from the INTERREG Programme	leadership
	empathy
	understanding of intercultural differences
4. Permanent experienced staff dedicated to cross-border-cooperation	conflict management skills
	spirit of initiative
	empathy
	creativity
	proactivity

Source: own elaboration.

In the case of the Polish-Czech borderland, it was possible to identify significantly more links between elements strengthening the resilience of cross-border project cooperation to crises and selected skills related to cross-border project management under COVID-19 pandemic conditions (Table 7.6).

Table 7.6. Correlations between elements shaping the crisis resilience of cooperation in cross-border projects and skills relevant for managing cross-border projects in times of crisis – the Polish-Czech borderland

Resilience shaping element	Related skills important in managing cross-border projects in times of crisis
1. High level of mutual trust	spirit of initiative
	leadership
	self-organisation
	empathy
	conflict management skills
	capacity to adapt
2. Common values	leadership
	conflict management skills
	proactivity
	spirit of initiative
	stress resistance
3. Durability of cooperation	creativity
	capacity to cooperate remotely
	leadership
	capacity to work on a high level of uncertainty
	proactivity
4. Knowledge and know-how in cross-border cooperation	leadership
	conflict management skills
5. Mutual understanding of the needs and problems of partners	spirit of initiative
	leadership
	stress resistance
6. Entering cross-border cooperation into the organisation's operational strategy	leadership
	conflict management skills

Source: own elaboration.

Each of the six elements strengthening the resilience of cooperation to crises, included in Table 7.6, is linked to leadership, while in the case of four elements, there is a link to conflict management skills. Skills such as spirit of initiative and stress resistance

are mentioned most frequently in the second place. The combination of leadership and conflict management skills offers the opportunity to strengthen up to four elements that shape the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises, namely: high level of mutual trust; common values; knowledge and know-how in cross-border cooperation; entering cross-border cooperation into the organisation's operational strategy. Research showed that the approach to cross-border projects is less conciliatory in the Polish-Czech borderland, hence it is recognised that skills resulting from strong personal qualities, i.e., leadership, or, e.g., negotiation skills related to conflict management (e.g., conflicts over resources or funds) are an important element shaping the resilience of cross-border project cooperation in times of crisis. As in the case of the Franco-German borderland, skills related to self-management and relational skills are considered important in this case. The interrelationships presented explain, at least in part, the relationship between shaping the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises and project management skills. The proper development of these skills of project teams can strengthen the resilience of cross-border projects cooperation.

Conclusion

The authors' motivation to undertake research into the problems of resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises and disruptions was the experience of the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of cross-border projects, the functioning of Euroregions, and the development of cross-border partnerships that benefited from the INTERREG programmes. The unprecedented negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border relations focused the authors' attention on the existence of a number of potential risk factors that could derail the achievements of cross-border cooperation in the EU to date, as well as halt the process for the future. The question arose as to how people involved in the development of cross-border cooperation should react to the disruptions caused, among other things, by top-down decisions on restrictions on cross-border traffic and, finally, on the closure of many borders, and what could be done to strengthen the resilience of cross-border cooperation to such crises in the future.

Assuming that the driving force behind cross-border cooperation in the EU is the involvement of partners in projects co-financed by INTERREG programmes, the authors of the study de-

cided to analyse the management process of these projects during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of the research carried out in the Franco-German and Polish-Czech borderlands, the research questions posed in the paper were answered and the objective of the monograph was achieved.

It was established that the COVID-19 pandemic affected the phases of cross-border projects co-financed by the INTERREG programmes to a varied extent. The pandemic impact on the implementation and durability phases of the project was higher than the impact on the preliminary phases. The research also showed that the COVID-19 pandemic made the management of projects during implementation much more difficult than the process of planning projects and building cross-border partnerships itself. This leads to the conclusion that the strengthening of the resilience of cross-border project cooperation is necessary, when crisis situations affect specific activities carried out by the partners.

Four groups of skills that proved helpful in managing cross-border projects during the pandemic emergency situation were identified. The authors assigned these skills to the respective groups of soft and hard competences. Soft competences in self-management and relational competences were identified as key, but the study also highlighted a specific group of soft competences related to the management of projects under risk conditions resulting, among other things, from crisis situations. These are skills such as capacity to cooperate remotely, capacity to work on a high level of uncertainty and capacity to adapt, on which the project management in stabilised conditions does not place much value. The findings of the research point to the need to strengthen precisely these skills of project management staff, as well as the hard competences associated with remote working and on-line communication, i.e. digital skills and IT skills. Advanced statistical analyses showed that it was the skills of cross-border project management teams during the pandemic that proved to be

a key factor in building the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises.

The research also identified two factors that explain the impact of crisis situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, on cross-border project cooperation. The first factor is a driver for the development of cross-border cooperation, typical for the phases and activities involved in planning cross-border projects. It includes elements such as:

- interest in finding new partners for cross-border cooperation;
- the realisation of joint cross-border missions, plans and strategies;
- motivation to extend cross-border cooperation in existing partnerships;
- dynamism of cross-border cooperation;
- importance of cross-border cooperation,
- administrative burden caused by cross-border activities.

The second factor, concerning the sustainability of cross-border cooperation, can be attributed to the managing activities carried out during the implementation and durability phases of the project cooperation. It includes elements such as:

- the interest in maintaining cross-border cooperation after the end of the project;
- interpersonal relations between people jointly managing cross-border cooperation;
- economic importance of cross-border projects implementation;
- quality of cross-border cooperation.

The factors identified are universal in nature and illustrate well the diversity of elements relevant to cross-border cooperation in a variety of crisis situations. Knowing them is important to ensure the resilience of cross-border cooperation on project,

which are at the specific stages of their life cycle when a crisis occurs.

Considering the differences in the level of maturity of cross-border cooperation between the Franco-German and Polish-Czech borderlands, the study also identified the elements that individually have the greatest impact on resilience to crisis of the cooperation in the two analysed areas. In both the Franco-German and the Polish-Czech borderland, good relations between partners and a high level of mutual trust were identified as two leading elements in this respect.

In the Franco-German borderland, where cross-border cooperation is much more advanced than in the Polish-Czech borderland, the other important elements shaping resilience are institutional support as well as good organisational and competence preparation for managing cross-border projects.

In the Polish-Czech borderland, where the first cross-border partnerships were established as late as about 25 years ago, the other elements shaping the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises concern the raising of funds from the INTERREG Programme for cross-border projects. The resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises is linked there to ensuring access to funding for cross-border projects; moreover, a strong commitment to using the INTERREG Programme is demonstrated.

As highlighted earlier, strengthening the resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises should be closely linked to the development of appropriate skills of teams involved in managing the cross-border projects in crisis situations. The research made it possible to identify links between some of the elements that strengthen the resilience of cross-border cooperation and the skills of professionals managing the cross-border projects. In this aspect, the differences between the studied borderlands presenting different levels of maturity in cross-border cooperation became once again apparent. One such key difference relates to

the critical resilience shaping element of durability of cooperation. In the Franco-German borderland, this element is linked to two skills: proactivity and spirit of initiative. In the Polish-Czech borderland, the durability of cooperation is linked to five skills: proactivity, creativity, leadership, and capacity to cooperate remotely, and capacity to work on a high level of uncertainty. This example is a good illustration of the differences regarding the development of crisis resilience of cross-border cooperation in connection with project management skills in borderlands demonstrating varying levels of maturity of this cooperation.

In a crisis situation, in the Franco-German borderland, the sustainability of cooperation in cross-border projects should be based on the ability to sustain interest in new activities. In the Polish-Czech borderland, the need for skills to overcome risks arising from a crisis situation is becoming apparent. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, this concerned the risk of project failure arising, for example, from the need to provide remote working or to work in constantly changing organisational conditions.

It should be emphasised that the conclusions concerning the development of resilience of cross-border cooperation to crises were based on research concerning only one situation of this type, i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic. This indicates the limitations of the applicability of these proposals in crisis situations of a far different nature, e.g. military conflict between neighbouring countries. Another limitation of the research is the methodological approach adopted. The research was carried out as interpretive in nature, which means that no hypotheses had been made. Only two of the EU internal borderlands, representing varying levels of maturity of cross-border cooperation, were included in the study. A full study, carried out on a sample representative of all the borderlands of the EU, could provide much more precise knowledge of the relationships and dependencies between the elements under study, as well as enable hypothesis testing. Nev-

ertheless, the end of the financial perspective of the INTERREG programmes covering the period 2014-2020, as well as the phasing out of cross-border cooperation in many projects that have already fulfilled the condition of ensuring a 5-year durability period for the results, is not conducive to obtaining a representative sample for such research and expanding its scope.

The current international geopolitical reality of the EU itself points to new areas of research on building resilience in cross-border cooperation. They result from the high probability of further crises in the future, related, among other things, to increasing illegal migration to the EU, Russian aggression against Ukraine also affecting all countries in the region, or, last but not least, growing trends of rebordering. These new challenges open up the field for broadening the research perspective to include the above-mentioned issues, which may in the future influence both the objectives of cross-border cooperation and the factors shaping its resilience to other potential crises.

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The authors of this monograph were driven to delve into the challenges facing cross-border cooperation amidst crises and disruptions spurred by the adverse impacts witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic. This included challenges to the implementation of cross-border projects, the activities of Euroregions, and the development of partnerships based on INTERREG programs, as well as other issues related to territorial cooperation.

The confluence of the pandemic crisis and broader international geopolitical issues, such as illegal migration to the EU and geopolitical tensions like Russian aggression against Ukraine, underscores the imperative to explore new research avenues focused on bolstering the resilience of cross-border cooperation within the EU.

With a focus on identifying key factors shaping the management of cross-border projects co-financed by INTERREG programs, as well as factors influencing partner cooperation, this study aims to fortify cross-border cooperation in the face of future crises and disruptions.

The monograph offers valuable insights for institutions and organizations operating in border regions, catering specifically to theoreticians and practitioners engaged in cross-border cooperation. By distilling lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic period, it provides a roadmap for integrating resilience into future cross-border activities and endeavours.