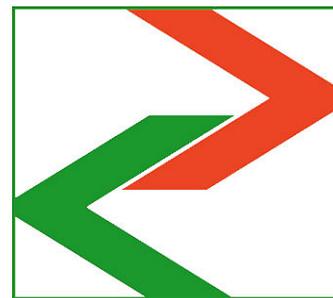


Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Grenzregionen (AGEG)
Asociación de Regiones Fronterizas Europeas (ARFE)
Association des régions frontalières européennes (ARFE)
Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)
Comunità di lavoro delle regioni europee di confine (AGEG)
Europæiske grænseregioners Arbejdsfællesskab (AGEG)
Werkgemeinschaft van Europese grensgebieden (WVEG)
Associação das Regiões Fronteiriças Europeias (ARFE)
Σύνδεσμος Ευρωπαϊκών Συνοριακών Περιφερειών (ΣΕΣΠ)
Stowarzyszenie Europejskich Regionów Granicznych (SERG)
Ассоциация Европейских Приграничных Регионов (АЕПР)



PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE-PROJECTS

**their significance and contribution to the success
of cross-border (INTERREG A) programmes**

1.) Previous evaluations and experiences

Current neutral studies dealing with cross-border cooperation and INTERREG evaluations confirm that in INTERREG A programmes the best qualitative results are not primarily achieved through flagship projects, but **the success** is rather determined by the variety of different real **cross-border projects** addressing region-specific needs. Quite often the management of these A programmes (sub-programmes) is decentralised (euroregional level).

Advanced cross-border structures work in many cases with long-term **development strategies including infrastructural / economic as well as socio-cultural priorities**. The latter ones have proved to be an indispensable and equally relevant element determining the success of cross-border development (so to say as the necessary foundation for a smooth functioning of infrastructural / economic cooperation with successful and long-term projects).

The experience with “best practice” shows that from the beginning of INTERREG (1990) on the A programmes with the best evaluation results (in the meantime also many other programmes) have worked with “**people-to-people-projects**“ (**small projects**). The aim of these projects is to prepare, support and realign (experimental small projects) the priorities and actions laid down in A programmes.

„**People-to-people-projects**“ (small projects) cover following **subjects**:

- economy, technology,
- transport, small infrastructures,
- qualification and education, equality,
- access and accessibility,
- healthcare and welfare,

- tourism and cultural heritage,
- nature and environment,
- society development (incl. languages).

In most cases, these are actions with financial volume that lies below the agreed **threshold** (eg. 50.000 €) for projects in INTERREG A-programmes. However, as they **evidently** create the necessary **conditions** for efficient cross-border implementation of programmes and projects (eg. while improving the necessary professional and intercultural skills, through legal and administrative cooperation), **particular modalities** were created in A programmes enabling the implementation of such **“people-to-people-projects” (small projects)**.

In particular, in A programmes between **new member states** and **the neighbouring areas along the „old“ external borders of the EU**, quite often, **specific priority axis: Small Project Fund = SPF** has been created. In the A programmes of the **“old EU”**, usually the respective INTERREG Steering Committees have approved funds for a framework operation supporting small projects that was managed by the Euroregions (repeated application under different priorities during the whole programming period possible) corresponding with one of the priorities selected in the respective Operational Programme. In many cases, several small actions were brought together in one „package.“

In general, the funds have been rather low, usually between 4 and 5% of the whole programme volume in the „old“ EU, while in the new member states and along the „old“ external borders the demand has been higher. In latter case, usually a specific priority axis “Small Project Fund” has been created in the Operational Programmes. Under this axis many projects with a volume exceeding the “people-to-people-projects” in the “old” EU have been implemented that were managed by the Euroregions.

- **Small funds ----- great success !!!!**

2. Reasons for sustainable success of „people-to-people-projects“ (small projects)

a) EU evaluation of INTERREG

Recent ex-post evaluation report of INTERREG approved by the EU Commission underlines in different sections the added value of „people-to-people-projects” (small projects).

On page 51 under the headline: **„Inter-cultural learning effects among a wider public“** it is spoken, following the example of the PAMINA programme, of „people to people framework....which generated a **clear cross-border added value** and **tangible outcomes** at the grassroots level“.

On page 72 the **“soft leverage effects”** are described: “... in terms of **mobilization and socio-cultural understanding**, particular important in **Strand A programmes**, which had a **high share of joint cooperation projects** which involved intensive exchanges and experimentation. For **(other) programmes** not leading to intensive topical exchanges, the significance of **soft leverage effects was comparatively low**. Another noteworthy factor was the often strong mobili-

sation of the **wider civil society** in the concerned programme area. Direct involvement of citizens and in particular of young people was **achieved through micro-projects** enhancing cross-border people-to-people relations or exchanges in issues of day-to-day relevance. Inter-personal contacts at grassroots-level helped to **remove existing prejudices and furthered inter-cultural understanding** and learning at the level of individuals. ...The mobilization of **private sector actors** in the context of cross-border cooperation was also **significant**. This was to some extent a **pre-requisite for success...**

On page 73 under the headline: **“A wider added value under experienced & mature programmes”** it is highlighted that: “Socio-cultural and socio-economic added value was generated by the support to a variety of activities **“bridging” border obstacles** resulting from cultural (linguistic) and regulatory differences. This helped to further **develop cross-border economic relations and market transparency** and improved the daily life of individual citizens.”

In the summary on page 162 it is outlined: “Our analysis shows that operations supported by INTERREG III directly mobilized a **large number of individuals and organisations** coming from different levels of government and various sectors throughout Europe (i.e.1 million individuals representing around 68,000 different organisations).....The **contribution of Strand A programmes** to further intensifying cross-country inter-cultural understanding at a grassroots level was **significant**. **Social capital** was built up through the individual and organizational learning effects associated with programme and project-level cooperation which would not have existed without INTERREG.”

These **results** can be attributed in particular also to „**people-to-people-projects**“ (small projects) focusing on “soft leverage factors.”

b) Practical experiences in euroregions and similar structures

„People-to-people-projects“ (small projects) have proved to be successful **instruments for sustainable regional development** of cross-border areas that create **added value**. They strongly promote and facilitate important cooperation in legal and administrative questions as well as cooperation between institutions and citizens.

They create the **necessary conditions** for the establishment of functional **networks** by stakeholders from both sides of the border, **the exchange of knowledge and experiences**, the elaboration of joint **solutions to problems** and in particular for the elaboration of real cross-border projects, particularly by **private stakeholders**.

Accordingly, they prove to be **an engine** accelerating current and future cross-border cooperation in economic / infrastructural and socio-cultural field. In particular, through „people-to-people-projects“ (small projects) **European funding policy becomes visible and tangible for citizens: cross-border cooperation in daily life**.

Europe of citizens --- Here it becomes reality!!

Advanced Euroregions and similar structures have long experience in cross-border regional development and implementation of EU funding programmes. They work also with **many contacts, cross-border networks and working groups (with experts, NGO's private stakeholders etc.)**. They are well known by the citizens and are perceived as a **competent provider of advisory and support services**. Advice and support at regional / local level is particularly acknowledged by applicants in **INTERREG A projects**, above all in **“people-to-people-projects” (small projects)**.

For **less experienced Euroregions** and similar structures the management of „people-to-people-projects“ (small projects) provides the **opportunity** to become **gradually familiar with** the rules and procedures in **INTERREG A (or ENPI and IPA)** and to take over **responsibility** (bottom-up-approach!).

3) Ensuring „people-to-people-projects“ (small projects) in the new programming period 2014-2020

Due to the allowed **selection of only 4-5 priorities** it must be expected, that there will be **no separate priority axis** in the Operational Programmes for “people-to-people-projects” (small projects) in the future.

As regards the next INTERREG V A programmes, generally, **three options** are possible:

- a) **If EU-Objective 11 is selected**, a framework operation as „people-to-people-projects“ (small projects) or an adequate application procedure can be centrally specified in the Operational Programme **under the priority „promoting legal and administrative cooperation and cooperation between citizens and institutions.“**
- b) For **each EU-Objective** selected for the Operational Programme the option would be opened to approve **a framework operation for „people-to-people-projects“** (the option and the corresponding procedures should be included in the Operational Programme or in an agreement).
- c) **Under the selected „vertical“ EU-Objectives a cross-thematic measure as “people-to-people-projects” (small projects)** would be included in the Operational Programme, so to say as “horizontal level” that would have the aim to support, prepare and implement the priorities and actions of the Operational Programme. **Funding** for this horizontal level would be specified and approved.

In all three cases the task of preparation, application and implementation of **„people-to-people-projects“ (small projects)** should be assigned to the existing **Euroregions or similar structures** (should be specified in the Operational Programmes).

The financial modalities for these small projects should be laid down individually in each programme area (in the Operational Programmes or in an agreement between all partners). For example, the EU-funding can amount to minimally 50% and up to 75% (if objective 1-areas are involved)

and the maximal EU-funding should not exceed 50.000 € (in projects under the headline „society development“ the upper limit can amount from 25.000 € to 50.000 € (exceptional cases)).

Moreover, it would be advisable to **bring together several small projects under the same topic in one package** (for education, small infrastructures, language, society, culture, interpersonal contacts etc.), eg. in accordance with the above-mentioned specified volumes. This would facilitate the definition and justification of the expected cross-border **impacts and results as regards the economic, social and society development.**