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PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE-PROJECTS

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

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1.) Previous evaluations and experiences

Reports / opinions at European level, surveys, studies 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 or similar structures).

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 **oil** for a smooth functioning of infrastructural / economic cooperation with successful and long-term projects).

According to this experience with “best practice”, from the **beginning of Interreg** (1990), the A programmes often with the best evaluation results (in the meantime also many other programmes), applied with “**people-to-people-projects**“ (also sometimes called **small projects**). The aim of these projects is to prepare, support and realign (experimental projects) the priorities and actions laid down in A programmes.

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

- economy, technology,
- innovation and research,
- transport, small infrastructures,
- qualification and education, equality,
- access and accessibility,
- healthcare and welfare,
- tourism and cultural heritage,
- nature and environment,
- society development (incl. languages),
- administrative cooperation.

In most cases, these are **actions** with a financial volume that lies **below the agreed threshold** (e. g. 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 (e. g. while improving the necessary professional and intercultural skills, through legal and administrative cooperation), **particular modalities** were created in many A programmes enabling the implementation of such **“people-to-people-projects”**.

In particular, in A programmes between **new member states** and **the neighbouring areas along the „old“ external borders of the EU**, quite often, a **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 an independent **framework operation supporting People-to-People projects** that was managed by the cross-border region (Euregio or similar structure) (repeated application under different priorities during the whole programming period possible). In many cases, **several People-to-People projects** were brought together in one **„package“** with cross-border, regional importance.

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 the latter case, usually a specific priority axis **“Small Project Fund”** has been included in the Operational Programmes.

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

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

a) *EU evaluation of INTERREG*

The **ex-post evaluation report of Interreg approved by the EU Commission (2010/11)** underlines in different sections the added value of „people-to-people-projects“.

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

On page 72 the **“soft leverage effects”** are described as follows: “... 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 mobilisation 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**

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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**“ focusing on “soft leverage factors.”

b) Practical experiences in euroregions and similar structures

„People-to-people-projects“ have proved to be successful **instruments for sustainable regional development** of cross-border areas that create **added value**. They strongly promote and facilitate intercultural competence and the 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**.

The results of a survey of the AGEG Interreg Task Force in 2016 (with a very high response rate of 45%) underline these experiences and highlight the importance of the "People to People Projects" and corresponding subprograms for the success of Interreg A and the development of cross-border cooperation in general. The quality of the projects is consistently classified as very high. Their

abolition would lead to a serious negative impact on the trust-building cooperation which forms the basis of all cross-border cooperation (see EU chart of the cake for 25 years Interreg).

What is particularly interesting in the results of the survey is that the importance of the "people to people projects", which have so far been realized mainly in the Central European region, is also recognized in other border regions where they have not yet been used, and should be implemented in the future: Bulgaria / Romania, Belgium / Netherlands (Euregio Scheldemond), Finland / Russia (Northern Karelia), Finland / Sweden (Ostrobothnia, Kvarken Council), Spain / Portugal.

Accordingly, people-to-people projects 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**. This advice and support at regional / local level is particularly acknowledged by applicants in **Interreg A projects**, above all in **“people-to-people-projects”**.

For **less experienced Euroregions** and similar structures the management of „people-to-people-projects“ (especially in some new member states and candidate countries) provide the **opportunity** to take **gradually ownership with** the rules and procedures in **Interreg A (or ENPI and IPA)** and to take over **responsibility and accountability** (bottom-up-approach!).