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AEBR – AGEG – ARFE

DISCUSSION PAPER

DECENTRALISATION OF FUTURE INTERREG PROGRAMMES: OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES WITH SUB-PROGRAMMES

Association of European Border Regions
(AEBR)

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1. Aim of this paper

The aim of this paper is to present a concrete and practicable proposal for a better decentralisation in future INTERREG A programmes. If this meets general approval, details like e. g. the concrete distribution of tasks, can be further elaborated.

This proposal is based on “best-practice” in Europe in the field of cross-border cooperation which is to a large extent in line with the present evaluations of programme A by the GD REGIO.

Both have shown that region-specific, decentralised managed INTERREG A programmes achieve the best cross-border results.

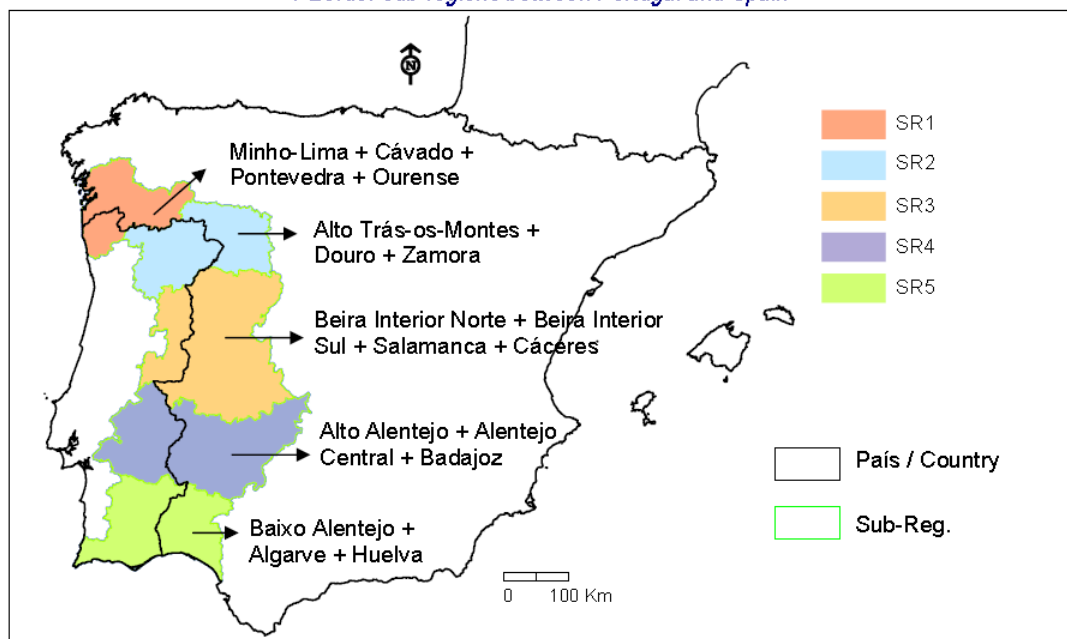
2. Previous development of the Interreg A programmes

In the programme periods Interreg A I to III, there was a series of *region-specific „euregional“ programmes*: Kvarken (FI/SE), Öresund (DK/SE), Sønderjylland/Schleswig (DK/DE), Euroregion Pomerania (DE/PL), 3 irisch/nordirische Cluster (IRL/NI), Euregio Scheldemond (BE/NL), Ems Dollart Region (DE/NL), EUREGIO (DE/NL), Euregio Rhein-Waal (DE/NL), euregio rhein-maas-nord (DE/NL), Euregio Maas-Rhein (NL/DE/BE), Pamina (FR/DE), Interreg Oberrhein (FR/DE/CH). These geographically rather small programmes have been *prepared by cross-border organisations with participation of all stakeholders from both sides of the border, corresponding to the real problems and the specific needs*. Subsequently, *invitations were issued to jointly draft the Interreg A programme with the responsible state ministries / authorities. These programmes had their own EU funds, the euregional structures managed their own programme and decided on their projects*. Nevertheless, *larger projects of importance for the whole border were made possible together*.

These Interreg A programmes received high, often the best ratings in the evaluations of the EU.

In the same period, there were also *very large Interreg A programmes*, such as Spain / Portugal, which was *initially developed and managed by both governments*. As a result of the discussions by the AEBR project LACE, strongly supported by the EU Commission, *a decentralization of the large programme gradually took place in a form which corresponds to sub-programmes*: Galicia/Norte, Castilla y Leon (Zamora)/Norte, Castilla y Leon (Salamanca)-Extremadura (Caceres)/Centro, Extremadura (Badjoz)/Alentejo, Andalusien (Huelva)/Algarve (please have a look at the following image from a study by Prof. Eduardo Medeiros about CBC in the Spanish-Portuguese border in Interreg I, II and III):

Fig. 2: Sub-regiões fronteiriças entre Portugal – Espanha
/ *Border sub-regions between Portugal and Spain*



As a result of the accession of the *new Member States* in 2004 and 2007, there was a large number of *new border areas*. However, due to its human capacity, the EU Commission tended to approve *one programme per border or trilateral programmes* with regard to the desired number of programmes (up to about 60) in the INTERREG A. Many of the above small but very good programmes disappeared under the roof of a large programme per border. At the border DE / NL there were still subprogrammes, later on they disappeared too.

3. Problem

With the growing size of the Interreg A programmes, the financial volume / programme grew, notably through the merging of several small programs, but also by increasing EU funding for territorial cooperation. This seemed so *appealing to the national governments* that they more and more absorbed the drafting, the management of the programmes and the decision on the projects where this was not yet the case. Where there was already a centralization in the past, *no decentralization* was carried out. The consequences were *programmes and projects*, which were decided more from the *national point of view* and were *no longer oriented* primarily on the respective needs and *the problems of the respective functional cross-border areas*.

Examples:

- The cross-border areas DE / PL have little in common with a Euroregion Pomerania with seaports, fishing and coastal tourism and a Euroregion Neisse with mountains, winter sports and almost all-year hiking.

- The Pyrenees know quite different priorities in the West with the Atlantic coast, in the middle Pyrenees with high mountains and barely existing or adequate cross-border infrastructure, and in the eastern part of the Mediterranean.
- The ES / PT border has completely different cooperation conditions with the rather green areas Galicia / Norte (also with some industry), with the very dry and hot climate in large parts of Extremadura and in Alentejo (very rural) and the tourist centres in Andalusia / Algarve on the Mediterranean / Atlantic.

Stakeholders with their specific knowledge on the ground could practically no longer be involved in these large programmes. The influence of cross-border structures has also been pushed back more and more. Simultaneously to this growing problem, divers studies and publications of the EU Commission and the political statements and reports of the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions have been calling for more decentralization, a "bottom up approach" and a partnership with the regional / local level.

The *Barca report*, which has met with a great response, elaborated this most clearly. However, unfortunately, *conclusions were hardly drawn*, probably also due to the fact that no way out of this complicated patterns of interests was demonstrated.

External borders:

Cross-border EU programmes at the external borders should follow the rules and experiences of Interreg A. Finland/Russia today still has three Interreg A programmes for the entire border, while on internal borders, despite past experiences, ever larger programme areas have been created.

4. Proposal for solution

The principle "*one programme per border*" (respectively trilateral programmes) will be retained. But *in the case of a large programme per border, sub-programmes* are going to be introduced, especially if this is *requested by functional cross-border structures*. Also, the sub-programmes receive *own funds* on the basis of an allocation system defined after programme approval.

One **Managing- and Certifying Authority** per programme and border will remain; there should be also only one **Monitoring Committee**. But *for each sub-programme* independent *Steering Committees* are going to operate together with a *joint secretariat*. One of these secretariats will *also act as Joint Secretariat* and carry out the work for the Monitoring Committee.

The sub-programmes with Steering Committees have a *high degree of independence in the implementation of the sub-programmes up to project selection and approval*.

4.1 Model description for a programme with sub-programmes

4.1.1 programme development and INTERREG agreement

The *elaboration* of an INTERREG A programme is carried out by a *cross-border structure*:

- in the preparatory phase with all stakeholders on either side of the border,
- in the elaboration phase in partnership with representatives of the relevant national governments / authorities.

This allows a “*place-based approach*”. For the areas covered by the *sub-programmes*, cross-border *programmatic issues with priority measures* are going to be developed, which are *summarised in the main programme per border*. The sub-programmes are oriented on the NUTS III level according to the future guidelines for INTERREG A programmes.

The *cross-border partnership* acting in the preparatory phase has to elaborate also a *strategic framework* for the management of the programme with sub-programmes and the finances.

“*Best practice*” would be an *INTERREG agreement* previously signed by all partners regulating all relevant details in order to avoid problems in the programme implementation as it is often the case today.

Main issues of such an agreement are for instance:

- Modalities of an INTERREG A programme also applying to the sub-programmes.
- Specification of common monitoring, selection and control procedures.
- Provision of the co-financing.
- Commitment on a common bank account, to which preferably also the national co-financing has to be transferred, even for the sub-programmes.
- Definition of the liability.
- Right to control the other partners.
- Common eligible measures.
- Obligatory definition and interpretation of a cross-border project.
- Percentage allocation of the funds to the sub-programs

4.1.2 Programme structure

- The **Monitoring Committee** is responsible for (to be defined in the INTERREG agreement):
 - the strategic orientation , monitoring and evaluation of the programme,
 - the composition of the programme,
 - the proceedings and frequency of the meetings (proposal: bi-annual meetings),
 - all aspects concerning the procedures in the Monitoring Committee.
- A **Steering-Committee** and a **Secretariat** carry out the **operational management** for each **sub-programme**. The Steering-Committee is responsible for:
 - management and implementation of the sub-programme,
 - the final decision on project selection and approval,
 - decisions based on the principle of equality of the partners from mutual side of the border (unanimity),
 - the frequency of the meetings (circa every 3 month), depending on the number of ongoing submitted projects (no call for proposals!).
- The **Secretariat** has to fulfil the following tasks:
 - Administrative support of the Steering Committee and other important infrastructure of the sub-programme.
 - Permanent information and concrete support for potential applicants.

- Receipt of the projects application and eligibility check.
- Execution of all administrative tasks connected with submission, selection and approval of the projects.
- Public relation and publication.

In each sub-programme several cross-border working groups should be established with representatives of the NGO's, social partners, etc.

The following diagram shows under *Type 1 the programme structures for one programme per border with sub-programmes, type 2 shows completely independent sub-programmes.*

Summary of Programme Management Models	
<p>Interreg Partnership for the development and management of programmes (regional/local cross-border partnership) Comprising regional/local authorities and other authorities/bodies co-financing the programme (e.g. national-level Member State authorities)</p>	
<p>Interreg Agreement Between the partnership members (to be presented to the European Commission)</p>	
Type 1	Type 2
Main programme <u>without</u> sub-programmes	Main programme <u>with</u> sub-programmes
Operational Management	
<p>For one main programme per border:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one Managing Authority • one Joint Secretariat 	<p>For one main programme per border:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one Managing Authority <p>For each sub-programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one Steering Committee • one Secretariat (one takes the role of the Joint Secretariat)
Strategic Management	
<p>Monitoring Committee Certifying Authority</p>	<p>Monitoring Committee Certifying Authority</p>

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