

Katsikis, Ioannis; Fragidis, Garyfallos; Paschaloudis, Dimitrios

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Cross Border Collaboration: A Network Analysis of the Bilateral Collaborative Projects in the Case of Greece and Bulgaria *

Ioannis Katsikis¹, Garyfallos Frangidis² and Dimitrios Paschaloudis²,
¹Management Science Laboratory, Department of Management Science and Technology,
Athens University of Economics and Business, Greece
²Department of Business Administration, School of Management and Economics,
Technological Educational Institute of Serres, Greece

Abstract

Although neighboring countries and both members of the EU, Greece and Bulgaria have very different social and economic environments in which entrepreneurial activities take place. At the same time, collaborative activities and research on economic and social cohesion and development between the organizations of Greece and Bulgaria is only minimal. In this empirical paper, we study the collaborative projects initiated by the organizations of the countries in order to understand the collaborative status of the two nations, their priorities and targets. Thus, we analyse 90 research project proposals funded by the European Territorial Cooperation Program Greece-Bulgaria 2007-2013, (Interreg IV). Interreg IV is an EU initiative which aims to stimulate interregional cooperation in the EU between the years 2007-13. It is financed under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). This phase of the Interreg initiative is designed to strengthen economic and social cohesion throughout the EU, by fostering the balanced development of the continent through cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. Special emphasis has been placed on integrating remote regions and those which share external borders with the candidate countries. In our work we perform a network analysis in order to examine data relevant to the project's priority axis, the number of the partners involved, the type of the partners and their nationality. Our analysis provides interesting results for the specific organizations, the conditions and the targets of the projects for which they choose to collaborate under the specific EU funded scheme. Furthermore, our research sheds light on the competences and the competitive advantages for the partner's selection process.

Keywords: cross border cooperation, international entrepreneurship, Greece, Bulgaria

JEL Codes: L26, F23, F21

Type: empirical paper

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† Corresponding author: Garyfallos Frangidis, Department of Business Administration, School of Management and Economics, Office 8, 2nd Floor, TEI of Serres, Terma Magnisias, GR 62124, Serres, Greece. T.: +30 2321049310, W.: <http://business.teiser.gr/>, E.: garyf@teiser.gr

Introduction

Greece and Bulgaria are two countries with long and interesting financing history. Although neighboring countries and both members of the EU, Greece and Bulgaria have very different social and economic environments in which entrepreneurial activities take place (Katsikis et al., 2012). Bulgaria has always been one of the one of the first investment objectives and destinations, initially for small and then for large and international Greek companies, whose gradual growth and expansion in market played an important role in the process of economic development of both countries. There is strong history coherence between the two neighboring countries, as their economic transactions, due to their regional proximity but also the multiple effects in Greek economy such as a dynamic impetus to exports, increased competitiveness and entrepreneurship, contribution to emergence of Greece to another outflow of investment capital.

Over the years Greece has evolved to one of the largest foreign investor in Bulgaria with investments of over three billion (Bitzenis 2006, Petrochilos and Salavrakos, 2003). At the same time, collaborative activities and research on economic and social cohesion and development between the organizations of Greece and Bulgaria is only minimal. In this empirical paper, we study the collaborative projects initiated by the organizations of the countries in order to understand the collaborative status of the two nations, their priorities and targets. Thus, we analyze the 90 research project proposals with 329 project partners funded by the European Territorial Cooperation Program Greece-Bulgaria 2007-2013, (Interreg IV).

In our work, we perform a project and partner analysis in order to examine data relevant to the project's priority axis, the number of the partners involved, the type of the partners and their nationality. Our analysis provides interesting results for the specific organizations, the conditions and the targets of the projects for which they choose to collaborate under the specific EU funded scheme. Furthermore, our research sheds light on the competences and the competitive advantages for the partner's selection process. Based on those results, our paper concludes by providing insights on the regional and organizational strategies for the internationalization and the development of bilateral collaboration between the organizations that could contribute positively in responding to the current economic crisis in Greece.

The paper is structured as follows: in the first part we discuss the role of cross border collaboration in the case of Greece and Bulgaria. In the second part we present the case of the European Territorial Cooperation Program in general and the specific instruments for the Operational Program Greece-Bulgaria 2007 – 2013 which we focus our detailed study. In the third part of the paper we analyse the methodological approach of our study. In the forth part we briefly present the findings of our analysis regarding the charatistics of the projects and of the partners involved. The paper concludes with a summary of our results and some ideas for future research.

1 The Role of Cross Border Collaboration

1.1 *The Role and the Importance of Cross Border Collaboration in the Frames of the European Territorial Cooperation - ETC*

According to the European Commission (2012) cross-border cooperation helps transform regions located on either side of internal or external borders of the European Union into strong economic and social poles. In particular, cross-border actions are encouraged in the fields of entrepreneurship, improving joint management of natural resources, supporting links between urban and rural areas, improving access to transport and communication networks, developing joint use of infrastructure, administrative cooperation and capacity building, employment, community interaction, culture and social affairs. Cross-border cooperation is essentially about “filling the gaps” through agreed cross-border “analysis and response” strategies, specifically formulated and tailored for each border region.

The European Territorial Cooperation programs also include a transnational cooperation through which they promote cooperation among greater European regions, including the ones surrounding sea basins (e.g. Baltic Sea Region, North Sea, Mediterranean and Atlantic Area) or mountain ranges (e.g. Alpine Space) and facilitates coordinated strategic responses to joint challenges like flood management, transport and communication corridors, international business and research linkages, urban development and others. Special attention is given to outermost and island regions (e.g. Indian Ocean, Caribbean Area or Northern Periphery).

In our case the program which we shall analyse is a typical case of interregional cooperation. A scheme offering a framework for the exchange of experiences between local and regional actors from across Europe in order to contribute to the EU's strategies on growth, jobs and sustainable development. In addition, it aims at reducing disparities by matching less experienced regions with more advanced regions in the various policy fields such as innovation, demographic change, energy supply and climate change.

2 The Case of the European Territorial Cooperation Program 2007-2013, (Interreg IV)

Within the framework of the European Territorial Cooperation Program 2007-2013, (Interreg IV), cohesion policy encourages regions and cities from different EU Member States to work together and learn from each other through joint Programmes, projects and networks. During the Programming Period 2007-2013 the ETC has been introduced as a fully-fledged objective of cohesion policy, along with convergence and regional competitiveness and employment and provides a framework for exchanging experience between regional and local bodies in different countries.

With a community contribution of almost €7.8 billion for the sole internal borders, and approximately €9.4 billion by adding IPA-CBC and ENPI-CBC funding, territorial

cooperation has reached a new scale and now comprehends 75 cross-border Programmes (including external EU borders), 13 transnational Programmes, one interregional Programme and the three networking Programmes URBACT, ESPON and INTERACT. The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) is the unified European Union's financial instrument aimed at aiding the Pre-Accession process for Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries, also called "Beneficiary countries". It brings all past pre-accession support (Phare CBC, ISPA, SAPARD, CARDS, etc.) into one single funding instrument. Funds are allocated through five components: 1) Transition Assistance and Institution Building, 2) Cross- Border Cooperation, 3) Regional Development, 4) Human Resources Development, and 5) Rural Development. The Cross-border Cooperation component of IPA promotes co-operation between EU Member States and Candidate/ Potential Candidate Countries, co-operation between Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries themselves and participation of IPA beneficiary countries in Structural Funds' transnational cooperation programmes (South East Europe and MED Programmes).

With the aim of reinforcing cooperation between member states and partner countries along the external border of the European Union, Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) is a key priority of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). The key objectives of the CBC strategy are to promote economic and social development in border areas, address common challenges, ensure efficiency and secure orders, and promote people-to-people cooperation. The ENPI CBC approach is based on the principles of multiannual programming, partnership and co-financing and takes into account the specificities of the EC's external relations. Programmes involving regions on both sides of the EU's border share one single budget, common management structures, a common legal framework and implementation rules. The Programmes' structure is based on a fully balanced partnership between the participating countries. The Programmes are managed by an EU Member State regional or national authority.

2.1 *The Case of the ETC Program Greece-Bulgaria 2007-2013, (Interreg IV)*

Interreg IV is an EU initiative which aims to stimulate interregional cooperation in the EU between the years 2007-13. It is financed under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The cross-border European Territorial Cooperation Programme "Greece-Bulgaria 2007-2013" was approved by the European Commission on 28/03/2008 by the Decision C (2008) 1129/28-03-2008. The total budget (ERDF and national contribution) for the European Territorial Programme "Greece-Italy 2007-2013" is €132,318,963. The total financing consists of €112,471,118 (85%) funding from the ERDF and €19,847,845 (15%) of national contribution from the two neighboring countries: Greece and Bulgaria. This phase of the Interreg initiative is designed to strengthen economic and social cohesion throughout the EU, by fostering the balanced development of the continent through cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. Special emphasis has been placed on integrating remote regions and those which share external borders with the candidate countries.

The eligible areas of the programme in the case of Greece and Bulgaria, contains seven Regional Units (former Prefectures) on the Greek side (Evros, Kavala, Xanthi, Rodopi, Drama,

Thessaloniki and Serres) and four Districts on the Bulgarian side (Blagoevgrad, Smolyan, Kardjali, Haskovo), covering an area of 40.202 km² and 2.812.236 inhabitants. More analytically, the eligible area of the programme consists of Region of Eastern Macedonia-Thrace (Prefectures of Evros, Kavala, Xanthi, Rodopi and Drama) and Region of Central Macedonia (Prefectures of Thessaloniki and Serres) in Greece and the South-West Planning Region and South-Central Planning Region (Districts of Blagoevgrad, Smolyan, Kardjali and Haskovo) in Bulgaria. The Prefecture of Kavala has been included as adjacent area. These are illustrated on the following figure (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The Eligible Area of the Cross-Border Cooperation Greece – Bulgaria 2007 – 2013

The strategic goal of the Operational Program for Cross-Border Cooperation “Greece – Bulgaria” for the Programming Period 2007 – 2013 is “to promote the cross-border area by ensuring regional cohesion and enhancing competitiveness”. This strategic goal is expected to be achieved through the two distinctive strategic objectives: 1) Strengthening the attractiveness of the area by upgrading the quality of life and improving accessibility structures and 2) Enhancing competitiveness by promoting entrepreneurship, establishing networks of cooperation and investing in human resources. These two strategic objectives are defined in the relevant Priority Axes, with more special objectives for each one of them. These are summarized and presented on the following table (Table 1):

Table 1: Priority Axes and Objectives in the ETC Program “Greece-Bulgaria 2007-2013”

Priority Axis	Specific Objectives
1: “Quality of Life”	1.1: Protection, Management & Promotion of the Environmental Resources
	1.2: Protection, Management & Promotion of the Cultural Resources
	1.3: Cooperation and Networking on Health and Social Welfare Issues
2: “Accessibility”	2.1: Development of the Road and Railway Network
	2.2: Improvement of Cross-Border Facilities
3: “Competitiveness and Human Resources”	3.1: Support and Valorization of Human Resources - Support of Preparatory Actions in view of the Open Labour Market
	3.2: Encouragement of Entrepreneurship & Actions that Cope with the Restructuring of the Economy
	3.3: Promotion of Cooperation between Research, Technological and Academic Institutions and Business Organizations
4: “Technical Assistance”	4.1: Core Programme Management Activities
	4.2: Project Generation and Information & Communication Activities of the Programme

3 Methodology

The purpose of our study is to offer a first analytical view on the relations and the network developed through the development of collaborative partnerships within the frames of European Territorial Cooperation Programme “Greece-Bulgaria 2007-2013” program. In order to materialize our intentions and as a first step towards the social network analysis, for our analysis we collected analytical information on 327 projects approved through the ETC “Greece-Bulgaria 2007-2013” program. Here, we present a first descriptive analysis of the demographics of the project and partners involved in the “Greece-Bulgaria 2007-2013” program. In our analysis we emphasize on the characteristics of the projects and on the type of the partners involved. Although, these analytical efforts are necessary steps towards a more coherent social network analysis, which would be the final outcome of this research, our first results from the descriptive analysis provide interesting outcomes of autonomus value.

3.1 Data Collection and Analysis

In order to materialize our intentions we formed a unified dataset of the projects undertaken within the frames of the European Territorial Cooperation Programme “Greece-Bulgaria 2007-2013”. We managed to collect information covering 90 research projects that are implemented through the collaboration of 327 project partners. In this dataset we included information on the project title, the partners involved and their role in the project (lead partner, ect), the priority axis, the intervention within which the project lies, project number, the final budget and the name of the partner, its nationality and its type. For the needs of our analysis we distiquist and categorized the different type of partners into six (6) categories: 1) Public Organizations, 2) Local Administration Authorities, 3) Non Governmental Organizations - NGOs, 4) Universities, 5) Research Centres, and 6) Private Companies. In the following sections we present the results of our analysis. The list of the projects is available in the Appendix of this paper.

4 Analysis of the Results

In this section we present the results of our analysis. Here, in the first section we focus on reporting some preliminary results on the descriptive statistics of our study. In the second section we focus on an analysis of the demographics of partners involved.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Project Type Analysis

Here we present some descriptive statistics on the demographics of our sample. The findings reveal interesting facts on the structure and the organization of the projects approved. As shown on the following table (Table 2), the majority of the projects are located under the "Quality of Life" priority axis. Second comes the priority axis number 3: "Competitiveness and Human Resources" while there is a limited only number of projects in the priority axis 2: "Accessibility".

Table 2: Priority Axis, Objective per Project

Priority Axis	Frequency	Percent	Objective	Frequency	Percent	Cum. Percent
<i>Priority Axis 1: Quality of Life</i>	53	58,9%	1.1	23	25,6%	25,6%
			1.2	12	13,3%	38,9%
			1.3	18	20,0%	58,9%
<i>Priority Axis 2: Accessibility</i>	8	8,9%	2.1	7	7,8%	66,7%
			2.2	1	1,1%	67,8%
<i>Priority Axis 3: Competitiveness & Human Resources</i>	29	32,2%	3.1	11	12,2%	80,0%
			3.2	8	8,9%	88,9%
			3.3	10	11,1%	100,0%
Number of Projects	90	100,0	Total	90	100,0	

Within the above priority axis, the majority of the projects, as exhibit on the above table (Table 2) are located under the 1.1 objective: "Protection, Management and Promotion of the Environmental Resources". The second most important is the 1.3 objective: "Cooperation and Networking on Health and Social Welfare Issues" and then the 1.2: "Protection, Management & Promotion of the Cultural Resources". Generally, priority axis 1: "Quality of Life" is the most important field since the 58,9% of the projects are in the first priority axis, with the 25,6% to be under the 1.1 objective.

The result of the above analysis indicate the importance of the improvement of the quality of life for the regions of the two countries. Moreover, the improvement of the quality of life is thought to be achieved through the activities for the protection, management and the promotion of the environmental resources and secondly through the cooperation and networking on health and social welfare issues rather than the protection, management & promotion of cultural resources.

4.2 Analytics: The Demographics of Partners involved

The findings of our study reveal interesting facts on the population of participants in the the projects undertaken within the frames of the European Territorial Cooperation Programme “Greece-Bulgaria 2007-2013”. In the table below (Table 3) we illustrate the origin of partners involved in relation to their role in the project. Our data show that the majority of partners come from Greece (173: 52,9%), and 154: 47,1% from Bulgaria. Additionally, Greek partners hold a more important role in the project implementation since the majority of lead partners (LP) come from Greece (65) and only 25 from Bulgaria. Probably, the large experience of Greek partners in undertaking European projects, due to the long history of participation of Greece in European settings could be an explanatory factor for the above mentioned phenomenon.

Table 3: Country * Role Crosstabulation

Count	Role										Total	Percent
	LP	PP1	PP2	PP3	PP4	PP5	PP6	PP7	PP8	PP9		
Bulgaria	25	35	41	18	12	8	7	5	2	1	154	47,1
Greece	65	30	24	23	15	5	5	2	3	1	173	52,9
Total	90	65	65	41	27	13	12	7	5	2	327	100,0
Percent	27,5	19,9	19,9	12,5	8,3	4	3,7	2,1	1,5	0,6	100	
Cumulative Percent	27,5	47,4	67,3	79,8	88,1	92	95,7	97,9	99,4	100		

In the following table, we illustrate the dissemination of the partners based on their type and in relation to their origin. The majority of partners, almost half of them (47,4%), come from the local administration authorities, emphasising thus the role of local administration in the development of cross-border cooperation activities. Additionally, an important number of partners (31,8%) comes from Non governmental organizations (NGOs). The participation of other type of partners, such as universities (10,4%), research centres (4,6%), private companies (4,9%) and other public organizations (0,9%) is only minimal.

Table 4: Country * Type of Partner Crosstabulation

Count	Type of Partner						Total
	1) Public Organizations	2) Local Administration Authorities	3) NGOs	4) Universities	5) Research Centres	6) Private Companies	
Bulgaria	2	81	48	15	5	3	154
Greece	1	74	56	19	10	13	173
Total	3	155	104	34	15	16	327
Percent	0,9	47,4	31,8	10,4	4,6	4,9	100
Cum. Percent	0,9	48,3	80,1	90,5	95,1	100	

Additionally, the presence of local authorities in the projects is more important for the Bulgarian partners than it is for the Greek ones, while the presence of NGOs from Greece is more intense than for the Bulgarian ones. A large difference exist on the participation of private companies from the two countries. Although there are 13 private firms from Greece the number of the Bulgaria ones is only limited to three. It seems that the local authorities of the region are the ones that mostly exploit the opportunities provided through the European Territorial Cooperation Programme “Greece-Bulgaria 2007-2013” in order for them to expand or / and to integrate their scope of activities through the use of the financial resources gained and the development of collaborative projects with other organizations. The same happens for the NGOs from both the Greek and the Bulgarian side who see the ETCP funding as an important opportunity to further expand their activities. In the following table (Table 5), we view the type of partners in relation with the thematic priority axis.

Table 5: Type of Partner * Priority Axis Crosstabulation per Project

Type of Partner	Priority Axis / Project Number			Total Number of Partners	
	1: <i>Quality of Life</i>	2: <i>Accessibility</i>	3: <i>Competitiveness & Human Resources</i>		
1) Public Organizations	0	0	0	90	327
2) Local Administration Authorities	38	8	10		
3) NGOs	8	0	12		
4) Universities	4	0	3		
5) Research Centres	1	0	3		
6) Private Companies	2	0	1		
Total Number of Projects	53	8	29	90	327

As we see on Table 5, local administration authorities undertake projects mostly in the first priority axis: “Quality of Life”. The third priority axis: “Competitiveness & Human Resources” is also an important one both for the local administration authorities and for the NGOs. What is interesting to mention is the fact that under the second priority axis “Accessibility” we see only the operation of local administration authorities and the lack of any other partner, a case rather problematic for the sustained development of the specific target.

Conclusion and Discussion

Greece and Bulgaria are two countries with long and interesting financing history. Although neighboring countries and both members of the EU, Greece and Bulgaria have very different social and economic environments in which entrepreneurial activities take place. Bulgaria has always been one of the one of the first investment objectives and destinations, initially for small and then for large and international Greek companies, whose gradual growth and expansion in market played an important role in the process of economic development of both countries. In this empirical paper, we study the collaborative projects initiated by the organizations of the countries in order to understand the collaborative status of the two nations, their priorities and targets. Thus, we analyse the collaboration activities of 329 participants forming 90 research project proposals funded by the European Territorial Cooperation Program Greece-Bulgaria 2007-2013, (Interreg IV) financed under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Within the framework of the European Territorial Cooperation Program 2007-2013, (Interreg IV), cohesion policy encourages regions and cities from different EU Member States to work together and learn from each other through joint Programmes, projects and networks. During the Programming Period 2007-2013 the ETC has been introduced as a fully-fledged objective of cohesion policy, along with convergence and regional competitiveness and employment and provides a framework for exchanging experience between regional and local bodies in different countries.

The purpose of our study is to offer a first analytical view on the relations and the network developed through the development of collaborative partnerships within the frames of European Territorial Cooperation Programme "Greece-Bulgaria 2007-2013" program. In order to materialize our intentions and as a first step towards the social network analysis, for our analysis we collected analytical information on 327 projects approved through the ETC "Greece-Bulgaria 2007-2013" program. Here, we present a first descriptive analysis of the demographics of the project and partners involved in the "Greece-Bulgaria 2007-2013" program. In our analysis we emphasize on the characteristics of the projects and on the type of the partners involved. Although, these analytical efforts are necessary steps towards a more coherent social network analysis, which would be the final outcome of this research, our first results from the descriptive analysis provide interesting outcomes of autonomus value.

The result of the above analysis indicate the importance of the improvement of the quality of life for the regions of the two countries. Morevoer, the impovement of the quality of life is thought to be achieved through the activities for the protection, management and the promotion of the environmental resources and secontly through the cooperation and networking on health and social welfare issues rather than the protection, management & promotion of cultural resources.

Our data show that the majority of partners come from Greece (52,9%), and 47,1% from Bulgaria. Additionally, Greek partners hold a more important role in the project implementation since the majority of lead partners (LP) come from Greece (65) and only 25

from Bulgaria. Probably, the large experience of Greek partners in undertaking European projects, due to the long history of participation of Greece in European settings could be an explanatory factor for the above mentioned phenomenon. Additionally, The majority of partners, almost half of them (47,4%), come from the local administration authorities, emphasising thus the role of local administration in the development of cross-border cooperation activities.

The presence of local authorities in the projects is more important for the Bulgarian partners than it is for the Greek ones, while the presence of NGOs from Greece is more intense than for the Bulgarian ones. A large difference exist on the participation of private companies from the two countries. Although there are 13 private firms from Greece the number of the Bulgaria ones is only limited to three. It seems that the local authorities of the region are the ones that mostly exploit the opportunities provided through the European Territorial Cooperation Programme in order for them to expand or / and to integrate their scope of activities through the use of the financial resources gained and the development of collaborative projects with other organizations. The same happens for the NGOs from both the Greek and the Bulgarian side who see the ETCP funding as an important opportunity to further expand their activities. In the following table (Table 5), we view the type of partners in relation with the thematic priority axis.

Finally, what is interesting to mention is the fact that under the second priority axis "Accessibility" we see only the operation of local administration authorities and the lack of any other partner, a case rather problematic for the sustained development of the specific target. In our analysis we also had an analytical look inside the structure of the programs by studying natural result having in mind that those programs are usually offered outside the typical structures of education and thus allow for a better flexibility to emerge.

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