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Article

The role of the European Union's neighbourhood policy in developing cross-border cooperation in the Polish-Ukrainian borderland

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The Role of the European Union's Neighbourhood Policy in Developing Cross-Border Cooperation in the Polish-Ukrainian Borderland

Abstract

Cross-border cooperation, financially supported by the EU Neighbourhood Policy instruments, is an important factor for the socio-economic development of cross-border areas at the EU's external borders. This paper is devoted to cross-border cooperation on the Polish-Ukrainian border, which was financed by the Cross-Border Cooperation Program Poland-Belarus-Ukraine 2014-2020, which was one of the programs of the European Neighbourhood Policy. This issue becomes particularly significant in the context of cooperation with Ukraine, which is challenging due to the ongoing conflict in its territory. There is a need to examine existing solutions and propose future directions for cross-border cooperation. The aim of the article was to present evolution and identify the attributes of the European Neighbourhood Policy, which is a key instrument of the development of cross-border cooperation at the EU's external borders. The second aim was a multidimensional analysis of Polish-Ukrainian cooperation during a period 2014-2020, taking into account the structure of projects, partners and areas of cooperation. The structure of partners was examined and discussed based on their status, sector, and level of activity. The research augmented the current knowledge in the field of cross-border collaboration supported by the European Neighbourhood Policy. The management of cross-border cooperation on the Polish-Ukrainian border can benefit from the study's practical conclusions.

Keywords

Cross-border cooperation | Ukraine | European Neighbourhood Policy | projects | development

JEL Codes

R58, E61, F59

1. Introduction

The issues of Polish-Ukrainian cooperation are becoming increasingly important in the context of the dynamically changing geopolitical situation in Europe. The countries neighbouring the EU are important actors in the ongoing process of European integration. Among these countries, Ukraine plays a special role (Lippert, 2007), participating in cross-border cooperation despite the armed conflict.

The European Neighbourhood Policy plays an important role in the development of cross-border cooperation, with the key objective of supporting civil society, promoting the rule of law, and establishing a deep and sustainable democracy (Emerson, 2004). The ENP, through its financial instruments, has stimulated the socio-economic development of cross-border areas located on the EU's external borders (Sklenková, 2012). These ambitious objectives have been achieved through cross-border cooperation programmes dedicated

to selected EU external borders. The European Neighbourhood Policy was formally launched in 2004 (Communication 373/2004). The unprecedented enlargement of the EU coincided with the development of a concept presenting a long-term vision for relations with neighbours (Kalicka-Mikołajczyk, 2021). The European Commission has proposed the creation of a 'circle of friends' (Happ & Bruns, 2016) located around EU borders. This circle included 16 countries. The prospect of cooperating with the EU and joining the integration process was particularly enthusiastically welcomed in Ukraine. The Ukrainian side declared its willingness to deepen its relations with the EU with the hope of gaining EU candidate status (Kaja-Pilas, 2012). Ukraine did not obtain such status until 2022 after it was militarily attacked by the Russian Federation. The accession process then accelerated, while cross-border cooperation with EU neighbours deepened (Antonyuk & Zinko, 2023). An opportunity for the development of the Polish-Ukrainian border region is the use of a new financial instrument the INTERREG NEXT Poland-Ukraine 2021-2027.

2. Cross-border cooperation with Ukraine in the light of the European Neighbourhood Policy

Cross-border cooperation at the EU's external borders is inextricably linked to the European Neighbourhood Policy. The rationale and principles of financial support for cross-border cooperation at the EU's external borders differ significantly from support for cross-border cooperation implemented within the EU (Studzieniecki et al., 2022; Gumenyuk & Studzieniecki, 2019). In the former case, this cooperation is related to the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy, while in the latter case, it is related to the implementation of the EU Cohesion Policy (Leonardi, 2005; Żuk, 2018; Jakubowski et al., 2017). The goals and assumptions of the two policies diverge, but cross-border cooperation itself is implemented in a similar manner. Cross-border cooperation takes place through the implementation of joint projects. Numerous scientific studies have been devoted to programmes and projects implemented in the Polish-Ukrainian borderland (Dolzbłasz & Raczyk, 2011; Charucka, 2016; Kawalko, 2015; Pysarenko & Naslidnyk, 2010; Volodin, 2011). They allowed for a deeper understanding of the conditions and effects of cross-border cooperation in this borderland.

Both Poland and Ukraine have been deeply interested in their mutual cooperation (Marcinkowska, 2016). Such a situation stemmed from five factors (Sanotska et al., 2019):

1. direct neighbourhood,
2. common (but difficult) history,
3. the attractiveness of the Polish labour market for the Ukrainians,
4. membership of Poland in the Western structures,
5. the threat of Russia.

Unfortunately, the two countries' cooperation experienced various obstacles in Ukraine (Studzieniecki & Kowalewski, 2013; Zheltovskyy, 2015). There were huge economic and social disparities between Poland and Ukraine. The situation in Ukraine was much worse than in Poland. But it was believed that the European Neighbourhood Policy could help carry out territorial reform in Ukraine, reduce bureaucracy, marketize the economy, and increase the role of regional authorities (Shcherba, 2013; Borshch, 2014).

The origins and organisational and legal framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy are well recognised in the academic literature (Marcinkowska, 2011; Christensen, 2011; Maliszewska-Nienartowicz, 2007; Varwick & Lang, 2007). There is a consensus that the key reasons for the birth of the ENP were the need to comprehensively regulate the EU's relations with neighbouring countries (Kalicka-Mikołajczyk, 2021; Gstöhl & Schunz, 2016) and to strengthen the EU's position as an 'actor' on the global political stage (Misiągiewicz et al., 2012). The concepts for shaping relations with neighbours emerged at the end of the 20th century (Harasimowicz, 2016). The Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) program was crucial in fostering collaboration between member states of the European Union and its neighbours as well as other partner countries. It was established in 1991 to encourage democratic and pro-market reforms in countries like as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Mongolia, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan (Liargovas & Papageorgiou, 2024). In 1995, the EU launched the European Union's support program for Mediterranean partner countries (MEDA). Regretfully, these programmes' efficiency was far from ideal (Zygierewicz, 2003; Przybyszewska, 2014). Bureaucracy, corruption, an

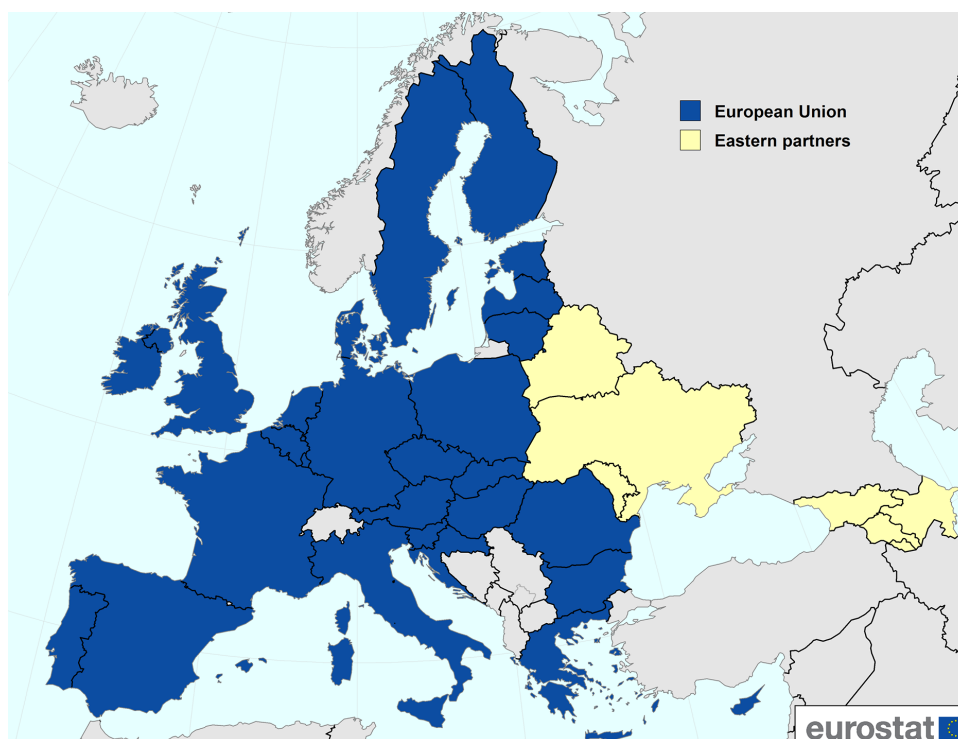


Figure 1. Eastern Partnership countries
Source: EUROSTAT, 2017

inadequate judiciary, and over-reliance on the central government hindered economic development. As a result, the European Commission searched for new solutions that would improve cooperation with partner countries (Brodzka, 2010).

With the prospect of more (mainly neighbouring) countries joining the EU, it became necessary to develop mechanisms aimed at encouraging their cooperation and facilitating the accession process. The ENP was intended to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines on the European continent and to prevent the isolation of neighbouring countries and the creation of barriers at the new borders of the enlarged EU (Świeżak, 2007).

The Eastern Partnership initiative (Latoszek & Kłos, 2016) played an important role in deepening EU cooperation with Ukraine. It aimed to deepen the EU's integration with Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan (Figure 1).

By bringing together political and socio-economic systems, the Eastern Partnership was also intended to strengthen peaceful relations in Eastern Europe (Stańczyk, 2011; Popielawska, 2009; Moraczewska, 2014; Harasimowicz, 2016). The success of this initiative required a financial commitment from the EU (Stępniewski, 2017).

The European Neighbourhood Policy was accompanied by EU financial instruments (Figure 2) providing funds for joint initiatives between member states and their neighbours (Sklenková, 2012; Schumacher et al., 2018). These instruments have provided an organisational and financial framework for cross-border cooperation at the EU's external borders (Celata & Coletti, 2015; Boman & Berg, 2007), including the EU border with Ukraine (Gawrich et al., 2010).

Cross-border cooperation has become particularly important for Ukrainian entities (Miszczuk, 2017; Peciakowski & Gizicki, 2021). It has represented an opportunity for the socio-economic development of underdeveloped border areas (Stępniewski, 2017). Numerous researchers have emphasised that there is no other land border in Europe (like the border with Ukraine) that separates countries with a greater difference in the level of socio-economic development (Buller et al., 2017; Jakubowski et al., 2017). Hence, it has become particularly important to deepen cross-border cooperation with Ukraine as one of the European Union's largest and very important external neighbours.



Figure 2. European Neighbourhood policy instruments
Source: authors' own elaboration

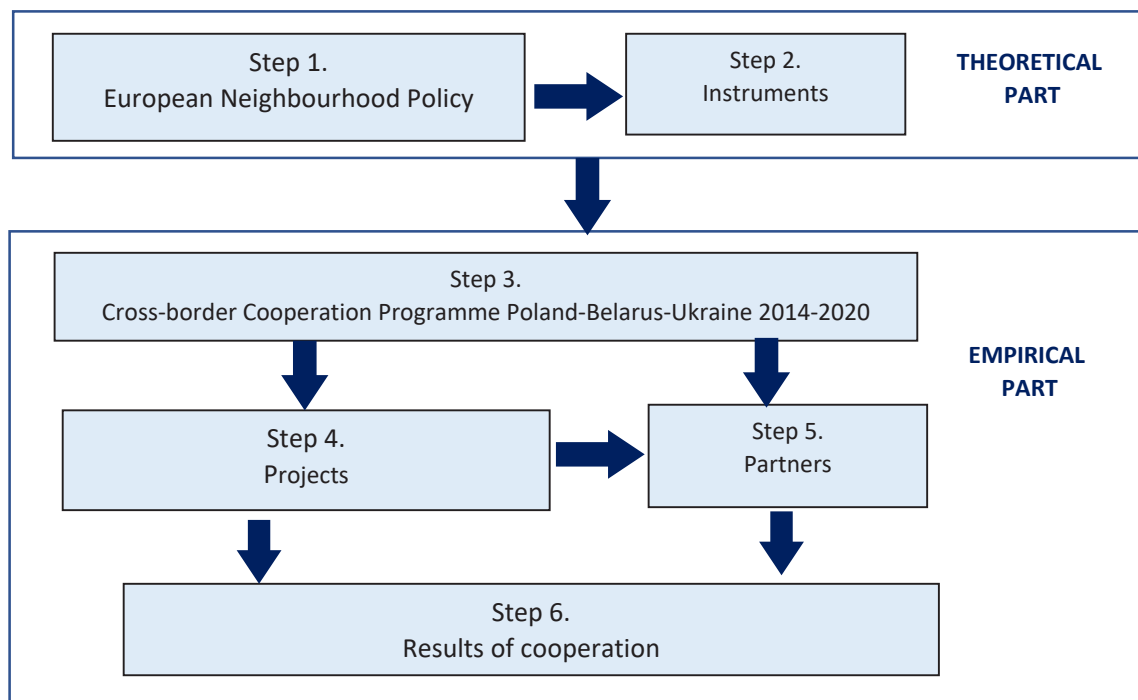


Figure 3. Concept of the research
Source: authors' own elaboration

3. Concept of the research

This research consisted of a theoretical part and a practical part (Figure 3). The aim of the theoretical part was to identify the key attributes, determinants, and instruments of the EU Neighbourhood Policy with a particular focus on Ukraine. The aim of the empirical part was to present Polish-Ukrainian cooperation financed by the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 in subjective, objective, and spatial terms. The implementation of the research objectives involved six stages. The first two corresponded with the theoretical objective. They included a presentation of the origins and assumptions

of the ENP and a discussion of the evolution of cross-border cooperation instruments dedicated to Ukraine. This was followed by a presentation of the objectives and priorities of the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 and the areas of support covered by this programme.

In the next stage, cross-border cooperation projects between partners from Poland and Ukraine were analysed in detail. The structure of the projects was presented in terms of their nature, priority, and budget. Each project involved partners from Poland and Ukraine. Based on the analysis of the projects, these partners were identified. They were then characterised. Their activity was analysed in terms

of level, sector, status, and location. The final stage of the research was devoted to analysing the effects of cross-border cooperation. Secondary sources were used in the research, including legal documents, resources of the EU Programme Institutions, the EU Project Database, and the Project Database of the Poland-Ukraine-Belarus Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020.

4. Analysis of cross-border cooperation programmes

Within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, programmes have been established to support Ukraine's cross-border cooperation with neighbouring EU member states such as Poland, Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia. These programmes operated over 3 funding periods and are presented in Table 1.

The budget of the programmes dedicated to Ukraine for the period 2014-2020 decreased by 11% compared to the previous period 2007-2013. This was due to structural changes in the programmes, including the replacement of the trilateral Romania-Ukraine-Moldova programme by the bilateral Romania-Ukraine programme. For the 2021-2027 period, the budget of programmes dedicated to Ukraine increased by almost 50%.

The funds allocated to Polish-Ukrainian cooperation in all financial periods were higher than those of the other programmes. This was particularly the case in the last funding period, when the budget

of the Poland-Ukraine programme was higher than the total budget of all other programmes (Figure 4). In the period 2014-2020, Polish-Ukrainian cooperation was supported by the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Programme, which covered the core and adjacent regions (Table 2). On the territory of Poland, these were 12 NUTS 3 subregions located in 4 voivodeships (Podlaskie, Mazowieckie, Lubuskie, Podkarpackie).

The Ukrainian component comprised six administrative regions, called oblasts, while the Belarusian component included four oblasts (Table 2).

The total area covered by the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 was 316.3 thousand sq. km, of which the Polish part accounted for 75.2 thousand sq. km, the Belarusian part for 138.6 sq. km, and the Ukrainian part for 102.5 thousand sq. km (Figure 5). Despite the division of the area into main and adjacent regions, entities coming from both parts and applying for funding from the programme were treated equally.

The main objective of the programme was to support development processes in the Polish-Belarusian-Ukrainian border area through co-financing of various projects, consistent with the objectives and priorities of the Cross-Border Cooperation Programme (Table 3).

All projects applying to the programme had to fit into one of the priorities included in the objectives such as Heritage, Accessibility, Security, and Borders. They had to be non-commercial and had to contribute to improving the quality of life of people living in Eastern Poland, Western Ukraine, and Belarus

Table 1. Cross-border cooperation programmes dedicated to Ukraine. All amounts in million €

Programme	Funding period		Funding period		Funding period	
	2007-2013		2014-2020		2021-2027	
	Budget	Support	Budget	Support	Budget	Support
Poland – Belarus - Ukraine	202.95	186.20	201.38	188.86	-	-
Romania - Ukraine - Moldova	139.39	126.72	-	-	-	-
Hungary - Slovakia - Romania - Ukraine	75.50	68.64	81.34	73.95	94.00	83.18
Black Sea	30.93	28.12	54.33	48.82	94.46	85.01
Romania - Ukraine	-	-	66.00	60.00	76.87	68.03
Poland - Ukraine	-	-	-	-	266.59	235.88
In total	448.77	409.68	403.05	371.63	531.92	472.1

Source: authors' own elaboration based on Keep.eu, 2024

Table 2. Regions supported by the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020

No.	State	Regions	
		Main regions	Adjacent regions
	Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Podlaskie voivodeship (subregions: białostocki, łomżyński, suwalski) • Mazowieckie voivodeship (subregions: ostrołęcko-siedlecki) • Lubelskie voivodeship (subregions: bialski, chełmsko-zamojski) • Podkarpackie voivodeship (subregions: krośnieński, przemyski) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lubelskie voivodeship (subregions: puławski, lubelski) • Podkarpackie voivodeship (subregions: rzeszowski, tarnobrzeski)
	Belarus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grodno Oblast, Brest Oblast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minsk Oblast, Gomel Oblast
	Ukraine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lviv Oblast, Volyn Oblast, Zakarpattia Oblast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rivne Oblast, Ternopil Oblast, Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast

Source: Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020, 2024

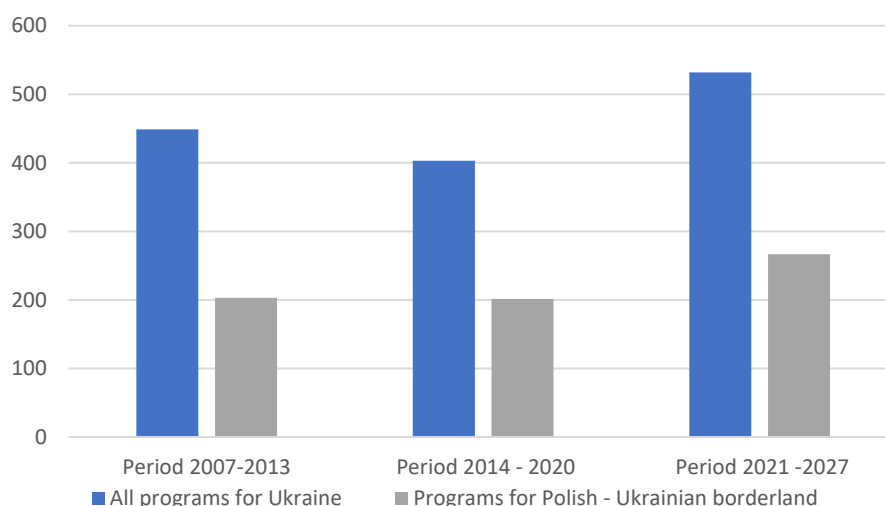


Figure 4. Budget of cross-border cooperation programmes dedicated to Ukraine, including the Polish-Ukrainian programmes (all amounts in million €)

Source: authors' own elaboration based on Keep.eu, 2024

5. Analysis of cross-border cooperation projects

A total of 158 projects were implemented with the funds of the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020, including 109 projects in which Polish and Ukrainian partners cooperated. There were 103 projects that featured only entities from Poland and Ukraine, while six projects additionally featured entities from Belarus. The number of projects in which Polish partners cooperated with Ukrainian partners was significantly higher than the number of projects involving cooperation between Poles and Belarusians (Figure 6).

The duration of the Polish-Ukrainian projects ranged from 8 to 36 months. The budget of the projects varied greatly and ranged from EUR 0.5 thousand to EUR 2.67 million. Within the framework of Polish-Ukrainian cooperation, 4 types of projects were implemented: direct, large infrastructural, micro, and regular. The largest number of projects was of the micro type, the smallest number was of large infrastructural projects (Table 4). The total budget of all projects was over EUR 118 million, of which almost EUR 106 million came from the European Neighbourhood Instrument. Project budgets were characterised by considerable variation. The largest budget, amounting to 6.32 million Euros, was in large infrastructure projects, and the smallest was in micro-projects and averaged 61.68 thousand Euros (Table 4).



Figure 5. Area supported by the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020
Source: Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020, 2024

Table 3. Objectives and priorities of the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020

No.	Objective	Full name of the objective	Priorities of the objective	
	Heritage	Promotion of local culture and preservation of historical heritage	1.1	Promotion of local culture and history
			1.2	Promotion and conservation of natural heritage
	Accessibility	Improving the accessibility of regions, the development of sustainable and climate-resilient transport and communication networks and systems	1.3	Improving and developing transport services and infrastructure
			1.4	Development of information and communication technology infrastructure
	Security	Common challenges in the area of safety and security	1.5	Support for the development of health care and social services
			1.6	Addressing common security challenges
	Borders	Promotion of border management and border security, mobility and migration management	4.1	Support for efficiency and border security
			4.2	Improving border management operations, customs and visa procedures

Source: authors' own elaboration based on the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020, 2024

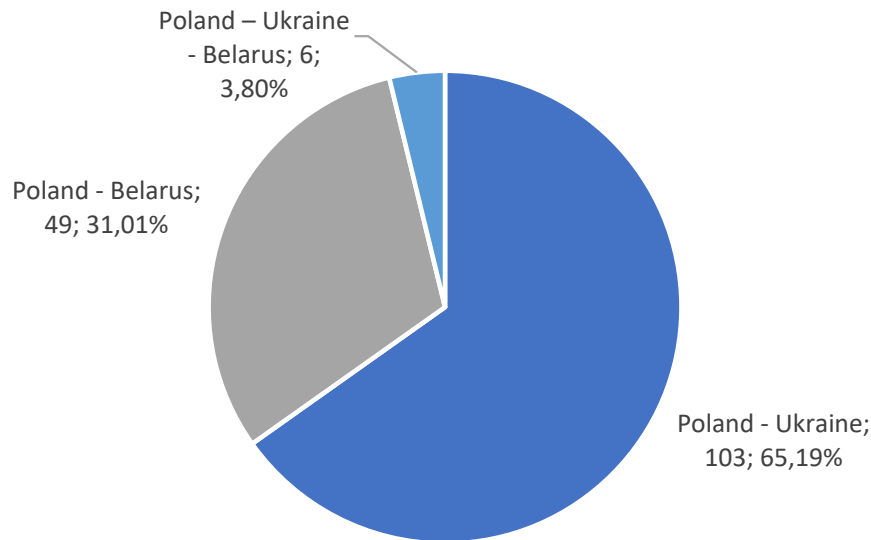


Figure 6. Project structure of the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 due to the cooperation of partners from individual countries
Source: authors' own elaboration based on the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020, 2024

Table 4. Structure of Polish-Ukrainian projects in the framework of the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 by type of projects

No.	Type of project	Number	Budget [Euro]	Support of EIS [Euro]	Average budget [Euro]
	direct	7	3,542,603	3,542,603	506,086.14
	large infrastructural	6	37,915,167	33,780,537	6,319,194.50
	micro	58	3,577,375	3,215,611	61,678.88
	regular	38	73,342,363	65,453,814	1,930,062.18
In total		109	118,377,508	105,992,565	-

Source: authors' own elaboration based on the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020, 2024

Each project was assigned one of the six priorities listed in Table 5. More than 64% of the projects were implemented under the priority "Promotion and preservation of natural heritage". There were 70 such projects. In contrast, the fewest number of projects, namely two, fell under the priority "Support for border efficiency and security".

The average project budget, in the context of the priorities, did not vary as much as in the case of the breakdown by project type, ranging from almost €0.5 million for projects related to 'Promotion and conservation of natural heritage', to €3 million for projects related to the priority 'Support for border efficiency and security' (Table 5).

6. Analysis of cross-border cooperation partners

There were 298 participations by various partners in the 109 Polish-Ukrainian projects presented in Table 5. Excluding partners from Belarus, there were 289 participations. The number of partners from Poland and Ukraine was 209. This means that each partner participated on average in 1.38 projects. Most partners (161) took part in the implementation of only one project. The leader in terms of activity was the Association of Local Governments "Carpathian Euroregion - Ukraine", which took part

Table 5. Structure of Polish-Ukrainian projects of the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 by priority of projects

No.	Priority of the project	Number	Budget [Euro]	EIS [Euro]	Average budget [Euro]
	Improving border management operations, customs and visa procedures	4	7,614,313	6,852,881	1,903,578.35
	Promotion and conservation of natural heritage	70	29,530,245	26,586,615	421,860.64
	Improvement and development of transport services and infrastructure	13	39,844,067	35,241,085	3,064,928.23
	Support for the development of health care and social services	14	24,021,719	21,683,759	1,715 837.07
	Addressing common security challenges	6	13,424,134	12,079,498	2,237,355.67
	Support for efficiency and border security	2	3,943,030	3,548,727	1,971,515.00
In total		109	118,377,508	105,992,565	-

Source: authors' own elaboration based on the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020, 2024

in the implementation of 16 projects. There were 103 partners from Poland and 106 from Ukraine.

When analysing the status of partners (Figure 7), it was noticed that the largest number of partners were local government units (municipalities, cities, districts, and voivodeships provinces) and social sector entities (schools, hospitals, museums, etc.).

Only two partners represented the economic sector. The entities involved in the collaboration were classified by sector of activity. Eleven such sectors were identified (Figure 8). Almost half of the partners (42.11%) represented Public Administration. The next largest group (13.4%) were entities from the Development Activities sector - primarily local and regional development agencies. Another group was made up of partners from the Culture (11.96%) and Security (9.09%) sectors.

In terms of the level of activity (Figure 9), local level entities (municipalities, cities, local institutions) dominated. They accounted for more than 50% of the participants. The next most numerous group was that of regional-level entities. These were mainly government and local government units.

In spatial terms, Lviv was the leader as far as participation among Ukrainian cities is concerned, while Rzeszów was the leader among Polish cities. Partners from these cities were involved in 22 and 12 projects, respectively. The largest number of partners from Ukraine were based in Lviv Oblast, while the largest number of partners from Poland were based in Lubelskie Voivodeship (Figure 10).

7. Conclusions

Many researchers criticise the European Neighbourhood Policy (Emerson, 2004; Tocci, 2011; Simão, 2017). According to Lehne (2014), the policy setting based on suspicion on idealistic premises turned out to be too naive. The soft power employed by the EU was not efficient at managing the political and economic situation in neighbouring countries (Czachor, 2019).

However cross-border cooperation programs were quite successful instruments of the ENP. They were intended to benefit both member states and neighbouring countries with which the EU has a direct border. The programs supported cross-border cooperation primarily by financing joint projects implemented by partners located on both sides of the border. The scope and effectiveness of this cooperation varied greatly, which resulted from a number of factors occurring in both cooperating countries. The amount of financial support and the rules of cooperation depended on the relations between the EU and partner countries.

The Polish-Ukrainian borderland has received special treatment in EU activities. Among the programmes dedicated to the borderlands of Ukraine and EU member states, the Polish-Ukrainian programmes had the highest budget. The Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Programme 2014-2020 had a trilateral character. However, Ukraine's activity was much higher than that of Belarus. Almost

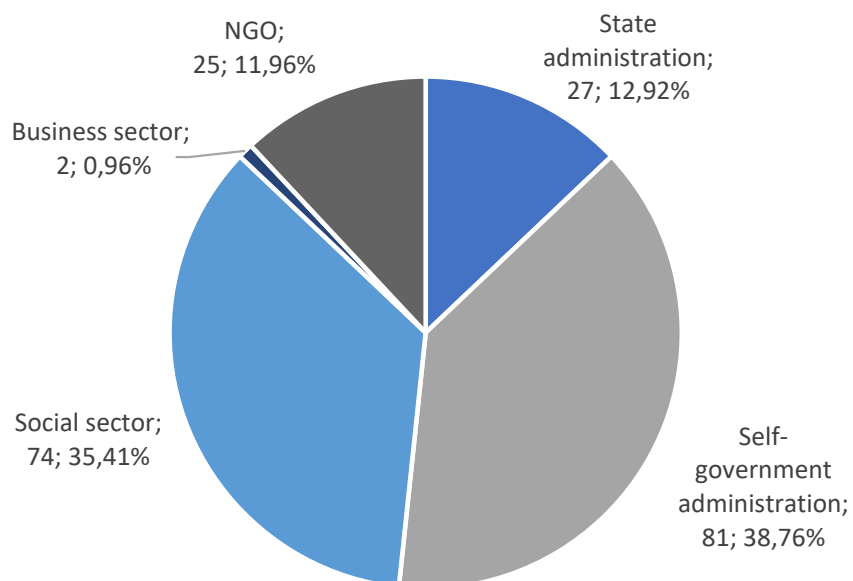


Figure 7. Structure of the partners of the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 by status

Source: authors' own elaboration based on the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020, 2024

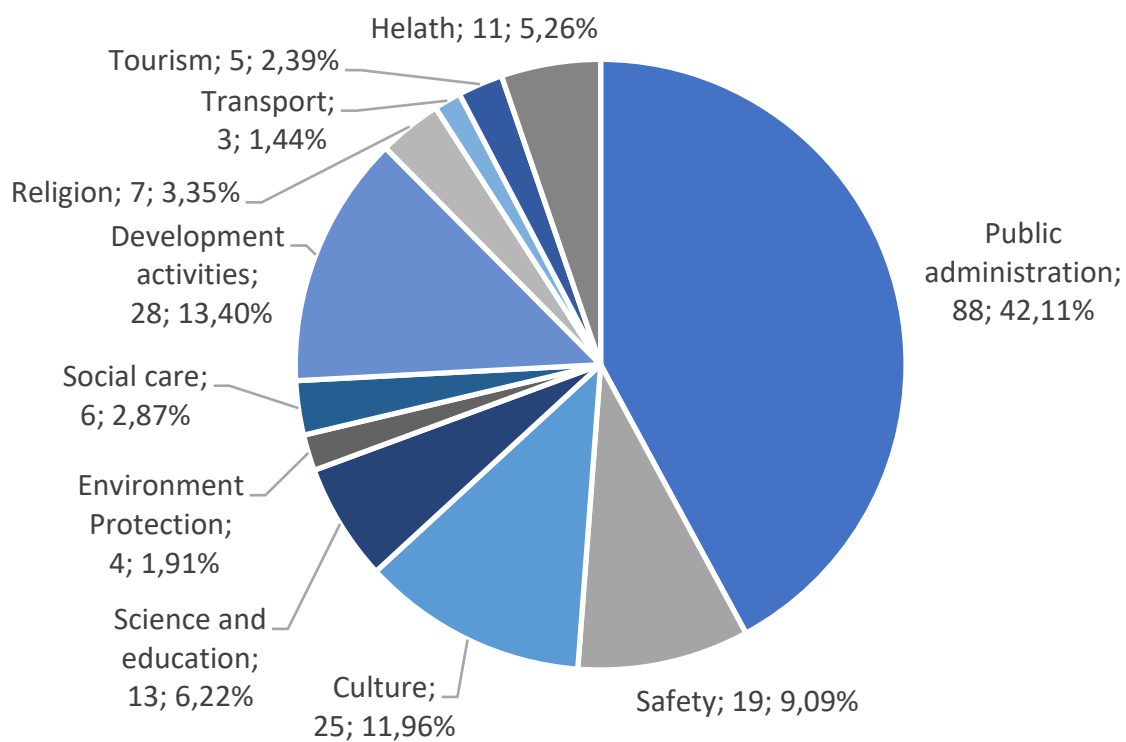


Figure 8. Structure of the partners of the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 by sector

Source: authors' own elaboration based on the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020, 2024

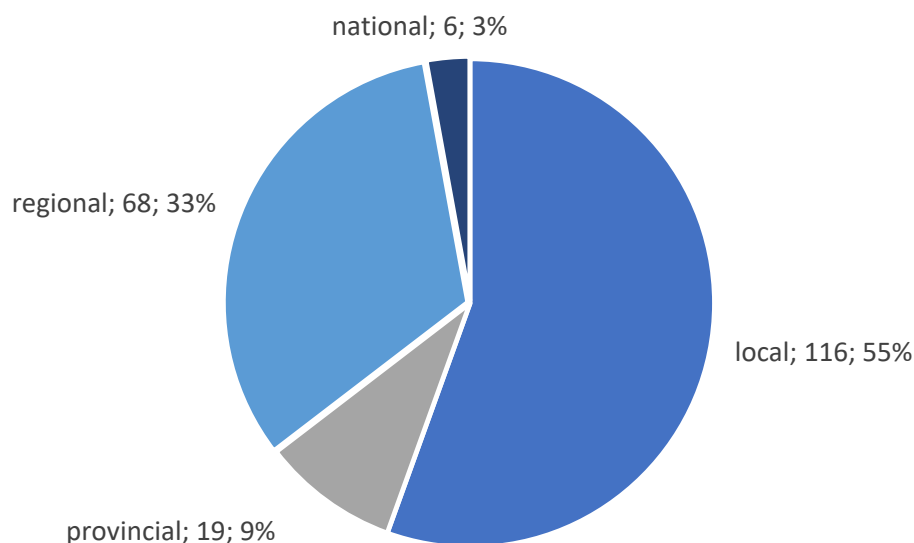


Figure 9. Structure of the partners of the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 by level

Source: authors' own elaboration based on the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020, 2024

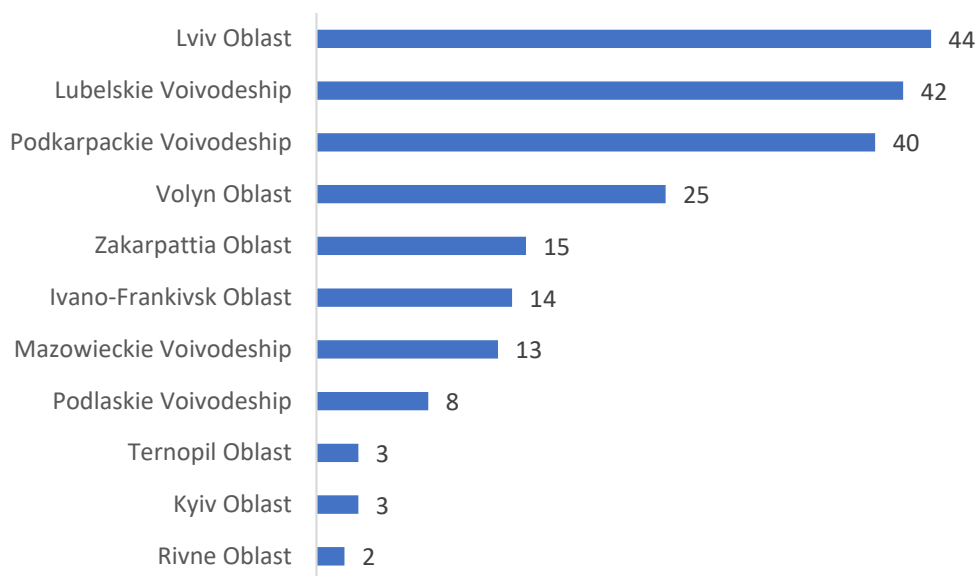


Figure 10. Number of entities participating in the cooperation located in provinces in Poland and regions in Ukraine

Source: authors' own elaboration based on the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020, 2024.

70% of the projects were implemented under Polish-Ukrainian cooperation. Most of the projects were micro projects, implemented mainly by social sector entities.

They focused on the promotion and preservation of natural heritage. However, the largest share of funds was directed to the priority "Improvement and

development of transport services and infrastructure". These projects were characterised by the highest budgets. The main beneficiaries of the cooperation projects were local government units. This was due to the nature of the programme. Euroregional structures played an important role in the development of cross-border cooperation.

The COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's aggression against Ukraine did not allow all programme objectives to be met. These problems were related to tourism and the protection of national heritage. The implementation of the programme contributed to the improvement of transport accessibility, the construction of new roads and the renovation of existing roads, the reduction of travel times in the supported regions and the reduction of noise levels. The investments also included additional work in the road lanes to improve the level of travel safety, such as strengthening shoulders, building bicycle paths, installing lighting, and marking pedestrian crossings. There has been an increase in the efficiency of border checks. The measures taken increased the capacity of border crossings between Poland (European Union) and Ukraine and decreased illegal migration and smuggling.

A number of problems have emerged impeding the implementation of the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine 2014-2020 program. It was difficult for the authorities to conduct information and promotional programs aimed at potential beneficiaries. The full-scale war in Ukraine limited the availability of central administration funds that were necessary to implement projects. The scope of implemented projects has changed and there have been significant delays in the implementation of planned activities. Moreover, the beneficiaries had to bear higher costs than assumed in the project budget, which resulted from inflation and the unstable euro exchange rate. (*Ewaluacja wpływu Programu Współpracy Transgranicznej Polska-Białoruś-Ukraina 2014-2020 na obszar wsparcia*, 2024).

Unfortunately, Polish-Ukrainian cooperation was characterised by a high level of territorial concentration of support. Therefore, the recommendations included in the report "Evaluation of the impact of the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 on the area of support" (2024) recommended increasing the representativeness of the counties and municipalities that currently constitute the so-called "white spots" and it also recommended increasing the proportionality of the distribution of support across the area. An opportunity for deepening and broadening Polish-Ukrainian cooperation is the INTERREG NEXT Poland-Ukraine 2021-2027 programme, which has the highest budget in the history of cross-border cooperation at 266.59 million euros. The programme also has, for the first time in history, a bilateral character. This resulted from the exclusion of Belarus from cooperation with the EU

due to its involvement in the Russian-Ukrainian war, on the side of the Russian Federation. The challenge for the follow-up activities is to include new entities from both sides, including those in the economic sector.

In view of the imperative of integrating Ukraine into the Polish and EU space, the new programme takes on particular importance. According to experts (Jakubowski et al., 2024), Polish partners should play the role of promoters of cooperation, orienting it towards cross-border integration of spatial systems. The authors emphasise that the funds of the Cross-Border Cooperation Programme cannot be treated as a substitute for structural funds. Despite the hostilities, cross-border cooperation in the Polish-Ukrainian border area is ongoing. It takes place under conditions of uncertainty and security risks resulting from the ongoing hostilities. However, training courses and joint conferences are taking place. Health has become a new priority of the programme. Despite the many threats to health and life, there has been an intensification of cooperation between medical services. This issue is of vital importance to the Polish side and of existential importance to the Ukrainian side.

As a result of the literature research and the analysis of secondary sources, the objectives of the study were realised, and the attributes of the ENP instruments were identified. Moreover, the key determinants of the use of this instrument in the Polish-Ukrainian borderland were presented, and the directions of multidimensional Polish-Ukrainian cooperation financed from EU funds were also identified. At the same time, the impediments to the implementation of this policy resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian Federation's attack on Ukraine were pointed out. The need and directions for further Poland-Ukraine cross-border cooperation (health) as part of the EU's broader neighbourhood policy with the closest border countries in selected directions were highlighted and so was the key role of the European Community in these activities.

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