



ROAD2EU SUMMER SCHOOL 2026 — LECTURE 10

# Implementation Lab: Interreg, Partner Roles, Risk and Resilience in Cross-Border HE Pilots

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# WHAT THIS LECTURE COVERS

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- 01** Cross-border policy backbone
- 02** Interreg environments (PL-DE and PL-UA)
- 03** Partner roles
- 04** Risk and resilience
- 05** Budget sketching
- 06** Indicators and review

# CROSS-BORDER IMPLEMENTATION MATTERS: INTERREG SUPPORTS JOINTLY DESIGNED RESPONSES TO SHARED CHALLENGES

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- **Border areas** are major parts of European territorial life — home to millions of EU citizens who live, work, and study across national boundaries.
- **Interreg** explicitly supports jointly designed responses to shared border challenges — not just parallel national projects that happen to be geographically close.
- For higher education institutions, cross-border cooperation is a **practical extension of existing European cooperation logic** into local and regional border contexts.

## JOINTLY DESIGNED RESPONSES

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The key word in Interreg is 'jointly': **jointly developed, jointly implemented, jointly staffed, and jointly evaluated.** This is what distinguishes genuine cross-border cooperation from parallel national projects.



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# THE POLICY BACKBONE: INTERREG A, TERRITORIAL AGENDA 2030, EGTC, AND EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

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## FRAMEWORK 1

### Interreg A

Cross-border cooperation programmes supporting jointly designed projects in border regions across the EU.

## FRAMEWORK 2

### Territorial Agenda 2030

EU spatial policy framework promoting balanced territorial development and urban–rural synergies, including border areas.

## FRAMEWORK 3

### EGTC Logic

European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation — legal instruments for cross-border institutional cooperation and joint governance.

## FRAMEWORK 4

### European Universities Initiative

EU-funded alliances of universities cooperating across borders on education, research, and innovation — a model for HE cross-border cooperation.



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# PL-DE AS AN IMPLEMENTATION ENVIRONMENT: BRANDENBURG-POLAND PROGRAMME



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## Programme Scope

The Interreg VI-A Brandenburg-Poland programme (2021-2027) supports cross-border cooperation in education, culture, institutional collaboration, and sustainable development.

## Educational Pilots

The programme offers a mature, stable context for educational pilots: established governance structures, experienced managing authorities, and a track record of HE cooperation.

## Relevance for ROAD2EU

VIZJA University's Warsaw location and existing German academic partnerships make PL-DE a natural implementation environment for ROAD2EU cross-border pilots.

## KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Mature governance structures
- Established managing authority
- Track record of HE cooperation
- Relatively stable security environment
- Strong institutional networks

# PL-UA AS AN IMPLEMENTATION ENVIRONMENT: RESILIENCE AND SMALL PROJECTS FUNDS

## Programme Context

Interreg NEXT Poland-Ukraine combines cross-border development objectives with the realities of the ongoing war in Ukraine, requiring explicit resilience planning.

## Small Projects Funds

The programme's Small Projects Funds make small-scale educational pilots realistic: lower administrative burden, faster approval, and more flexibility for pilot-scale work.

## Resilience Requirements

Projects in the PL-UA context must build explicit resilience into their design: fallback delivery modes, flexible timelines, and contingency plans for security disruptions.

## KEY DIFFERENCES FROM PL-DE

- Active security risks
- Requires explicit resilience planning
- Small Projects Funds available
- Stronger humanitarian dimension
- Higher design flexibility needed



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# WHY HEIS BELONG IN CROSS-BORDER WORK: NATURAL, CREDIBLE BORDERLAND ACTORS

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- **Higher education** is already deeply embedded in European cooperation through Erasmus+, European University Alliances, and research networks.
- Cross-border pilots **extend this logic into local and regional border contexts** — bringing university expertise to the specific challenges of borderland communities.
- Universities are **natural, credible borderland actors**: they have the expertise, the networks, and the institutional legitimacy to convene cross-border partnerships.

## NATURAL BORDERLAND ACTORS

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**Universities do not need to justify their presence in cross-border cooperation — they are already the most credible and experienced cross-border actors in most European border regions.**



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# SUGGESTED PARTNER ROLES FOR A CROSS-BORDER HE PILOT

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## **Lead Partner**

Responsible for overall project management, financial reporting, and communication with the managing authority.

## **Co-Lead Partner**

Responsible for cross-border coordination on the other side of the border; mirrors the lead partner's management functions.

## **Academic Leads**

Responsible for content design, delivery, and quality assurance of the educational components.

## **Admin / Finance Lead**

Responsible for budget management, procurement, and financial documentation.

## **QA / Evidence Lead**

Responsible for monitoring, evaluation, and documentation of outputs and results.

## **Communication + Learner Liaison**

Responsible for dissemination, participant communication, and learner support.



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# A SIMPLE GOVERNANCE MODEL: LIGHTWEIGHT STRUCTURE FOR SMALL PILOTS



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- 1 Joint Steering Group**  
A small decision-making body with representatives from all partners, meeting quarterly or at key milestones.
- 2 One Coordinator on Each Side**  
A named coordinator on each side of the border, responsible for day-to-day management and partner communication.
- 3 Shared Milestone Calendar**  
A single, shared calendar of key milestones, deliverables, and reporting deadlines accessible to all partners.
- 4 Short Reporting Template**  
A brief, standardised reporting template that partners complete at agreed intervals — no more than 2 pages per period.
- 5 Clear Escalation Route**  
A documented process for escalating problems — who to contact, in what order, and with what authority to resolve issues.

# MAIN RISK CATEGORIES IN CROSS-BORDER HE PILOTS

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## Legal / Administrative Mismatch

Different national legal frameworks, procurement rules, and administrative requirements can create friction and delays.

## Language Barriers

Communication, documentation, and delivery in multiple languages requires explicit planning and resources.

## Recognition Mismatch

Qualifications, credits, and learning outcomes may not be mutually recognised across borders without explicit agreements.

## Unequal Capacity

Partners may have significantly different administrative, financial, and technical capacities, creating dependency risks.

## Security Disruption

Especially relevant in PL-UA context: security conditions can disrupt delivery, mobility, and partner capacity.

## Weak Monitoring

Insufficient monitoring discipline can lead to missed milestones, undocumented outputs, and reporting failures.



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# RESILIENCE LOGIC: FALLBACK MODES, COMMUNICATION DISCIPLINE, AND PLANNING AROUND UNCERTAINTY

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- **Use fallback delivery modes** — design every activity with an alternative delivery format (online, hybrid, asynchronous) that can be activated if in-person delivery is disrupted.
- **Maintain communication discipline** — establish clear, regular communication rhythms between partners that do not depend on physical meetings.
- **Plan around uncertainty** rather than assuming stability — especially in the PL-UA context, where security conditions can change rapidly.

## RESILIENCE IS VISIBLE IN DESIGN

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**Resilience is not an abstract quality — it is visible in specific design choices: fallback delivery modes, communication protocols, and contingency plans that are written into the project from the start.**



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# BUDGET SKETCHING: LINK BUDGET CLEARLY TO OUTPUTS AND SEPARATE COST CATEGORIES

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- **Link the budget clearly to outputs** — every budget line should correspond to a specific output or activity in the project logic.
- **Separate cost categories:** coordination, delivery, mobility, events, digital support, dissemination, and monitoring each have different cost drivers and should be budgeted separately.
- **Budget clarity is part of partnership trust** — partners need to understand how resources are allocated and why, to maintain confidence in the lead partner's management.

## BUDGET AS TRUST

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**A clear, well-structured budget is not just a financial document — it is a communication tool that tells partners, evaluators, and funders that the project is well-designed and professionally managed.**



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# INDICATORS AND REVIEW: A SMALL, MANAGEABLE MONITORING MODEL

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- Use a **small output and result indicator set** — four to six indicators that are directly linked to the project's theory of change.
- **Document participation** (numbers, profiles, cross-border composition), **outputs** (products, events, publications), and **co-created products** (jointly developed materials, tools, or protocols).
- Track **continuation potential** — evidence that partners intend to continue, scale, or institutionalise the pilot after the project ends.

## SMALL BUT CREDIBLE

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**A monitoring model with four well-chosen indicators, consistently applied, is more credible than a comprehensive framework that is never completed. The goal is learning and accountability, not bureaucratic compliance.**



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# Questions & Discussion

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**Which type of pilot is most realistic for a first cross-border step: a short course, a staff format, or a service-design pilot?**

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