



ROAD2EU WINTER SCHOOL 2025

# Cross-Border Cooperation and Territorial Governance: Higher Education Partnerships in the PL-DE and PL-UA Contexts

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LECTURE 10



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# WHAT THIS LECTURE COVERS

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**01** Why border cooperation matters

**02** Interreg and territorial logic

**03** PL-DE context

**04** PL-UA context

**05** Risks and pilot design

# BORDERLANDS ARE CENTRAL TO TERRITORIAL COHESION, NOT PERIPHERAL

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- A large share of the **EU population lives in border areas**, making them strategically important for cohesion policy.
- Interreg treats border regions as **places for jointly tackling common challenges**, not as peripheral edges.
- Borderland cooperation is therefore a core EU territorial priority, not an optional extra.

## THE BORDERLAND IMPERATIVE

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**Borders are not barriers to be managed; they are zones of shared opportunity that require joint governance and investment.**



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# INTERREG IS A STRUCTURED POLICY FIELD, NOT JUST A NETWORKING ACTIVITY

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- **Interreg A** specifically supports cooperation between adjacent border regions through structured funding programmes.
- Territorial policy promotes **integration beyond borders** and better coordination between national systems.
- This means cross-border work has clear rules, eligibility criteria, and accountability requirements.

## STRUCTURE MATTERS

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**Cross-border cooperation is a formal policy field with its own legal framework, programme logic, and institutional architecture.**



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# MULTIPLE GOVERNANCE TOOLS INSTITUTIONALISE CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

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## TOOL 1

### **Joint Programme Structures**

Formal co-managed programmes with shared governance bodies and joint secretariats.

## TOOL 2



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### **EGTCs**

European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation  
— legal entities for cross-border governance.

## TOOL 3

### **Euroregions**

Informal or semi-formal cross-border associations promoting regional cooperation and identity.

## TOOL 4

### **Cross-Border Stakeholder Platforms**

Networks of public, private, and civil society actors working across borders on shared priorities.

# UNIVERSITIES ARE NATURAL CROSS-BORDER ACTORS IN THE EUROPEAN SPACE

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- Higher education is already **deeply integrated into European cooperation** through alliances, Erasmus+, and joint degrees.
- Borderland cooperation is a **natural territorial extension** of this existing European logic.
- Universities bring credibility, knowledge, and networks that are essential for sustainable cross-border partnerships.

## THE NATURAL FIT

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**Universities are uniquely positioned as cross-border actors because they already operate in a European space of shared academic values and mobility.**



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# THE PL-DE BORDERLAND OFFERS A MATURE CASE OF INSTITUTIONAL ACADEMIC COOPERATION

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- The Polish-German borderland has a **long, documented history** of educational and academic cooperation.
- **Collegium Polonicum** in Slubice demonstrates how cross-border academic cooperation can become fully institutionalised.
- This case offers valuable lessons on continuity, institutional memory, and long-term partnership management.

## LESSONS FROM MATURITY

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**Mature cross-border cooperation requires sustained political will, dedicated institutional structures, and a long-term investment in cross-cultural trust.**



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# PL-DE COOPERATION IS RICH BUT NOT FRICTIONLESS

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- Long-term cooperation requires **repeated opportunities, institutional commitment, and cross-cultural trust** built over time.
- **Legal, structural, and asymmetry issues** between Polish and German higher education systems remain real and persistent.
- Success requires proactive management of these frictions, not just goodwill.

## HONEST ASSESSMENT

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**PL-DE cooperation is a rich environment, but it is not frictionless. Honest acknowledgement of asymmetries and legal barriers is essential for realistic partnership design.**



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# PL-UA COOPERATION COMBINES BORDER DEVELOPMENT WITH RESILIENCE CHALLENGES

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- PL-UA cooperation uniquely combines **border development objectives** with resilience and war-related humanitarian challenges.
- **Interreg NEXT Poland-Ukraine** provides the formal programme structure and funding framework for this cooperation.
- This context requires a stronger resilience logic and adaptive project design than standard cross-border programmes.

## THE RESILIENCE IMPERATIVE

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**PL-UA cooperation demands a fundamentally different approach: one that builds in flexibility, contingency planning, and humanitarian sensitivity from the outset.**



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# SMALL PROJECTS FUNDS OFFER REALISTIC ENTRY ROUTES FOR UNIVERSITIES

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- **Small Projects Funds (SPFs)** within Interreg programmes offer manageable, lower-risk opportunities for education-related cross-border cooperation.
- Short pilots are a **realistic and strategic starting point** for universities without prior cross-border project experience.
- SPFs allow institutions to build relationships, test ideas, and develop capacity before scaling up.

## START SMALL, THINK BIG

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**Small Projects Funds are not a consolation prize; they are a strategic entry point that allows universities to build the trust and capacity needed for larger, more complex partnerships.**



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# RISK PLANNING IS PROPORTIONATE AND NECESSARY IN CROSS-BORDER WORK

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- Common risks include **legal mismatch, language barriers, unequal partner capacity, security disruption, and weak monitoring.**
- Small pilots should include **simple, proportionate mitigation and fallback planning** from the design stage.
- Risk planning is not bureaucratic overhead; it is a core element of responsible project design.

## PROPORTIONATE RISK MANAGEMENT

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**Risk planning in cross-border projects should be proportionate to scale: simple registers and clear fallback options are sufficient for small pilots.**



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# A SIMPLE PRACTICAL MODEL FOR CROSS-BORDER HE PILOTS

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- 1 Define One Joint Problem**  
Agree on a single, clearly articulated territorial challenge that both partners face and can address together.
- 2 Assign Partner Roles Clearly**  
Specify who does what, who leads, and who is accountable for each deliverable from the outset.
- 3 Use a Short Work Plan**  
Keep the work plan simple, time-bound, and focused on a small number of concrete outputs.
- 4 Short Risk Register + Small Indicator Set**  
Include a brief risk register and a small, manageable set of indicators to track progress and impact.



## SELECTED REFERENCES

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# Questions & Discussion

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**Which pilot model is most realistic: project-based, service-based, or more structural cooperation?**

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