

# The Socio-Cultural Factors in the Common Strategic Planning in European Territories: Principles for Sustainable Development Extracted from Borderlands

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*Abstract:* The large number of borderlands existing in European territory contains many ventures of Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC). Nonetheless, the management strategies related to such projects and the sustainable development they bring to the regions still raise many questions. Considering the little knowledge regarding the management and governance of borderland territories, the present research through the analysis of nine CBC projects (eighteen European border cities) aims to provide further insights from a common strategic planning perspective. The study was projected to locals, experts, and technicians related to the border cities' planning. In this regard, the participants were asked through questionnaires about their perceptions and feelings about the success of the border-cooperation projects in their area of residence or work. Thereby, the investigation enabled us to identify and isolate the five essential factors and challenges to consider from a socio-cultural perspective: (i) Sense of belonging and break cultural barriers; (ii) Diverse infrastructural offer - Euro Citizenship; (iii) Better life's quality standards; (iv) Retain young and talented people; and Public participation.

*Key-Words:* - Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC); Regional Planning; Strategic Planning; Societies; Sustainable Development; Territorial Governance and Management.

Received: August 27, 2020. Revised: October 6, 2020. Re-revised: October 29, 2020.  
Accepted: November 9, 2020. Published: November 13, 2020.

## 1 Introduction

The ventures of CBC encouraged the making of a comprehensive system of connections among individuals and states, which empowered the accomplishment of a few political, economic, natural, and sociocultural win-win-situations [1, 2, 3, 4]. Even if these relationships occur more often in Europe, CBC is a process carried out worldwide. We have the examples of a few CBC Projects between the United States of America and Mexico (North America), India-Pakistan (Asia), Turkey-Azerbaijan (Europe-Asia), Argentina-Chile or Brazil-Bolivia (South America), among numerous different models through the globe [5, 6, 7, 8].

Nevertheless, as much as we produce about CBC in the EU and carry efforts to expand cooperation in different sectors of society are highlighted, due to institutional and administrative difficulties, cooperation has been limited in the vast majority of countries. This cooperation is sometimes strictly economic [9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15].

In recent decades, an increasing amount of CBC projects have been established in European territories. However, the management strategies related to such projects and the sustainable development they bring to the regions still raise many questions [10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19].

Besides, in the thematic literature related to common strategic planning, there are no many references about a far-reaching way of how CBC and its implementation and management should be carried out on these borderlands territories [19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24].

Thereby, and bearing in mind the little knowledge regarding the management and governance of borderland territories, from a joint strategic planning perspective, the present research aims to answer the following questions: *Which are the factors and processes implicated in the long-term territorial sustainability of CBC projects and strategies of City-to-City Cooperation (C2C) from a Socio-Cultural perspective? Which are the guidelines and principles that the decision-makers and main-actors should follow for proper and successful implementation of those factors?*

Therefore, nine European Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) strategies and projects were chosen, and the public and technicians' perceptions assessed.

The current investigation enables us to improve the understanding of how the involved stakeholders and main-actors of border regions and cities should manage the critical factors for CBC and which principles they may implement to reach success in their cooperation initiatives, strategies, and projects. The study is based on exploring the perceptions of the citizens and main actors implicated in the selected case studies' border cooperation projects.

Thus, the study initiates with an opening section. It is succeeded by a methodological framework concerning the used proceedings on the experimental part of this research, the outcomes, the inherent discussion and conclusions, and the future research paths.

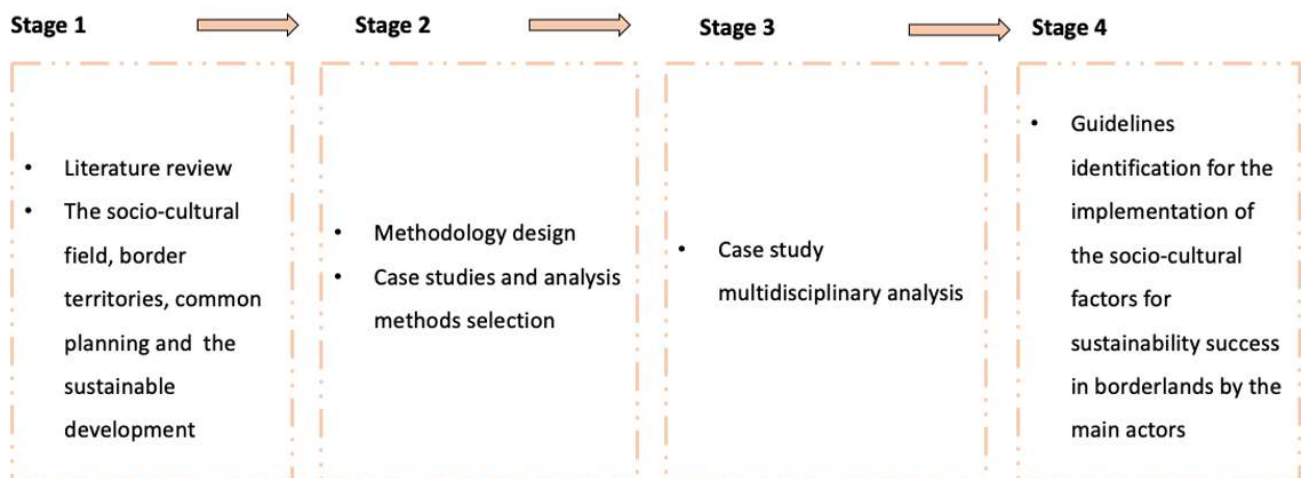


Figure 1: Methodology stages (Authors).

## 2 Problem Formulation

The current research imposed various procedures and methods across the study, involving direct and indirect research procedures and instruments. The authors devoted a considerable quantity of time and focused on the design of a methodological section.

The methodological section was split into four major stages, closing with the guidelines for the implementation of the Socio-Cultural factors for Sustainability Success in Borderlands by the main actors (Figure 1). The stages are as follows: literature review, case study selection criteria, analysis of the case studies through a Case Study Research Method (CSR) [25], and the guidelines definition.

Thereby, the author collected the data by former examinations carried out on the selected locations. The site examinations have analyzed the design, planning, and implementation processes of the respective case studies. In this regard, the study

understand a vast scope of problems, taking into account not only the present knowledge regarding borderlands, common strategic planning, and the Socio-Cultural dynamics in those areas.

Having in mind the purpose of the investigation, nine case studies were chosen (Figure 2). For this purpose, criteria for the selection of the case studies was set as:

(i) The municipalities should have conducted preliminary work inherent to CBC; (ii) the cooperation project must have shown consideration on the socio-cultural level; (iii) the distance among cities shall not be superior to 60 km; (iv) the population of one of the cities at least should be no less than 20.000 inhabitants. Furthermore, previous researches were considered in order to identify which border cities meet the above-mentioned criteria.

The investigation was projected to locals, experts, and technicians related to the planning of the border cities. Thereby, a survey with two sections was

Figure 2. Chosen case studies (Authors).

(A) Haparanda - Tornio; (B) Valga - Valka; (C) Frankfurt Oder - Slubice; (D) Bayonne - San Sebastian; (E) Chaves - Verín; (F) Tuy - Valença; (G) Cieszyn - Cesky Tesín; (H) Gorizia - Nova Gorica; (I) Oradea - Debrecen

conducted informal interviews with stakeholders, experts, and main-actors of those borderlands to determine the critical challenges that must be

conducted—section A, with a total of four questions - closed-up questions by an assessment method, and section B, composed by multiple-choice questions.

- Haparanda - Tornio
- Valga - Valka
- Frankfurt Oder - Slubice
- Bayonne - San Sebastian
- Chaves - Verín
- Tuy - Valença
- Cieszyn - Cesky Tesín
- Gorizia - Nova Gorica
- Oradea - Debrecen



answered across the current work. Furthermore, through the literature review became possible to

The questionnaires were conducted in the years 2016 and 2017. The sampling was composed of the actors

living or working in the region. After collected, the

In order to investigate the citizens' impressions,

Case study	Population	Distance between cities (Km)	Strategy of territorial development	Border typology	Pre-owned dialects	Currency	GDP/capita (million euros)
Haparanda	9500	5	HaparandaTornio	Schengen Area	Swedish	SEK	36 000
Tornio	22 000				Finnish	EUR	24 000
Valga	12 200			Schengen Area	Estonian, Russian	EUR	12 000
Valka	6000				Latvian, Russian		10 000
Frankfurt Oder	60 000	1	Action Plan Frankfurt-Slubice 2010-2020	Schengen Area	German	EUR	22 000
Slubice	20 000				Polish	PLN	13 500
Bayonne	44 500	45	White Book & Strategic Plan 2014-2020	Schengen Area	French	EUR	33 500
San Sebastian	186 500				Spanish		24 000
Chaves	41 200	25	Agenda 2008	Schengen Area	Portuguese	EUR	13 200
Verin	18 000				Spanish		21 800
Tuy	17 000	3	INTERREG/POCTEP	Schengen Area	Spanish	EUR	21 800
Valença	14 100				Portuguese		13 200
Cieszyn	36 100	1	Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia	Schengen Area	Polish	PLN	16 000
Cesky Tesin	26 100				Czech	CZK	17 800
Gorizia	35 300	3	AETC	Schengen Area	Italian	EUR	27 500
Nova Gorica	32 000				Slovenian		19 700
Oradea	200 000	60	Euroregion Hajdú-Bihar-Bihar	Outside Schengen Area	Romanian	RON	10 100
Debrecen	205 500				Hungarian	HUF	12 500

Table 1. Outline of the indirect analysis on each case study [10, 19, 26]

resulting data from the questionnaires was organized, and then statistically analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). In this regard, the author used descriptive statistics to assess the outcomes proceeding from the previous analysis. Also, a Principal component analysis (PCA) was used.

### 3 Results

All through the contextual investigation assessment, a few information was gathered, to get a solid comprehension of the most significant issues that conceivable could impact the accomplishment of the CBC ventures (Table I). Consequently, general settings were dissected as measurable information for the number of inhabitants in the urban areas; information for the separation between the urban communities of these outskirts urban communities; the continuous methodology of the regional turn of events; the border typology; the pre-owned dialects and monetary forms; and, the GDP per capita.

four closed-up questions, through an assessment method (Likert scale), were asked to the residents. The persons engaged were asked to address their agreement level with four sentences, where: 1-disagree (totally); and, 5-agree (totally) (Table 2). In this way, most of the sentences (a, and d) the chose answer was 3 in 5 points agreement scale. As to sentence b, the higher values were shared among 2, 4, and 5 agreement levels in the scale - thus, this sentence shows a tendency for agree.

Table 2. Assessment ratings questions<sup>1</sup>.

Sentences	Agreement level				
	1	2	3	4	5
a	0.0	16.6	<b>61.1</b>	16.1	5.5

<sup>1</sup>(a)In the cooperation area of both cities, there is a duplication of equipment; (b) There is an increasing access to information/data from both cities by local citizens; (c) In the cooperation area of both cities, there is a high quality of data exchanging the services level; (d) Through

the implementation of the CBC strategy the job opportunities for both cities has increased.

b	0.0	<b>27.7</b>	16.6	<b>27.7</b>	<b>27.7</b>
c	0.0	<b>22.2</b>	<b>22.2</b>	<b>22.2</b>	<b>22.2</b>
d	0.0	5.5	<b>38.8</b>	27.7	22.2

Sentence c, divided into equal choices between the agreement points 2, 3, 4, and 5, 22.2% each. The sentence with a higher tendency to disagree was (b): “There is increasing access to information/data from both cities by local citizens?”. On the opposite, the sentence with a higher tendency to agree was (d): “Through the implementation of the CBC strategy, the job opportunities for both cities have increased.”

Moreover, different questions (questions X and Y, Table 3) were utilized, where the members ought to highlight the three most relevant components for regional accomplishment in CBC ventures. Moreover, the members were additionally approached to reply to another question, where they ought to highlight the three principle challenges urban areas need to consider in CBC. The participants highlighted the reducing loss of young citizens as the major challenge for regional CBC; and the sense of belonging and cultural barriers for the border cities' cooperation.

Table 3. Multiple-Choice questions (a and b)<sup>2</sup>.

CBC Challenges	X	Y
(i) Connectivity – movement between cities	5.5	1.9
(ii) Development of a strong territorial strategy	3.7	3.7
(iii) Strategies for no equipment duplication	7.4	<b>14.8</b>
(iv) Sense of belonging and cultural barriers	<b>9.3</b>	<b>22.2</b>
(v) Euro Citizenship	1.9	0.0
(vi) Access European funds	5.5	3.7
(vii) Proximity to socioeconomic flows	3.7	0.0
(viii) Local planning and life's quality standards	<b>9.3</b>	7.4

<sup>2</sup> (X) Please highlight the three principle challenges for territorial success in CBC projects? (Y) Please highlight the three principle challenges cities should consider in CBC?

(ix) Reducing the loss of young citizens	<b>14.8</b>	9.6
(x) Common planning master plans	3.7	<b>18.5</b>
(xi) Political engagement	<b>9.3</b>	9.6
(xii) Public participation	<b>14.8</b>	3.7
(xiii) Transparency and engagement between cities	5.5	5.5
(xiv) Project marketing and advertisement	5.5	0.0

Also, advanced statistics were used - PCA. By that analysis, fourteen variables were investigated (Table 4). The variables (iv), and (ix) are the ones that could be considered the principals' variables. In the first place, we have the variable (iv), followed by (ix).

Table 4. Analyzed variables/components.

Analyzed variables/components	% of variance
(i) Connectivity – movement between cities	-.81
(ii) Development of a strong territorial strategy	-.92
(iii) Strategies for no equipment duplication	.73
(iv) Sense of belonging and cultural barriers	<b>1.75</b>
(v) Euro Citizenship	-1.39
(vi) Access European funds	-.63
(vii) Proximity to socioeconomic flows	-1.10
(viii) Local planning and life's quality standards	.32
(ix) Reducing the loss of young citizens	<b>1.42</b>
(x) Common planning master plans	.49
(xi) Political engagement	.54
(xii) Public participation	.85

(xiii) Transparency and engagement between cities	-0.46
(xiv) Project marketing and advertisement	-0.81

Besides, from the study of Castanho et al. [27], where fourteen critical factors for CBC projects have been identified, we have studied them to isolate the ones that connect the socio-cultural theme solely. Thus, five specific critical factors were isolated (Tables 5 and 6).

Table 5. Socio-Cultural crucial factors.

<b>P1</b>	Sense of belonging and break cultural barriers
<b>P2</b>	Diverse infrastructural offer - Euro Citizenship
<b>P3</b>	Better life's quality standards
<b>P4</b>	Retain young and talented people
<b>P5</b>	Public participation

Table 6. Socio-Cultural crucial factors connected with the case study.

Case studies	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Haparanda-Tornio	X				
Valga-Valka	X		X		
Frankfurt Oder-Slubice	X			X	
Bayonne-San Sebastian	X				X
Chaves – Verín		X			
Tuy – Valença		X		X	
Cieszyn-Cesky Tesin			X		
Gorizia-Nova Gorica			X		
Oradea-Debrecen			X		

## 4 Discussion

Through the examination of Table 1, it is conceivable to quickly comprehend the primary highlights of the border cities inside the CBC condition. From this table, significant contrasts should be highlighted as the demographic dynamics between the cities of Haparanda and Tornio, Frankfurt Oder and Slubice, Valga and Valka, Bayonne and San Sebastian (the city of San Sebastian has four times more population than Bayonne), or even, the Portuguese city of Chaves and the Spanish city of Verín. Concerning the distance between cities, we have Oradea and Debrecen with the maximum distance possible of the pre-selection criteria (60km), the border cities of Frankfurt Oder and Slubice, and Cieszyn and Cesky Tesin with a distance around 1Km separating their urban centers. Nevertheless, as other similar studies have already shown, the distance has no much significance in the success of the CBC [27,28,29]. In this regard, we have the example of the border cities of La Línea de la Concepción (Spain) and Gibraltar (Gibraltar-UK), where the CBC is seen as a failure [10]. The cities of Oradea and Debrecen have a No Schengen Area Typology; this is another exciting outcome we can retain from this table. It is well known all the benefits that the Schengen agreement may provide to the CBC [30, 31], however, in this particular case, the cities show exceptional indicators, which could raise some questions regarding some of the EU policies and approaches towards the CBC ventures. Regarding the GDP/per capita indicator, it is possible to denote some unbalances. For example, in the cities of Chaves-Verín and Tuy-Valença (favoring the Spanish cities), or Bayonne-San Sebastián (with a higher GDP in the French side of the border), or Frankfurt Oder-Slubice (with the GDP favoring the German city).

By the examination of Table 2, where the participants were approached to address the understanding level with four sentences, it is conceivable to confirm that two of the sentences show an exact position (sentences a, and d). Sentences b and c divided the participants' opinions; nevertheless, both have shown a tendency to the agreement (being in sentence b, this tendency more evident). Concerning the affirmation a (In the cooperation area of both cities, there is a duplication of equipment), the participants showed an inconclusive opinion with 61.1% of the answers concentrated in the middle of the agreement scale; however, a small positive tendency was identified. Focusing on sentence b (There is increasing access to information/data from both cities by local citizens), the opinions were divided equally, with 27.7% of the agreement in points 2, 4, and 5 of the Likert Scale –

showing a tendency to the agreement. With the affirmation In the cooperation area of both cities, there is a high quality of data exchanging the services level (sentence c), the participants' opinions divided once again, and equally shared among the agreement in points 2, 3, 4, and 5 of the Likert Scale (with 22.2% each). Contextually, sentence d (Through the implementation of the CBC strategy, the job opportunities for both cities have increased), the answers showed an exact position of unclearness – once the highest percentage was found in the agreement point 3 (with 38.8); even though, this affirmation also shows a slight agreement tendency. However, if we consider that the decision-makers and CBC representatives promise and announce better life quality standards, and many job opportunities for the local populations with the implementation of such border strategies – i.e., a recurrent situation in many of the Iberian Eurocities projects [28]; therefore, it was expected that those border populations select a higher level of agreement with this affirmation; which is are unfavorable findings for the government officials associated with this typology of activities. Indeed, past investigations confirm these discoveries and perspectives – i.e., [18, 19, 23, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39] are just some examples.

Through the analysis of tables 3 and 4, it is possible to isolate the most relevant challenges that the border actors consider essential for the success of a regional and local CBC venture from a socio-cultural perspective. For the success on a regional scale, the most relevant challenges were: reducing the loss of young citizens (14.8%), public participation (14.8), and the sense of belonging and cultural barriers. If we consider the success on a local scale (city-to-city cooperation): the sense of belonging and cultural barriers (22.2); common planning master plans (18.5), and strategies for no equipment duplication (14.8). Besides, throughout the application of a (PCA) to the previously selected challenges, it was possible to isolate two: the sense of belonging and cultural barriers; and the reducing the loss of young citizens. Also, table 6 corroborates, in part, these findings, once the factors P1 (sense of belonging and cultural barriers), the most identified factor in the case studies. However, P3 (better life quality standards) were also identified in many case studies as P1 – revealing that some factors could have a higher weight than others in different borderlands realities. Therefore, and considering the existing multidisciplinary literature [see: 11, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46] we obtain five critical factors for CBC territorial success, from a socio-cultural perspective.

Considering the outcomes mentioned above, we should further analyze and crossing them with the

actual panorama ongoing in EU -i.e., the pandemic crisis of COVID-19 (pandemic crisis); Brexit; the refugees' fluxes; increase of nationalism; among many others significant obstacles that may jeopardize the CBC success. Here, it should be highlighted the recent pandemic crisis of COVID-19 and the possible last-longing impacts over the CBC. For example, the cut of freedom of movement within EU territories or the rise of nationalism fractions (dangerously increasing the sense of belonging and the cultural barriers). Such issues are already affecting international relationships worldwide and, consequently, the common strategic planning – i.e., the case of some countries in the Balkans regions, among many other examples. Also, there is the Brexit, which is now an obstacle to many ongoing CBC projects and several others even before they came out of the paper. Based on the exposed, we can observe that CBC is and the common strategic planning associated, are processes that require constant monitoring and assessment to achieve the so-desired sustainability.

## 4 Conclusion

With this study, we were able to define not only the most relevant challenges to consider in CBC ventures as well as to identify the essential factors for the success of these border projects from a socio-cultural perspective. Thus, the most relevant challenges to consider are:

- reducing the loss of young citizens
- public participation
- sense of belonging and break cultural barriers
- common planning master plans
- strategies for no equipment duplication

Also, the critical factors to consider in CBC, from a socio-cultural perspective are:

- sense of belonging and break cultural barriers
- diverse infrastructural offer - Euro Citizenship
- better life's quality standards
- retain young and talented people
- public participation

Also, and dependent on the various highlights and singularities of the analyzed cities, it appears the factors don't have a similar relevance over every European CBC Project.

Contextually, if we consider the direct and indirect results, it is possible to extract guidelines for



proper design, implementation, and management of the common strategic planning directed to the CBC projects, considering the socio-cultural sphere. Thereby, the proposed principles are:

- creation of strategies to improve the rural and urban life quality standards [12,19,47,48];
- a more robust political engagement and transparency [18, 49];
- promote stakeholders' active involvement - public participation [50, 51, 52];
- invert on an economic system that meets the needs of its citizens [53,54];
- promote employment that can rejuvenate its population [54], and at the same time increase the regional and local know-how [12, 55];
- no social discrimination and opportunities equality [56];
- conservation and preservation of the border ecological systems - promote interactions between societies and the environment [57, 58];
- foster synergies that sustain areas with ecological and cultural heritage values [59].

Moreover, the main-actors and decision-makers responsible for these border territories should focus on the creation of coherent public policies that focus on sustainable development, enabling significant investments regarding infrastructure and services [22, 60, 61, 62]. Therefore, and considering the horizontal scope of sustainable development and consequently, for the common strategic planning, it is pivotal to exist narrow cooperation among the public sector, the private sector, communities, and civil society [19, 63, 64].

Indeed, previous studies were already focused on the investigation over the influential factors for the success in borderlands (see: [11, 18, 19, 27, 61, 65, 66, 67]; among many other pieces of research); however, such factors have never been isolated from a socio-cultural perspective. For a full understanding of the border territories, future studies should be carried out in other EU cities, regions, and environments.

Also, more case studies should be analyzed, and more questionnaires implemented to keep the data updated. Therefore, it will allow us to understand this issue in more detail.

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### Sources of funding for research presented in a scientific article or scientific article itself

The author would like to thank to the program of the Minister of Science and Higher Education titled “Regional Initiative of Excellence” in 2019-2022, project number 018/RID/2018/19, the amount of funding PLN 10 788 423,16.

The authors wish to acknowledge funding for this research work from the VI Regional Research Plan and the Regional Government of Extremadura and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), associated with financing the research group Sustainable Development and Territorial Planning

(GR18052) and the Environmental Resources Analysis Research Group (GR18054).

This work was supported by national funds through the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P. (Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology) by the project UIDB/05064/2020 (VALORIZA – Research Centre for Endogenous Resource Valorization).

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