

# European Transnational Cooperation in the Making

## The Added-Value of INTERREG-B

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*The European transnational cooperation process, implemented via the ongoing 15 EU INTERREG-B programmes, is integrated in the second objective of EU Cohesion Policy: European Territorial Cooperation. Aiming to promote better cooperation and regional development processes within the European Union by a joint approach to tackle common issues, the EU transnational cooperation programmes are key to tackling transnational development bottlenecks and to better exploring transnational territorial capitals. Currently, there are ongoing discussions within the European Commission to delimit the new EU Cohesion Policy post-2020 INTERREG-B programmes. In this context, this article summarises the main conclusions of four invited speakers of an international conference which took place on 21 June 2019 at the Instituto Universitário de Lisboa. The conference aimed to present some of the key contributions towards territorial development of the EU of EU Cohesion Policy and, in particular, of three INTERREG-B programmes: North West Europe (NWE), South West Europe (SUDOE), and the Atlantic Area.*

## I. Introduction

Transnational cooperation is one of the three Territorial Cooperation processes supported by the European Union (EU) since the 1990s, together with cross-border and interregional cooperation. More specifically, and according to the European Commission (EC), 'transnational cooperation, also known as INTERREG B, involves regions from several countries of the EU forming bigger areas. It aims to promote better cooperation and regional development within the Union by a joint approach to tackle common issues. INTERREG B supports a wide range of project investment related to innovation, environment, accessibility, telecommunications, urban development

etc. The transnational programmes add an important extra European dimension to regional development, developed from analysis at a European level, leading to agreed priorities and a coordinated strategic response.<sup>1</sup> Currently, 15 INTERREG-B cooperation programmes are being implemented, financed through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) with around €2.1 billion for the period 2014-2020.

As the preparations for the next EU Cohesion Policy (2021-27) phase take place, a wide debate within and outside the EC has sparked on the potential 'new territorial delimitations' of the post-2020 INTERREG-B programmes. In this context, the DINÂMIA'CET – IUL, a research unit of the Instituto Universitario de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL) organised an international con-

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ference to debate the main effects of the implementation of EU transnational cooperation programmes and their future prospects.

With this in mind, four speakers with deep knowledge on the implementation of EU Cohesion Policy and EU transnational cooperation programmes were invited to participate in an international conference, which took place on 21 June 2019 at the Instituto Universitário de Lisboa. The first speaker (Guus Muijzers) represented the European Commission and focused mainly on presenting a critical overview of EU Cohesion Policy. Guus Muijzers is working at the EC, since 1992. In 2003 he joined the DG Regional and Urban Policy. He has a vast experience in EU Cohesion Policy and European Territorial Cooperation processes.

The next three speakers were invited because of their profound knowledge in implementing EU INTERREG-B programmes. The first (Rudolf Louwers) is the Director of the INTERREG North-West Europe (NWE) Programme since 2007, where he leads a multi-national team of EU project experts with the mission to support European Territorial Cohesion. He was invited because the NWE INTERREG-B programme is known within the EC to be one of the best managed EU INTERREG-B programmes. The second (Isabelle Roger) is the current Director of the INTERREG-B SUDOE Joint Secretariat programme. She was invited not only because of her deep knowledge on implementing a transnational cooperation programme, but also because the INTERREG-B SUDOE programme covers the entire Iberian Peninsula. This fact helped the conference audience to better understand the importance of transnational cooperation processes for Portugal. The same rationale was behind the invitation made to the last speaker (Sandra Tavares da Silva) who is the Executive Manager of the Managing Authority of the INTERREG-B Atlantic Area programme. Besides her valuable inside knowledge on implementing a transnational cooperation programme, Sandra adds an academic flavour to this debate as she has a Ph.D. in Economics and is a Professor at Faculdade de Economia da Universidade do Porto and an associated researcher at CEF.UP – Center for Economics and Finance.

The article is structured as follows: the second section initiates the debate of the EU transnational cooperation processes by linking them with the implementation of EU Cohesion Policy in the past decades, and as a major tool for development, cohesion and

cooperation. The following sections respectively present the main effects of the implementation of the INTERREG-B NWE, SUDOE and Atlantic Area programmes, not only in the current programming period, but also in prior programming phases. All the sections were initially written and organised by the corresponding author, based on the presentations from all four speakers. They were then revised and complemented by all speakers.

All in all, it was possible to conclude that the positive effects of EU transnational programmes have been far more positive to the EU integration and territorial development process as many presented concrete INTERREG-B projects in the conference can testify. Conversely, these programmes seem to be largely unknown, not only by the general public, but also by policymakers and the academic community. Hence, the idea of delivering such an article presenting a wealth of updated information on three concrete EU INTERREG-B programmes, from the inside view from those responsible for implementing them. Indeed, one of the lessons learned from evaluating EU policies and programmes over the past two decades is the following: the professionals with deeper knowledge on these policies and programmes are the ones who implement them on a daily basis for many years. As such, this article intends to provide fundamental data on the implementation, trends and main effects of EU INTERREG-B programmes which can be further analysed by the academic community.

## II. EU Cohesion Policy, a Tool for Development, Cohesion and Cooperation

Guus introduced the territorial development context in which EU Cohesion Policy is implemented and the key role that transnational cooperation could play in it.

Regional policy is the main tool to address territorial development. The European Commission's DG

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1 See <[https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/trans-national/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/trans-national/)> accessed 8 October 2019

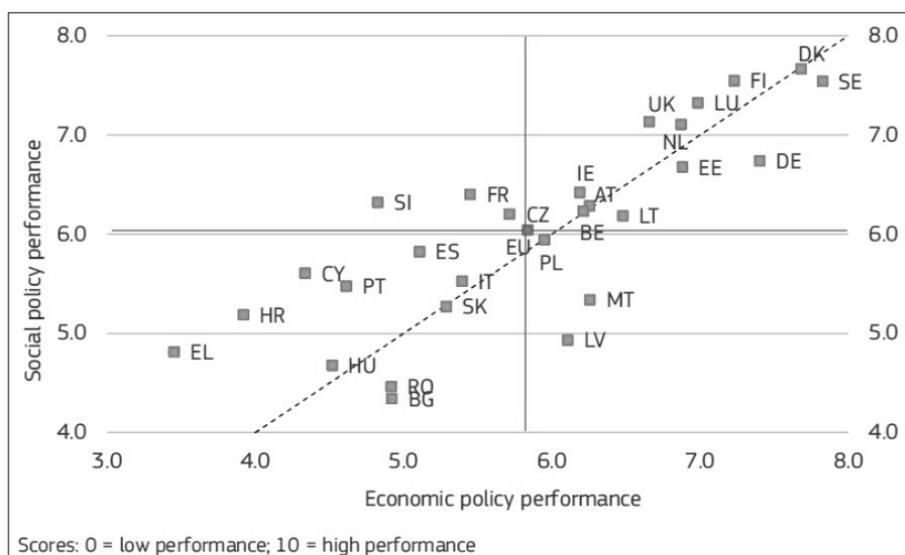


Figure 1: Economic and social performance indicators 2016

Source: European Commission, DG Regio, *My Region, My Europe, Our Future. Seventh Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion (2017)*

for Regional and Urban Policy itself defines it as follows: ‘EU regional policy is an investment policy. It supports job creation, competitiveness, economic growth, improved quality of life and sustainable development. These investments support the delivery of the Europe 2020 strategy’<sup>2</sup>. From a territorial perspective, this definition does not appear satisfactory, in our view. Whilst the framing of cohesion / regional policy within the current political priorities of the European Union is necessary, one should not forget the broader purpose of the policy – as clarified for example 10 years ago by Director-General Dirk Ahner in an article for *Notre Europe*, titled ‘What Do You Really Know About European Cohesion Policy?’ A key conclusion was that ‘Cohesion policy can only be validly assessed by framing it within an appropriate political perspective. Attempts to evaluate its economic content while ignoring its political value can only lead to an impoverished exercise misconceived in its foundation and misleading in its conclusions’<sup>3</sup>.

EU Cohesion Policy is about economic, social and territorial cohesion. So where are we in this respect? The 7th Cohesion Report (2017: xi) concludes:

After the double dip recession in 2008 and 2011, the EU economy is now growing again. The crisis seriously affected almost all Member States. It halted the long-term reduction in disparities in GDP per head between Member States. With the beginning of the recovery, however, these disparities have started to shrink again with growth everywhere, and higher rates in countries with lower levels of GDP per head. The first signs of narrowing disparities are also evident at regional level across the EU. From 2008 onwards, regional disparities in employment and unemployment rates widened along with those in GDP per head. In 2014, disparities in employment started to narrow, followed by disparities in GDP per head in 2015. Nevertheless, many regions still have a GDP per head and an employment rate below pre-crisis levels.

In such broad terms, things appear rather positive, but the report provides an enormous amount of data that also allows the conclusion that the EU is still far from having achieved the ‘cohesion’ the Treaty asks for, and not necessarily going in the right direction.

Firstly, disparities between countries remain substantial, not just in terms of GDP/capita, as the graph on economic and social policy performance indicators shows (Figure 1).

2 See <[https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/index\\_en.cfm](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index_en.cfm)> accessed 8 October 2019

3 D. Ahner, ‘What Do You Really Know About European Cohesion Policy?’ (2009) *Notre Europe*

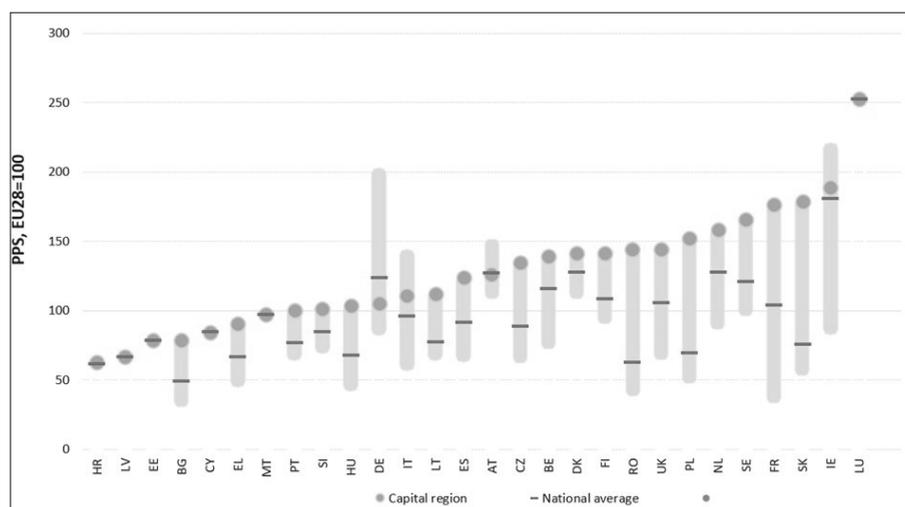


Figure 2: Regional GDP per capita – 2017.

Source: European Commission

Clearly, data at Member State level hide substantial disparities between regions within countries (Figure 2).

But, disparities also exist within regions – for example between the urban and rural parts; and these are increasing (Figure 3).

Second, the following graph (Figure 4) from the World Bank points to a widening social divide – and this occurs within almost any territorial entity.

Finally, with respect to the regional dimension of EU Cohesion Policy, one of the most insightful graphs shows the very worrying demography trends in several parts of the EU (Figure 5). In synthesis, this picture unveils three main EU territories suffering from relatively intense depopulation trends:

1. large parts of the Baltic countries and south-eastern Europe;
2. eastern Germany; and
3. the border area between Portugal and Spain also known as ‘Raia Ibérica’.

If young people do not believe they have a perspective for a good life in their region, they will seek opportunities for their future elsewhere. This is a key indicator for the success of regional policy – and possibly the most relevant one.

Economic, social and territorial cohesion are essential for the EU. As Dirk Ahner reminded in his article: ‘no Community could maintain itself nor have a meaning for the people which belong to it so long as some have very low standards of living and have

cause to doubt the common will to help each Member State to better the condition of its people<sup>4</sup>. Territorial Cooperation, including transnational cooperation, is the only tool we have to achieve it.

The million-euro question of course remains: how do we achieve more cohesion? And the difficult answer is: it’s not about money. Successive cohesion reports have devoted more and more attention to the importance of good governance. On 24 May 2018, a conference was held in Brussels on ‘Good Governance for Cohesion Policy’. This was not only about good management of EU funds. Andrés Rodríguez-Pose (LSE) convincingly showed that investments in infrastructure, human capital, innovation etc are not sufficient to make weaker regions catch up: this depends crucially on improvements in the quality of government and institutions, or in short: on good governance. Similar ideas are brought forward by books like ‘Why nations fail’<sup>5</sup>. One key player at the conference responded with what should then be the billion-euro question: ‘Yes, we know we need better governance. But how do we bring that about?’ Governance is embedded in the socio-cultural history and traditions of countries, and cannot simply be copied

4 Commission of the European Communities, Report on the Regional Problems of the Enlarged Community, COM (73) 550 def, Brussels (1973)

5 D. Acemoglu, J. Robinson, Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty (Crown Publishing Group 2012) 544

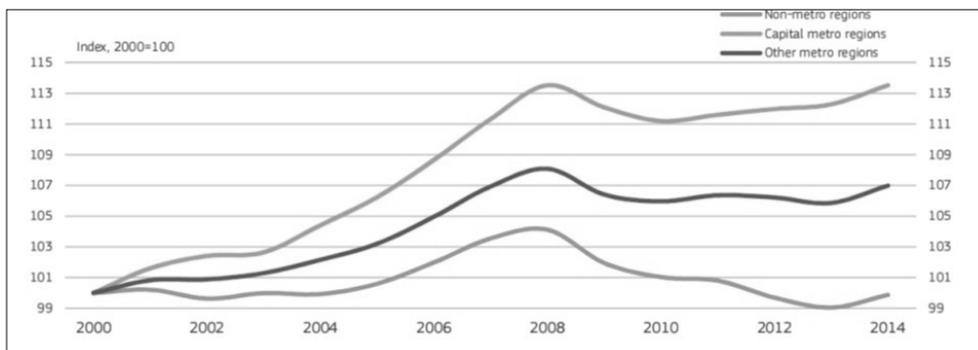


Figure 3: Evolution of total employment (number employed) in metro regions (2000-2014)  
 Source: <[https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/index\\_en.cfm](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index_en.cfm)> accessed 8 October 2019

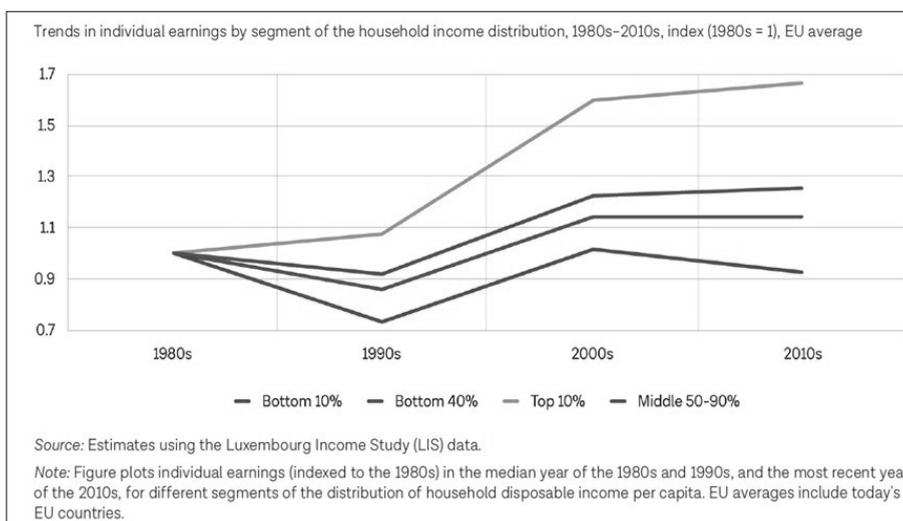


Figure 4: Low earners in European Union have been falling behind  
 Source: World Bank, *Growing United. Upgrading Europe’s Convergence Machine*, World Bank Report on the European Union (2018)

or transferred. Instead, it involves rather fundamental adaptations in society as a whole, on how the public sector is managed, and how it operates. And such changes cannot be brought about in a short period of time, but take generations.

Cohesion policy can and should play a role in improving governance. And it does this via the programming and partnership approach, and in shared management. The funding involves a degree of re-distribution, not in the budgetary sense, but as a delivery mechanism for better policy cycles. Using the funds should imply learning EU governance.

All this may sound challenging to those who see Cohesion Policy as essentially an investment policy, or mainly a solidarity instrument. This view of Cohesion policy is too narrow. Instead, it should be seen

as one of the cornerstones in the EU’s policy mix, which in absence of a substantial central budget must have an alternative way of ensuring that the benefits of (market) integration end up fairly across the continent. So, this is not solidarity (of richer with poorer), but the common self-interest of all countries and regions, and a necessary element of the system (in particular for those using the euro). Still, the legitimacy of the implicit transfers depends to a large extent on the credibility (in the eyes of the net payers) of the governance of the recipients. This may not be easy to accept, on either side, but there is no other way: a coin has two sides.

This implies that the EU eventually needs a common understanding on the role, functioning and limits of government and public policies. Cohesion Pol-

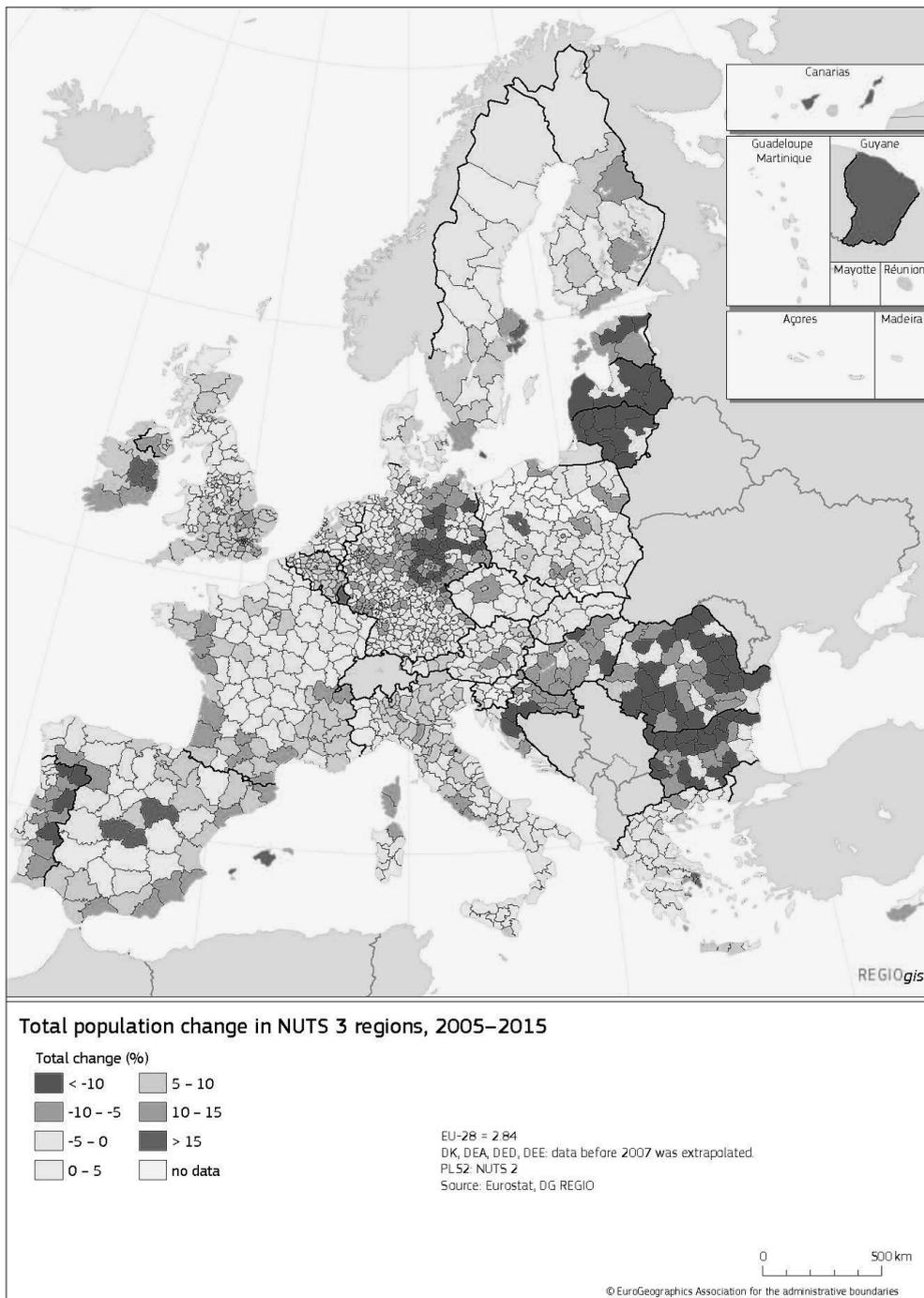


Figure 5: Total population change in NUTS 3 regions, 2005-2015  
 Source: European Commission

icy can and should step up its role to achieve this, not by setting conditionalities, but by enabling public sectors to develop towards common standards,

through adaptive mutual learning. Transnational programmes bring together public actors of several countries, and are therefore particularly suitable for

'governance cross-fertilisation'. And all this implies as well that a meaningful Cohesion Policy must involve all countries and regions of the EU.

Finally: Cohesion Policy emerged in the 1980s, in the light of enlargements and the prospect of completion of the internal market in 1992. The Padoa-Schioppa report from 1987 described the evolution of the economic system of Europe in terms of the triad efficiency – stability – equity. For the EU to remain successful, it must ensure the right balance in this triangle. And Cohesion Policy can make the best contribution by weighting towards the Stability-Equity side. This is the political value that Dirk Ahner was pointing to.

### III. The INTERREG-B North West Europe

Rudolf placed special emphasis on the pragmatic aspects of EU transnational cooperation and, in particular, on what the INTERREG-B NWE programme (NWE) (Figure 6) is doing. In general terms, the drivers for Cohesion Policy and transnational cooperation are reducing territorial disparities and creating a sense of belonging and European citizenship. On a positive note, the sense of belonging to the EU is generically on the rise, and this is partly due to Cohesion Policy.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, territorial disparities have been reduced among countries but have risen within national boundaries.<sup>7</sup> This could be caused by the systematic population flows from rural areas towards urban areas, but is anyway not fully counterbalanced by EU's Cohesion Policy.

As seen in Figure 6, the NWE programme is the only programme which includes the whole of the UK territory. 1/3 of this programme goes through the UK, meaning the UK is a very important programme partner. Overall, the area of the NWE is the most densely populated area of Europe, with high levels of productivity and economic opportunities. The territory has high levels of congestion and pollution per capita. While the initial transnational cooperation NWE programmes had a special focus on European spatial

development, gradually the most recent programmes have shifted to place more attention on promoting growth and jobs, and also environmental sustainability.

For the current NWE (2014-2020) the expected results are substantially positive:

- 16,661 households with improved energy classification;
- 3,456 business supported;
- 3,080 citizens benefiting from social innovation;
- 17,149 megawatts of additional renewable energy capacity; and
- 732 jobs created.

There is no doubt that these achievements are positive for the territorial development trends of the NWE region. However, the question remains: how do they contribute to cohesion? To deal with this issue, the NWE is currently developing two 'storylines' for territorial coherence indicators, despite the difficulties involved in this process due to lack of data. The first storyline is 'competitiveness', whereas the second is 'balanced development'. By February 2019, 83 projects were approved, involving 819 partners and a total of €313 million of ERDF, with the following distribution through the main intervention priorities:

1. innovation: 31 projects / €88 million;
2. low carbon: 34 projects / €166 million; and
3. resource and materials efficiency: 18 projects / €59 million.

One crucial point in the analysis of the current NWE is that the Cohesion Policy growth and jobs focus justifies the types of projects which have been approved. In this light, the territorial justifications tend to be less and less important for project selection. Also, some organizations, like the research entities, are over-represented in the programme. This might create a problem, since Horizon 2020 and Cohesion Funds are overlapping, whereas their aims are clearly distinct. Horizon 2020 is an excellence programme, whereas Cohesion Funds are about promoting cohesion, as the name indicates. So how does the NWE promote territorial cohesion? On one hand, it has concentrated the investment in some of its less developed regions, which can be partly seen by the distribution of the project applications (Figure 7). In sum, there is a high concentration of applicants coming from just a few NWE regions, and some periph-

6 See <<http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/83538>> accessed 8 October 2019

7 E. Medeiros, D. Rauhut, 'Territorial Cohesion A Policy Recipe for Achieving Territorial Cohesion?' (2018) *Regional Studies* <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2018.1548764>> accessed 8 October 2019





Figure 7: Approved partners per NUTS 2 region calls 1 to 6 + TC INTERREG-B (2014-2020)  
 Source: NWE

eral areas are well represented (Brittany, Scotland, and Ireland) – but often by the same partner. To further reduce territorial disparities there is a need to spread the word and money to less developed regions. This is not as easy as it might seem.

As regards the type of partners, they are dominated by the presence of higher education and research institutions, followed by SMEs and local public authorities. However, one visible trend is the reduced participation of public authorities, which can be seen as concerning. Furthermore, from a project thematic view, it is interesting to see the implementation of a cluster of projects associated with the development of ‘ocean energy’. This can be seen as a remarkable feat, in view of the fact that NWE is a land territorial development programme, in stark contrast with the North Sea INTERREG-B programme, which does not support this type of projects. Besides renewable energy and energy efficiency related projects, the NWE supports large number (more than 5) of health/medical (eg develop all kinds of sensors and tools to support living at home and disease discovery) and manufacturing-related projects (Figure 8).

Figure 3 also shows that the programme is clearly ‘result oriented’ and is achieving its main goals.

As regards the impacts of BREXIT to the NWE, there are some guarantees from the UK treasury and the UK partners that it would not interfere with the programme implementation. There are, however, some messages coming in which indicate that this is not completely solid. But the most important thing is that the UK contribution to the NWE serves also as a solidarity process with others and to fund non-UK partners. Hence, the risk of BREXIT is not with UK partners. Even so, there could be a negative impact from BREXIT to the ongoing NWE projects.

In conclusion, over the years, the NWE went from a territorial planning strategic rationale into a business support tool, as a result of the adoption of the EU 2020 strategy, based on a growth and jobs policy rationale. In view of the economic environment which changed drastically compared to 7 years ago, there is a need for a drastic change because within the NWE territory there are now sectors and regions where we face a shortage of some labour forces rather than a lack of jobs. Moreover, programmes should be

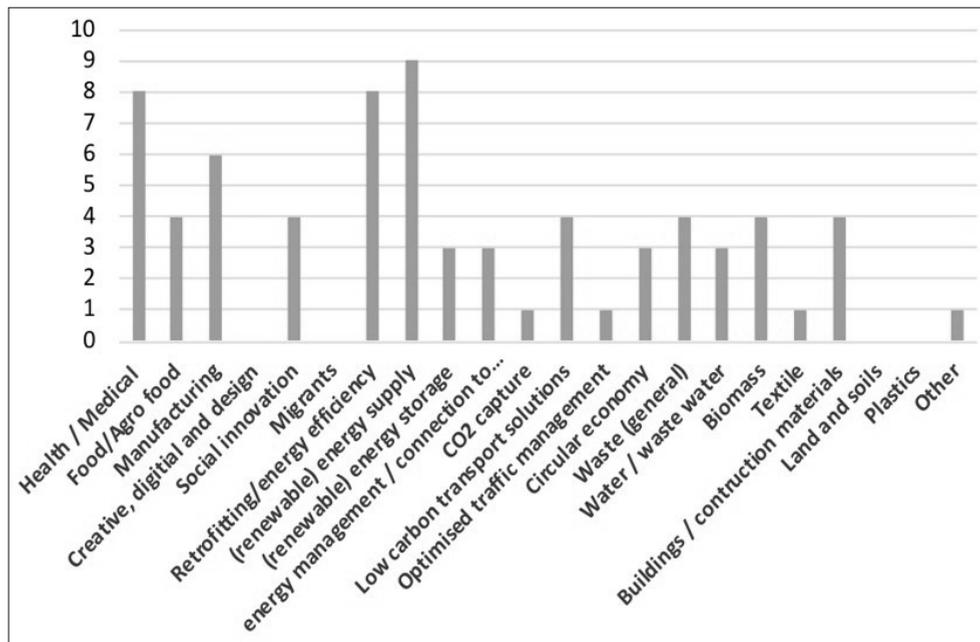


Figure 8: Approved number of project themes. Call 1 to 6 + TC – all priorities – NWE 2014-2020

Source: NWE

regarded as tools for projects and not the other way around. As such, projects should be at the heart of the development process and the design of programmes. Nevertheless, at the moment, the opposite is true. Often, programme areas are a hurdle for project development since they tend to allocate funds within the programme area, and because they tend to develop into a static structure. More particularly, geography and the programmes organisation are blocking change which is necessary to address the challenges faced by Europe. Instead, the cooperation between more and less developed areas within the whole of Europe can lead to more effective ways to reduce territorial disparities within Europe, while for instance improving the innovation within NWE could increase the disparities with regions in the East or South of Europe even more. Furthermore, the Commission's proposals for INTERREG-B programmes of the future to follow a so-called soft approach with an emphasis on supporting capacity building rather than concrete, collaborative investments is the wrong one since the expected impacts will be relatively low. In spite of the hurdles, NWE projects are delivering the expected results. What is

necessary now is to see its concrete contributions to achieving territorial cohesion, which is a major challenge for the NWE.

#### IV. The INTERREG-B SUDOE

Isabelle presented the evolution of the South West Europe INTERREG-B programme (SUDOE) along the past two decades, since it was approved as one of the EU INTERREG II-C programmes in April 1998. From the outset, it is important to stress that this programme has been a key tool to create a culture of cooperation in a territory where this practice was not usual. In that first period, the goal was to create some sort of pilot programme in order to see if the cooperation process between institutions could function in the area, namely in the field of spatial planning in order to mitigate territorial imbalances in the transnational areas. As can be seen in the INTERREG IIC - South West Europe main figures and axis, the total budget was relatively reduced in view of its main goals:

- 35 proposals \15 approved in 1999;

- total budget €9,6 million \ €5,5 million ERDF;
- axis 1: promote polycentrism and strengthen the competitiveness of the urban system;
- axis 2: development of rural areas with low population density; and
- axis 3: logic of connection: internal network and insertion in European transport systems.

Despite a very short implementation period (two years) and low budget, its impact was seen as positive. More particularly, it has allowed the public administrations from all involved territories to get to know each other better and to reveal to each other how they work. Following from this first cooperation experience, the INTERREG III-B South West Europe programme was approved in 2001, with a total budget of €109,8 million (€66,1 million ERDF) with the following four axes and nine measures:

1. innovation and networks support: 1.1 urban systems; 1.2 complementarities urban / rural; 1.3 innovation;
2. environmental protection: 2.1 natural heritage; 2.2 cultural heritage; 2.3 heritage management by actors;
3. information networks accessibility: 3.1 transports; 3.2 ICT; and
4. sustainable urban development: 4.1 strengthening the identity of SUDOE.

In this programming period (2000-2006), the SUDOE programme as it is actually known was launched: for the first time, a Managing Authority was designated, and on a geographical level, the eligible was enlarged with a few more French regions (Aquitaine, Languedoc-Roussillon and Poitou-Charentes). Also, Gibraltar and the two autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla were included in the programme. The main goal was to encourage a transnational zone of economic, social, and cultural integration of SUDOE with a top down approach which contributed to the territorial rebalance of Europe, taking into account the enlargement process to the East of the EU, and the development opportunities with Mediterranean and Latin American countries. Over the evolution of calls, stakeholders found a strong interest in collaborating in the themes of innovation and environment to the detriment of other axis. In essence, the lesson to be learned from this programming phase is that expectations of the territorial actors must be taken into ac-

count in order to forge an identity within the territory.

By 2007, the SUDOE IV programme was approved, with a total budget of €132 million (€99,4 million ERDF). Being designed in accordance to the Lisbon Strategy, it placed a stronger emphasis on innovation (axis 1) and environment (axis 2), whilst dedicating attention to two other major intervention axes: accessibility (axis 3) and sustainable urban development (axis 4). By that time, the spatial planning strategy rationale was replaced by a cooperation policy based on a 'thematic approach'. In other words, competitiveness and sustainable development have put aside the strategic positioning of the SUDOE area in Europe. As regards the applicants, the bulk of project proposals continued to respectively favour the thematic areas of innovation and environment, which led to a financial reprogramming during the period in favour of those topics. In other words, the trends marked by the previous programme have been confirmed and contributed to the consolidation of the cooperation area.

By June 2015, the current SUDOE programme (2014-2020, Figure 9) was approved with the inclusion of the Principality of Andorra. For this period, the total budget amounts to €141,8 million (€106,8 million ERDF), distributed along five main intervention axes (see below). Among these, the first (innovation – 55% of the funding) and the last (environment – 45% of the funding) received the bulk of the applications (Figure 10).

- Axis 1: Promoting research, technological development, and innovation.
- Axis 2: Promoting the competitiveness and internationalization of the SMEs of Southwest Europe.
- Axis 3: Contributing to a higher efficiency of the energy efficiency policies.
- Axis 4: Prevent and manage risks more efficiently.
- Axis 5: Protecting the environment and promoting the efficient use of resources.

Currently, the situation of the programme shows that 54% of applicants are applying for the axis of 'smart development', and 40% for the 'sustainable development' axis. What is most surprising is the exponential increase in applicants along all the SUDOE phases. Also, the current programme has specified more clearly what type of projects are expected to be implemented, and identified the relevant sectors of ac-



Figure 9: INTERREG-B SUDOE V area  
Source: SUDOE

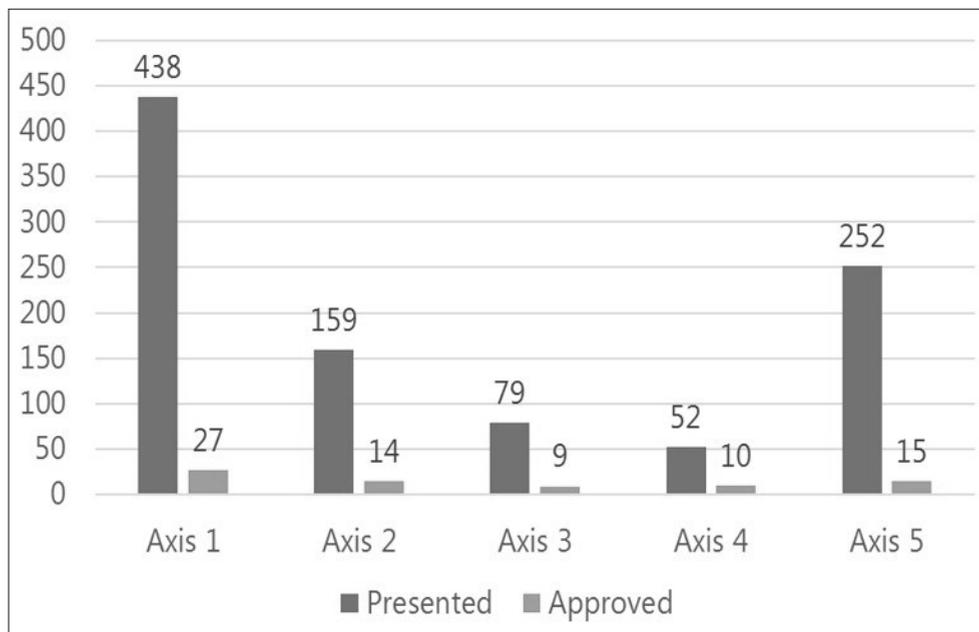


Figure 10: Number of applicants in the 3 calls (SUDOE V)  
Source: SUDOE

tivity on which projects must focus. Moreover, special attention is given to the representation of the whole value chain requiring for the first time SMEs

within project partnerships. All in all, the steady increase of the number of applicants to the programme over the course of the last couple of decades demon-

Table 1: Some figures on SUDOE participation

\*Calls 1, 2, 3; data 18/06/2019

Source: SUDOE

	2000-2006	2007-2013	2014-2020*	Global
ERDF (€)	67,248,575	99,413,459	106,810,523	273,472,557
Applicants	320	889	980	2.189
Approved projects	86	110	75	271
Entities participating in the applications	1,650	5,403	6,811	13.864

strates the success of SUDOE. The same can be extrapolated from the main results obtained in the last two programming periods:

- 4,000 jobs;
- 1,228 training events;
- 500 pilot projects;
- 23,000 SMEs involved;
- 31 patents;
- 90 actions to boost renewable energies;
- 37 actions to mitigate climate change effects; and
- 200 actions to promote cultural and natural heritage.

Regarding the regional distribution of the beneficiaries since SUDOE III, the North of Portugal, Lisbon Area, Aquitaine, Midi-Pyrénées, Catalonia, Galicia, Andalusia and Castilla and León were some of the areas with higher levels of applicants. Also interesting is the increasing number of research laboratories and universities (now representing close to 50% of the beneficiaries), whereas the number of national, regional and local administration entities as direct beneficiaries within the programme has gradually decreased (from 30% in SUDOE III to 10% in SUDOE V), acting now as associated partners. On the other hand, the associations, foundations, and development agencies still make about 20% of the total applicants. Moreover, as mentioned before, a new actor, SMEs, now represent around 10% of the beneficiaries, which has been a quite positive result for the programme.

In conclusion, there are several clear indicators that demonstrate the success of SUDOE in forging a sustainable transnational culture of cooperation

processes in the SUDOE area in order to address common challenges. But more important than the number of applicants and approved projects (Table 1), is their quality and their potential impact to the lives of citizens. That is why a specific area of the SUDOE webpage (Humans of SUDOE) is dedicated to collect feedback from everyone involved in this programme on its impact on their lives. In a different perspective, the next programming period can be particularly challenging with the introduction of a territorial perspective again due to the clear functionality of this geographical area. One possibility is to design a more specialised programme focused on tackling and mitigating climate change risks or demographic challenges. Moreover, for innovation, there could be a stronger concentration on the thematic area of health, following the establishment of already established networks in this arena. In a final remark, the underlying idea behind Cohesion Policy is to create Europe. Here, the cooperation between entities is the only way to create citizenship behaviours. In the SUDOE area, this cooperation culture was lacking two decades ago, but not anymore, largely because of the implementation of SUDOE.

## V. The INTERREG-B Atlantic Area

Sandra, representing the Managing Authority of the INTERREG-B Atlantic Area (Atlantic Area), highlighted the added-value of this programme for the Atlantic regions and, in particular, for Portugal. Expectedly, this programme takes place in the coastal Atlantic area, starting in the Canary Islands and end-



Figure 11: The INTERREG-B Atlantic Area programme area

Source: <<https://www.atlanticarea.eu/page/3>> accessed 8 October

ing in Ireland, involving 36 regions and 5 countries (Figure 11). This is a quite diverse area, encompassing both rich and poor regions, which justifies the need to work in close cooperation in order to correct those territorial imbalances. In the end, this programme aims to serve as an EU political instrument for promoting economic, social and territorial cohesion in the Atlantic Area, by promoting joint solutions to shared transnational challenges. Despite its territorial diversity, the Atlantic Area has a common

maritime heritage and there are many opportunities to face challenges within this ‘maritime dimension’ as well as the ‘terrestrial dimension’. From a thematic standpoint, the Atlantic Area (2014-2020) is focused on four main priorities aligned with the EU agenda, with a relatively modest budget for a large geographical area (€185 million; ERDF €140 million):

1. stimulating innovation and competitiveness, addressing the challenge of accelerating intelligent growth;

1. fostering resource efficiency, promoting renewable energies and energy efficiency;
2. strengthening the territory's resilience to risks of natural, climate and human origin, to support a better protection and management of the territory; and
3. enhancing biodiversity and the natural and cultural assets, which will serve the identified need of protecting the environment and promoting the cultural and natural identity.

Based on data from the previous programming period (2007-2013), it is possible to conclude that the approved 71 projects produced quite positive impacts, in particular in reinforcing the social and economic cohesion of the Atlantic regions, as well as the blue and the green economy. As an indication, 4 projects were awarded for the excellent and innovative work they developed ('Atlantic Blue Tech'; 'Arcopol Platform'; 'Batterie'; and the 'Atlantic Power Cluster'). These projects brought more awareness about crucial initiatives to the territorial development of the Atlantic Area:

1. integrated water resource management;
2. local planning before events of coastal pollution;
3. safety and security issues in the shipbuilding industry;
4. renewable energy sector;
5. heritage as a local development resource; and
6. supporting local development through European research facilities, optimising R&D investment.

The main outputs are also positive and diverse: case studies and pilot actions; methodologies and tools; databases and information systems; education and knowledge transference; and disseminating and capitalising results. In conclusion, this programming period has mainly generated intangible outputs.

In the current programming phase (2014-2020), 72 projects are being implemented after being approved in two calls. Based on existing evaluation reports, one can highlight their quite positive potential impacts and contribution towards the development of the blue economy in the region. Here, it can be stressed that the project 'EBB' received an award in the Atlantic Project Awards during the 5th Atlantic Stakeholder Platform Conference (2018). Moreover, the 'CleanAtlantic' and the 'AYCH' projects were selected by DG REGIO as examples of good practices. Fi-

nally, the Interact E-Book highlighted the 'AYCH', 'MMIAH' and 'ATLASWH' projects, which were presented as good examples of cultural heritage cooperation projects.

Ultimately, the Atlantic Area is about building trust, addressing shared regional challenges and innovative approaches, strengthening territorial and sustainable economic development, targeting partnership projects which will provide joint solutions to shared transnational challenges faced by the eligible area, and disseminating and capitalising results. The latter aspect has been addressed via the organisation of seminars and conferences, as well as by forging networking, links and synergies with other programmes. In addition, the benefits to society can be witnessed by the programme contribution to the approval of 'five patents' (on the use of marine compounds against neurodegenerative diseases) and by the dissemination of concrete policy recommendations and tools: eg the new ICES (International Commission for the Exploitation of the Seas); the EC Proposal for Risk Assessment of Marine Bio Toxins; the EU Green Paper on Creative Industries and the report on 'Small-scale Coastal Fishing, Artisanal Fishing and the Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy' approved by the European Parliament. The interest in the programme by the stakeholders is quite high. This can be confirmed by the high demand registered in both calls: 425 expressions of interest and 102 full applications in call 1 and 115 full applications in call 2.

With these two calls, the Atlantic Area budget was fully allocated. The distribution *per* priority shows that the innovation and competitiveness is the one with more approved projects and higher funding. This is followed by the priority related with biodiversity, natural and cultural assets (Figure 12). All in all, 365 associated partners can be added to the 726 partners, some located in Canada and Morocco, showing the interaction also with entities located on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. The inclusion of partners not located in the eligible Area created some delays in the beginning of the implementation of projects because it was mandatory to fulfil the need to sign a contract between the managing authority and the national authorities of the countries where these partners were located in order to guarantee the control of expenditures. In this stance, it will be important that in the next programming period a simplification process is implemented to mit-



Figure 12: The INTERREG-B Atlantic Area (2014-2020) approved projects

Source: Atlantic Area

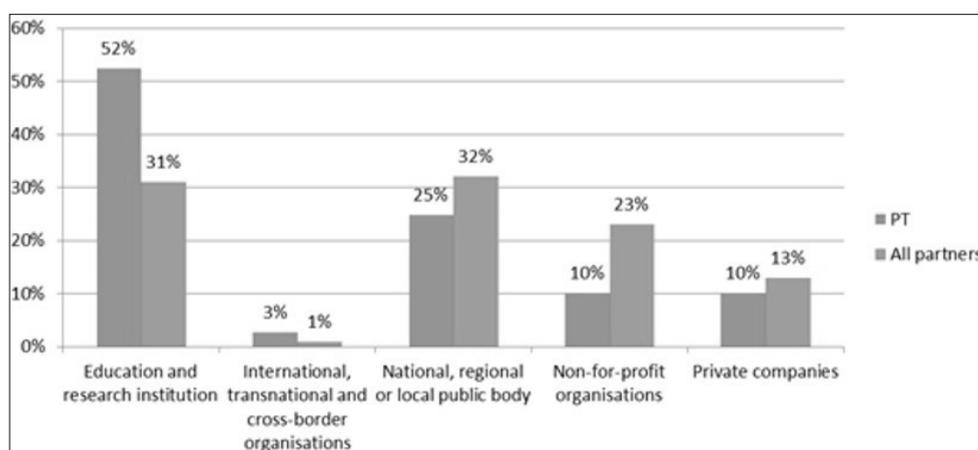


Figure 13: The INTERREG-B Atlantic Area (2014-2020): type of partners.

Source: Atlantic Area

igate such problems, ensuring the added value that partnerships encompassing this type of partners bring.

Considering the distribution of the ERDF *per* lead country, Spain receives the larger share of funding: Spain: 42% / Portugal: 17% / France: 16% / Ireland: 14% / UK: 11%. Likewise, Spain leads on the number of involved partners (429), followed by Portugal (231), the UK (179), France (176) and Ireland (145). These are distributed more or less in equal parts (around 30%) *per* 'public entities' and *per* 'education and research entities'. 'Non-profit organisations' represent

a bit more than 20% of the total partners, whereas 'private companies' represent the remaining 13%. Curiously, in Portugal, more than 50% of the partners are associated with 'education and research entities' (Figure 13).

It is also important to stress that there is a considerable amount of uncertainty for the next programming period due to several factors such as the current debate on the multi-annual financial framework, the negotiation of the legislative proposals for the new programming period and discussions on the geography of future programmes. Additionally,

BREXIT has the potential to affect the next programming period. Even so, the Atlantic Area is very much engaged in preparing for future challenges and opportunities. In this regard, the Strategy for the Atlantic is also being assessed, and there is the possibility to benefit from, and simultaneously to contribute for, a better and stronger strategy for the Atlantic, fully aligned with the maritime strategy. Indeed, 90% of funding was used to finance projects that also reflected the priorities of the Atlantic strategy during 2014-2020. The strategy now is a Sea Basin and it still is uncertain how it is going to evolve. The Atlantic Area projects are very focused on the sea, on Blue Growth, but also on Green Growth, on the territory and on the people. In conclusion, what is important is to have a strong Strategy for the Atlantic, where we can know more precisely how to avoid the bad allocation of resources, in order to improve coordination and policy making, as well as cohesion, not only in the economic sense, but also on social, territorial and human cooperation.

## VI. Conclusions

The next year (2020) signals the end of the current EU Cohesion Policy programming period (2014-2020). European Territorial Cooperation (also known as INTERREG) was included as a main EU Cohesion Policy goal in 2007, following the successful implementation of the INTERREG EU Community Initiative.<sup>8</sup> Currently, European Territorial Cooperation is the second main EU Cohesion Policy goal, together with the main goal of 'Investment in Growth and Jobs'. However, it receives less than 3% of the total financial allocations of EU Cohesion Policy.<sup>9</sup> From these, only around 20% is allocated to the 15 EU transnational cooperation (INTERREG-B) programmes.

Does this signify that EU transnational cooperation programmes have a minimum positive impact on the EU territorial development and cohesion process? To appropriately answer this question, a deep (territorial) impact assessment of INTERREG-B programmes is required. As a part of this evaluation process, qualitative and quantitative data is needed to better understand the policy causalities of these programmes in the development processes of their intervention territories. In this regard, this article provides a wealth of information from the authors responsible for the implementation of three EU INTERREG-B programmes (NWE, SUDOE and Atlantic Area), which can be extremely valuable for further policy impact evaluations of EU INTERREG-B programmes. This is especially important in a current policy scenario where the future delimitation areas of the post-2020 INTERREG-B programmes is being discussed within the European Commission.

Based on the statements provided along the sections of this article, it is possible to conclude that, despite its limitations, EU Cohesion policy has had a positive role in promoting economic, social and territorial cohesion processes across the EU. At the same time, it has supported a crucial dimension of territorial cohesion: Territorial Cooperation.<sup>10</sup> The question is: are EU INTERREG-B programmes directly focused on promoting territorial cohesion? From the presented three cases (NWE, SUDOE, Atlantic Area), even though this goal was directly expressed in previous programming phases currently, the main strategic rationale is to use them as additional business support tool for the growing EU neoliberal agenda of growth and jobs, complemented with a long-standing environmental sustainability and social inclusion flavour. All in all, the initial EU territorial planning and cohesion rationale behind the creation of the INTERREG-B has been systematically lost over time.<sup>11</sup>

In this context, and in view of a drastically changed socio economic environment that lead to the definition of the current INTERREG-B programmes' strategies (the 2008 financial crisis), which can justify this 'excessive' strategic concentration on the 'growth and jobs agenda', one can argue for a strategic shift of the future INTERREG-B programmes into their initial goal of promoting territorial planning and cohesion processes. Another crucial challenge for the post-2020 EU Cohesion Policy phase, which is specific for a few INTERREG-B programmes, and particu-

8 E. Medeiros, *European Territorial Cooperation. Theoretical and Empirical Approaches to the Process and Impacts of Cross-Border and Transnational Cooperation in Europe*. The Urban Book Series. (Springer, Cham 2918) 269

9 European Commission, *Investments for Jobs and Growth. Sixth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion*, DG Regio (2014)

10 E. Medeiros, 'Territorial Cohesion: An EU Concept' (2016) *European Journal of Spatial Development* <<http://www.nordregio.org/publications/territorial-cohesion-an-eu-concept>> accessed 8 October 2019

11 See <[https://homepage.univie.ac.at/andreas.faludi/7\\_1%20Faludi%20Introduction.pdf](https://homepage.univie.ac.at/andreas.faludi/7_1%20Faludi%20Introduction.pdf)> accessed 8 October 2019

larly important for the INTERREG-B NWE programme, is the BREXIT process, as the entire UK territory is included in this programme.

From the results point of view, the article presented a wealth of data showing the positive influence of the three presented INTERREG-B programmes in promoting territorial development processes in their intervention areas. This is especially evident in the environmental (renewable energies, energy efficiency, natural heritage, climate change mitigation, and natural risks) and innovation (SMEs, research and health) domains. In the bigger picture, however, as stated along the text, EU transnational cooperation

programmes have also been essential to promoting a many times absent cooperation culture across Europe. Similarly, by supporting this Territorial Cooperation process, they are directly contributing to achieving a more cohesive European territory, although in a relative limited manner. To improve their crucial role within EU Cohesion Policy, there is a clear need to increase their strategic relevance and overall financial support for the post-2020 phase.<sup>12</sup>

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12 E. Medeiros 'Placing European Territorial Cooperation at the heart of EU Cohesion Policy' EStIF 5(3) 245-262