

ENACTED POLICY PAPER

Ways of improving the level of education in the borderland regions



European Union and its neighbourhood.
Network for enhancing EU's actorness
in the eastern borderlands

ERASMUS+ Project 2017-2625



The university environment at the Eastern border of the EU could not be immune to the "general rebordering pressures which result from widening boundary gaps at the EU's external borders, exogenous shocks to cross-border transactions, growing community deficits of debordering, their politicization"¹ and now the pandemic crisis.

Likewise, we cannot understand the actions, but especially the inactions of the academic communities, without looking at them in the context of the limited results or even the failure of some EU programs developed at its borders, such as the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy, the European Immigration Policy and the European Neighbourhood Policy. In addition, there are national rebordering pressures for a Fortress Europe² that some EU MS located on the EU's Eastern border (Hungary and Poland) are more and more actively putting on Brussels.

Following the research carried out within the ENACTED project we have identified a few areas in which we have defined the most relevant findings as regards to the project's objectives, followed by recommendations.

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¹ Franz Schiémelfennig, Thomas Winzen, *Ever Looser Union? Differentiated European Integration*, Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 17

² Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 'Re-bordering Europe? Collective action barriers to 'Fortress Europe'', in *Journal of European Public Policy*, 2021, vol. 28, 3 , pp. 447-467

1. The institutional dimension of the CBC in the academic field at the Eastern border of the EU

1.1. Although important steps have been taken towards the institutionalisation of the CBC in the academic field, the need to create a genuine academic community at the EU's Eastern border - in the area covered by the ENACTED project (extending from the Polish-Belarusian border to the Romanian-Moldovan border) is a desideratum that can contribute through its implications not only to the strengthening of the European Area of Higher Education, but to the creation of the conditions for the acceleration of cross-border cooperation at the EU's Eastern border in the area in question.

Recommendation:

The EU to take into consideration the role played by universities in transforming communities from border regions / CBC borders from proximity-based communities to communities in the process of integration. Welcoming the MSCA -SE (Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions – Staff Exchanges), part of the Horizon 2021-2027 as a mechanism for permanent exchanges to create a European community of the academic environment, we recommend to encourage the selection of projects developed by universities located on the two sides of the UE borders and particularly the Eastern border.

1.2. The existence, at the EU's border in the area studied by the ENACTED project, of some regional networks of the universities located on the two sides of the border, created before the accession of the Central and Eastern European countries to the EU - Association of Carpathian Region Universities (ACRU), Black Sea Universities Network (BSUN), Eastern-European University Network, has played the role of integrating through endogenous means the universities in the region into a single system. Unfortunately, following the accession of the Central and Eastern European countries to the EU, the universities in the EU MS belonging to these networks oriented

themselves towards projects with European funding specific to the new framework. Taking into consideration that these structures live solely on their members' contribution, today they are functioning at a low level or not functioning at all.

This same situation is recorded also in the case of the initiatives having an explicit cross-border character- Border University Network (BUN), Bukovinian University Consortium.

Recommendation:

In the same spirit of developing a cross-border academic community at the EU's Eastern border, we recommend that the European Commission study the possibility of associating initiatives of regional and local cross-border networks with different European programs in the field of education and innovation. These to be part of the EU's strategy to develop strong cross-border academic communities and pivots of innovation at the Eastern border.

1.3. Analysing the prevalence of academic cooperation programs in the direction of the implementation of projects affecting European issues, it can be indicated that their implementation is characteristic not only of educational institutions, but also of NGOs and state structures. It is worth noting that educational institutions, and those that implement higher education programs, still take the lead here.

Recommendation:

The development of an interactive platform with the CBC coverage with the most user-friendly interface, where all information on interdisciplinary academic projects affecting European issues, as well as specific results and advantages of participation in the most striking projects.

2. The efficiency in education of CBC at the Eastern border of the EU dimension

2.1. Starting with the model of Poland, an extensive program for the development of joint degrees at bachelor level, but especially at master level has been developed with the universities from Ukraine, where a major part of the universities are located in the Cross Border Regions (CBRs),

Recommendation:

The EU to acquire this model and support it by integrating it into a funding strategy and at the same time to encourage the Baltic states, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania to follow this model by receiving access to funding.

2.2. According to the findings of the project, it can be concluded that at the level of academic research the cross-border collaboration is very weak due to the lack of initiatives, the maintenance of bureaucratic obstacles and last but not least the lack of funding.

Recommendation:

To encourage joint PhDs projects between universities located on the Eastern border of the EU, covering topics that meet the need for knowledge of a shared civilization, the design of socio-economic ensembles in the CBC field. Through the Committee of the Regions, which has experience in this direction, to launch a European competition, for all border regions, and especially for those located on the external borders in order to give awards to the most valuable joint PhD theses, which respect the conditions presented above.

2.3. The existence and successfulness of cross-border academic communities is measured through the produced results, such as frequency and number of mobility, the number of the jointly elaborated projects, organized events, research published in scientific journals etc. The analysis from ENACTED project had shown that universities from the Eastern CBC area are active in this regard, but do not have policies to develop and encourage exchanges between the universities located on the Eastern border of the EU, which is the topic of the project.

Recommendation:

Erasmus+ activities and financial assistance put forward under the 2021-2027 MFF, together with the CBC programs funded by ENI must determine such type of mobilities which will contribute to the consolidation of cross-border academic communities at the EU's Eastern border.

2.4. Since there is no European Master covered by the project to train students in the region, on the one hand, in the field of development in the Border regions, and on the other hand, there would be an increase in the level of mutual knowledge between future specialists who will work in the cross-border cooperation structures at the EU's Eastern border or diverse actors interested in cross-border cooperation projects....

Recommendation:

To establish at the coordinating university of the ENACTED project the structure of such a European Master, which would have the possibility to award a joint diploma, with the participation of the most recognized specialists in the fields covered by the master's degree from the 6 member countries of the ENACTED project and students recruited from universities located on the Eastern border of the EU. At the same time, through mobility mechanisms, to ensure cross-border training courses for these students.

3. The Better knowledge of the EU dimension at the EU's Eastern border

3.1. The EU Curriculum Studies dimension is present at the EU's Eastern Border, both in the universities within the European Union Member States, as well as in the Eastern Partnership countries. Here a little bit more attention is paid to this issue but, in the end, there have been and will be cleavages, controversies and convergence in the domain of European Studies in the Eastern Partnership countries.

Recommendation:

The EU to use all institutional levers, NGOs and Jean Monnet professors from the EUMS and from the pivotal universities in the Eastern partnership countries to promote European studies in order to influence the curriculum of the universities on the EU border for them to include particularly those courses that are lacking: EU Economic Integration, EU Political and Administrative Studies, EU Communication Studies, EU Diplomacy and Security Studies.

3.2. By looking at the curriculum of the universities located on the Eastern border of the EU it is observed that the courses that offer information, that are formative in the category of knowledge of the space beyond the border, cross-border initiative are not strongly represented.

Recommendation:

The EU to use all the institutional levers together with the relevant ministries in the area covered by the ENACTED project to find its place in the university curricula courses dealing with knowledge of the shared history, the traditions and especially the possibilities for cooperation in the Eastern border regions of the EU.

3.3. The project observe that significant part of the teaching staff and student have a low level of proficiency in a foreign language, which actualizes the need to improve it for productive participation in projects.

Recommendation:

The necessity to introduce the courses on the development of linguistic competencies as part of cooperation with European partners.

3.4. Regarding the Jean Monnet Action, the general framework has been created and is working very well, the projects carried out have met their proposed objectives, so that European studies are a solid component in the curricula of universities in the states on both sides of the EU's Eastern external border but in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. serious imbalances exist between the areas where these projects are carried out (national centres of influence versus areas on the EU's Eastern border) of Jean Monnet structures (Modules, Chairs and Centres). The same situation is also in some EUMS (Hungary, Poland and Slovakia).

Recommendation:

- a. The European Commission as well the ECSA national associations and the Erasmus + national agencies to develop a strategy to encourage universities in the Border regions on the Eastern border of the EU to put forward increasingly solid projects for the creation of such structures.**
- b. The projects implemented in the areas referred to in this project need to be not only continued, but also amplified, so as Jean Monnet's action may be perceived as an effective tool.**

4. The Mobility as an instrument for the construction of cross-border communities dimension

4.1. The academic environment in the states located to the east of the EU border has taken from their neighbours' methods, practices and knowledge that they have adapted to the socio-economic environment of the region, on the other hand, the same environment is caught up in research projects with specialists in border issues from established schools in Western Europe. As a result of this East-West symbiosis, the Academic Mobilities are a mechanism of osmotic transfer of rules, values and knowledge has been put in place, which produces important mutations in the direction of the integration of the academic environment from these East-European states into the European education and knowledge space in general and the one concerning the role of Cross-Border Cooperation, in particular.

Recommendation:

- a. The Erasmus + Programme (2021-2027) to establish among the priorities of the mobilities with partner countries that a minimum of 10% to take place between EUMS universities located on the Eastern border of the EU and the Eastern countries on the other side of the border.**
- b. The universities located in the Borders regions (NUTS II) of the Eastern EU Borders to receive from the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) and the national Agencies an additional 10% bonus for funding exchanges with universities from the close neighbourhood.**
- c. The European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) and the national Agencies to find solutions in order to fund programs also for organising joint events between the universities at the Eastern border of the EU.**

5. The Innovation dimension

5.1 We observe that universities in member countries in the central and lower part of the EU's Eastern Border (from Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania) and also from Eastern Partnership countries (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova) have more interest in international research collaboration **which bring immediate short-term benefits** - staff and student exchanges in large numbers, access to projects with more consistent international funding and the pressure universities face from their national governments to focus their research around activities that are perceived as internationally excellent, **which tends to be assessed in terms of publications in high-impact journals and ability to attract blue chip funding**. The university did not attach great importance to cross-border cooperation programs, considering that even at national level in some states (the case of Romania), the research carried out within European programs (e.g. Jean Monnet Programs), with cross-border issues, **has a lower relevance as a whole of the national research activity**.

Recommendation:

The European Commission to consider finding solutions through the 2021-2027 funding mechanisms in order to encourage research in the framework of the CBC programs at the external borders and this research to be evaluated as an activity at the highest level.

5.2. Starting from the content of the title of the paper, we can say that universities are able to play an important transformative role in building functional cross-border innovative communities, especially from the EU's external borders where there are multiple barriers, political, economic, linguistic or mental. Even if at the beginning, the actions are only for their own benefit in education and research, but in the long run they are able to create networks that fit into the dimension of the Third

mission³. As noted by other CBC authors, third mission activities are strongly influenced by the level of institutionalization and ways of implementing third mission activities in the respective countries.

Recommendation:

In regions that do not benefit from a high innovation environment, with very dynamic actors, universities can be agents of actions that lead to the creation of knowledge that will have an impact on the transformation of the region into a hub of innovation. Universities can provide three main categories of proximity, i.e. physical, functional (refers to differences between regions in innovation performance) and relational proximity (non-tangible dimensions discussed in the literature, for instance cognitive, organizational, social, institutional, cultural and technological proximity).

5.3. Following the analysis of the universities' participation in the ENPI cross-border cooperation programs at the Eastern border of the EU, it was concluded that, in comparison with the Northern segments of the border (e.g. the Karelia region) where the level of university participation is over 60% involvement in projects, in the border sector which was covered by the ENACTED project (the Central and Southern parts) the level of participation of universities was very low, between 10-15%, and when there were cases of university participation it was almost entirely related to interuniversity projects, without the involvement of other actors (public authorities, NGOs, Business Actors). At the same time, also among the other actors mentioned, there is no culture of involvement of the university environment in the projects developed by them. This situation is due to the lack of culture of cooperation between the academic and non-academic levels in the Border Regions.

³Marjolein C.J. Caniëls, Herman van den Bosch, "The role of Higher Education Institutions in building regional innovation systems", in *Papers in Regional Science*, 2011, 90 (2), pp.271-286

Recommendation:

The European Commission and the national management authorities to specifically foresee that the majority of ENPI cross-border projects have at least two universities involved from two different countries in all the projects developed by non-academic actors. At the same time any project developed by two universities to have a minimum of 1 non-academic actor involved in the project.

5.4. Indicators that show the involvement of universities in the process of integration of border regions have different forms of expression and they can express different **Modes of Differentiated Integration: multi-speed, multi-tier, multi-menu**⁴. For example, in education these are represented by designing joint programs of studies, joint degrees, joint infrastructures. On the one hand, the presence of one of these activities represents an indication that the integration activity exists and shows that universities are involved in the construction of a cross-border Regional Innovation System, namely a permit for the future functional cross-border community.

Recommendation:

It is also being played out at national policy level in many European states as well as at the sub-national level, where local and regional governments are looking to their universities to support them in their drive for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

⁴Franz Schiommelfennig, Thomas Winzen, *Ever Looser Union? Differentiated European Integration*, Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 17