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STUDIES**

***Governance and resilience of cross-border regions  
PHD THESIS ABSTRACT***

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**KEY WORDS:** governance, resilience, cross-border cooperation, cross-border region, cross-border governance network, Romania-Ukraine, cross-border projects, euroregions, European groupings of territorial cooperation, cross-border projects, European groupings of territorial cooperation, analysis of partnership networks

## Thesis abstract

With the proposed research theme we bring together three concepts whose exploration has experienced significant dynamics in recent decades: governance, resilience and cross-border cooperation. Cross-border areas are peripheral areas, but they have development potential that can be exploited if appropriate solutions are found.

The *aim* of this research is to identify flexible forms/structures of cross-border cooperation that can contribute to the development and increased resilience of border regions or as examples of good governance of cross-border areas.

The research is focused on a specific cross-border area - Romania-Ukraine, which includes 5 counties in Romania (Satu Mare, Maramureș, Suceava, Botoșani, Tulcea) and 4 regions in Ukraine (Transcarpathia/Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Chernivtsi, Odesa/Odessa).

Following some research questions, having as a starting point some hypotheses and the stated motivation we proposed the following research objectives:

- *Objective 1* - To identify models and theories that contribute to the understanding of the concepts of governance and resilience of cross-border regions and communities based on existing scientific literature and regulations;
- *Objective 2* - To identify elements of cross-border cooperation that contribute to good governance and resilience of a cross-border region;
- *Objective 3* - To identify elements contributing to cross-border cooperation on the Romania-Ukraine border and to the development of the resilience of this region;
- *Objective 4* - To identify how EU financial interventions through cross-border cooperation programs have built an institutional framework and network that contributes both to the governance of border regions and to their resilience;
- *Objective 5* - To identify directions of intervention for the Romania-Ukraine cross-border area in order to contribute in the long term to increased resilience and good cross-border governance of the commons.

*The working hypotheses* considered in the research approach are based on the previous study of various regulations on cross-border cooperation in Europe, as well as on previous personal research and institutional experience of working in cross-border cooperation programs on the Romanian-Ukrainian border. Thus, the first hypothesis is the existence of a European/national context enabling/encouraging cross-border cooperation in general in the EU, but also in the area under investigation. A second hypothesis refers to the specificity of the chosen cross-border area, which requires a fragmented approach due to the differences between different sub-regions (the proposed division is: Satu Mare - Maramureș - Zakarpattia - Ivano-Frankivsk, Suceava - Botoșani - Chernivtsi, Tulcea - Odessa). A third hypothesis is based on the fact that in this cross-border area, as a result of the implemented programs but also of other institutional connections outside them, there is a certain form of institutional network on which we can identify a minimal measurement model.

In order to achieve the proposed objectives, we propose the following *methodological benchmarks and tools*:

- Defining the conceptual framework on the basis of theoretical references from the specific scientific literature focusing on understanding and clarifying cross-border governance, resilience and cooperation, but also identifying other concepts, models or theories that can contribute to the overall study and picture of cross-border regions;
- Analysis of legislative and procedural regulations specific to cross-border cooperation in the study area, including regulations specific to cross-border cooperation programs;

- Analysis of case studies presented in the scientific literature and other available formal sources to identify various models and good practices as well as possible issues that may affect cross-border cooperation and its two perspectives, resilience and good governance;
- Analysis of data on JOP RO-UA 2014-2020 grant beneficiaries in order to understand the structure and localization of institutional networks, partnership areas and other cooperation formats describing the border area of interest.

Thus, from a methodological perspective, we started by establishing the conceptual framework of the triad of governance-resilience- cross-border cooperation, based on general works as well as those based on case studies. To these we have added additional concepts (polycentric systems, social capital), theories (center-periphery, graph theory) and network analysis models (social network analysis, graph theory).

Since the literature on cross-border cooperation frequently refers to examples of forms of cooperation which, by their structure, create the framework for governance, we continued our search in regulations and works that focus on these forms. In the process, we have also drawn out the actors that have been brought into the discussion, together with the roles and contributions highlighted by the authors consulted.

We then moved to the next level in search of the answers to the research questions and we put together elements to clarify the specific analysis framework in the Romania-Ukraine cross-border area - cooperation structures and entities involved, existing challenges in the area to which were added those generated by the two crises - the COVID-19 pandemic and the war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

Of the works collected over time for this research approach, we have used over 350 sources: 43 books, 250 articles, 72 documents, reports, theses and normative acts and 16 web sources, of which 10 are our own previous works. At this stage, for structuring the ideas and overview for those concepts for which we identified many titles in the literature accessible in the databases, or accessing relevant sources from the last year for other concepts for efficiency, we used the SciSpace platform, which has artificial intelligence modules, the results provided were critically analyzed, processed and significantly revised

In addition, data on the projects funded by JOP RO-UA 2014-2020, implemented in the period 2020-2023, were added as a basis for analysis. The primary data source was the keep.eu platform. In structuring the database taken from the specific platform, we benefited from the support of the Regional Office for Cross-border Cooperation Suceava in order to understand the specific aspects of these data.

The data actually used in the analysis were: project scope, leader and partners, their location. The proposed model comprised six gradually built stages, each new stage being dictated by the previous stage. In the *first stage*, we distributed the projects according to several criteria: location, quality of leader or partner, scope, number of partners involved, type of entities involved, which allowed us to identify differences between counties/regions. *The second stage* involved the creation of a matrix that would include the connections between the different types of partners in these projects. This is structured by county/region, entity type and counts the individual connections between the 141 distinct entities involved in the 66 projects, as leader, partner or both. In addition to the tabular or graphical structures that we have prepared we have prepared maps for ease of certain interpretations. In order to measure the density of connections realized in projects and for comparability between counties/regions in terms of their generation potential, in the *third stage* we proposed a *partner connections index (CI)*, calculated as the *ratio between the number of connections and the number of entities involved in these connections*. It was calculated in several variants to identify additional data on the behavior of entities in a given county/region. In the *fourth step* we analyzed the connection trends between entity types to identify the main connection trends, i.e. the predominance of connections between certain types of entities, but also intra-

sector and inter-sector connections to create governance patterns (the sectors considered were - public sector, civil society sector, business sector and education sector). Following the fact that we found that there was a variety of connection typologies we considered it necessary to move to a new stage of analysis, the *fifth stage*, in which we calculated the number of connections of each of the 141 entities and identified, following a comparative approach, the specificity of each county/region, proposing a classification of the entities according to the number of connections. Then, out of the need to have a visual representation of the connections and to see how they constitute a possible network, we moved on to the *sixth stage of analysis*, inspired by graph theory, initially frequently used in mathematics and cybernetics and later extended to a variety of technical and social science fields through social network analysis. In this stage we obtained 21 graphs of different structures that provide clues related to the diversity and complexity of the entities and the connections between them in the cross-border area of analysis, in the framework provided by JOP RO-UA 2014-2020. We chose this customized approach to the data chosen for study for reasons of streamlining the analysis but also to capture facets that may be missed when using tools built for a general framework of use. For the data analysis steps in Chapter 4 and for their illustration, we used different tools and specialized support given the multidisciplinary nature of the topic.

The structure of the paper is given by the search for answers to the research questions, the pursuit of the objectives and the methodological route.

In the first chapter, "*Conceptual framework of the paper*", we present general and specific aspects related to the three main working concepts formulated in the title: governance, resilience and cross-border cooperation. In the case of the first concept, governance, in addition to the general aspects, the nuances of the derived concepts - governance of regions and good governance - are explored. The second concept, resilience, is presented in its specific form - community resilience - in terms of its dimensions, ways of measuring it and directions of intervention to increase resilience. In the case of the third concept, cross-border cooperation, in addition to its general aspects and dimensions, we also look at the role of projects in stimulating and strengthening cooperation and we look at different examples of cross-border cooperation in the European area, both between EU Member States and between them and neighboring countries, but also in other areas, particularly North America. We also draw attention from the literature to works that bring together at least two of the three concepts, as a completion of the sides of a conceptual triangle. This conceptual triad is joined by other concepts, adjacent theories, and methods - polycentricity, social capital, graph theory, center-periphery theory, social network analysis.

In the second chapter, "*European institutional forms and structures for cross-border cooperation*", we go through the three main forms of cooperation - Euroregions, EGTCs and EU programs - in order to bridge the concepts presented in the first chapter, which had cross-border cooperation at its center, and to create the first elements of context in which we will place our case study, without going into details and analysis that are suitable for further research. We also inventory the institutionally relevant entities for the governance of a cross-border region in general, in a multidimensional structure with a focus on specific types of entities.

The third chapter, "*Framework of analysis of the governance network of the Romania-Ukraine cross-border area*", completes the context of the case study - the governance network of the Romania-Ukraine cross-border area and includes: general aspects related to the area, actors and cooperation structures, areas of cooperation and aspects related to the two crises that have marked the entities in the study area - the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021) and the war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine (from 2022).

In the last chapter, the fourth, "*Model of governance network analysis in the Romania-Ukraine cross-border area*", we analyze the minimum level of development of the network of actors in the Romania-Ukraine cross-border region and the network working patterns and propose, based on the analysis, a model that can be used as a basis for the analysis of cross-border areas from the governance perspective. Thus, we start from the cooperation structures promoted and strengthened by specific cross-border programmes and projects, namely the JOP RO-UA 2014-2020, to which other cross-border programs or other contexts encouraging ad hoc or structured cross-border partnerships of smaller size for the same cross-border area can be added later as research directions. The basic analysis model applied in the cross-border context was initially inspired by graph theory and then by social network analysis, a method that has been built upon.

Each chapter has a concluding section at the end, and the paper concludes with the final conclusions, recommendations and research directions section, which includes references to the contributions of the research itself, as well as the limitations of the research.

Following the research we will structure the conclusions and results according to the objectives pursued.

*The first objective* set was to identify models and theories that contribute to the understanding of the concepts of governance and resilience of cross-border regions and communities based on existing scientific literature and regulations.

From the analysis of the accessed sources we identified increased interest in researching each of the three concepts of interest, governance - resilience - cooperation in a cross-border area/region, but especially approaches that bring together at least two of the three concepts: governance-resilience, cross-border cooperation-governance and cross-border cooperation-resilience. We have thus deduced that cross-border areas are spaces in which the search for good governance is necessary and complex, due to the apparent specificity of these spaces of manifesting differences at the same time as community needs to manage common resources or challenges. Where public entities are constrained by the rigidity of regulations to intervene quickly, those in the civil or education sectors can act more quickly due to their flexibility and availability of human resources. Theories of governance have not yet been fully harmonized, due to the dynamics of the current context marked by technical developments and the re-emergence of territorial conflicts, which require rethinking. Moreover, in a cross-border context, the variety of cases reveals different nuances. However, there are two major unanimous conclusions - the imperative to build cross-border cooperation involving public/governmental actors and the imperative to involve civil society in public decision-making and cross-border cooperation.

Then, from the perspective of resilience as a desideratum of cross-border areas marked by peripherality and therefore vulnerable, we understood the importance of building governance networks on the two main pillars - the public and civil society sectors, and the importance of building social capital, both at individual and especially at organizational level.

All three concepts drew on the perspectives of polycentricity, graph theory and social network analysis that we subsequently glimpsed in interpreting the data from the case study and provided us with the tools needed to build our own model of analysis.

The pursuit of the *second objective*, in which we set out to identify the elements of cross-border cooperation forms that contribute to good governance and resilience of a cross-border region, brought into focus the three main forms that facilitate cross-border cooperation - Euroregions, EGTCs and cross-border cooperation programs. The transition from the framework provided by Euroregions, which brought together public administrations in the border area, to the more comprehensive framework provided by



EGTCs, which also include actors from the civil or business representation sphere, has followed the evolution of the governance of regions, sometimes as a result of constraining or stimulating regulatory contexts, sometimes under the pressure of events or factors that have forced the action of several actors, or even as a result of pragmatism and understanding of the benefits of partnership and complementarity in the management of shared resources. By their specificity, cross-border programs come with a complementary institutional framework of coordination in the network of cross-border governance, in our course of understanding we are oriented towards those in the Eastern part of the EU.

The multiple examples analyzed have reinforced the conclusion that the cross-border institutional system, in the all-encompassing sense of public, civil society and business entities, is the basic skeleton without which a coherent and tailored to real needs cross-border resilience building or development strategy capable of crisis management cannot be considered.

The *third objective*, to identify the elements that contribute to cross-border cooperation on the Romania-Ukraine border and to the development of resilience of this region, started from the identification of the main actors in the area and the context that could have brought to the surface evidence of governance or resilience. Although the cross-border area presents a deficient landscape in many areas: transport networks, exploitation of common resources (watershed and natural parks), environment and biodiversity, education or governance, and in terms of border crossing points, the context of the war has required the urgent materialization of a postponed decision to open new ones in relation to the existing ones, we have identified elements on which a governance network can be built.

The main types of actors, public administrations and non-governmental organizations are regulated in the legislation of both states. The actors in the public sphere, public administrations and public institutions, have undergone transformations and updates, in Romania as a result of the process of alignment with the *acquis communautaire* and then as an EU Member State, and in Ukraine as a result of the choice of the European path and administrative reform, assimilating to varying degrees, in the regulatory framework or in fact, the principle of subsidiarity and principles of good governance. Euroregions have created another framework for cross-border cooperation by promoting economic, social and cultural links and have strengthened partnerships between administrative entities. Cross-border cooperation projects brought about the first issue-based partnerships and later networks, also involving non-governmental organizations. An important role was also played by minorities, Romanian communities and their organizations in Ukraine, as well as Ukrainian communities and their organizations in Romania, getting involved in cross-border projects and then playing an important role in the refugee crisis. Last but not least, universities as relevant multivalent actors firstly in the community and then at cross-border level, throughout the three programs implemented, have become increasingly involved, growing in the number of projects in which they have played a leading or partner role, both in Romania and Ukraine, in a variety of fields - educational, economic, environmental, energy, heritage and culture, research, medicine.

The specific structures of the CBC programs have greatly contributed to the proper management of projects in the two crises by providing a framework and solutions for continued partnership and cross-border projects. Also, the areas for which there has been funding have attracted a very high level of interest, some of them having a strategic role - border management and related infrastructure, institutional capacity building, modernization of police, border police and customs facilities.

The context of the pandemic and the war has led to improved communication and cooperation inter-personal, inter-institutional and between entities from different sectors (government, civil society and business). The pandemic brought to the forefront the creative

potential to reconfigure partnership activities, and the war brought civil society, both NGOs and citizens, to the forefront, intervening alongside the governmental public sector.

The analysis of the partnership relationships in the projects funded by the EaP RO-UA 2014-2020 contributed to the *fourth objective* of identifying how EU financial interventions through the CBC programs have built an institutional framework and network that contributes both to the governance of border regions and to their increased resilience. As the analysis has led to a multitude of interpretations presented in the conclusions of Chapter 4, in the following we will highlight some synthesized issues in connection with the findings subsequent to the previous objectives.

There is a significant number of entities (141) that had the CBC exercise in the period 2020-2023, going through two major crises - the COVID-19 pandemic, which by closing the borders essentially affected the cooperation, and the beginning of the war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, which put pressure on the Romanian-Ukrainian border, affected the human and material resources of the projects and shook the whole institutional system of the program. The completion of the 66 projects shows significant potential in terms of creativity and the ability to find solutions in times of crisis. Also, the mobilization of different actors in the early moments of the war refugee crisis tested and validated the capacity of cross-border networks, including the forms identified by us.

The public sector dominates the governance network in the cross-border area - which is intuitive, but also desirable due to their institutional stability and their capacity to mobilize institutional and financial resources or their essential role in public decision-making, but there is a significant inclusion of other actors: from civil society - with the potential to intensify cooperation and attract new partners. However we noted a weak presence in the projects of representative business sector entities (here we recommend their inclusion in various forms of partnership). Universities are present but rather in partnerships with each other or with civil society, thus there is significant potential for their inclusion in cross-border partnerships with local and regional governments or business sector representative entities. Although in this paper we have not focused on data on partnerships between entities other than those through projects funded by JOP RO-UA 2014-2020, we believe that further research on more types of databases may reveal connections of the type mentioned. There is a Euro-region involved in the governance network generated by the projects, although located outside the eligible area of the program, and it is capitalizing on the potential given by the existing social capital consolidated in previous programming exercises or under the Euro-region umbrella.

From the perspective of social capital and its contribution to community resilience we believe that there are two directions in which the analyzed entities are involved. The first direction is given by the various ways in which the partnerships as revealed in the analysis of the graphs, covering each of the three sub-areas but also creating connections between them. The second is given by the exercise of 4 years of project cooperation which has strengthened trust between partners - an essential dimension of social capital.

The diversity of forms of cooperation of the actors involved in the projects shows on the one hand a potential from the isolated dyad or triad type, and on the other hand multi-partner cooperation creating different small worlds that can be easily connected to each other through other local networks that we have not analyzed in this paper.

The different perspectives of analyzing the data on the projects and entities involved in JOP RO-UA 2014-2020 brought to light a variety of interpretations, sometimes some of them consolidating from several steps of analysis, sometimes completing after a refinement of the data or the introduction of an additional step or stage. The realized calculations, maps and plot representations showed a differentiation between counties, regions and the three

defined sub-areas - SZ1 (Satu Mare-Maramureş-Ivano Frankivsk-Ivano Frankivsk-Zakarpatia), SZ2 (Suceava-Botoşani-Cernăuţi) and SZ3 (Tulcea-Odesa).

Although the limits of our analysis indicate only part of the landscape of governance and resilience of the Romania-Ukraine cross-border area, we believe that the mobilization of the network as reflected in the media and in the reports of various national and international actors has also benefited from the preparation given by the partnership exercise in cross-border projects.

The *fifth objective*, the identification of directions for intervention in the Romania-Ukraine cross-border area in order to contribute in the long term to increasing resilience and good governance of the cross-border commons, was based on the linking of the four chapters and led to a series of recommendations that we formulate below, some related to better connecting the existing network or extending it, others related to increasing the capacity of the entities involved and the network in general.

*The first category of recommendations* concerns the creation of new connections between entities with experience in cross-border cooperation projects. Here we have several lines of action:

- Increasing the number of partners in projects which will lead to a larger number of entities such as medium dynamizers and partner hubs;
- Extending partnerships beyond the immediate neighborhood, if a connected cross-border region and the development of a governance network are pursued. In the case of connections between counties and regions that are in close proximity to neighboring ones and where the effort to reach out directly is not significantly high we believe there is potential to intensify partnerships through new initiatives in new programs or by starting new partnerships;
- in the same direction, increasing the number of partnerships between entities in different sub-areas. In situations of entities located at very large distances, including some located mid-distance may provide a more accessible framework;
- Comparing the number of intra-sectoral connections with the number of intersectoral ones, we observe that the former are twice as many as the latter, which from a governance and intersectoral cooperation point of view may represent a source of development of cooperation between entities from different sectors. Here we have identified the most possible directions of specific development between counties and/or regions. For example, connections with the private business sector, represented by entities such as chambers of commerce, small and medium-sized enterprise employers' associations, business advisory centers, etc., can be significantly generated by associating and developing cooperation projects with both the public and non-governmental sectors. The situation is similar in the case of linking the business and education sectors, where the potential for developing cooperation is at hand by associating the two sectors on common interests generated by at least two directions. The first direction may include at least the adequacy of the preparation of human resources for a competitive labor market - at pre-university level through vocational education and at university level through specializations connected at a practical level with the local sector and with the current developments dictated by the speed of technological change. The second direction is research-driven and can contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of the private sector not only from the perspective of the profit targeted by the private sector but also from the perspective of sustainable connection to the social and resource environment. A greater diversity of connecting experiences contributes to a wider and strengthened network both locally and across borders.

*A second category of recommendations* concerns attracting new entities to cross-border cooperation projects:

- Involvement in particular of entities from the category of business associations in partnerships on a variety of projects - educational or connecting labor market demand with

the educational offer and the current dynamic context, but also of several educational entities;

- Identification of "community leaders/facilitators" who have access to and mobilize people and resources. In the Romania-Ukraine cross-border area there is also an opportunity in the future to secure funding for cross-border projects to address specific common needs. Partnership between entities on both sides of the border is obligatory in these projects and, although there are traditional partnerships that have been tested and strengthened by working together, there are also new entities looking for partners or entities that have been involved in partnerships that are not functioning well.

*The third category of recommendations* relates to capacity building of actors in the cross-border area but also of the existing network/networks:

- Strengthening existing networks in the region or developing others at an early or non-existent stage is based on building partnerships. An entrepreneurial approach can evolve in at least two directions: firstly, by offering facilitation and advisory services from those who have been successful in this role, and secondly, by offering training to those who wish to take on this role or to those who are part of teams interested in developing long-term partnerships.

- to increase resilience and strengthen the network, institutional structures may consider intensifying specific initiatives in the fourth sector, governance, by accessing other programs or funding sources, with a focus on developing research cooperation, developing cultural and educational exchanges that can indirectly facilitate the strengthening of cross-border partnership at the area level and facilitate knowledge transfer between partners on either side of the border. The development or strengthening of the institutional network must be based on relations between public authorities at all levels, national, regional and local, taking into account their degree of stability over time, with the involvement of civil society and non-governmental organizations as legally constituted entities representing citizens and promoting their interests and needs in various fields:

- development of new forms and innovative instruments of cooperation in the cross-border area aimed at increasing the competitiveness of the Romanian-Ukrainian border regions, such as cross-border clusters, industrial zones and European groupings of territorial cooperation, as key elements for regional development;

- Systematic participation of sub-national actors at all stages of policy making, increasing democratic accountability and transparency;

- Strengthening administrative capacity, digital transformation of public services and training on effective project management, plus capitalizing on the results of previous projects through capitalization and knowledge transfer networking.

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