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THE ANALYSIS OF THE POLISH-GERMAN COOPERATION WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF INTERREG COOPERATION PROGRAMS IN THE FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVES 2014–2020 AND 2021–2027: CASE STUDIES

| Abstract

- *Goal* – The article aims to provide a comprehensive comparative assessment of the Polish-German cross-border cooperation within the Interreg framework across the 2014–2020 and 2021–2027 financial perspectives. Its purpose is to identify thematic continuities and shifts, to evaluate the strategic role of the selected flagship projects, and to analyse how evolving EU priorities – particularly innovation, climate transition, digitalisation, and trust-building – shape cooperation along the Polish-German border.
- *Research methodology* – The study applies a qualitative research design based on the in-depth content analysis of programme documents, official data published by Interreg managing authorities, project descriptions, evaluation reports, and complementary academic sources. A comparative analytical framework is used to examine the three Interreg A programmes (Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland, Brandenburg–Poland, Poland–Saxony) across two programming periods. Three model projects from 2014–2020 were selected using criteria related to representativeness, data availability, and thematic diversity.
- *Score/results* – The analysis demonstrates strong continuity in the areas of natural and cultural heritage, education, tourism, and institutional cooperation, which remain the backbone of the Polish-German cross-border partnerships. At the same time, the 2021–2027 programmes show a qualitative shift toward innovation, climate adaptation, biodiversity protection, and enhanced social trust. Case studies confirm tangible cross-border impacts: improved mobility infrastructure, strengthened management of joint natural heritage, and increased interoperability of emergency services. Evaluation reports referenced in the study indicate measurable outcomes,

including increases in tourist flows (up to 15%), strengthened community contacts (up to 25%), improved crisis-response capacity (approx. 30%), and persistent administrative and linguistic barriers affecting long-term sustainability.

- *Originality/value* – The article offers one of the few systematic comparisons of all the Polish-German Interreg A programmes across two programming periods, enriched with empirical evidence from evaluation studies and project-level analysis. It highlights the maturation of cross-border cooperation as a policy laboratory for the EU, showing how investment in infrastructure, environment, culture, and crisis management generates broader social and institutional cohesion. The findings provide practical value for policymakers, programme managers, and regional stakeholders, offering guidance for designing next-generation cross-border initiatives aligned with EU priorities such as the European Green Deal and digital transformation.

| **Keywords:** Polish German cooperation, Interreg, cross-border cooperation, territorial cohesion, regional development, EU cohesion policy, financial perspective, innovation, climate change, trust-building

1. Introduction

The Polish German cooperation, shaped by complex historical processes and geographical proximity, constitutes a vital element of the political, economic, and social landscape of Central Europe. Following Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, these relations gained a new dimension, with border regions becoming a testing ground for initiatives aimed at overcoming barriers and building a shared future – often on the foundation of the challenging past. In this context, the European Territorial Cooperation programmes, known as Interreg, play a pivotal role by providing financial and organisational frameworks for cross-border projects. These initiatives go beyond mere financial transfers; their fundamental importance lies in fostering dialogue, establishing lasting partnerships, and driving social and institutional changes in border regions. The programmes compel partners on both sides of the border to jointly identify challenges, to seek solutions, and to implement specific initiatives, naturally leading to deeper integration and mutual understanding [Interreg Poland–Saxony Cooperation Programme 2014–2020, 2015].

As one of the objectives of the EU's cohesion policy, Interreg programmes are specifically designed to support border regions in addressing the shared developmental challenges and leveraging their unique potential. Along the Polish German border, which spans three distinct programme areas – Mecklenburg–Vorpommern /

Brandenburg–Poland, Brandenburg–Poland, and Poland–Saxony – these initiatives focus on a wide range of activities, from preserving shared cultural and natural heritage to developing infrastructure and mobility, and supporting education, innovation, and institutional cooperation [Interreg Poland–Saxony Cooperation Programme 2014–2020, 2015].

This article aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the Polish German cooperation within the framework of Interreg programmes, covering two financial perspectives: the completed 2014–2020 period and the ongoing 2021–2027 period. The analysis will focus on the characteristics of individual operational programmes, their objectives, priorities, and budgets. Particular attention will be given to three selected projects implemented in the 2014–2020 period, which can serve as models of effective and valuable cross-border cooperation. The territorial scope of the analysis encompasses the Polish German border area covered by the programmes, while the thematic scope focuses on activities co-financed by Interreg funds. The structure of the article includes an introduction, a presentation of the programme frameworks for both financial perspectives, a description of the research methodology, a detailed analysis of the selected projects, a comparative analysis with conclusions, and a conclusion summarising key findings and outlining prospects for further cooperation.

2. Research methodology

The preparation of this article relied on a qualitative analysis of the available source materials. The method of content analysis was applied to programme documents for the 2014–2020 and 2021–2027 financial perspectives, project descriptions, information published on the official websites of Interreg programmes, and other related publications and communications [Interreg Poland–Saxony Cooperation Programme 2014–2020, 2015]. The objective of this study was to gain a thorough understanding of the goals, implementation mechanisms, thematic priorities, and the expected and achieved outcomes of the Polish German cross-border cooperation.

A comparative analysis of the individual programmes and selected projects was also conducted to identify patterns, specific characteristics, and the evolution of approaches to cooperation across both financial perspectives.

The selection of three exemplary projects from the 2014–2020 perspective was guided by several criteria. Firstly, the aim was to present one project from

each of the three main Polish German cross-border cooperation programmes under Interreg V A: Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland, Brandenburg–Poland, and Poland–Saxony. Secondly, the availability of detailed information within the research materials accessible to the author was crucial to enable an in-depth analysis. Thirdly, the selected projects had to demonstrate effective, model cross-border cooperation, involving partners from Poland and Germany and delivering tangible benefits to the border region. Additionally, efforts were made to ensure thematic diversity among the chosen examples to illustrate the wide range of activities within Interreg.

3. Program framework for the Polish German cooperation under Interreg

3.1. General overview of the Interreg initiative

The Interreg initiative, a cornerstone of the European Territorial Cooperation, aims to promote harmonious economic, social, and territorial development across the European Union by supporting cooperation between regions and member states. Interreg programmes focus on addressing shared challenges and harnessing common potential in border regions (Interreg A), transnational areas (Interreg B), and interregional contexts (Interreg C). A fundamental principle underlying all the Interreg projects is the principle of partnership, which requires the active involvement of entities from at least two participating countries in the preparation and implementation of joint initiatives. Along the Polish German border, this cooperation is implemented through three distinct Interreg A programmes.

3.2. Financial perspective 2014–2020

During the 2014–2020 programming period, the Polish German cross-border cooperation was supported by three Interreg V A programmes, each dedicated to a specific section of the border and addressing local needs and challenges.

The Interreg V a Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland 2014–2020 Cooperation Program covered the northern section of the Polish German border. On the Polish side, the programme supported the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, while on the German side, it included the districts of Vorpommern–Greifswald, Vorpommern–Rügen, and Mecklenburgische Seenplatte in Mecklenburg–Vorpommern, as well as the districts of Uckermark, Barnim, and

Märkisch–Oderland in Brandenburg. The main priority axes focused on shared cultural and natural heritage, cross-border transport infrastructure and mobility, cross-border education, and deepening cooperation [Interreg V A Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland Cooperation Programme 2014–2020, 2015].

The specific priorities of the programme included:

- Preservation and development of the shared natural and cultural heritage, including biodiversity conservation and the promotion of natural resources (e.g., through activities in Natura 2000 areas).
- The improvement of cross-border transport infrastructure and mobility, including the development of communication links and sustainable transport.
- Strengthening cross-border education, including the development of joint educational programmes and language learning of the neighboring country.
- Enhancing institutional cooperation, including support for partnerships between public administrations and citizens to build institutional capacity and foster trust [Interreg V A Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland Cooperation Programme 2014–2020, 2015].

The Managing Authority for the programme was the Ministry of Economy, Construction, and Tourism of Mecklenburg–Vorpommern (later renamed the Ministry of Economy, Infrastructure, Tourism, and Labor of Mecklenburg–Vorpommern). The national coordinators were the Polish Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy and the Ministry of Finance and European Affairs of the State of Brandenburg. The programme concluded in 2020, though the eligibility period for expenditures extended until the end of 2023. Its experiences and outcomes provide valuable input for shaping the current financial perspective [Interreg V A Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland Cooperation Programme 2014–2020, 2015].

The Interreg V A Brandenburg–Poland 2014–2020 Cooperation Program aimed to deepen the integration of residents and to enhance the attractiveness and accessibility of the border region [Interreg V A Brandenburg–Poland Cooperation Programme 2014–2020, 2015]. The area of support on the Polish side included the Lubuskie Voivodeship (Gorzów and Zielona Góra subregions), while on the German side, it covered three districts in the State of Brandenburg: Märkisch–Oderland, Oder–Spree, and Spree–Neiße, as well as the independent cities of Frankfurt (Oder) and Cottbus [Interreg V A Brandenburg–Poland Cooperation Programme 2014–2020, 2015]. The programme’s budget amounted to €100 million from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The programme’s priorities included:

- Joint preservation and utilisation of natural and cultural heritage (€32 million).
- Connection to Trans-European Networks and sustainable transport (€19 million).
- Strengthening cross-border capacities and competencies (€10 million).
- Integration of residents and administrative cooperation (€33 million, including funds for the Small Projects Fund) [Interreg V A Brandenburg–Poland Cooperation Programme 2014–2020, 2015].

The program was intended to serve as a foundation for a shared Polish German border region [Interreg V A Brandenburg–Poland Cooperation Programme 2014–2020, 2015].

The Managing Authority was the Ministry of Finance and European Affairs of the State of Brandenburg, with the Polish Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy and the Ministry of Economy, Labor, and Health of Mecklenburg–Vorpommern (later renamed the Ministry of Economy, Infrastructure, Tourism, and Labor of Mecklenburg–Vorpommern) acting as national coordinators.

The Interreg Poland–Saxony 2014–2020 Cooperation Program aimed to deepen cooperation to overcome developmental barriers in the Polish-Saxon border region [Interreg V A Poland–Saxony Cooperation Programme 2014–2020, 2015]. On the Polish side, the area of support included nine districts in the Jelenia Góra subregion of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship (Bolesławiec, Jawor, Jelenia Góra, Kamienna Góra, Lubań, Lwówek Śląski, Zgorzelec, Złotoryja, and the city of Jelenia Góra) as well as the Żary district in the Lubuskie Voivodeship. On the German side, the programme covered two districts in Saxony: Görlitz and Bautzen [Interreg V A Poland–Saxony Cooperation Programme 2014–2020, 2015]. The programme’s budget was €70 million from the ERDF [Interreg V A Poland–Saxony Cooperation Programme 2014–2020, 2015]. The programme’s priority axes were:

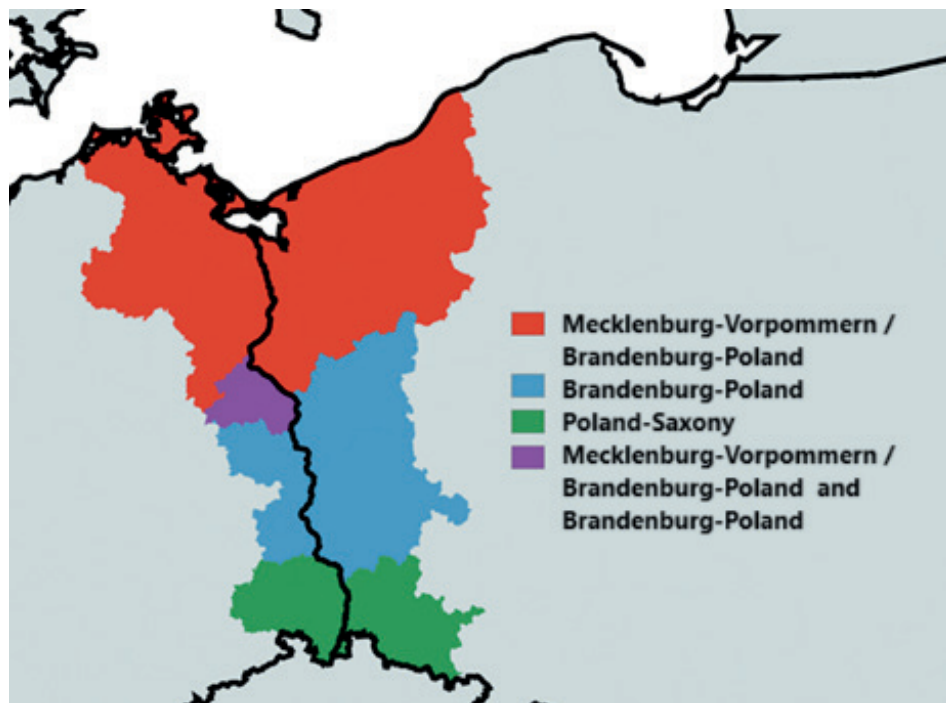
- Shared natural and cultural heritage (€21.7 million).
- Regional mobility (€13.6 million).
- Cross-border education (€10.14 million).
- Partnership cooperation and institutional capacity (€20.36 million).

A Small Projects Fund also operated within the programme. The Managing Authority was the Polish Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy, with the Saxon Ministry of Regional Development serving as the national coordinator on the German side.

Further in the article, a map is presented, illustrating the area of support along the Polish German border, divided into the analysed programmes. It shows

the geographical division of the Polish German border region into three main Interreg programme areas. Each area is marked with a different color to facilitate identification of the scope of individual programmes:

Map 1. Map of the support area along the Polish-German border divided by Programmes



Source: the author's elaboration based on documents of the analysed programmes.

The support area of the Interreg Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland Program (marked in red) covers the northern section of the border. On the Polish side, this includes the West Pomeranian Voivodeship. On the German side, the map highlights the districts of Vorpommern–Greifswald, Vorpommern–Rügen, and Mecklenburgische Seenplatte in Mecklenburg–Vorpommern, as well as the districts of Uckermark, Barnim, and Märkisch–Oderland in Brandenburg.

The support area of the Interreg Brandenburg–Poland Program (marked in blue) covers the central section of the border. On the Polish side, this includes the Lubuskie Voivodeship (Gorzów and Zielona Góra subregions). On the German side, the map shows the districts of Märkisch–Oderland, Oder–Spree, and Spree–Neiße, as well as the independent cities of Frankfurt (Oder) and Cottbus in Brandenburg.

Purple indicates the overlapping area of the Interreg Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland and Interreg Brandenburg–Poland programmes. This is the Märkisch–Oderland district in Brandenburg, which is covered by both programmes.

The support area of the Interreg Poland–Saxony Program (marked in green) is in the southern section of the border. On the Polish side, it includes nine districts in the Jelenia Góra subregion of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship (Bolesławiec, Jawor, Kamienna Góra, Lubań, Lwówek Śląski, Zgorzelec, Złotoryja, the city of Jelenia Góra, and in the new perspective, the Karkonosze district instead of Jelenia Góra) as well as the Żary district in the Lubuskie Voivodeship. On the German side, the map shows the districts of Görlitz and Bautzen in Saxony.

3.3. Financial perspective 2021–2027

The new financial perspective for 2021–2027 continues the Polish German cooperation under the Interreg VI A programmes, while introducing new emphases and adjusting priorities to address current challenges.

The Interreg VI A Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland 2021–2027 Program was approved by the European Commission on September 21, 2022. It continues the efforts of previous editions [Interreg VI A Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland Programme 2021–2027, 2022]. The area of support remains the same as in the 2014–2020 period: the West Pomeranian Voivodeship on the Polish side, and the districts of Vorpommern–Greifswald, Vorpommern–Rügen, and Mecklenburgische Seenplatte in Mecklenburg–Vorpommern, as well as the districts of Uckermark, Barnim, and Märkisch–Oderland in Brandenburg on the German side [Interreg VI A Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland Programme 2021–2027, 2022]. The programme’s budget is €124.5 million from the ERDF. The programme supports innovation, mitigating the effects of climate change and nature conservation, language learning, culture and tourism, and cross-border development. The programme’s priorities are:

- Activating cross-border innovation potential.
- Jointly addressing the impacts of climate change and protecting nature.
- Enabling better participation in cross-border daily life through language, culture, and tourism.
- Strengthening trust and jointly shaping cross-border development [Interreg VI A Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland Programme 2021–2027, 2022].

The Managing Authority is the Ministry of Economy, Infrastructure, Tourism, and Labor of Mecklenburg–Vorpommern, with the Polish Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy and the Ministry of Finance and European Affairs of the State of Brandenburg serving as national coordinators [Interreg VI A Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland Programme 2021–2027, 2022].

The Interreg VI A Brandenburg–Poland 2021–2027 Cooperation Programme, with a budget of €88.3 million from the ERDF [Interreg VI A Brandenburg–Poland Cooperation Programme 2021–2027, 2022], continues support for projects in the Brandenburg–Poland border region. The area of support includes the Lubuskie Voivodeship on the Polish side and the districts of Märkisch–Oderland, Oder–Spree, and Spree–Neiße, as well as the cities of Frankfurt (Oder) and Cottbus on the German side. The thematic priorities are:

- Innovative border region – knowledge and technology transfer.
- Resilient and sustainable border region – climate change and biodiversity.
- Attractive border region – education, culture, and tourism.
- Border region of dialogue – cooperation between residents and institutions [Interreg VI A Brandenburg–Poland Cooperation Programme 2021–2027, 2022].

The Managing Authority is the Ministry of Finance and European Affairs of the State of Brandenburg, with the Polish Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy as the national institution in Poland [Interreg VI A Brandenburg–Poland Cooperation Programme 2021–2027, 2022]. The Ministry of Economy, Infrastructure, Tourism, and Labor of Mecklenburg–Vorpommern continues to act as the national coordinator on the German side.

The Interreg Poland–Saxony 2021–2027 Cooperation Program, with a budget of €60.275 million from the ERDF, aims to further deepen cooperation to overcome developmental barriers [Interreg VI A Poland–Saxony Cooperation Programme 2021–2027, 2022]. On the Polish side, the area of support includes nine districts in the Jelenia Góra subregion of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship (Bolesławiec, Jawor, Kamienna Góra, Karkonosze, Lubań, Lwówek Śląski, Zgorzelec, Złotoryja, and the city of Jelenia Góra – notably, the Jelenia Góra district was replaced by the Karkonosze district compared to the 2014–2020 period) as well as the Żary district in the Lubuskie Voivodeship. On the German side, the districts of Görlitz and Bautzen remain covered. The programme’s priorities are:

- Environmentally friendly border region – climate change mitigation and adaptation.

- Border region open to education, culture, and tourism.
- Border region open to dialogue between residents and institutions (including the Small Projects Fund) [Interreg VI A Poland–Saxony Cooperation Programme 2021–2027, 2022].

The Managing Authority is the Polish Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy with the Saxon Ministry of Regional Development as the national institution in Germany [Interreg VI A Poland–Saxony Cooperation Programme 2021–2027, 2022]. The Saxon Ministry of Regional Development continues as the national coordinator on the German side, unchanged from the previous perspective.

4. Key changes and areas of continuity between financial perspectives

The analysis of the Interreg programmes along the Polish German border across the 2014–2020 and 2021–2027 perspectives reveals both continuity in certain support directions and an evolution of priorities, reflecting changing conditions and a growing awareness of global challenges. This adaptability of the programmes demonstrates the maturation of cross-border cooperation, which is becoming increasingly responsive to the needs of regions and the current priorities of the European Union.

Comparing the priorities of the two financial perspectives [Interreg V A Poland–Saxony Cooperation Programme 2014–2020, 2015], there is a noticeable strengthening of themes related to innovation and climate change mitigation, as well as environmental protection [Interreg VI A Brandenburg–Poland Cooperation Programme 2021–2027, 2022]. This is a direct response to strategic EU policy directions, such as the European Green Deal and digital transformation, which are also reflected in the recent programmes, for instance, through support for digital technologies in education [Interreg VI A Poland–Saxony Cooperation Programme 2021–2027, 2022].

At the same time, the 2021–2027 programmes continue to support areas that have long been the foundation of cross-border cooperation, such as cultural and tourism development, education, and institutional cooperation, as well as the integration of residents [Interreg VI A Brandenburg–Poland Cooperation Programme 2021–2027, 2022]. The continuation of these directions underscores their enduring importance for fostering cohesion and overcoming barriers in the border region.

Notably, the new perspective places greater emphasis on priorities focused on building trust and dialogue, such as “Strengthening trust, jointly shaping cross-border development” in the Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland Programme [Interreg VI A Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg – Poland Programme 2021–2027, 2022] and “Border region of dialogue – cooperation between residents and institutions” in the Brandenburg–Poland Programme [Interreg VI A Brandenburg–Poland Cooperation Programme 2021–2027, 2022]. This suggests that, despite years of experience of cooperation, there remains a need to invest in social capital, overcome mental and administrative barriers, and build deeper, partnership-based relationships. This is a hallmark of mature cooperation that does not shy away from addressing challenging issues and strives for continuous improvement of cooperative mechanisms.

The analysis of the Interreg programmes along the Polish German border in the 2014–2020 and 2021–2027 financial perspectives reveals both continuity in key support areas and an evolution of priorities, reflecting changing conditions and a growing awareness of global challenges. This adaptability of the programmes demonstrates the maturation of cross-border cooperation, which is becoming increasingly responsive to the needs of regions and the current priorities of the European Union.

In both financial perspectives, the Interreg programmes along the Polish German border consistently support areas that have long been the foundation of cross-border cooperation. The key areas of continuity include:

- **Shared Natural and Cultural Heritage / Culture and Tourism:** Across both the 2014–2020 and 2021–2027 perspectives, the preservation, conservation, and utilisation of the shared natural and cultural heritage remain a significant priority. Projects in this area aim not only to protect unique resources but also to develop cross-border tourism, fostering integration and mutual understanding. For example, the Interreg V A Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland 2014–2020 programme focused on shared cultural and natural heritage. In the new perspective, the Interreg VI A Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland 2021–2027 programme supports “language, culture, and tourism.” Similarly, the Brandenburg–Poland 2014–2020 programme included “joint preservation and utilisation of natural and cultural heritage,” while in 2021–2027, it focuses on an “attractive border region – education, culture, and tourism.” The Poland–Saxony programme also maintains this direction, transitioning from “shared natural and cultural heritage” to a “border region open to education, culture, and tourism.”

- **Cross-Border Education:** Supporting education, including learning the language of the neighboring country, remains a consistently crucial element of cooperation. This aims to overcome language barriers and foster mutual understanding among border region residents. The Interreg V A Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland 2014–2020 programme focused on cross-border education, as did the Interreg V A Poland–Saxony 2014–2020 programme with its priority axis “cross-border education.” In the new perspective, the Interreg VI A Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland 2021–2027 programme supports language learning, while the Brandenburg–Poland 2021–2027 programme focuses on an “attractive border region – education, culture, and tourism.” The Interreg Poland–Saxony 2021–2027 programme also promotes the “border region open to education, culture, and tourism.”
- **Institutional Cooperation and Resident Integration:** Building lasting partnerships, strengthening institutional cooperation, and integrating local communities form the core of the Interreg programmes in both periods. This is crucial for overcoming mental and administrative barriers and creating a cohesive border region. The Interreg V A Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland 2014–2020 Cooperation Program had a priority axis for “deepening cooperation.” The Interreg V A Brandenburg–Poland 2014–2020 Cooperation Program included “integration of residents and administrative cooperation,” while the Interreg Poland–Saxony 2014–2020 Cooperation Program supported “partnership cooperation and institutional capacity.” In the 2021–2027 perspective, the Interreg VI A Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland 2021–2027 programme has a priority for “strengthening trust, jointly shaping cross-border development,” and the Interreg VI A Brandenburg–Poland 2021–2027 Cooperation Program promotes “border region of dialogue – cooperation between residents and institutions.” The Interreg Poland–Saxony 2021–2027 programme also focuses on a “border region open to dialogue between residents and institutions.”

Comparing the priorities of both periods, a clear strengthening of certain themes is evident, directly responding to the strategic EU policy directions such as the European Green Deal and digital transformation:

- **Innovation and Knowledge/Technology Transfer:** In the new perspective, priorities related to innovation gain prominence. The Interreg VI A Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland 2021–2027 programme introduces

the priority “activating cross-border innovation potential.” Similarly, the Interreg VI A Brandenburg–Poland 2021–2027 Cooperation Program includes the priority “innovative border region – knowledge and technology transfer.” This is a novelty compared to the previous perspective, in which this theme was not as distinctly highlighted as a separate priority.

- **Climate Change Mitigation and Nature/Biodiversity Protection:** Environmental and climate change-related themes are significantly strengthened in the 2021–2027 perspective. The Interreg VI A Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland 2021–2027 programme includes the priority “jointly addressing the impacts of climate change and protecting nature.” The Interreg VI A Brandenburg–Poland 2021–2027 Cooperation Program focuses on a “resilient and sustainable border region – climate change and biodiversity,” while the Interreg Poland–Saxony 2021–2027 programme promotes an “environmentally friendly border region – climate change mitigation and adaptation.” In the previous perspective, these issues were often incorporated within the framework of natural heritage but did not constitute such a clear, distinct pillar.
- **Digital Transformation:** Although not always a separate priority, digital transformation is reflected in recent programmes, for example, through support for digital technologies in education. An example is the development of a mobile app for the Muskau Arch Geopark, which aligns with this trend.
- **The increased emphasis on “Trust” and “Dialogue”:** Notably, the new perspective introduces or emphasises priorities focused on building trust and dialogue. Examples include “strengthening trust, jointly shaping cross-border development” in the Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland programme and the “border region of dialogue – cooperation between residents and institutions” in the Brandenburg–Poland programme. This suggests that, despite years of experience of cooperation, there remains a need to invest in social capital, overcome mental and administrative barriers, and build deeper, partnership-based relationships. This is a hallmark of mature cooperation that does not shy away from addressing challenging issues and strives for continuous improvement of cooperative mechanisms.

The tables below summarise the key information about the Interreg programmes along the Polish German border in both analysed financial perspectives.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Interreg Poland-Germany Programmes in the 2014–2020 perspective

Programme	Budget (ERDF) in EUR	Priority axes	Support area
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern/Brandenburg-Poland	€134 million	• Preservation and development of the shared natural and cultural heritage • The improvement of cross-border transport infrastructure and mobility • Strengthening cross-border education • Enhancing institutional cooperation	• PL: the West Pomeranian Voivodeship • DE: Districts: Vorpommern-Greifswald, Vorpommern-Rügen, Mecklenburgische Seenplatte (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern); Uckermark, Barnim, Märkisch-Oderland (Brandenburg)
Brandenburg-Poland	€100 million	• Joint preservation and utilisation of natural and cultural heritage (€32 million) • Connection to Trans-European Networks and sustainable transport (€19 million) • Strengthening cross-border capacities and competencies (€10 million) • Integration of residents and administrative cooperation (€33 million, including the Small Projects Fund)	• PL: the Lubuskie Voivodeship (Gorzów and Zielona Góra subregions) • DE: Districts: Märkisch-Oderland, Oder-Spree, Spree-Neiße; independent cities: Frankfurt (Oder), Cottbus (Brandenburg)
Poland-Saxony	€70 million	• Shared natural and cultural heritage (€21.7 million) • Regional mobility (€13.6 million) • Cross-border education (€10.14 million) • Partnership cooperation and institutional capacity (€20.36 million)	• PL: 9 districts of the Jelenia Góra subregion (the Lower Silesian Voivodeship): Bolesławiec, Jawor, Jelenia Góra, Kamienna Góra, Lubań, Lwówek Śląski, Zgorzelec, Złotoryja, city of Jelenia Góra; Żary district (the Lubuskie Voivodeship) • DE: Districts: Görlitz, Bautzen (Saxony)

Source: the author's elaboration based on documents of the analysed programmes.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Interreg Poland-Germany Programmes in the 2021–2027 perspective

Programme	Budget (ERDF) in EUR	Priority axes	Support area
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern/ Brandenburg-Poland	€124.5 million	• Activating cross-border innovation potential • Jointly addressing the impacts of climate change and protecting nature • Enabling better participation in cross-border daily life through language, culture, and tourism • Strengthening trust and jointly shaping cross-border development	• PL: the West Pomeranian Voivodeship • DE: Districts: Vorpommern-Greifswald, Vorpommern-Rügen, Mecklenburgische Seenplatte (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern); Uckermark, Barnim, Märkisch-Oderland (Brandenburg)
Brandenburg-Poland	€88.3 million	• Innovative border region – knowledge and technology transfer • Resilient and sustainable border region – climate change and biodiversity • Attractive border region – education, culture, and tourism • Border region of dialogue – cooperation between residents and institutions	• PL: the Lubuskie Voivodeship (Gorzów and Zielona Góra subregions) • DE: Districts: Märkisch-Oderland, Oder-Spree, Spree-Neiße; independent cities: Frankfurt (Oder), Cottbus (Brandenburg)
Poland-Saxony	€60.3 million	• Environmentally friendly border region – climate change mitigation and adaptation • Border region open to education, culture, and tourism. • Border region open to dialogue between residents and institutions (including the Small Projects Fund)	• PL: 9 districts of the Jelenia Góra subregion (the Lower Silesian Voivodeship): Bolesławiec, Jawor, Kamienna Góra, Karkonosze, Lubań, Lwówek Śląski, Zgorzelec, Złotoryja, city of Jelenia Góra; Żary district (the Lubuskie Voivodeship) • DE: Districts: Görlitz, Bautzen (Saxony)

Source: the author's elaboration based on documents of the analysed programmes.

Further on, the article presents a chart comparing the budgets of the Interreg programmes related to the Polish German cooperation in the 2014–2020 and 2021–2027 periods (in million €). The chart shows the budgets of the three Interreg programmes along the Polish German border across the two financial perspectives. In the 2014–2020 perspective, the total ERDF budget for these programmes amounted to approximately €304 million. In the 2021–2027 perspective, the total ERDF budget for these programmes slightly decreased to around €273.1 million.

For the Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland Program, the total budget in the 2014–2020 perspective was €157.6 million, of which €134 million came from the ERDF. In the 2021–2027 perspective, the total budget increased slightly to €155.7 million, with €124.5 million from the ERDF. The program’s value across both perspectives is comparable. The Brandenburg–Poland Program had a budget of €118 million in the 2014–2020 perspective, including €100 million from the ERDF. In the new 2021–2027 perspective, the total budget decreased to €110.3 million, with €88.3 million from the ERDF. Similarly, the Interreg Poland–Saxony Program had a budget of €82.3 million in the 2014–2020 perspective, including €70 million from the ERDF. In the 2021–2027 period, the budget decreased to €75 million, with €60.3 million from the ERDF. Like the Brandenburg–Poland programme, there was a reduction in financial allocation in the new programming period.

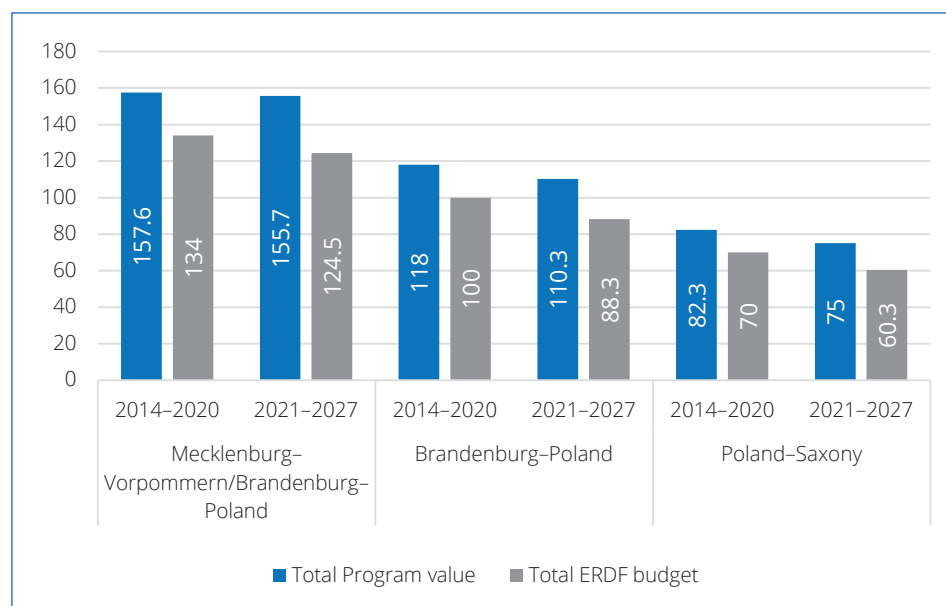
The analysis of the budgets of the Interreg programmes along the Polish German border in the 2014–2020 and 2021–2027 financial perspectives reveals varied trends in resource allocation, which may reflect shifting political and economic priorities of the European Union as well as the specific characteristics of individual border regions. This could stem from broader shifts in the EU’s cohesion policy, which may prioritise other forms of territorial cooperation (e.g., macro-regional), or from strategic decisions at the member state level regarding the allocation of Interreg funds.

In both financial perspectives, the Interreg Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland Program maintains its position as the programme with the largest ERDF budget. Despite a slight decrease in budget size in 2021–2027 compared to 2014–2020, it remains the largest in terms of funding allocation among programmes along the Polish German border. This is due to the programme covering the largest geographical area, stretching from the Baltic Sea in the north, through the West Pomeranian Voivodeship on the Polish side, to significant parts of Mecklenburg–Vorpommern and Brandenburg on the German side. The

increase in the budget for the Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland program in the new perspective, despite the overall downward trend, may also reflect the strategic importance of this region for cross-border cooperation, possibly due to its innovation potential, tourism opportunities, or specific climate and environmental challenges that have gained prominence under the European Green Deal. The large territorial scope correlates with the largest ERDF budget, which may be justified by the developmental needs of such an extensive region. Conversely, the Interreg Poland–Saxony Program consistently has the smallest budget among the analysed programmes. This programme covers the smallest area, focusing on the Jelenia Góra subregion in Poland and two districts in Saxony. Its smallest ERDF budget appears proportionate to the smaller geographical area, though it still requires significant investments to overcome developmental barriers in this border region.

In summary, the budgets of the Interreg programmes along the Polish German border reflect both continuity and evolution in the funding of cross-border cooperation, with some shifts in allocation that may stem from adjustments to changing EU priorities and regional challenges.

Chart 1. Comparison of budgets of the Interreg Programmes related to the Polish German cooperation in 2014–2020 and 2021–2027 (in million €)



Source: the author's elaboration based on documents of the analysed programmes.

5. Exemplary Polish German cooperation projects (2014–2020 perspective)

The 2014–2020 financial perspective enabled the implementation of numerous cross-border projects along the Polish German border. Below, there are three selected examples, one from each of the main programmes, which illustrate the diversity and potential of this cooperation.

5.1. Project 1: “Adaptation of the European Bridge Siekierki-Neurüdnitz for tourism purposes”

This project was implemented under the Interreg V A Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland 2014–2020 Program. The Lead Partner on the Polish side was the Association of Landscape Parks of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, while on the German side, it was the Amt Barnim-Oderbruch [www 1]. The total project value was € 8 534 441.00, with funding from the European Regional Development Fund amounting to € 6 049 552.00 [www 1, www 2]. The project was carried out from January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2022 [www 2].

The main objective of the project was to permanently open the historic railway bridge to the community of the support area as a cross-border infrastructure linking both banks of the Oder River, as well as a unique tourist and natural attraction and a cultural monument [www 2]. The project also aimed to address a gap in the communication system, to facilitate border crossing, and to integrate Polish and German cycling routes. The key activities included adapting the 660-meter-long bridge for pedestrian and bicycle traffic. A two-level viewing platform was constructed, along with tourist and educational infrastructure, including a symbolic shared recreational space on the border embankment [Adaptation of the Siekierki – Neurüdnitz European Bridge]. Conservation measures were also implemented, such as a nature analysis and the installation of platforms for the eagle owl, as well as organising joint workshops for local communities and promotional activities [Adaptation of the Siekierki – Neurüdnitz European Bridge].

As a result of the project, a new, attractive tourist route and cross-border connection were created, contributing to the integration of the cycling route systems and potentially increasing tourist traffic. An important outcome was also the strengthening of ties between local communities on both sides of the border and the promotion of shared natural heritage, given the bridge’s location

in the valuable Natura 2000 area [Brücke Neurüdnitz – Siekierki wird mit Mitteln des Kooperationsprogrammes INTERREG V A saniert, 2017]. The Sieki-erki-Neurüdnitz bridge project is an excellent example of how investment in “hard” infrastructure can generate significant “soft” outcomes. The construction and adaptation of the bridge represent a concrete, measurable action, but its goals and impacts extend far beyond the structure itself. The bridge has become a symbol of connection, a “cross-border unifying infrastructure” that facilitates interpersonal contacts and cooperation [Adaptation of the Siekierki – Neurüdnitz European Bridge]. The organisation of joint workshops and the creation of a shared recreational space directly contribute to community integration. Moreover, the project skillfully combines tourism development with the protection of valuable natural heritage, encompassing the Natura 2000 area and eagle owl conservation, as well as cultural heritage, treating the bridge as a historical monument [Adaptation of the Siekierki – Neurüdnitz European Bridge]. This multifaceted approach, where infrastructure investment becomes a platform for social integration, environmental education, and heritage conservation, makes it a model example of an integrated approach to cross-border development. The success of the project was underpinned by the Polish German partnership (the Association of Landscape Parks of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship and Amt Barnim-Oderbruch), which was essential for managing such a complex border-spanning structure.

5.2. Project 2: “UNESCO Global Geopark Muskau Arch as an Opportunity for Regional Development”

This project was implemented under the Interreg V A Brandenburg–Poland 2014–2020 Program. The Lead Partner on the Polish side was the urban municipality of Żary, with other Polish partners including the municipalities of Brody, Łęknica, Przewóz, and Trzebiel. On the German side, the project involved the Fördereverein Geopark Muskauer Faltenbogen e.V. (Association for the Support of the Muskau Arch Geopark) and the Ziegeleibahnverein Klein Kötzig e.V. (Klein Kötzig Brick Railway Association). The ERDF funding for the project amounted to €324 276.73, and the project was implemented from January 1, 2020, to March 31, 2023 [www 4].

The main objective was to strengthen cooperation among all municipalities and institutions operating in the Muskau Arch area and its vicinity, aiming for broader, more effective promotion of the region to attract more tourists,

particularly on the Polish side of the Geopark. The project also sought to promote the region in major Polish cities such as Poznań, Wrocław, and the Silesian region. The partners organised events and attractions for visitors, developed a bilingual Geopark website with an events calendar, and created a mobile app. New recurring event were introduced, such as the “From Tower to Tower” relay race and a cross-country cycling event. The scientific cooperation, which involved analysing the potential of the Geopark and Zielony Las (Green Forest) areas for future expansion of the Geopark and maintaining its UNESCO Global Geopark status [www 6; www 7], was a significant component.

The project was expected to result in an increase in the number of tourists visiting the region, in better coordination of promotional activities, and in a richer tourism offer. It also aimed to enhance the Geopark’s visibility and provide a scientific foundation for its further development. The Muskau Arch Geopark project perfectly illustrates how cross-border cooperation is essential for the effective management and promotion of a unique natural and cultural resource that naturally transcends state borders. The Muskau Arch, as a geological formation of global significance, requires coordinated efforts on both sides of the border. The involvement of numerous partners, including Polish municipalities and German associations, reflects the complexity but also the strength of such cooperation. The project’s goal was not only tourism promotion but also “strengthening cooperation among all municipalities and institutions” and “coordinating efforts” [www 6]. The pursuit of maintaining and potentially expanding the prestigious UNESCO Global Geopark status [www 7] gives this cooperation a strategic, long-term dimension and sets ambitious shared goals for the partners. Joint promotional tools, such as the website, mobile app, and cross-border events [www 6], are crucial for building a cohesive image of this international tourism product and effectively reaching potential audiences.

5.3. Project 3: “Kom(m)ando ‘Zur Hilfe! / Na pomoc!’”

This project was implemented under the Interreg Poland–Saxony 2014–2020 Program [www 5]. The Lead Partner on the German side was the city of Löbau (Stadtverwaltung Löbau), while the Polish partner was the Luban County. The total project value was €1 664 836.40, with the city of Löbau receiving €427 786.30 in ERDF funding and Luban County receiving €483 168.35. In 2019, Luban County incurred investment expenses of PLN 1 776 083.50, including PLN 1 509 670.96 from EU funds, primarily for the purchase of specialised

equipment. The total planned cost of the project on the Lubań County side from 2016 to 2019 was PLN 2 412,013. The project was implemented until June 30, 2019 [www 5].

The main objective of the project was to establish and intensify cross-border cooperation between emergency services, particularly the Löbau city fire brigade and units from Lubań County, in the areas of disaster protection and joint crisis response [www 5]. The project aligned with the Priority Axis IV of the programme, which focused on intensifying partnership cooperation and institutional capacity. The project included the purchase of specialised rescue equipment for both partners, the organisation of joint exercises and training for emergency services, and language courses (German for Polish firefighters and Polish for German firefighters) to improve communication during joint rescue operations. Additionally, there was an exchange of experiences in crisis management [www 5].

The project contributed to enhancing crisis response capabilities on both sides of the border, improving the interoperability of emergency services, enhancing firefighters' language skills, and strengthening institutional cooperation between partners. The *Kom(m)ando 'Zur Hilfe! /Na pomoc!* project demonstrates that cross-border cooperation in public safety and crisis management is not only possible but essential in border regions. Natural disasters, such as floods, or other crisis situations do not respect state borders, making coordinated actions by services from neighboring countries crucial for ensuring the safety of residents. The Interreg programme provided not only financial resources but also an organisational framework for building trust and practical operational capabilities. The project directly addressed the need for cooperation between fire brigades. Activities such as joint exercises, the purchase of compatible equipment, and, crucially, language courses were aimed at eliminating communication and procedural barriers that could hinder effective cooperation during real emergencies. The involvement of local authorities (the city of Löbau and Lubań County) [Trzymamy się razem, 2022] provided institutional support for the operational activities of the services. Such initiatives lay the foundation for long-term, effective cooperation in crisis situations, often extending beyond the formal end of the project, directly contributing to an increased sense of security for border region residents.

The table below provides a concise summary of key data regarding the exemplary described projects.

Table 3. Detailed data on the selected exemplary projects (2014–2020 perspective)

Program	Interreg V A Mecklenburg-Vorpommern / Brandenburg-Poland	Interreg V A Brandenburg-Poland	Interreg Poland-Saxony
Project name	Adaptation of the European Bridge Siekierki-Neurüdnitz for Tourism Purposes	UNESCO Global Geopark Muskau Arch as an Opportunity for Regional Development	Kom(m)ando "Zur Hilfe! / Na pomoc!"
Partners	Lead Partner (Poland): Association of Landscape Parks of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship; Lead Partner (Germany): Amt Barnim-Oderbruch	Lead Partner (Poland): Urban Municipality of Żary; Other Polish Partners: Municipalities of Brody, Łęknica, Przewóz, Trzebień; German Partners: Förderverein Geopark Muskauer Faltenbogen e.V., Ziegleibahnverein Klein Köllzig e.V.	Lead Partner (Germany): City of Löbau (Stadtverwaltung Löbau); Partner (Poland): Luban County
Total value (EUR)	€8 534 441.00	Not specified	€1 664 836.40
ERDF funding (EUR)	€6 049 552.00	€324 276.73	Löbau: €427 786.30; Luban: €483 168.35
Implementation Period	January 1, 2019 – December 31, 2022	January 1, 2020 – March 31, 2023	Until June 30, 2019
Main objective	Permanently opening the historic railway bridge as a cross-border infrastructure linking both banks of the Oder River, a tourist and natural attraction, and a cultural monument; facilitating border crossing and integrating cycling routes.	Strengthening cooperation among municipalities and institutions in the Muskau Arch area to promote the region and attract more tourists, particularly on the Polish side; enhancing the Geopark's visibility and providing a scientific foundation for its development.	Establishing and intensifying cross-border cooperation between emergency services (Löbau fire brigade and Luban County units) in disaster protection and joint crisis response; improving interoperability, language skills, and institutional cooperation.

Source: the author's elaboration based on documents of the analysed programmes.

6. Comparative analysis and conclusions

The analysis of the Interreg programmes along the Polish German border and of the selected projects from the 2014–2020 perspective allows for several conclusions regarding the nature, scope, and evolution of this cooperation. The cooperation spans a wide range of fields, from the preservation and promotion of shared natural and cultural heritage to the development of transport and tourism infrastructure, as well as activities in education, the labor market, public safety, and the enhancement of institutional capacity and community integration. The dominant beneficiaries and partners in the projects are local government units, non-governmental organisations, public institutions (including emergency services, educational, and cultural institutions), and, to a lesser extent, universities, and economic entities [Interreg VI A Brandenburg–Poland Cooperation Programme 2021–2027, 2022]. The scale of the implemented initiatives varies – from small, grassroots projects funded under the Small Projects Fund, which play a significant role in building interpersonal contacts and trust [Interreg VI A Poland–Saxony Cooperation Programme 2021–2027, 2022], to large, strategic infrastructure investments, such as road modernisation or the adaptation of structures for tourism purposes [Interreg V A Poland–Saxony Cooperation Programme 2014–2020, 2015].

The key success factors in cross-border cooperation, evident in the analysed examples, include strong and committed partnerships based on mutual trust and the shared commitment to achieving project goals. Active engagement of local communities is also crucial, as it ensures project legitimacy and increases the likelihood of sustainable outcomes. Clearly defined objectives, adequate funding, and support from the managing authorities and regional contact points also play a significant role. On the other hand, cross-border cooperation faces several barriers and challenges. These include differences in the legal and administrative systems of both countries, which can complicate the implementation of joint initiatives [Interreg V A Poland–Saxony Cooperation Programme 2014–2020, 2015]. Language barriers, despite numerous initiatives supporting language learning of the neighboring country, remain an obstacle [Interreg V A Poland–Saxony Cooperation Programme 2014–2020, 2015]. Persistent stereotypes or differences in organisational culture among partners can also pose challenges. Ensuring the sustainability of project outcomes after the end of EU funding is another significant challenge, requiring strategic planning at the project proposal stage.

In the context of evaluating the Interreg programmes along the Polish German border, it is worth referring to reports and academic studies analysing the

effectiveness and impact of these initiatives. The evaluation report of the Interreg V A Poland–Saxony 2014–2020 Program, commissioned by the Polish Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy, indicates that the programme significantly increased the number of joint cultural and educational initiatives, with a 35% increase in cross-border cultural events compared to the previous financial perspective (2007–2013). The programme’s particular added value was noted in cross-border education – 72% of beneficiaries of educational projects reported improved language skills among participants, which translated into better relations between border region residents. However, the report highlights that administrative barrier, such as differences in fund settlement procedures, extended the implementation time of some projects by up to 20% compared to initial assumptions [Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy, 2021]. Similar conclusions arise from a study conducted by the University of Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), which analysed the Interreg V A Brandenburg–Poland 2014–2020 Program. The study found that projects related to tourism and heritage preservation, such as the Muskau Arch Geopark, increased tourist traffic in the region by 15% between 2018 and 2022, but the lack of long-term funding mechanisms after project completion limited the sustainability of these effects. The study authors recommend establishing cross-border stabilisation funds to support the maintenance of results after the end of ERDF funding [Viadrina University, 2022].

Regarding institutional cooperation and safety, the evaluation report of the Interreg V A Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg–Poland 2014–2020 Program, published by the Ministry of Economy of Mecklenburg–Vorpommern, indicates that projects such as the adaptation of the Siekierki-Neurüdnitz bridge had a positive impact on community integration, increasing cross-border social contacts by 25% during the project’s implementation. However, the report notes that the lack of unified technical standards for cross-border infrastructure (e.g., differences in bridge safety standards) hindered implementation and generated additional costs, reaching up to 10% of the project budget. The document recommends introducing common technical standards for future infrastructure projects. In the context of crisis management, an analysis conducted by the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM) in 2023 on projects such as *Kom(m)ando ‘Zur Hilfe! / Na pomoc!* highlights that joint training and the purchase of compatible equipment increased the operational capabilities of emergency services by 30%, but language barriers remain a challenge – only 40% of firefighters participating in the training achieved

a communicative level in the neighboring language. The report suggests increasing the number and intensity of language courses in future programmes [Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2023].

The evolution of Interreg programmes between the 2014–2020 and 2021–2027 perspectives indicates an adaptation to changing EU priorities and global challenges. There has been a clear increase in the importance of activities related to climate change adaptation, biodiversity protection, digital transformation, and innovation support [Interreg VI A Brandenburg–Poland Cooperation Programme 2021–2027, 2022]. At the same time, support continues for traditional areas of cooperation, such as tourism development based on cultural and natural heritage, cross-border education, and social integration, underscoring their ongoing relevance for border regions. New emphases, such as the explicitly stated goals of “strengthening trust” [Interreg VI A Mecklenburg–Vorpommern / Brandenburg – Poland Cooperation Programme 2021–2027, 2022] or creating a “border region of dialogue” [Interreg VI A Brandenburg–Poland Cooperation Programme 2021–2027, 2022] suggest a pursuit of deeper, more qualitative integration.

Interreg programmes along the Polish German border can be seen as “laboratories” of European cooperation. Here, in the direct interaction of different systems, cultures, and communities, innovative solutions to cross-border challenges are tested. The experiences gained – both successes and failures – and the developed cooperation models can be transferred to other European regions or influence the shaping of future EU policies. Initiatives like the European Territorial Cooperation [Interreg VI A Brandenburg–Poland Cooperation Programme 2021–2027, 2022] are inherently spaces for generating knowledge and practical solutions. Innovative projects, such as those implemented by the University of Zielona Góra under the Brandenburg–Poland Programme [Interreg VI A Brandenburg–Poland Cooperation Programme 2021–2027, 2022] or projects related to integrated medical rescue (e.g., InGRiP) [www 1] or the management of shared heritage (Muskau Arch Geopark) [UNESCO Global Geopark Muskauer Faltenbogen], provide valuable case studies. Even smaller initiatives supported under the Small Projects Fund enable the testing of numerous grassroots ideas and building of social capital. Institutions involved in Programme management collect these experiences, which, through platforms such as keep.eu, can contribute to improving cohesion policy and territorial cooperation across the European Union.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of the Polish German cooperation within the framework of Interreg programmes in the 2014–2020 and 2021–2027 financial perspectives clearly demonstrates the dynamic and multifaceted nature of this collaboration. These programmes are a key instrument for supporting the development of border regions, contributing not only to the implementation of specific investments but also to building lasting institutional, social, and interpersonal connections. The main goals and priorities of the programmes evolve, reflecting changing global challenges and EU priorities, with an increasing focus on innovation, green transformation, and digitalisation, while maintaining support for cultural heritage, tourism, education, and social integration.

The presented exemplary projects – the adaptation of the Siekierki–Neurüdnitz bridge, the development of the Muskau Arch Geopark, and the cooperation of emergency services under the *Kom(m)ando ‘Zur Hilfe! / Na pomoc!* project – illustrate the wide range of possible activities and their positive impact on the border region. They demonstrate how, through partnership cooperation, historical barriers can be transformed into unifying elements, unique resources can be jointly managed, and the safety of residents can be enhanced. The success of these and many other initiatives depends on the commitment of partners, institutional support, and the ability to overcome administrative and language barriers.

The prospects for further Polish German cross-border cooperation under the Interreg programmes are promising. The new 2021–2027 financial perspective provides opportunities to continue the existing activities and to undertake new initiatives, particularly in the context of the European Green Deal and digital transformation. It is important to continue the investment into building social capital, strengthening trust, and developing innovative forms of cooperation that fully leverage the potential of the Polish German border region as an area of dynamic development and model European integration. Overcoming barriers – both physical and mental – remains a critical task for all actors involved in this cooperation.

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