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# The Analysis of the Determinants of Sustainable Cross-Border Cooperation and Recommendations on Its Harmonization

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Received: 8 October 2017; Accepted: 28 November 2017; Published: 1 December 2017

**Abstract:** Cross-border partnerships are a distinctive example of inter-organizational cooperation, embedded, in terms of territory, in the neighboring borderland regions of two or more countries. The aim of this paper is to identify factors that contribute to the sustainable cross-border cooperation and affect motivation to increase cooperation between cross-border partners. The objective implementation is connected with the verification of a hypothesis referring to the possible impact of the European Union funds on the trans-boundary cooperation transformations. Results of desk research and quantitative research involving IDI, CATI, CAWI and CATI and PAPI data collection methods, implemented in the Polish–Czech borderland in 2016 were used in this paper. Research on the Polish–Lithuanian borderland was also used in the paper to conduct comparative analysis, useful to identify and evaluate factors motivating sustainable cross-border cooperation in the Czech–Polish borderland. The sustainable, cross-border and inter-organizational cooperation in the borderlands results from the simultaneous interaction of three groups of factors: (1) people and institutions (the quality of interpersonal relationships); (2) cross-border planning, procedures and support mechanisms (e.g., the possibility of jointly planning the cross-border cooperation and obtaining EU funds for the development of the borderlands as well as the availability of other funds helpful in this kind of cooperation); and (3) environment (historical affinity and geographical proximity of neighboring border regions, system support at the regional and local level in neighboring countries).

**Keywords:** sustainable cross-border cooperation; inter-organizational cooperation; international partnerships; borderland development

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## 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of cross-border partnerships is associated with overcoming stereotypical perception of a border as a barrier and obstacle to multidimensional integration in order to undertake joint projects, beneficial to the partners themselves and the development of borderland areas of neighboring countries. Cross-border partnerships are a distinctive example of inter-organizational cooperation, embedded, in terms of territory, in the neighboring borderland regions of two or more countries [1]. Cross-border relationships are established between at least two partners operating on both sides of the border and pursuing common goals, important both for their organizations and for the development of the entire borderland [2]. Inter-organizational cooperation in this model also takes place while maintaining the principle of equality in sharing resources, responsibilities, risks and benefits [3], and one of the aspects of the efficiency of co-operation between cross-border partners is also the exchange of knowledge and experience.

Among the factors that contribute to the sustainable cross-border cooperation, European funds begin to play an increasingly important role as they enable the implementation of many undertakings

that go beyond standard relationships [4]. First, these are funds from the European Regional Development Fund, for example the INTERREG VA program. This is a specific cross-border strategy which shows the directions of cross-border cooperation between entities in border region [5]. Although European territorial cooperation is one of the priorities of EU cohesion policy, for example within the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy, and many efforts are made, among others, to develop sustainable cross-border cooperation, it is the needs, expectations and interests of partners that are a key catalyst for the development of cross-border relationships. However, there is rarely full compatibility between cooperation partners in this respect, who may have a different approach to cross-border cooperation itself, its objectives, areas and results. The range of these differences can determine the effectiveness of sustainable cross-border cooperation. The local adaptation of Commission incentives depends both on the degree to which border actors are satisfied with national policies and on actors' capacity to consolidate pro-European institutional arrangements [6].

Differences between partners and different motivation for partners to undertake and develop sustainable cross-border cooperation are important issues affecting the prospects for this cooperation [7,8]. This issue has not been comprehensively examined yet, among others due to differences between the determinants of cross-border cooperation in various regions of the world [9–12]. The authors sought to examine the issues based on representative studies conducted in the Czech–Polish borderland, using the data on the Polish–Lithuanian borderland in the comparative analysis.

The motivation for research was the increasing importance of inter-organizational cooperation on the borderland. It takes place in specific conditions of the cross-border environment, in a microscale, i.e., most often in Euroregions [13] and in the form of larger undertakings, e.g., as cooperation of partner cities or cooperation in cross-border projects implemented under the INTERREG VA Program. Nearly 20 years of cross-border cooperation in the Polish–Czech border; however, results in large disparities in the scope of this cooperation, primarily as regards the types of cooperating organizations and areas of cooperation. Some partnerships have already completed a number of joint projects and have reached a high level of maturity, resulting in clear cross-border effects, for example in culture, education and local government activity. At the same time, many cross-border organizations are still avoiding cross-border co-operation or lack instruments that can be used for this purpose. Knowledge about their motives and barriers to cooperation is a valuable prerequisite for starting discussions on the need to balance cross-border cooperation, especially in territorial and sectoral dimension. This is necessary for further harmonization of the borderland development policy and the development of a strategy for further cooperation, since the present one has lost its validity.

In the paper, the authors used desk research and quantitative research involving IDI, CATI, CAWI and CATI and PAPI data collection methods, implemented in the Polish–Czech borderland in 2015 and 2016. The study, which covered the issues discussed in the text, was commissioned by the Managing Authority of the INTERREG Program for the Czech Republic and the Republic of Poland in connection with defining the cross-border co-operation index for this program for 2014–2020.

The thematic areas of both research related primarily to factors influencing motivation to cooperate on both sides of the border. In this respect, data on the Czech–Polish borderland were analyzed in detail using:

- survey methods such as CATI, CASI and CAWI on a group of 466 Polish local government units and 199 Czech local government units as well as other public institutions for assessing the conditions of Polish–Czech border cooperation and identifying factors affecting motivation to increase cooperation between them;
- survey methods such as CATI, CASI and CAWI on a group of 150 Polish non-governmental organizations and 150 Czech non-governmental organizations for assessing the conditions of the Polish–Czech border cooperation and identifying factors affecting motivation to increase cooperation between them and local authorities; and

- survey methods such as PAPI and IDI on a group of 500 Polish and 500 Czech inhabitants living in the borderland for assessing the conditions of the Polish–Czech border cooperation and identifying factors affecting motivation to increase cooperation between different partners from both sides of the border.

The authors also used quantitative research (PAPI, 118 local authorities; IDI, 10 local authorities, 10 non-governmental organizations, 10 companies, and 5 universities) conducted in Podlaskie Province in Poland in 2014, mainly to identify factors affecting the conditions of cross-border cooperation on the Polish side as well as motivation to undertake such cooperation. Due to the lack of similar research on the Lithuanian side, the authors conducted such research independently in 2016, on a sample of 20 respondents representing entities involved in the Polish–Lithuanian cross-border cooperation (among others in the districts of Kaunas, Marijampole and Vilnius). Research on Podlasie Province was used in the paper, as well as research conducted by the authors in the Lithuanian part of the Polish–Lithuanian borderland, which was merely illustrative and was used as a comparison in relation to detailed research conducted in the Czech–Polish borderland. Research on the Polish–Lithuanian borderland was therefore used in the paper to conduct comparative analysis, useful to identify and evaluate factors motivating cross-border cooperation in the Czech–Polish borderland. Conclusions from the study will serve as recommendations for entities responsible for a sustainable cross-border cooperation policy (e.g., regional governments, business environment institutions), whose task is to create good conditions and environment for the development of cross-border integration as well as entities involved in cross-border cooperation.

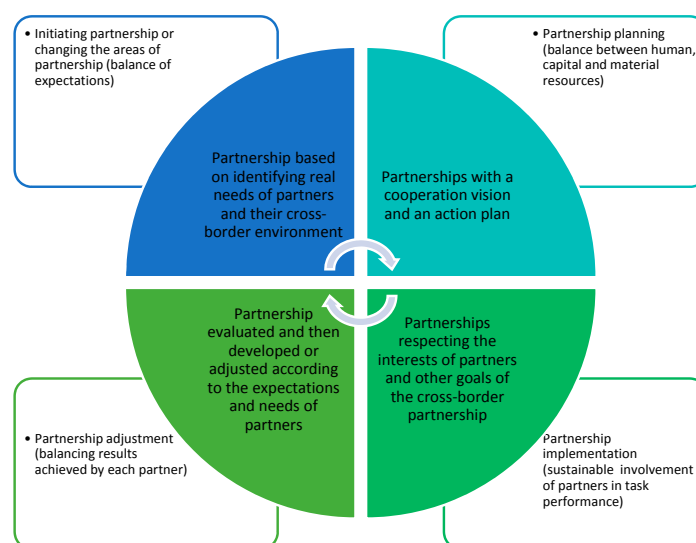
## **2. The Development of Sustainable Inter-Organizational Cooperation in the Form of International Partnerships in the Borderlands**

Inter-organizational cooperation involves taking mutually compatible and complementary activities by cooperating units that are important in terms of their impact on the implementation of a specific project [14,15]. Each organization can take advantage of the ability to cooperate to efficiently achieve the goals, whose implementation individually would be impossible or would require the involvement of many more forces and resources [16]. Inter-organizational cooperation enables the implementation of specific functions that facilitate a unique project and increase the operating range, usually without investment. On the one hand, this allows supplementing resources, and, on the other hand, it is the basis of a flexible (or even anticipatory) adaptation to changing conditions [17]. Due to inter-organizational cooperation, it is possible to reduce operating costs and build competitive advantage leading to standing out in the market, achieving innovation [18] and influence on the sustainable development of companies [19]. Sometimes international partnerships can be helpful in responsible lobbying [20].

The more complex processes that are taking place in the organization and its environment, the bigger the need there is for cooperation, which goes beyond the boundaries of the organization and, increasingly, even the boundaries of sectors and regions [21]. Transforming short-term interaction into cooperation, and later into long-term cooperation can result in the permanent partnership of two or more entities. This process is favorable to the development of network communication, and stimulating the formation of new connections that increase the exchange of information and facilitate the coordination of activities [22]. In this aspect, any form of inter-organizational cooperation is desirable, for example, in the borderlands, where there is a strong need for integration of neighboring communities. Territorial partnership, including cross-border partnership, should pursue individual goals of cooperating organizations, with implications for their hierarchical environment. In that respect, partnership can be used to transfer a development policy to the lower levels of the hierarchy (“top down” policy) or may be an agreement entered into by entities at different levels of hierarchy, providing them with influence and participation in the development processes (“bottom up” policy) [23].

In the borderlands, the formal and informal, bilateral or network cooperation of various entities in the cross-border market can develop, including local governments, non-governmental organizations such as associations, clubs, foundations, etc., clusters and thematic networks, schools and universities, informal groups and residents [24]. The separate area in the cross-border cooperation is the cooperation of companies, according to commercial conditions. The focus of each kind of cross-border cooperation is primarily on problems connecting partners, their challenges and goals of joint actions, as well as the broader range of conditions resulting from the environment in which this cooperation develops (including the cross-border environment). Conditions for forming lasting cross-border partnerships with implications for the quality of this partnership include: ensuring the equal rights of all partners leading to mutual respect, equal benefits for partners ensuring the durability of cooperation, and transparency in the relationship leading to trust. Therefore, in the process of arranging and developing cross-border partnerships, such entities that should be preferred have: compatible objectives of action, interests, expectations, and are aware of their needs and the benefits they expect from the cooperation, want to participate in the benefits of cooperation, but they are also ready to share the cost and risk. They also have appropriate resource potential to cooperate such as knowledge, people, financial and material resources, organizational culture that effectively promote cooperation, exchange of knowledge, experience and ideas. They have a genuine motivation to undertake cooperation, and they are focused on permanent, not temporary partnership [25,26].

The discussion leads to the conclusion that the sustainable inter-organizational cooperation in the model of the cross-border partnership should be based primarily on short-term relations [27] and then on sustainable relationships [28], whose key aspects pertaining to the projects are presented in Figure 1. The key stages of cross-border partnership are also typical for the phases of cross-border cooperation: initiating, planning, implementation, and adjustment.



**Figure 1.** Development of sustainable relationships between partners in a cross-border project. Source: own study.

Figure 1 illustrates a sustainable approach to the development of partnerships, respecting the key conditions of inter-organizational cooperation in cross-border projects, namely:

- The partnership is a response to the needs of each partner, which are examined and assessed realistically in relation to the activities and costs planned in the project.
- Cooperating parties are involved in the project as agreed, adequate to their real competencies and capabilities.
- A project is prepared in such a way that each partner achieves their expected results.

- A project results from genuine willingness to cooperate, rather than being imposed by circumstances.
- A project leads to impacts that are the basis for the further development path of such partnership, for example project implementation, defined on the basis of the cooperation strategy, is favorable to building and strengthening trust between the partners and eliminating barriers to communication and cooperation.
- A project is conducted in such a way that after its completion, the partners still want to cooperate with each other.

Cross-border partnerships give the formal structure to sustainable, inter-organizational cross-border cooperation, providing a basis for establishing the cross-border network of relationships, enabling cooperation in the field of economy, infrastructure, and culture [29]. A number of factors can be undoubtedly specified that influence the individual partners of cross-border cooperation and which determine the success of these relationships, especially in the long term [30]. Important factors stimulating cross-border relationships include the EU territorial cooperation policy [31]. Based on these assumptions, borderland areas have been formally determined, entitled to benefit from EU funds for the development of borderlands in the European Union and the integration of communities in neighboring areas. Euro-regions fulfill a special function within the framework of the borderland areas [32], aimed at stimulating the development of cross-border cooperation in the microscale.

### **3. The Polish–Czech Borderland—The Analysis of the Studied Area and Stakeholders of Cross-Border Cooperation**

An interesting area of research on the development of cross-border cooperation is, *inter alia* Central and Eastern Europe, including the Polish–Czech borderland. These are usually economically and socially less developed peripheral areas, exposed to marginalization, but at the same time they enjoy exceptional support resulting from the EU territorial cooperation policy [33]. Unlike many well-developed border land areas in Western Europe, North America [34] and East Asia, cross-border relationships have formally developed for about 20 years, which results from the post-war geopolitical situation in Europe. The states of the communist bloc, under the leadership of the Soviet Union, only formally cooperated in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance to keep pace with the dynamic integration in the European Economic Community (later the European Union). Communist countries were not only artificially integrated (for example, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia), but also social and economic relations between neighboring countries and individual contacts between their citizens were regulated [35]. Before the collapse of the communist bloc, only certain citizens who cooperated with the authorities could obtain a passport. By the time former communist countries (including Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia) joined the Schengen area on 21 December 2007, each person crossing the border was subject to document control. Before people were allowed to move freely between countries, the borderland areas, as they were militarily strategic, they were excluded from economic priority and social investments, and they were mostly patrolled by the army. In a social sense, crossing the border was perceived as an extraordinary necessity, not as a privilege of borderland residents and other citizens. The opportunity was taken only in specific situations. Thus, the border divided the countries instead of uniting them, which today clearly affects the development of cross-border cooperation in former communist countries [36]. In this respect, it is worth identifying the factors shaping the development of cross-border cooperation in the Czech–Polish borderland, representative of this part of Europe.

The Polish–Czech borderland is an area whose territorial shape is determined by tendencies towards the integration of communities in the neighboring regions of Poland and the Czech Republic, and the range of cross-border relationships between the two countries. The area of the Czech–Polish borderland was formally outlined for the implementation of the INTERREG VA Program Czech Republic–Poland 2014–2020. It consists of NUTS 3 regions, including five Czech regions: Liberec, Hradec Králové, Pardubice, Olomouc and Moravia-Silesia; and six Polish subregions: Bielski and

Rybnik (the Province of Silesia), Jeleniogórski and Wałbrzyski (the Province of Lower Silesia), Nyski and Opolski (Opole Province) along with other smaller areas. The total area of the borderland area is 47,097 km<sup>2</sup>, where the Czech area is 23,135 km<sup>2</sup> (i.e., 29.3% of the Czech Republic) and the Polish area is 23,962 km<sup>2</sup> (approximately 8% of Poland) [37]. Most border areas of the two countries have conservation value (inter alia mountain systems), and are protected (e.g., Natura 2000). There is a clear contrast between the eastern heavily industrialized part of the borderland and peripheral agricultural regions in the central part of both the Czech and Polish area. The economy in the borderline is industry-oriented, and in the Opole Province—agriculture-oriented.

The borderland region is inhabited by approximately 7.1 million inhabitants, of which 3.4 million are on the Czech side (i.e., 32.1% of Czech inhabitants) and 3.7 million on the Polish side (i.e., 9.7% Polish inhabitants). The average population density is 151 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> and is significantly varied [35]. Serious problems include: the aging of the population and labor migration due to the loss of jobs in remote areas that are inaccessible in terms of communication, the elimination of some industries, and the process of suburbanization. People that migrate are mainly people of working age, with higher education, which has a negative impact on the labor market and the economy of the regions.

The Polish–Czech borderland is a major economic area, with a dominant industrial function, although since 1989 it has been struggling with the consequences of the process of economic transformation (the decline of traditional industries, the slow transformation into a service-based economy, structural unemployment and the simultaneous excess of graduates with insufficient qualifications compared to the requirements of the current labor market). The common socio-economic problems of regions on both sides affect the development of institutionalized cooperation (e.g., Euro-regions, the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation TRITIA and NOVUM) and bottom-up relationships (e.g., the partnership contracts between municipalities, cross-border projects).

Due to the advantages of the borderland, the sustainable cross-border development of this area is interesting not only for the local community, local governments and entrepreneurs, but also for investors and tourists. The cross-border cooperation follows the strategies and politics. Unfortunately, only the cooperation of local governments and non-governmental organizations on the Czech–Polish border develops sufficiently, better than cross-border entrepreneurship [38] and cross-border tourism. Another problem is the insufficient cross-border transmission capacity, which affects mainly transport and freight forwarding; it is difficult to reach industrial zones and technology centers. The need to increase the number of vehicles crossing the border and inadequate basic infrastructure for entrepreneurship hinder Polish–Czech cooperation. People living near the border are reluctant to the building of infrastructure in order to deepen economic cooperation. Reconciling the interests of businesses and residents is one of the challenges for the cross-border areas [37].

On both sides of the border, business-related environment is developing that supports cross-border entrepreneurship. Polish–Czech economic cooperation is particularly evident in the automotive and food industries (the points of sale of regional products across the border), as well as spa services and tourism. Cooperation is developing at the national level (the Czech–Polish intergovernmental commission), at the regional level (e.g., through EGCC TRITIA and NOVUM) and at the local level (e.g., the cooperation of local governments, associations, and inhabitants). Cooperation is co-financed with EU funds (since 1999 Phare BCB, later INTERREG IIIA Program Czech Republic–Poland 2004–2006, Operational Programme of Cross Border Cooperation Czech Republic–Poland 2007–2013 and now INTERREG VA Program Czech Republic–Poland 2013–2020), but it also takes place without these funds.

An important role in cooperation on the Czech–Polish border is played by six Euroregions: Nysa, Glacensis, Praděd, Silesia, Cieszyn Silesia and Beskidy Mountains, as well as the previously mentioned EUWT TRITIA (a legal entity established in 2013, in which Opole Province and the Province of Silesia, the Moravian-Silesian Region and Zlín Region have their share; it is used to resolve specific issues that have cross-border or transnational dimension). In 2015, another such entity, EUWT NOVUM Sp. z

o.o, was founded by the Province of Lower Silesia, Liberec Region, Hradec Králové, Pardubice and Olomouc Regions and Nysa and Glacensis Euroregions and also other entities.

Local governments are also important stakeholders in cross-border cooperation. At the level of provinces, cross-border cooperation usually involves the strategic planning of the development of the borderland and initiatives of fundamental importance for the whole area (e.g., the integrated rescue system). District and municipal local governments prefer the joint implementation of specific activities or projects. They are usually aimed at improving the availability of transport and tourism, risk prevention and environmental protection, education and entrepreneurship.

Cross-border cooperation is also developing strongly among non-governmental organizations: associations, foundations, clubs, chambers of commerce and crafts. Usually they join cross-border projects in the fields of culture, sports and tourism, education and youth exchanges. This form of cooperation is particularly important for the development of mutual relationships between borderland residents, as well as for the development of mutual economic relations. National parks, media and research organizations also cooperate in the Czech–Polish borderland. There is also a clear tendency towards cross-sectoral cooperation and the evolution of bilateral cooperation-networking [39].

#### 4. The Assessment of Cross-Border Cooperation in the Czech–Polish Borderland—Methods and Figures

There are three official Impact Assessment Procedures in European Union. There are two procedures which concern the environmental dimension of territorial development: The Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment (SEA) and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The third procedure—Impact Assessment (IA)—amplifies its spectrum of analysis to the social and the economic dimensions. There is also another assessment procedure—the Territorial Impact Assessment (TIA)—which is widely described by E. Medeiros. It has all the ingredients to replace the before mentioned three procedures. TIA is helpful in assessing inter alia the implementation of multi-level participatory approach with the final aim to improving the cooperation between tiers. It is necessary to add that, following the TARGET–TIA methodology, all selected components of the cross-border cooperation could be assessed in their: relevance, sustainability, contribution to endogenous development and possible multiplier effects [40].

The evaluation of the Polish–Czech cross-border cooperation was carried out within the framework of the study commissioned by the INTERREG Program Managing Authority for the Czech Republic and the Republic of Poland throughout the Polish–Czech border region, covering the NUTS 3 regions and among the five Czech regions: Liberec, Hradeckí, Pardubice, Olomouc and Moravian-Silesian; and six Polish subregions (the subregion is a NUTS 3 unit in the Republic of Poland): Bielsko and Rybnik (Silesia), Jelenia Góra and Wałbrzych (Lower Silesia), Nysa and Opole (Opolskie Voivodship). The main characteristics of these units are in Table 1 and Figure 2.

The conducted surveys were representative, which means that the selected sample reflected the characteristics of the whole population, and the results of the questionnaire survey corresponded to the characteristics of the whole population/target group. The sample consisted of target groups: local governments, non-governmental organizations and residents of the region. The basic test has been defined as follows:

- Residents of the common region are those who have resided on the border for at least the last six months.
- Local governments outside the subgroup consisted of chambers of commerce, trade unions and associations (defined solely on the Czech side), while the target group consisted of two further subgroups (1. public administration bodies; 2. federations and associations, established and set up by public administration bodies). Within the subgroup of this target group, the survey was not directed exclusively at local governments, but broadly on the entire public administration, i.e., on local governments and state administration.
- Non-governmental organizations are those operating in the areas indicated below.

The study of the population of individuals included a representative sample representing the individual age groups of the population and the gender representation. The place of residence of the respondents, which corresponds to the structure at NUTS level 2, is also taken into account—the part that forms the support area. The representative sample was based on data obtained from the Managing Authority of the INTERREG Program for the Czech Republic and the Republic of Poland. The study was conducted using the PAPI and IDI method, with persons who participated in various forms of cross-border cooperation, e.g., in trans-national projects, in places of their implementation. The sample size was 500 respondents from Poland and the Czech Republic. We managed to collect 995 correctly filled questionnaires.

**Table 1.** The main socioeconomic characteristics of units on the Polish–Czech border region. Source: Eurostat.

Unit No.	1	2	3	4	5	
Population density—inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup>	141.0	117.8	115.9	122.0	228.9	
Population—total	439,639	551,421	516,149	634,718	1,213,311	
Employment (thousand persons total)	195.0	244.0	249.0	283.0	540.00	
Gross domestic product (GDP)—Euro per inhabitant	11,500	13,000	12,100	11,600	12,500	
Unit No.	6	7	8	9	10	11
Population density—inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup>	284.8	469.4	101.7	158.3	91.7	111.4
Population—total	658,613	623,559	560,164	654,469	367,646	584,911
Employment (thousand persons total)	270.8	225.3	171.0	192.1	109.6	240.0
Gross domestic product (GDP)—Euro per inhabitant	10,900	9400	9100	7900	6600	9900

No NUTS3 regions: 1—Liberec; 2—Hradec Kralove; 3—Pardubice; 4—Olomouc; 5—Moravia-Silesia; 6—Bielski; 7—Rybnik; 8—Jeleniogórski; 9—Wałbrzyski; 10—Nyski; 11—Opolski.



**Figure 2.** NUTS III: The Polish–Czech border region. Source: own study.

The survey of local government and public institutions and non-governmental organizations included a representative sample for each subgroup. The structure at NUTS level 2 was also taken into account. The given number of target groups: public authorities and public institutions and non-governmental organizations was based on statistical data obtained from the Managing Authority



of the INTERREG Program for the Czech Republic and the Republic of Poland, based on which the corresponding quota sample was determined. The study was performed using CATI, CASI and CAWI method, after performing pilot studies. The sample of self-governments and public institutions amounted to 466 entities from Poland and 199 from the Czech Republic, while in the case of non-governmental organizations, it was 150 respondents from Poland and the Czech Republic. Approximately 632 questionnaires were collected from self-governments and public institutions and 232 surveys from non-governmental organizations.

All border residents surveyed responded to the same questions, regardless of possible personal involvement in cross-border cooperation. Partial results of these studies are presented in the next subsection.

The survey of self-governments and public institutions and non-governmental organizations has been addressed both to entities implementing cross-border cooperation as well as to those that have not yet undertaken such cooperation. For this reason, the survey methodology was divided into two questionnaires. The first concerned the general knowledge of cross-border cooperation and the personal response of the respondents to its undertaking and development. In this part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked, among others about:

- the usefulness of cross-border cooperation for selected target groups;
- catalysts and barriers to cross-border cooperation; and
- positive and negative aspects of cooperation.

The second block was addressed only to entities involved in various forms of cross-border co-operation and served to deepen knowledge on areas of cooperation and preferred forms of cooperation.

INTERREG Poland–Czech Republic 2014–2020 is focused on the following areas of cooperation:

1. Joint risk management—ca. 6% of the budget program;
2. Development of the natural and cultural potential for the promotion of employment—ca. 6% of the budget program;
3. Education and qualifications—ca. 5% of program budget; and
4. Institutional and community co-operation—ca. 25% of program budget.

In addition to these main areas of cooperation, there is also a micro-projects fund managed by the Euroregions, where beneficiaries carry out cross-border cooperation on a smaller scale.

The adopted divisions have a contractual character, as calls for new projects proposals are open for submission.

The scope of research carried out included cross-border evaluation of the INTERREG VA Program Czech Republic–Poland 2014–2020, as well as the development of a future development strategy for the Polish–Czech border at the level of the cooperating regions.

The scope of the Polish–Czech cross-border cooperation is not currently regulated by any strategic documents at the regional level, although this practice is quite common in many borderlands, where cooperation has a longer tradition [41]. Currently, the shape of cooperation in the Czech–Polish borderland is largely affected by bilateral agreements between various entities, for example on the joint implementation of EU projects [42] and the requirements for ensuring the sustainability of cooperation in the period of at least five years from the end of the cross-border project. The availability of European funds is also provided by, among others, INTERREG VA Program Czech Republic–Poland 2014–2020. Details on the preferred areas of cross-border cooperation are presented in Table 2. The analysis included studies conducted among main subjects of cross-border cooperation in the regions such as: local governments, public institutions and non-governmental organizations. This approach corresponds to other views presented in the literature [43,44].

**Table 2.** Areas of Polish–Czech cross-border cooperation in the opinion of the selected groups of stakeholders. Source: research findings.

No.	Area of Polish–Czech Cross-Border Cooperation	% of Positive Responses			
		PL—Local Governments and Public Institutions	CZ—Local Governments and Public Institutions	PL—NGOs	CZ—NGOs
1	Culture	76.37	53.36	12.44	10.07
2	Sport, recreation and tourism	76.64	49.03	15.42	6.36
3	Cooperation between partnering towns	64.92	44.34	7.73	3.48
4	Exchange of youth, seniors and socializing events	71.83	38.98	11.33	5.25
5	Safety (e.g., risk prevention, cooperation between firefighters, paramedics, and police)	54.38	35.89	11.82	2.31
6	Protection of nature and landscape	50.76	30.13	4.01	3.48
7	Education and higher education	53.28	38.63	4.19	4.53
8	Economic cooperation	38.55	22.92	2.43	1.62
9	Transport	34.35	24.12	1.55	1.27
10	Spatial planning and development planning	29.22	19.53	0.67	0.96
11	Public services not mentioned above (health, social services)	23.36	14.96	0.00	2.58
12	Power industry	14.77	11.68	0.88	0.32

The data contained in Table 2 indicate a relatively higher interest in cross-border cooperation on the Polish side rather than on the Czech side. As regards the entities involved in this cooperation, local governments and public entities show bigger commitment than non-governmental organizations. This is due to the conditions of cross-border cooperation, which entails sometimes higher costs, difficult to cover by social organizations. Such organizations rarely participate, among others, in cross-border projects because they do not have the financial resources required to support these projects. In cooperation between local governments and public entities, the areas that dominate include their own tasks, undertaken to the benefit of the local community, primarily culture, sport, tourism and recreation. The integration of local communities and cooperation between twin towns also play an important role. The areas of cooperation between NGOs are quite varied. On the Polish side, interest in tourism, sports, recreation and culture prevails, as well as the integration of local communities and cooperation in the field of safety. Similar trends can be observed among Czech partners, but interest in cooperation on this side is much lower. The above information indicates that the area of the closest cross-border and inter-sectional cooperation (public entities, local governments and non-governmental organizations) is culture, sport, recreation and tourism, as well as cross-border exchange and the integration of local communities. A big interest in cooperation between partnering towns indicates that it is a form of cooperation based on which other partnerships can develop, e.g., between different entities from both countries. Stakeholders declare a relatively low interest in the development of cross-border cooperation in the field of spatial planning and development planning. This proves that the cooperation has an on-going character, with no tendency for long-term, strategic arrangements on the long-term development of the borderland.

In regards to the forms of cross-border cooperation between Polish and Czech local governments and public organizations, and between non-governmental organizations, details are presented in Tables 3 and 4. Response options included the variety of possible forms of cooperation and their specific character with reference to various stakeholder groups.

**Table 3.** Implemented forms of the Czech–Polish cross-border cooperation between local governments and public institutions. Source: research findings.

No.	Forms of the Development of Polish–Czech Border Cooperation	Percent Positive Responses	
		PL—Local Governments and Public Institutions	CZ—Local Governments and Public Institutions
1	The development of good neighborly relationships and getting to know each other (e.g., the organization of joint events)	81.21	74.98
2	Diversification of a cultural, tourist, and sporting option	79.87	74.11
3	Exchange of information and experiences	71.84	71.46
4	Implementation of joint projects (e.g., investments)	66.26	61.55
5	Joint implementation of infrastructure projects	63.07	56.64
6	Arranging cross-border cooperation for the subordinate units, non-governmental organizations, businesses	63.64	45.50
7	The joint implementation of major international projects	50.04	49.77
8	Joint training	51.07	49.57
9	Sharing resources (e.g., during natural disasters, rescue operations)	49.53	45.70
10	Planning for the borderland (the common development of strategy, joint consultations)	43.72	41.81

Table 3 clearly shows the consensus on the preferred forms of cross-border cooperation between the Polish and Czech local governments and public institutions. However, the prevailing forms of cooperation do not generate high added value, i.e., socializing events, cultural exchanges, sporting events, as well as the exchange of information and experience. Only some local governments and public institutions (approximately 50–60%) declare the specific forms of cooperation, i.e., the implementation of joint projects (investment, infrastructure, and international projects). There are relatively few of them, if you assume that projects are one of the basic forms of cooperation development. Only approximately 50% of respondents see the possibility of sharing certain resources, and even fewer declare a willingness to undertake joint planning of the borderland development. Little interest in the latter form of joint action proves the earlier results presented in Table 2, indicating that cross-border cooperation is seen more in current rather than strategic terms. It is used to diversify current activities of local government, to develop a better offer of leisure activities for inhabitants, but it is not regarded as a tool of strategic, sustainable and harmonious development of neighboring borderland areas. The border, therefore, is a symbolic division line in regards to the strategic planning of regional development. The reason for this situation, however, may be not only the approach of cross-border partners but also low demand for planning at the local level, lack of effective planning skills, and lack of awareness about the importance of planning for the future development of the region. The problem may also be low competence in the planning and development of cross-border cooperation. This argument was partially proved in other studies conducted in the Polish–Czech–German borderland [45]. The issues covered require additional, in-depth analysis, especially in those Polish and Czech municipalities that are direct neighbors, and where the dimension of the cross-border cooperation may be the most complete. It is also worth highlighting the different approach to the problem of arranging cross-border cooperation among the subordinate units, non-governmental organizations, and businesses, which should be one of the key

duties of local governments and public institutions. In this regard, Polish respondents are more active than Czech ones. This proves the earlier thesis that the dynamics of the development of cross-border cooperation and interest in it is higher on the Polish side. It should be noted that the development of cross-border cooperation particularly requires a gradual transition from the bilateral model to the network model and Polish partners are more involved in this process.

**Table 4.** Implemented forms of development of Polish–Czech cross-border cooperation between NGOs.  
Source: research findings.

No.	Forms of the Development of Polish–Czech Cross-Border Cooperation	% of Positive Responses	
		PL—NGOs	CZ—NGOs
1	Development of good neighborly relationships and getting to know each other (e.g., the organization of joint events)	82.42	78.57
2	Expansion of a cultural, tourist, sporting option	79.28	79.08
3	Joint implementation of major international projects	82.34	76.92
4	Expansion of a sporting offer	79.29	72.77
5	Assistance in starting Czech–Polish cross-border cooperation for partner and cooperating organizations (e.g., enterprises)	74.69	68.36
6	Sharing resources (e.g., during natural disasters, rescue operations)	84.25	56.90
7	Joint training	74.50	68.36
8	Expansion of the tourist offer	86.70	60.37
9	Protection of nature	77.93	59.38
10	Planning for the borderland (the joint development of strategy, joint consultations)	77.13	57.19
11	Expansion of the offer in the field of social welfare or health care	79.03	82.05
12	Exchange of information and experiences	66.98	52.72

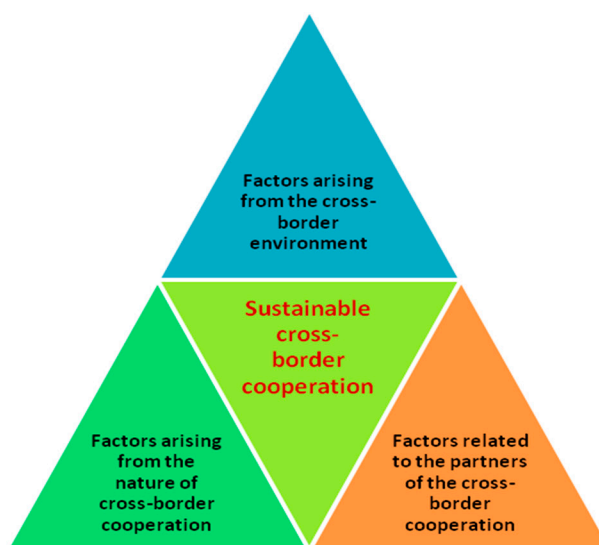
The non-governmental organizations studied often rely on relationships developed by local governments in cross-border cooperation. In addition, in this group of respondents, interest in organizing joint cross-border events, as well as expanding the offer of cultural and sporting activities prevails. The priority in cross-border cooperation for Polish non-governmental organizations is also participation in joint international projects, the development of a tourist office, and sharing resources in the event of natural disasters. Czech partners are interested in other activities, primarily in the field of social welfare and health care. At least half of the respondents are interested in any of the proposed forms of cooperation; it should be noted, however, that effective cooperation is possible only if partners from both sides of the border are interested in it. Non-governmental organizations are interested in arranging further partnerships more than local governments and public institutions, thus enabling the development of cross-border cooperation in many areas and at many levels. These trends are also proved by other research on the specific character of cross-border relationships in Europe [46].

To sum up, local governments and public entities in the Czech–Polish borderland work together, but above all, on a daily basis, without explicit reference to the long-term, sustainable partnerships and joint planning of the borderland development. In turn, non-governmental organizations from both parts of the border show relatively high commitment to cooperation. They see opportunities in these activities to expand their activity through international projects. In addition, in this case, cooperation on a daily basis prevails: relatively more entities are interested in planning a common strategy for development than in the case of local governments and public institutions.

## 5. Factors Affecting the Sustainable Cross-Border Cooperation—Research Conclusions

The shape and intensity of cross-border cooperation in the Czech–Polish borderland are the result of many factors [47]. They include factors related to the participants of various forms of cross-border

cooperation (the entity's legal form, its status, the purpose of its activity, etc.), factors related to the very essence of cooperation in the Czech–Polish borderland (the preferred models of cooperation, the development of cross-border cooperation structures), as well as external factors coming from the cross-border environment (e.g., economic, social, political, cultural, etc.). The impact of these factors on both sides of the border can be varied. They derive from the national and regional determinants and factors affecting the socio-economic relationships between the two countries [48]. It is worth mentioning the interaction of these factors in the borderland area of neighboring countries and their strong link. Factors related to sustainable cross-border cooperation should be assessed in a slightly different way, which, as a rule, are generally the same on both sides of the border, because it is a common element in the mutual relationship. This significantly affects the final shape of sustainable cross-border cooperation. General relationships between the selected factors influencing sustainable cross-border cooperation are presented in Figure 3 and Table 5.



**Figure 3.** Selected factors affecting the sustainable cross-border cooperation. Source: own study.

As Figure 3 and Table 5 indicate, many diverse factors influence the sustainable cross-border cooperation to varying degrees on both sides of the border. In any case, their impact may be different, due to specific individual circumstances. In the author's opinion, the greatest variability and uncertainty applies to factors related to cooperation partners, including the changing needs and interests of partners and their possibilities for cross-border cooperation. However, while partners independently develop their potential for cross-border cooperation, they have relatively little impact on the cross-border environment, and they can shape the nature of cross-border cooperation only to a limited extent. Similar research was conducted by other authors, whose works prove these conclusions. The turbulent nature of the environment has a significant impact on the dynamics of these processes [49,50].

The authors conducted the analysis of the factors influencing cross-border cooperation based on representative quantitative research done in the Czech–Polish borderland with the participation of local governments, NGOs and inhabitants—separately for the respondents from both parts of the borderland. The following is the assessment of the selected factors influencing cross-border cooperation, in the opinion of these groups of respondents (Table 6). The factors analyzed during quantitative research were selected as a result of pilot qualitative studies as the factors of the potentially greatest importance for the development of cross-border cooperation in the Czech–Polish borderland.

**Table 5.** Selected factors affecting the sustainable cross-border cooperation. Source: own study.

Factors Related to Cooperation Partners		Factors Arising from the Nature of the Cooperation		Factors Arising from the Cross-Border Environment	
1	Interest in the development of cross-border cooperation			1	The scope of systemic support for the development of cross-border cooperation at the national, regional and local level
2	Planning and preparation for cross-border cooperation (organizational, financial, and technical potential)	1	The availability of cross-border cooperation structures (e.g., Euroregions)	2	The strategic conditions of the development of neighboring areas, contributing to or hindering the development of cross-border cooperation
3	The compatibility of cross-border cooperation with the interests of the organization	2	The areas of cross-border cooperation possible to develop within the framework of cross-border partnerships	3	The degree of similarities between historical and socio-economic lineages of neighboring communities
4	The quality of relationships between cross-border partners	3	The scope of cross-border cooperation supported by EU funds	4	The geopolitical situation in countries developing cross-border cooperation
5	The common value system of partners, favorable to the development of cross-border cooperation	4	The availability of standards and best practices pertaining to the development of cross-border cooperation and partnerships	5	Communication availability of the borderland and its impact on the development of cross-border relationships
6	The perception of the attractiveness of partners developing cross-border cooperation			6	The availability of EU funds
7	Tolerance for cultural, world-view diversity, etc.				

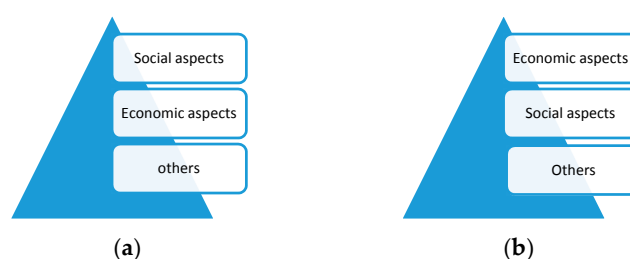
**Table 6.** Factors affecting the sustainable cross-border cooperation in the Czech–Polish borderland, in the opinion of local governments and non-governmental organizations. Source: research findings.

No.	Factors of Polish–Czech Cross-Border Cooperation	Percent of Positive Responses			
		PL—Local Governments and Public Institutions	CZ—local Governments and Public Institutions	PL—NGOs	CZ—NGOs
1	The quality of human relationships, mutual desire to know each other better	77.02	65.97	58.88	71.01
2	The possibility of jointly obtaining EU funds	80.92	50.51	68.81	47.58
3	Historical affinity and geographical proximity	57.04	59.76	34.66	63.47
4	System-related problems (e.g., transport, environmental protection, the labor market)	44.81	32.62	30.57	32.29
5	System support at the regional and local level (e.g., financial aid for their own contributions to projects, the cooperation of local governments, etc.)	34.33	32.00	41.75	29.29
6	Professionalism and competence of officials	26.52	22.00	14.63	13.35
7	Economic interests	24.30	22.85	26.71	26.29
8	System support at the national level (international agreements and cooperation at the government level between the two countries in order to facilitate the Czech–Polish cross-border cooperation)	14.84	13.48	25.10	14.04

The study indicates that the key catalyst for the sustainable cross-border cooperation, in the opinion of Polish local governments and public institutions, is the possibility of obtaining EU funds for joint projects (80.92%), followed by the quality of interpersonal relationship (77.02%), as well as historical affinity and geographical proximity (57.04%). The approach of Polish partners to cooperation is therefore dominated by economic interest, followed by social aspects. A different approach to cooperation is presented by Czech local government officials and the representatives of public institutions, for whom the following social aspects are the most important in cooperation: the quality of interpersonal relations, mutual desire to know each other better (65.97%), as well as historical affinity and geographical proximity (59.76%). Economic interest, i.e., the possibility of jointly obtaining EU funds (50.51%), ranks third. The above results indicate that as far as local governments and public institutions are concerned, on both sides of the border there is a different set of factors determining cross-border cooperation.

For Polish organizations, as well as for local governments and public institutions, the possibility of obtaining EU funds jointly is crucial (68.81%) in the sustainable cross-border cooperation. It is followed by the quality of interpersonal relations, mutual desire to know each other better (58.88%), and the system support at the regional and local level (41.75%), which should be interpreted primarily as assistance in obtaining funds for their own contribution to projects. It can be concluded that, as in the case of local governments and public institutions, Polish non-governmental organizations rank economic aspects first in terms of co-operation, and social aspects second. In regards to Czech non-governmental organizations, responses were similar to those in the case of local governments and public institutions. A social aspect is of key importance: the quality of interpersonal relations, mutual desire to know each other better (71.01%), as well as historical affinity and geographical proximity (63.47%). Economic interest, i.e., the possibility of jointly obtaining EU funds (47.58%), ranks third.

The analysis of research findings shows differences in motivation of Polish and Czech cross-border cooperation partners, but they are not significant. The differences relate, in fact, only to the order of responses about individual factors influencing cross-border cooperation. There is no significant disparity in the partner's assessment of these factors. One can even venture to say that highlighting social issues on the Czech side and economic issues on the Polish side is a complementary approach (Figure 4), thus, in cooperation, an emphasis is put on both the financial aspect (raising funds for joint projects), as well as on the aspect concerning the long-term development of interpersonal relations (cultivating the relationships that both partners find attractive).



**Figure 4.** The diversity of factors affecting the development of cross-border cooperation in the Czech–Polish borderland, in the opinion of local governments, public institutions and non-governmental organizations (Source: own studies): (a) Czech part of the borderland; and (b) Polish part of the borderland.

On the Polish side, what is crucial are procedures and support mechanisms that determine the interest of people and institutions in establishing and developing cooperation. It refers, first, to facilitating the possibility of obtaining EU funds in cross-border partnerships. In regards to Polish organizations, the environment is of secondary importance. It can therefore be assumed that it is a “top down” approach—provided that good conditions are created, cooperation will be initiated and will continue to develop. An approach to cooperation on the Czech side is different. In this case, the

most important factors include interpersonal relationships, as well as common goals and interests. The environment is also significant. First, institutional support (e.g., the activity of Euro-regions), as well as the accessibility of the border and similar socio-economic systems in both countries is important. It is evident that, on the Czech side, it is primarily people, who are genuinely interested in establishing cross-border relationships, that are a driving force for cooperation. This is definitely a “bottom up” approach to cooperation. The authors assess both approaches as complementary ones.

Similar results were obtained in the survey involving the local communities of the borderland. In the opinion of borderland residents, key factors affecting cross-border cooperation include:

- Group 1 factors: friendship between the two nations, common economic interests, similarity between languages and cultures, similar lifestyle;
- Group 2 factor: the availability of EU funds; and
- Group 3 factors: European integration and the favorable local government policy were chosen less often.

The specific nature of sustainable cross-border cooperation in the borderlands results from the simultaneous interaction of different groups of factors. One of the current typologies of factors shaping the development of cross-border cooperation defines them as barriers arising from differences in the development of: socio-economic, physical, cultural and normative and institutional disparities. At the same time, this typology covers the categories of potential which include: competitiveness, market integration, human and social capital, integrated services for cross-border functional urban areas, potential from shared management of natural resources [51]. In turn, the author has made a division into the three groups of key categories that affect this process (Table 7).

**Table 7.** Groups of factors affecting sustainable cross-border cooperation. Source: own study.

No.	Group Name	Reference to the Type of Factors	Type of Impact (Examples)	
			Beneficial	Adverse
1	People and institutions	Factors related to cooperation partners	Interest in cooperation, tolerance for differences, the compatibility of objectives, similar languages and cultures	Diverging interests, the tendency to compete, the lack of potential for cooperation, political and social antagonism
2	Cross-border planning, procedures and support mechanisms	Factors related to cooperation character	The availability of funds to support cooperation, the dissemination of good practices in cross-border partnerships	Poor flow of information about organizations seeking cross-border partners, formally reduced areas of cross-border cooperation
3	Environment	Factors related to the regional and cross-border environment	The availability of institutional mechanisms supporting partnerships (e.g., Euroregions)	No strategic vision of cooperation at the institutional level (e.g., no development strategy of the borderland).

Literature studies and the author’s own research prove that the impact of each of these three groups of factors:

- may be time-varying;
- may be different in every part of the borderland;
- may vary in intensity, depending on the thematic area of cooperation and the category of partners involved in cooperation;
- may affect the behavior of each partner in a different way; and



- may have different effects in each part of the borderland.

In the author's opinion, the optimal conditions for the development of sustainable cross-border cooperation occur when in all three groups of factors described above, beneficial impact outweighs the adverse one. This thesis is proven, among others, by the results of the evaluation of the factors affecting sustainable cross-border cooperation in the Czech–Polish borderland (Table 7). Referring to the classification presented in Table 8, key factors affecting sustainable cross-border relationships include:

- Group 1 factors: the quality of interpersonal relationships, mutual desire to know each other better;
- Group 2 factors: the possibility of jointly obtaining EU funds and other funds (public and private) for the development of the borderlands; and
- Group 3 factors: historical affinity and geographical proximity of Polish and Czech border regions, system support at the regional and local level.

**Table 8.** Dominant factors affecting the development of Polish–Czech cross-border cooperation—local governments, public institutions and non-governmental organizations. Source: own study.

Rank	Polish Part of the Borderland— “Top Down” Approach	Rank	Czech Part of the Borderland— “Bottom Up” Approach
1.	Cross-border planning, procedures and support mechanisms	1.	People and institutions
2.	People and institutions	2.	Environment
3.	Environment	3.	Cross-border planning, procedures and support mechanisms

Research proved that the above groups of factors determine cross-border cooperation in the Czech–Polish borderland, although their rank is different (Table 8).

In regards to the opinions of the residents in the borderland on factors influencing the shape of Polish–Czech cross-border cooperation, there are differences in this respect as well (Table 9).

**Table 9.** Factors affecting the development of cross-border cooperation in the Czech–Polish borderland, in the opinion of inhabitants. Source: research findings.

No.	Forms of the Development of Polish–Czech Cross-Border Cooperation	% of Positive Responses	
		Inhabitants in the Polish Part of the Borderland	Inhabitants in the Czech Part of the Borderland
1	Similarity between languages	31.41	54.71
2	Friendship of the two nations	34.59	31.36
3	Similarity between cultures	24.63	37.40
4	Common economic interests	33.52	20.42
5	Similar problems	23.58	24.87
6	The availability of EU funds for this purpose	32.57	17.73
7	Similar lifestyle	25.51	23.04
8	European integration (e.g., joining the Schengen Area)	24.68	18.01
9	Common political interests	18.41	11.39
10	Favorable local government policy supporting the Polish–Czech cross-border cooperation	15.71	9.97

In the opinion of the Polish respondents, a key factor in the development of cooperation is friendship between the two nations (34.59%), followed by economic interest (33.52%) and the availability of EU funds (32.57%); that is, economic factors. Similarity between languages is also of great importance (31.41%). On the other hand, similarity between languages (54.71%) and culture (37.40%) is crucial for the Czechs, followed by friendship between the two nations (31.36%). As can be seen above, the motivation of inhabitants in both parts of the borderland to develop Polish–Czech cooperation varies. On the Polish side, as in the case of local governments and non-governmental organizations, an economic factor plays a very important role, while, for the Czech community, the key determinant of the development of cross-border cooperation is a social aspect.

In reference to the aforementioned methodology of impact assessment of territorial cross-border cooperation [40], it is evident that the above-mentioned factors affecting the development of cross-border cooperation in the Czech–Polish borderland are mostly responsible for the barriers that affect reduction in inter alia cross border structures, urban networks, entrepreneurial, employment, and labor market. Significantly fewer of them are in the group of components that stimulate territorial capital valorization (e.g., economic growth and modernization, and implementation of CB Committees). This means that the factors that promote border co-operation reduce primarily the impact of barriers, and to a lesser degree contribute to territorial capital valorization.

To verify the differences in factors influencing cross-border cooperation identified in the Czech–Polish borderland, the authors analyzed studies conducted in the Polish–Lithuanian–Belarusian borderland, where an important platform for cooperation is joint EU projects. For this purpose, the results of the quantitative study were used, conducted on a sample of 52 of the 118 municipalities of Podlasie Province, which declared international cooperation [52]. The studies proved a significant economic aspect of cross-border cooperation for Polish partners, which manifests itself primarily in interest in the implementation of joint cross-border projects, funded by the European Union. The vast majority of the respondents had an instrumental approach to cross-border cooperation, treating it as a mechanism for raising funds for the development of municipalities and non-governmental organizations. The vast minority of the respondents emphasized the importance of the mission they implement through cross-border cooperation in such areas as cooperation with the Polish minority abroad. The above points about significant differences in motivation for the development of cross-border cooperation between partners are also found in other studies concerning European cross-border regions [53].

To complement these findings, the authors also conducted a qualitative study in the Lithuanian part of the borderland on a sample of 20 respondents representing entities involved in the Polish–Lithuanian cross-border cooperation (including in the districts of Kaunas, Marijampole and Vilnius, May 2016).

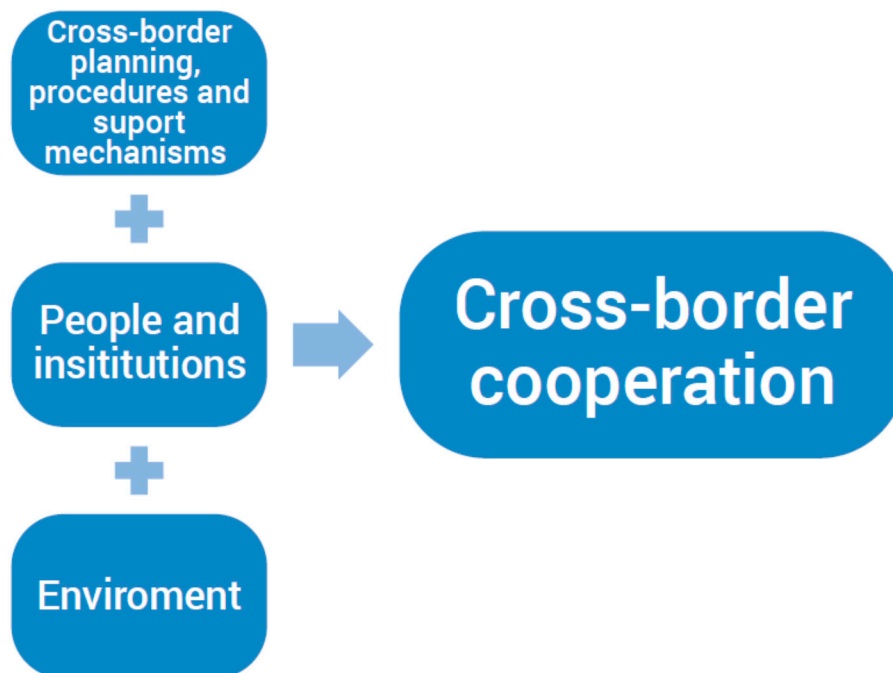
The respondents were asked the same questions on motivators influencing the shape of Polish–Lithuanian cross-border cooperation, based on the factors studied in the Czech–Polish borderland. The following factors prevailed in the responses: the possibility of jointly obtaining EU funds, jointly solving system problems (e.g., transport, environmental protection, etc.), as well as system support at the national, regional and local level. In fact, none of the following factors was selected: the quality of interpersonal relations, mutual desire to get to know each other, historical affinity and geographical proximity. The respondents stressed that the contacts are discouraged primarily due to the impossibility of direct communication (Polish and Lithuanian languages are significantly different, while Czech and Polish languages are so similar that it allows the Poles and the Czechs to easily communicate at a basic level), as well as political disagreements between the Lithuanians and the Polish minority in Lithuania, resulting, among others, from historical events. In addition, they pointed out that cooperation is not determined by geographical proximity, but the financial and human potential of the organization and an interest in establishing cross-border contacts. It was also emphasized that usually after the completion of projects, the cooperation is weaker or even disappears. The qualitative comparative analysis of cross-border cooperation in the Czech–Polish and

the Polish–Lithuanian borderlands proves that jointly obtaining EU funds for cross-border projects is insufficient motivation for partners from both sides of the border to establish lasting relationships. This is because social elements play an important role in these relationships, such as mutual acceptance, understanding, kindness, and values that unite rather than divide; for example, historical affinity and a lack of mutual ethnic animosity, cultural identity, and similarity between languages.

In the opinion of the inhabitants of the Polish and Czech parts of the borderland, key factors influencing cross-border relationships are related primarily to the cooperating partners and communities of the borderland (Group 1). Only on the Polish side, was a Group 2 factor mentioned, associated with obtaining EU funds, but there is a noticeable tendency for the Polish part of the borderland in all groups of the respondents. This was also proven by the findings of research conducted by the authors in the Polish–Lithuanian–Belarusian borderland. The author’s own research in the Polish–Lithuanian borderland proved that except for a Group 2 factor (the possibility of jointly obtaining EU funds) and a Group 3 factor (system support at the regional and local level), there are no other factors in Polish–Lithuanian relationships that are significant for the development of cross-border cooperation. First, there are no Group 1 factors related directly to partners, which strongly affect cooperation in the Czech–Polish borderland. This was also proven by Polish and Lithuanian institutions studied, in the opinion of which the main barriers to the development of cooperation include no real interest in cooperation and no potential for this cooperation, communication problems due to considerable language differences, historical and political events antagonizing both countries, etc.

## 6. Conclusions

It can therefore be concluded that the leading determinants of the sustainable of Polish–Czech cross-border cooperation include Group 1 factors directly related to partners, while Group 2 and Group 3 factors are their necessary complement (Table 8). However, the strength of the influence of individual factors may vary (Figure 5). All the studies prove that it is people and represented institutions that have a decisive influence on the sustainable cross-border cooperation, although the impact of support mechanisms is also significant.



**Figure 5.** Relationships between factors affecting sustainable cross-border cooperation. Source: own study.

Both the studies on the Czech–Polish borderland and on the Polish–Lithuanian borderland revealed that the Polish side is more active in cooperation development. The authors conclude that this is due to high demand for EU funds on the Polish side, their high availability and high efficiency in obtaining them by Polish beneficiaries. The determinants of cross-border cooperation, especially financial ones, clearly indicate that this is a form of inter-organizational cooperation, especially popular among entities with a stable financial situation, i.e., local governments and public institutions. Entrepreneurs and informal groups are excluded from obtaining EU funds and in practice, it significantly reduces their activity in cooperation, which was also shown by other studies [54]. This is a very serious problem of cross-border co-operation, threatening its balance. Social issues are harmoniously developed, environmental issues also play an important role in the cooperation, while economic issues lie in the background, as there is a lack of an economic catalyst for their development.

The thesis about the dominance of factors related to partners (interpersonal relations and the need for integration) is also supported by a survey. It seems that cooperation thrives best in areas that are the most accessible and have the widest impact on borderland community, e.g., culture, sport, tourism, and social integration. Projects that prevail are therefore “people for people” projects. At the same time, niche, strategic areas, reserved for a small group of stakeholders, e.g., spatial planning, are considered much less attractive areas of cooperation. The superficial forms of cooperation and current activities prevail, such as meetings, events, etc. Less frequently does cooperation become more specified, unless it is part of the EU project. There are virtually no examples of cooperation of strategic character, e.g., in jointly planning the development of the borderland.

It seems that the harmonization of cross-border cooperation is primarily the result of improving its key determinant, which is people and institutions and broadly speaking, all factors related to the partnership. While seeking partners for cross-border cooperation, including the joint implementation of EU projects, the long-term objectives of cooperation should first be considered. In regards to partnership management, the appropriate selection of partners should be crucial. Entities that turn out to be good partners:

- have compatible objectives, interests, and expectations;
- are aware of their needs and benefits they expect from cooperation;
- want to share cooperation benefits, but they are also ready to share costs and risk;
- have appropriate cooperation resources: knowledge, people, financial and material resources;
- have genuine motivation to undertake cooperation; and
- are focused on the permanent, not temporary partnership.

It is also important to respect the principles of a good partnership:

- equal rights for all partners, which leads to mutual respect;
- transparency in the relationship, which leads to trust; and
- mutual benefits for partners, which speaks well for the stability of cooperation.

In addition to the quality of the partnership, another factor affecting the harmonization of cross-border cooperation is the quality of a project. A well prepared partnership project takes into account the following assumptions:

- It responds to the real needs of potential beneficiaries on the side of each partner, and the needs are examined and assessed realistically, compared to the activities and costs estimated in the project.
- It engages cooperating parties in the partnership in the manner agreed, adequate to their real competencies and capabilities.
- It is prepared such that each partner achieves the expected results.
- It arises from a genuine desire to cooperate, rather than being forced by circumstances.
- It brings outcomes that should result in the further path of the development of such partnerships, e.g., a path defined based on the established cooperation strategy.

- Its implementation will foster and strengthen trust between the partners and eliminate barriers to communication and cooperation.
- It is conducted in such a way that after its completion, the partners still want to cooperate with each other.

The key determinants of sustainable cross-border cooperation have been identified; however, the question about the formula and directions of this cooperation remains open. In the author's opinion, the following issues need to be resolved for the further development of sustainable inter-organizational cooperation in the Czech–Polish borderland, as well as other borderlands:

- Should current, superficial relationships continue to dominate in cross-border cooperation, or should this cooperation be consciously expanded into the areas of strategic importance for the development of the borderland?
- Should cross-border cooperation continue to dominate only in selected areas, e.g., culture, sport, tourism, and social integration (usually coinciding with the subject of EU projects), or should it be expanded into other thematic areas important in terms of the long-term development of the borderland?
- Should cross-border cooperation continue to rely on bilateral partnerships or should more advanced models be striven, e.g., a network partnership?

The authors intend to devote further research to these issues, analyzing the possibilities of deepening cross-border relationships in inter-organizational cooperation in the borderlands, gradually transforming bilateral partnerships into network relationships and expanding the areas of common interest in cross-border relationships.

**Author Contributions:** The individual contribution and responsibilities of the authors are as follows: Joanna Kurowska-Pysz designed the research, provided the data collection and drafted the manuscript. Katarzyna Szczepańska-Woszczyna provided extensive suggestion throughout the study regarding the Abstract, Introduction, Methodology, and Findings, and revised the manuscript. Both authors discussed the research, cooperated with each other to revise the paper, and have read and approved the final manuscript.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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