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## The role of cross-border cooperation in improving the level and quality of life

### Wpływ współpracy transgranicznej na poziom i jakość życia

**ABSTRACT:** Does cross-border cooperation facilitate or impede the quality of family life in the region? This article examines this question using empirical examples of cross-border cooperation Programmes in the Polish-Belarusian-Ukrainian borderland. It is shown that the processes of cross-border cooperation have a significant positive impact on the quality of life of the local population and regional development.

**KEYWORDS:** cross-border cooperation, family, quality of life, sustainability

**ABSTRAKT:** Czy współpraca transgraniczna ułatwia czy obniża jakość życia rodzin w regionie? Niniejszy artykuł analizuje tę kwestię na empirycznych przykładach Programów współpracy transgranicznej na polsko-białorusko-ukraińskim pograniczu. Zostało udowodnione, że procesy współpracy transgranicznej mają istotny pozytywny wpływ na jakość życia społeczności lokalnej oraz rozwój regionalny.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** współpraca transgraniczna, rodzina, jakość życia, zrównoważony rozwój

### Introduction

Nowadays, significant attention in the socio-economic literature is paid to how to achieve sustainable development goals without abusing our ecosystems and the quality of life. Nevertheless, existing researches (for example, Sachs, Schmidt-Traub, Mazzucato<sup>1</sup>; Fonseca<sup>2</sup>; Moyer&Hedden<sup>3</sup>) which study how these goals can be achieved are concentrated chiefly on supra-national, sub-national and national levels, leaving behind the regional and individual issues. At the same time, the regional level and regional sustainability can be especially crucial for achieving a good quality of life as they could not be reached adequately without efficient cooperation between local stakeholders. Cross-border cooperation involves local border families that try to solve challenges and needs that are often similar to all sides of the border. There are many examples of how it should be done in various spheres and sectors- from enhancing local tourism through

1 J. Sachs, G. Schmidt-Traub, M. Mazzucato, et al., *Six Transformations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*, "Nature Sustainability" 2019, vol. 2, no. 9, p. 805-814. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-019-0352-9>.

2 L. Fonseca, J. Domingues, and A. Dima, *Mapping the Sustainable Development Goals Relationships*, "Sustainability" 2020, no. 8, p. 3359. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12083359>.

3 J. Moyer, S. Hedden, *Are we on the right path to achieve sustainable development goals?*, "World Development" 2020, vol. 127. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.104749>.

developing a joint promotional brand to improving the capacities of medical institutions in the cross-border region and all of that effort can help families advance the quality of life.

For the EU, where local cooperation is one of the main pillars of European integration and development, this issue is crucial.

In this article, I am going to concentrate on cross-border cooperation, which has a substantial impact on quality of life through stimulating borderland economic growth, preserving the natural and cultural heritage of border regions, improving cross-border accessibility, increasing the quality of roads and border-crossing points, supporting health care, security and other infrastructure investments.

This article will explore how regional cross-border cooperation brings significant long-lasting results that positively influence the quality of life in the region and have a direct positive impact on local families. For this purpose, the most extensive cross-border Programme on the EU land borders – between the partners from Poland, Belarus and Ukraine (PL-BY-UA) is analysed.

The paper's main goal is to present the achievements of the PL-BY-UA cooperation and to show the impact on the quality of life that this cooperation has. This goal is planned to be achieved by answering the following research question: How does cross-border cooperation facilitate quality of life in the region?

### Theoretical premises

Initially, discussions about sustainable development (SD) were concentrated on the need to reduce the negative impact of human beings on the natural environment. Later, this concept was modernised, covering three development factors: respect for the natural environment, social progress and economic growth<sup>4</sup>.

In its turn, initially related only to health issues, the concept of quality of life (QOL) currently contains essential socio-economic aspects of human life<sup>5</sup>.

In this article to define QOL, the conceptual framework proposed by Felce is used.

According to his approach, well-being or QOL is a multidimensional construct and consists of three main elements: (1) life conditions of individuals and their circumstances (objective element); (2) individual well-being related to the personal satisfaction of life conditions (subjective element); (3) personal values and aspirations that are objectively and subjectively related to (1) and (2)<sup>6</sup>.

QOL is directly related to sustainable development<sup>7</sup>. In practice, if we analysed the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations, we can find that all 17 goals and 169 targets put QOL in a central place (e.g. health, poverty reduction; education; nutrition; gender equality; clean water and sanitation, sustainable energy and safer cities etc.).

4 J. Blatter, J. *Emerging Cross-Border Regions as a Step towards Sustainable Development? Experiences and Considerations from Examples in Europe and North America*, "International Journal of Economic Development" 2000, vol. 2, no. 3, p. 402-439. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3009670>.

5 According to WHO, "QOL is an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and concerning their goals, expectations, standards and concerns".

6 D. Felce, *Defying and applying the concept of quality of life*, "Journal of Intellectual Disability Research" 1997, vol. 41.

7 A. Hedlund-de Witt, *Rethinking Sustainable Development: Considering How Different Worldviews Envision "Development" and "Quality of Life"*, "Sustainability" 2014, 6(11), p. 8310-8328; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su6118310>, available at <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/6/11/8310>.

Concerning measurements of QOL, this question also raises many debates. First, QOL covers the individual perception of life's position; therefore, all measurements could be subjective. Secondly, QOL is not only social or health well-being but material wealth also. Therefore, measurement should cover a wide range of factors. Current research literature proposes several indicators to measure QOL, including (1) Human Development Index; (2) World Happiness Report; (3) Physical Quality of Life Index; (4) Happy Planet Index; (5) Social Progress Index and many others. However, these indexes mainly refer to the national level, almost skipping other lower levels. To avoid this gap, to examine how cross-border cooperation influences the QOL at the regional level, the methodology developed by WHO (WHOQOL BREF) has been used. Remarkably, three main domains in their regional perspectives have been considered: (1) health; (2) social relationships and (3) environment.

As it was stated above, despite the significant research attention that theories of SD and QOL have, issues related to their regional aspect are underdeveloped. Mainly, an aspect of cross-border cooperation<sup>8</sup> and its influence on QOL requires further research.

Therefore, trying to understand how cross-border cooperation is related to QOL, first of all, the results of cross-border cooperation should be evaluated.

To examine the general impact of the cross-border cooperation on QOL and SD development, the following essential aspects should be examined:

- characteristics of the cross-border area;
- allocated financial resources;
- achieved impact on QOL dimensions.

## Methodology

This paper is a review article and is based on research of documents laying down specific provisions for the implementation of the cross-border cooperation Programmes<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, the following evaluation reports have been analyzed: external evaluation of the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI) (2014 – mid-2017), the final report on the evaluation study titled “Ex-post evaluation of actions co-financed by the Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Poland – Belarus – Ukraine 2007-2013”, report “Socioeconomic analysis of the programme area Interreg Next Poland – Belarus – Ukraine 2021 -2027”, evaluation report “Ocena wpływu Programu Sąsiedztwa Interreg IIIA/Tacis CBC Polska-Białoruś-Ukraina 2004-06 na osiągnięcie spójności gospodarczej, społecznej i terytorialnej na obszarze transgranicznym objętym wsparciem”; relevant project descriptions, reports of the projects implemented within Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Programmes.

The paper consists of three chapters. The first one is dedicated to the theoretical dimensions of the quality of life and its interconnections with cross-border cooperation. The second chapter summarises three cross-border cooperation Programmes between Poland, Belarus and Ukraine. It presents how sustainable project results positively influence QOL in terms of borderland economic growth, natural and cultural heritage, improving cross-border accessibility, supporting

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8 [Cross-border cooperation is a partnership between local and regional stakeholders separated by a national frontier, whose actions have repercussions at the local and the regional level on both sides of that frontier] – Territorial Cooperation – a Historical Perspective 2015, p. 1.

9 For example, Regulation (EU) No 232/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014; Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 897/2014 of 18 August 2014.

health care, security and other infrastructure investments. Part three includes the conclusions of the paper.

### Background

The Cross-border Cooperation Programme Poland-Belarus-Ukraine (hereinafter referred to as the Programme) is one of the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes implemented since 2004. Preceded by a year of preparations and consultations, the efforts resulted in a Programme that has been continuously operating for 17 years<sup>10</sup>. The implemented actions contribute to the improvement of the life quality of the inhabitants of eastern Poland, western Ukraine and Belarus.

The Programme Area is determined based on NUTS 3 units (subregions) in Poland and oblast division in Ukraine and Belarus:

- In Poland it covers the following subregions: Białostocki, Łomżyński, Suwalski, Ostrołęcki, Siedlecki, Bialski, Lubelski, Puławski, Chełmsko-Zamojski, Przemyski, Rzeszowski, Tarnobrzelski, Krośnieński.
- In Belarus, the Programme Area covers: Grodno, Brest, Gomel and Minsk oblasts (excluding the city of Minsk).
- In Ukraine, the Programme Area includes the following Oblasts: Volyn, Lviv, Zakarpattya, Rivne, Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast<sup>11</sup>.

The Programme's objective is to support and promote integrated regional development in neighbouring border regions, including regions at the external borders of the European Union.

The support area covers approximately 316,000 sq. km. Its most significant part lies in the Belarusian territory (44%) and the rest, respectively, in Ukraine (32%) and in Poland (24%). In 2018, the support area had 19 886 000 inhabitants. Of this number, 31% lived in Poland, 27% in Belarus and 42% in Ukraine.

These countries share similar demographic patterns: significant outmigration, ageing, an ongoing rural-to-urban exodus, and a high burden of non-communicable diseases. Deaths, irrespective of the location of the subregions or oblasts, are mainly caused by cardiovascular disease (in Poland their share in the total number of deaths is 41,5%, in Belarus – 55,5%, and in Ukraine – 56,5%) and cancer (in Poland their share in the total number of deaths is 26,5%, in Belarus – 15,7%, and in Ukraine – 13,4%) in all regions.

Conclusions resulting from the programme documentation covering the social and economic analysis of the Programme area show significant problems. These include quite low levels of quality of life and regional development. Table 1 presents some data related to QOL in selected regional centres (see table 1).

10 Report *Socio-economic analysis of the Programme area Interreg Next Poland – Belarus – Ukraine 2021-2027*, Utila 2020.

11 According to the Programme documents.

**Table 1. Quality of life in selected regional centres**

	Lviv		Lublin		Brest		Białystok		Rzeszow	
Purchasing Power Index	Very Low	37.91	Low	57.48	Very Low	32.28	Low	53.85	Low	53.86
Safety Index	High	60.54	High	74.73	Moderate	40.91	High	77.18	Very High	80.5
Health Care Index	Moderate	59.70	High	62.81	Low	35.56	Moderate	47.47	High	65.74
Climate Index	High	69.61	High	77.51	High	74.17	High	76.22	High	74.35
Cost of Living Index	Very Low	28.96	Very Low	37.89	Very Low	27.60	Very Low	38.81	Very Low	37.95
Property Price to Income Ratio	Moderate	11.06	Moderate	11.94	Moderate	10.13	Moderate	11.97	Moderate	11.31
Traffic Commute Time Index	Low	32.94	Very Low	24.79	Low	28.33	Very Low	24.5	Low	31.83
Pollution Index	Moderate	51.29	Low	35.91	Moderate	55.23	Moderate	59.19	Low	34.28
Quality of Life Index	Moderate	127.89	High	159.26	Low	108.44	Moderate	136.97	High	159

Source: Data from [www.numbeo.com](http://www.numbeo.com)

Despite quite low indexes, thanks to the implementation of specific programmes (e.g. Phare, Neighbourhood Programme), significant progress has been noted.

From 2004, when PL-BY-UA cooperation was started, 554 Polish, 155 Belarusian, 335 Ukrainian institutions were involved in implementing projects.

In terms of finance, as much as 414.1 MEUR have been allocated from the EU funds for the support in three editions of the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine cross-border cooperation (Table 2). Approximately 10 % of all EU funds are allocated to the Technical Assistance budget; therefore, 372 MEUR has been dedicated to particular project activities.

**Table 2. Allocated financial resources (three Programme periods)**

2004-2006	2007-2013	2014-2020
Total budget		
58.4 MEUR (44.8 MEUR from EU) <sup>a</sup>	203.6 MEUR (186.2 MEUR from EU)	201.4 MEUR (183.1 MEUR from EU)

a Allocation: ERDF – 37.818 MEUR; 7.0 MEUR – Tacis CBC.

Source: Data from the Programme report, 2018

In total, 284 cross-border projects have been implemented (editions 2004-2006 and 2007-2013) and 130 projects (including 65 micro-projects) in 2014-2020 Programme editions.

Below the main effects of the Programmes on the QQL dimensions are presented:

### Health dimension

Poland, Ukraine and Belarus share similar demographic patterns: significant outmigration, ageing, an ongoing rural-to-urban exodus, and a high burden of non-communicable diseases. Deaths, irrespective of the location of the subregions or oblasts, are mainly caused by cardiovascular disease (in Poland their share in the total number of deaths is 41,5%, in Belarus – 55,5%, and in Ukraine – 56,5%) and cancer (in Poland their share in the total number of deaths is 26,5%, in Belarus – 15,7%, and in Ukraine – 13,4%) in all regions.

This is due to the growing demographic trends and the growing number of people in post-working age, as well as the apparent inequalities between the subregions of the Programme area regarding the availability of health care. These problems also overlap with staff shortages – in the medical sector, as in other sectors, there is an outflow of staff to other urban centres and regions with a higher level of development potential. Inequalities in access to health care are manifested by the varying number of clinics, doctors and hospital beds concerning the number of inhabitants.

In the first Programme period (2004-2006), there was no particular priority directly related to the health sector.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, all Programme priorities have been related to healthcare indirectly, mainly through strengthening institutional cross-border cooperation and increasing the quality of human capital.

It should be noted that the next Programme had a particular objective directly related to healthcare – within the frames of the CBC Programme Poland – Belarus – Ukraine 2007-2013, 13 projects on medical topics were financed (with total budgets more than 26,5 MEUR). Covered activities concerned equipped hospitals and health facilities with modern medical and preventive care equipment, so it is easier now to detect the early stages of cancer, tuberculosis or cardiovascular disease among the locals. The results of these projects are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Results of the health projects within CBC Programme Poland – Belarus – Ukraine 2007-2013**

Results	Value
Modernised or new hospital or outpatient departments	8
Created diagnostic laboratories	3
Created hospices	2
Medical equipment purchased	1061
Ambulances purchased	7
Number of patients included in the medical studies	1504
Tools to facilitate diagnostic cooperation	5

Source: Final Report on the evaluation study titled "Ex-post evaluation of actions co-financed by the Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Poland – Belarus – Ukraine 2007-2013".

Programme 2014-2020 has particular priority related to health – Priority 3.1 Support for the development of health care and social services. Support in this area concerned 12 projects

<sup>12</sup> Only one project (directly related to the healthcare sector) has been implemented – Orthopedics without borders – 1st Polish – Ukrainian workshop in spine diseases treatment.

of infrastructure and soft nature (research, health promotion) with a total budget of more than 18,5 MEUR, 16 independent public health care facilities took part in this Programme edition. According to current data, the results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4. Results of the health projects within CBC Programme Poland – Belarus – Ukraine 2014-2020**

Indicator	Target value	Achieved (as of 1 February 2022 -according to project reports)
Population covered by improved health services as a direct consequence of the support	10 583 993 [persons]	320426
Number of medical / prevention research / research / treatment programmes organised	28	7
Number of events supporting the development of public health	133	6
Number of participants of the events supporting the development of public health	11 393 094 [persons]	2 014 346
Number of new or improved health care services	28	4
Several modernised/improved medical facilities (e.g. hospitals, hospices etc.)	22	2
Number of newly built medical facilities (e.g. hospitals, hospices etc)	1	0
Number of purchased medical vehicles	16	7
Number of purchased specialised medical equipment	948	102
Number of initiatives aimed at prevention of spreading human/animal/plant diseases across the border	3	0

Source: data from projects interim reports.

It should be noted that today the coronavirus pandemic significantly accelerated cross-border cooperation in healthcare. For example, in 2020-2021, around 3 MEUR of existing Programme savings have been dedicated to 12 health projects for further contribution to the COVID crisis response<sup>13</sup>.

### Environmental dimension

The environmental quality of a cross-border area is a key aspect of its inhabitants' quality of life and also determines its attractiveness for tourists. Among the cross-border areas with special natural and cultural values covered by the Programme implementation, the following should be listed successively from the north: the primaevial forests surrounding the Augustów Canal (Augustów, Grodno and Dainava), the Białowieża Primeval Forest, Pobuże Podlaskie, Polesie Włodawskie, Dubienka Depression, Roztocze, Przemyśl bend of the San River and Bieszczady Mountains with its foothills. On the Polish-Belarusian border, there is the Białowieża Primeval Forest, covering vast areas of woodland. Its major part (58%) is located in Belarus. Another important element of the cross-border ecosystem is the Bug River Valley, which is a border river for all three countries involved in the Programme. The following are also important for cooperation in the field

13 D. Volodin, *Cross-border cooperation as an essential factor of the sustainable healthcare: the case of Polish-Belarusian-Ukrainian border region* in L. Buller (ed.), *Health security in the area of the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine cross-border cooperation Programme*, Warsaw 2021, p. 15-29.

of environmental protection in the Polish-Ukrainian borderland: Western Polesie, Roztocze and Eastern Beskids. They constitute a coherent natural and cultural area and at the same time an important tourist potential of these countries.

The Programme area is also characterised by an uneven spatial distribution of protected areas. The share of legally protected areas varies from country to country and ranges from 8% in Lviv Oblast to 75% in Krosno subregion. Poland is characterised by a high share of protected areas in the whole Programme Area reaching almost 75%. While in Ukrainian and Belarusian regions it is much lower and remains at the level of about 15% (not exceeding this value – in Ukraine, it varies from 8% to 16% and in Belarus from 7% to 15%).

Many ecological corridors of international importance cross the Programme area: (1) the Southern Corridor from the Bieszczady Mountains to the Ruda Forests; it passes through the Przemyskie and Dynowskie Foothills, Island Beskids, and (2) the Carpathian Corridor runs through the Bieszczady Mountains, Low Beskids and Beskid Sądecki, Pieniny Mountains up to the Tatra Mountains. It connects with parts of the Carpathian Mountains lying on the Ukrainian side.

Over the last decade, Poland has made great progress in environmental protection, reducing the dependence of economic growth on environmental pressure. Belarus and Ukraine are also working towards improving the quality of the environment. Further reduction in the use of resources and the reduction of emissions of substances and energy to the environment continue to pose a challenge in the process of implementing the principles of sustainable development in the economy and strengthening pro-efficiency trends.

EU membership places numerous obligations on environmental standards. Some of these requirements are overachieved, for example concerning greenhouse gas emissions. In 2017, Poland achieved a 28% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions expressed in carbon dioxide equivalent compared to the base year level, including carbon dioxide emissions by approx. 29%, methane by 35%, and nitrous oxide by 29%.

All three editions of the Programme included protecting the natural environment into their primary objectives. According to the PL-BY-UA program documentation, environmental sustainability is an essential cross-sectional issue in the implementation of the Program, and it should be visible at every stage of its implementation. Therefore, projects that would directly negatively impact the environment could not be financed under the Program. In total, starting from 2004-2006, 70 projects (without microprojects) in the field of environmental protection were implemented. In general, projects supported nearly 25 500 inhabitants; due to the projects, over 3 thousand households were connected to municipal sewage systems (more than 100 km of sewage systems were built, five sewage treatment plants have been built/upgraded; regional fire protection system for counteracting threats to the natural environment has been improved (for example, more than 300 modern police, fire brigade, rescue vehicles have been purchased).



**Table 5. Results within CBC Programme Poland – Belarus – Ukraine 2014-2020: the environmental dimension**

Indicator	Target value	Achieved (as of 1 February 2022 – according to project reports)
Number of promoted and/or preserved natural sites as a direct consequence of Programme support	69	5
Number of persons participating in actions and awareness-raising activities promoting the preservation of natural heritage	23091 [persons]	584
Number of campaigns promoting the preservation of natural heritage	27	2
Number of publications on the natural heritage of the region	98	10
Length of constructed sewage systems aiming at preservation and protection of natural heritage, km	1247	7311
Length of modernised/improved sewage system aimed at preserving natural heritage, km	12832	5350
Number of modernised/improved wastewater treatment/purification plants aimed at preserving natural heritage	4	1
Population benefiting from fire protection measures services as a direct consequence of the support	11393094 [persons]	8 408 128 [persons]
Increased number of visitors of the natural heritage sites	13,1%	7,61%

Source: Data from projects interim reports.

### Social dimension

#### Socio-economic cooperation

According to the Programmes documents and grant contracts, the total amount allocated for socio-economic cooperation is EUR 8,237,792.96. In the territorial aspect, the Polish part of the Programme received EUR 4,627,872.91 (56.19% of the whole amount), Belarusian – EUR 422,743.13 (5.13%) and Ukrainian – EUR 3,187,176.92 (38.68%). These projects improved SMEs' conditions and cooperation within the cross-border region, cooperation between scientific centres and business organisations, tourism, the development of modern information facilities for further economic development<sup>14</sup>.

The central part of socio-economic cooperation takes tourism development that in its turn has a straightforward impact on QQL in the region. As Programme and projects reports say, many activities carried out in the Programme area promoted various branches of tourism – health, cultural, military, religious and historical ones. The total number of projects linked to the tourism sector has been estimated as 66, and the total allocation that can be linked to the tourism sector was more than 60 MEUR. The following Programmes results are linked (directly or indirectly) to tourism development: 52 cultural and historical sites were improved; 31 tourism information

14 S. Galko, D. Volodin, A. Nakonechna, *Economic competitiveness increase through the development of SMEs in cross-border regions of Poland, Belarus and Ukraine*, "Economic Annals-XXI" 2015, no. 9-10, p. 23-27.

centres/points were created; 1875 km of touristic bicycle/water routes were constructed or labelled/ marked.

Socio-economic cooperation also covers improved border infrastructure – among existing 29 Polish-Ukrainian-Belarus cross-boundary points, 4 of them (Budomierz-Hruszów; Dołhobyczów-Uhrynów; Połowce-Pieszczatka; Kuźnica Białostocka-Bruzgi) have been created/modernized due to Programmes financial support. As a result, it is expected that the average waiting time reduced by 35% in Korczowa, 25% in Medyka and 10% in Kroszowice. Moreover, due to projects's realisation, border crossing capacity for vehicles has been increased by 29 865 vehicles and 48 800 people per day has a significant positive impact on economic cooperation between border regions.

#### Cultural and historical cooperation

Cultural heritage is a particular aspect of all three editions of the Programme as its area is characterised by a great cultural diversity – with many objects included in the UNESCO World Heritage List<sup>15</sup>. In the Programme 2004-2006, the support of the socio-cultural sphere was reflected in the implementation of 25 initiatives promoting and protecting cultural heritage and 127 micro-projects in this scope. Support for the socio-cultural sphere in the years 2007-2013 was manifested in the 26 projects and 56 micro-projects (within umbrella projects). This support is continued in the third edition of the Programme, within thematic objective HERITAGE, where 17 regular and 65 microprojects have been implemented so far.

The implementation of all these projects improved the region's opportunities for promotion, preservation of traditions of border areas and cultural diversity, and cooperation between local communities.

**Table 6. Results within CBC Programme Poland – Belarus – Ukraine 2014-2020: the social dimension**

Indicator	Target value	Achieved (as of 1 February 2022 -according to project reports)
Increased number of visitors of the historical heritage and cultural sites	16,6%	11,8%
Number of improved cultural and historical sites as a direct consequence of Programme support	55	3
Number of cross-border cultural events organized using ENI support	340	28
Number of participants of cross-border cultural events organized with the support of ENI funding	86845 [persons]	12050
Number of newly created tourist services increasing the use of cultural heritage in tourism	24	1
Population benefiting from the newly created or improved social services [persons]	100548	27960
Number of newly created infrastructure serving the local community to preserve local culture and/or historical heritage	13	2

Source: data from projects interim reports.

15 L. Buller Implementation of cross-border cooperation projects in the area of cultural heritage under the Programme Poland – Belarus – Ukraine. Analysis of Financial Perspectives 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 in L. Buller (ed.) Cross-border heritage as a basis of Polish-Belarusian-Ukrainian cooperation, Centre of European Projects, 2018, p. 45-81, available at <https://pbu2020.eu/en/librarynews/10#book/43>.

The projects related to cultural diversity have an impact not only due to the infrastructural and investment works carried out but also through the organisation of the cross-border events. They enable the establishment of cooperation with people from abroad, which in turn enable mutual learning of cultural and linguistic codes and sharing the knowledge about cultures, traditions, and customs.

Beneficiaries implementing projects observed a high degree of socio-cultural activation. At the same time, it should be noted that support in the first edition of the Programme related mainly to greater integration at the institutional level—subsequent editions of the Programme aimed at the integration at the level of members of local communities.

## Conclusions

There is no “one-size-fits-all” concept for cross-border collaboration, as projects strongly depend on their specific environments, such as geography, economy, ecology, culture, healthcare systems and the experiences of stakeholders who initiate them. As a plus, projects implemented within Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Programmes are in line with general socioeconomic tendencies in the covered regions and dedicated to particular QOL problems which are most relevant to the local families.

Based on evaluation and project reports, it is clear that the implementation of the Programmes has enhanced the QOL of the border regions and communities. The changes observed show that the Programmes positively impact the lives of local families. Among many benefits of the Programmes, implementing their objectives on the eastern border of the European Union resulted in the socio-economic development of the border regions of participating neighbouring countries.

The results achieved during the implementation of the project show that projects have positively influenced the ecological situation and socio-economic development of the regions covered by the Programme. Moreover, cross-border cooperation enhances human capital through established partnerships during joint projects.

There has been improvement among others in infrastructure security, which can generally be defined as improving the quality of life and improving the conditions for economic development. The changes observed show that the Programmes positively impact the lives of local communities and target groups and facilitate sustainable development.

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