

# European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation NOVUM – An Example of Polish-Czech Cross-border Cooperation

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**Abstract.** The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation NOVUM (EGTC NOVUM) was established in 2015 and conducts its activities in the Polish-Czech borderland. The main aim of NOVUM is to intensify, facilitate and promote Polish-Czech cross-border cooperation aimed at the strengthening of economic and social cohesion of the area of operation of the Grouping (EUWT NOVUM, 2018). Since the beginning of its existence, the Grouping has implemented many of its own projects aimed at increasing cooperation and cohesion in the Czech-Polish border area. The grouping also deals with creating cross-border partnerships and searching for partners who can successfully realize projects. The aim of this article is to analyze the activities of the Grouping and to show how its activities influence the Czech-Polish cross-border cooperation. It analyses projects that contribute most to the Czech-Polish cooperation.

**Keywords:** EGTC NOVUM; cross-border cooperation; European projects; European Union

**JEL Classification:** R5; P25

## 1. Introduction

The European Union has created the European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) as a legal instrument to facilitate cross-border cooperation. EGTCs conduct their activities based on Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) (The European Parliament...,2019), which allows for the creation of cooperation units by public entities from different Member States. In addition, it provides these entities with a Community legal framework. Thus, it can be generally written that European groupings of territorial cooperation are legal entities created by Member States, local and regional authorities and other entities governed by public law. Such an entity is of course created on the territory of the European Union and allows for the establishment of formal cooperation groups by public entities from different Member States.

It should be noted that the first EGTC, Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai, was created in January 2008. It enables cooperation between significantly different authorities from three different administrative levels in Belgium and France. The official headquarters are in France and the French authorities have accepted the EC Regulation as a basic right, allowing them to employ staff in accordance with Belgian law (Mędza, 2015).

The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation NOVUM (EGTC NOVUM) was established in 2015. The Convention and Statute of the Grouping were signed in September of that year, while its legal personality was established in December. NOVUM operates in the Polish-Czech borderland. Its founders and members are institutions from the Czech Republic and Poland. There are five regional authorities: one from Poland – Dolnośląskie Voivodship (Region) and four from Czech Republic (Hradec Králové Region, Liberec Region, Olomouc Region and Pardubice Region), as well as two Polish-Czech Euroregions: Nysa and Glacensis. NOVUM was established in order to intensify, facilitate and promote Polish-Czech cross-border cooperation aimed at the strengthening of economic and social cohesion of the area of operation of the Grouping (EUWT NOVUM, 2015). NOVUM conducts its activities based on the Strategy of integrated cooperation of the Czech-Polish border 2014-2020. The main areas of activities are: economic cooperation, transport, environmental protection, health protection, spatial planning and administrative problems (UMWD,2014).

The literature emphasizes that the creation of EGTC NOVUM increases the economic attractiveness of the Polish-Czech borderland area and that this grouping, as a new subject of European Union law, advances the Polish-Czech cross-border cooperation in the implementation of the European Union's regional policy (Adamczuk, 2016). It is also pointed out that the Polish-Czech borderland has become a model example of the most innovative cross-border cooperation. The first Euroregions in Poland were created here, followed by the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). For example, December 2016 marked the twentieth anniversary of the Polish-Czech Euroregion Glacensis. However, there is still untapped potential. Overcoming difficulties in contacts and effective implementation of new forms of cooperation may increase the chances for development of this region (Skorupska, 2014).

The aim of the article is to show how EGTC NOVUM activities contribute to the strengthening of cooperation in the Czech-Polish border region. How the realized projects influence the cross-border cooperation. What is their impact on achieving the assumed strategic objectives of cooperation. We will also analyze the activities realized outside the projects. The grouping undertakes many projects which contribute to the development of Polish-Czech cooperation.

## **2. Research Methodology**

NOVUM EGTC operates in the Lower Silesian Voivodship on the Polish side and in four countries on the Czech side, i.e. Kralovehradecky, Liberecky, Pardubicky and Olomoucky. Altogether, this gives an area of more than 37.6 thousand km<sup>2</sup>, where nearly 5.1 million people live. The creation of EGTC NOVUM created an area of comparable size on both the Polish and Czech sides, inhabited by a similar number of people. The disproportion between the "big" Polish region and the "small" Czech one was thus eliminated.

During the nearly 6 years of its operation, the Grouping implemented 11 projects. Of these, one was financed from national resources and the rest from the European Union budget. One project was financed by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Two projects

were implemented under the Interreg Central Europe Program and eight under the Interreg V-A Czech Republic-Poland. A detailed list of projects is presented below.

**Table 1.** Population and area of EUWT NOVUM (CZSO, Regional Office Hradec Králové: Statistical yearbook of the Královéhradecký region, Regional statistics, Hradec Králové (2017); CZSO, Regional Office Liberec: Statistical yearbook of the Liberecký region, Regional statistics, Liberec (2017); CZSO, Regional Office Olomouc: Statistical yearbook of the Olomoucký region, Regional statistics, Olomouc (2017); CZSO, Regional Office Pardubice: Statistical yearbook of the Pardubický region, Regional statistics, Pardubice (2017).

Region	Population (persons)	Area (km <sup>2</sup> )
Dolnośląskie	2,930,710	19,947
Hradec Králové	550,804	4,759
Liberec	440,636	3,163
Olomouc	517,087	4,519
Pardubice	633,698	5,271
Total	5,072,935	37,659

1. 01.08.2016-30.11.2016: Project "Along the trail of common heritage". Funding source: Polish-Czech Forum of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Republic of Poland. Subsidy value: PLN 23,210.00.
2. 01.06.2016-31.05.2017: Project "Motorway S3/D11 our joint priority". Funding source: Interreg V-A Czech Republic-Poland. Subsidy value EUR: 7,388.35.
3. 01.06.2018-30.11.2018: Project "15 years together". Funding source: Interreg V-A Czech Republic-Poland. Subsidy value EUR: 16,669.11.
4. 01.06.2017-31.05.2020: Project "Boosting energy efficiency in Central European cities through smart energy management". Funding source: Interreg Central Europe. Subsidy value: EUR 107,185.59.
5. 01.01.2018-31.12.2020: Project "We solve problems together". Funding source: Interreg V-A Czech Republic-Poland. Subsidy value EUR: 280,700.54.
6. 01.01.2018-31.12.2020: Project "How do your emergency services work?". Funding source: Interreg V-A Czech Republic-Poland. Subsidy value EUR: 84,377.29.
7. 01.01.2018-31.12.2020: Project "Akcent@Net". Funding source: Interreg V-A Czech Republic-Poland. Subsidy value EUR: 45,800.93.
8. 01.01.2019-30.06.2022: Project "Education knows no boundaries". Funding source: Interreg V-A Czech Republic-Poland. Subsidy value EUR: 125,950.00.
9. 01.01.2019-31.03.2021: Project "Spa 4 Development". Funding source: Interreg V-A Czech Republic-Poland. Subsidy value EUR: 80,493.40.
10. 01.04.2020-31.03.2022: Project "Capitalizing and exploiting energy efficiency solutions throughout cooperation in central European cities (TARGET-CE)". Funding source: Interreg Central Europe. Subsidy value EUR: 102,895.00.
11. 01.07.2021-30.06.2023: Project "In contact-Cross-border cooperation despite obstacles". Funding source: Interreg Central Europe. Subsidy value EUR: 85,859.00.

In total, the Group managed to obtain over 980 thousand euro. This shows great activity in the field of raising external funds. Thanks to obtaining these funds it is possible to achieve statutory goals.

### **3. Results**

In this part of the study, selected projects implemented by the Grouping will be analyzed in detail. All the projects are important for the realization of the Grouping's objectives. They all contribute to the strengthening of Polish-Czech cooperation in the cross-border area. Their realization has contributed to the achievement of concrete results. The European grouping of territorial cooperation is a cross-border entity and therefore it can realize cross-border cooperation projects on its own. Novum used this opportunity and realized project "We solve problems together". The project was focused on solving the defined system problems of cross-border cooperation on the Czech-Polish border. The main aim of the project was to increase intensity of co-operation between key institutions in the field of Polish-Czech cross-border co-operation, to create for them a co-operation network, communication channels and a platform for meetings of specialists in given fields.

For these purposes 6 thematic groups of EGTC NOVUM served in different spheres of cooperation: economic cooperation, environmental protection, health and safety, administrative problems, transport and planning and spatial development. Each of these groups met at least twice a year. In addition, conferences and training sessions were organized in the areas mentioned above. Within the economic cooperation group, two conferences were held as training conferences for entrepreneurs. In the area of environmental protection, 6 training conferences were organized for employees of offices responsible for issuing decisions on water management, air protection and waste management (including transboundary movements of waste). The topics of the conferences also included issues related to access to information on the environment. In the area of health protection and safety, conferences were organized on the issues of crisis management in the cross-border area. In the field of spatial planning and management, trainings were organized for the municipalities of the first border strip on the Polish side and municipalities with extended competence as well as other municipalities neighboring Poland. The scope of the conference included a comparison of spatial planning systems on the local level. In the second stage, an analysis of selected local spatial development plans in bordering municipalities was carried out together with a workshop attempt to identify conflicts and develop a common development framework. Three conferences on transboundary connections between Poland and the Czech Republic were organized within the Transport Group.

The effect of the works of the group on administrative problems was creation of the expert opinion "Map of competences of Polish and Czech self-government". Subsequently, 4 conferences for representatives of local self-government units were organized to present the results achieved. In total, more than 1,200 people participated in all training courses and conferences within the project. The beginning of 2020, due to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, brought new challenges. This was influenced by the closure of borders and restrictions on movement. It was decided to create an information point for cross-border

workers. There are several thousand Poles working in the Czech Republic, who used to cross the border every day to work. The closing of the borders prevented them from performing their work duties. 4 May 2020. The Polish government allowed people working in the Czech Republic to cross the border. However, the employees did not have the necessary knowledge when and under what conditions they could cross the border. The aim of the created information point was to provide reliable knowledge about legal regulations in force on both sides of the border. Information was collected from public institutions such as border guards, police, sanitary, etc. Its service will be handled by one of the employees. Every day he was on duty by telephone and provided information by e-mail. In addition, a database was created on the project website, which contained the necessary regulations. Employees accessing it had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with all the information that enables them to work on the other side of the border. Webinars were also organized, during which experts from various fields answered questions of those interested. In the following months, the scope of activities of the information point was extended. Its services were used not only by cross-border workers, but by all persons interested in traveling to a neighboring country. Another very important project for the Group was the project "How do your emergency services work?". The project partners were ambulance services from the Czech-Polish border area. Within the framework of the project, we managed to organize two conferences. Exchange placements of medical employees took place. Within the framework of the project, medical workers from Poland and the Czech Republic had the opportunity to go for an internship, during which they could familiarize themselves with the functioning and specifics of daily work in emergency rooms in the neighboring country, including the equipment of emergency services. An important element of the internship was the opportunity to draw attention to the differences in the functioning of emergency medical services on both sides of the border. Joint exercises of emergency medical services were held. This activity included organization of two joint exercises of emergency medical services from Czech Republic and Poland. They were carried out in a schedule of two-day actions of rescue teams in simulated conditions - at night and during the day. Task stations were organized where paramedics could demonstrate their skills and knowledge of medical rescue, while improving their qualifications. Thanks to the participation of Polish and Czech medical rescue teams, the exercises contributed to establishing closer contacts and improving coordination in the management of medical teams in the Polish-Czech borderland. Another activity was training of paramedics. The action included the organization of four two-day trainings for medical personnel, two in Poland and two in the Czech Republic. The subject of the trainings was, among others, providing help in life and health threatening situations, joint cooperation in providing pre-hospital care by paramedics in selected cases (sudden cardiac arrest, serious injuries, etc.). The intensive course time included lectures, demonstrations, discussions and exercise stations. The main element of knowledge transfer was exercises in small groups (up to eight people), using simulated scenarios on manikins adapted to perform advanced resuscitation procedures (e.g. intravenous access, instrumental ventilation, intubation, defibrillation). The trainings were ended with obtaining a certificate. A total of 750 people benefited from all activities implemented under the project. During the project

implementation, the most important problems related to providing medical assistance in border regions were discussed. It was emphasized that the most important problem is the lack of an intergovernmental agreement between Poland and the Czech Republic concerning medical rescue services. The lack of an agreement means that ambulances from one country cannot provide assistance on the other side of the border. The group has set itself the goal of getting this agreement signed. Meetings were organized with members of parliament from Poland and the Czech Republic, as well as with representatives of ministries of health.

A project that is also worth mentioning in more detail is the Spa for development. The project was mostly implemented during the period of restrictions imposed by the pandemic. However, the pandemic has increased the interest of tourists in practicing tourism on a more local level. Tourists want to spend their vacations close to home, but still abroad. They had no knowledge of the available tourist facilities on the other side of the border. They also often did not know that such spas existed at all. In the framework of the project an atlas of Polish and Czech spas was created. People interested in visiting a spa can learn about its offer and accommodation facilities. The project was also very useful for spa managers. They gained knowledge on how health resorts in the other country function. They exchanged information on how to organize public transport in the area of the spa, how to manage green areas or how to provide qualified personnel. They also discussed how public authorities support spas when they are closed due to a pandemic.

#### **4. Conclusions**

In conclusion, it should be stated that EGTC NOVUM is an important instrument of cross-border cooperation between Poland and the Czech Republic. Its activity has a significant impact on strengthening cooperation between entities in the area of its operation. Thanks to its projects, NOVUM has become one of the most active players in Czech-Polish cooperation. The activities of the Grouping were also very important when the covid-19 pandemic occurred. They affected the daily lives of many people. Thanks to the activities undertaken by the Group, it was possible to facilitate daily life. Currently, the information activity is continued under the In Touch project. An Information Center was created where all the necessary information is gathered for those who want to visit a neighboring country. Special information packages were created. They cover e.g. transport, education, health care or education. In the case of transport, there is information on the road management system, places where one can find information on impediments on the roads, closed border crossings or the system of road fees.

On the other hand, the implementation of a project addressed to medical rescuers made it possible to identify a very important barrier hampering everyday work in border regions. The lack of a Polish-Czech intergovernmental agreement on paramedic rescue causes very frequent complications in providing assistance to injured people. The group has taken steps to ensure that such an agreement is signed as soon as possible. The realization of this project showed how important the problem is the need for cooperation between emergency services in border areas. The specificity of the area results from the fact that it is often easier and faster to get help from the other country. All this influenced the decision on the need to continue

this cooperation. At present, a project is being developed in which all the ambulance services in the Czech-Polish border area will cooperate. There are also plans to create a transregional training center for paramedics.

In addition to the two projects discussed in detail, the results of other projects should also be mentioned. These have enabled cooperation to be established between spa communities, between teachers or the learning of the neighboring language.

Another very important area of the Group's work is assisting those interested in cooperating. The restrictions caused by the pandemic have made it difficult to establish direct partnerships. The Grouping plays the role of an entity that searches for a partner on the other side of the border for entities interested in collaborating. Thanks to this activity it has been possible to establish many partnerships. Consequently, several projects have been prepared.

Also some more general conclusions can be drawn. Six years have already passed since the creation of the Group. This period has shown how good a decision it was to create it. Many projects have been successfully completed. Many people have participated in the activities carried out by the Grouping. They benefited from conferences, trainings and webinars. Implemented projects perfectly fit into the existing gap in cooperation. Their implementation has shown the necessity of long-term cooperation. The grouping became one of the most active entities of the Polish-Czech cross-border cooperation. Its activities were also noticed by the Committee of the Regions. The project How do you rescue at your place was recognized as an example of good practice in the area of cooperation between emergency services.

**Conflict of interest:** none

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