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Full cities, empty territories

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Extended abstract

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Title: The participation of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in Interreg projects for the programming period 2007-2013

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Abstract: *(minimum 1500 words)*

The Universities are becoming more active in regional development and the literature on how to improve their contribution to regional development is more and more abundant. However, the subject of their role in inter-regional cooperation is marginalised and the articles treating the subject focus on one project or one programme. There is no EU overview available for the moment. It should be noted that for the programming period 2007-2013 there were 7950 HEI project partners in Interreg programmes, which corresponds to a bit more than 17% of all partners in European Territorial Cooperation.

This article presents a general overview of the European HEI participation in inter-regional cooperation projects based on the available data and seeks if regional participation differences emerge, what are they and if regional participation could be correlated to indicators at NUTS2 level. The data extracted from the common Interreg database KEEP has been filtered, analysed, correlated and the results obtained could serve in the research and discussion on regional development and specialisation.

The role of the universities in regional development and especially in the knowledge-economy has been acknowledged for quite a long time (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 1995;



Drucker & Goldstein, 2007, Morgan, 2007). Besides the classical teaching role, the Universities have been drivers for innovation and recently began moving into governance. The scientific discussion of what exactly HEIs should be doing to support regional development still continues. The questions about “how” this should be done, as well. Several recent studies dealing with the “how” have their attention drawn towards the individual academics and personal linkages in the university-regional cooperation (Salomaa, 2019; Ahoba-Sam, 2019; Radinger-Peer, 2019; Cinar, 2019).

However, a vast majority of the studies dedicated to university-region interaction deal with the Regional Innovation Schemes. But how exactly all these terms, articles, overviews, and regulations combine and translate into reality? The role of each university is different and limited by its location – each country has different laws about HEI management, funding, and competencies. The most common points are that, by default the university generates knowledge, transfers that knowledge and traditionally, through the strive of universalism, has international standing. All those aspects have attracted the attention of European decision-makers, and through active modernisation process, they have tried to harness the international position and the innovation generative capacities of the European university. The university has been given a central role in regional development and in some regions, this went into the governance process. Besides the increasing number of articles on HEI contribution to regional development, in 2011, the European Commission published a study on their participation in regional ERDF funded projects (European Commission, 2011). However, there is not much concerning their inter-regional cooperation activities especially in ERDF funded territorial cooperation projects. Several articles treat specific projects or programmes (Prokkola, 2011; Medeiros, 2014 etc.), but there is no overview at EU level.

While it is true that the currently available data on Interreg projects does not provide enough information for an in-depth analysis, it offers the possibility to design an overview of the HEI participation in Interreg projects concerning themes and territories and could serve as a sound basis for further studies.

The data related to the University participation in Interreg projects has been extracted from the KEEP database and concerns the last closed programming period 2007-2013. The KEEP database is a tool developed by the Interact programme in 2009, at the



request of the Interreg community to have an overview of the funded projects by all Interreg programmes. Since then, it collects the data stored at programme level, concerning the projects, the partners funded, project objectives etc. and allows in depth analysis of Interreg participation at European level. The complete list of available data could be found on KEEP's website. The system aims to cover all the Interreg programmes: cross-border, transnational, ENPI, IPA and Interreg networking programmes. All the programming periods since the year 2000 are covered. The data, the programmes, and the level of completeness varies from programme to programme, although there are constant updates. More information on how data is collected and processed also could be found on the website. Before analysing the University participation in Interreg projects, however, it will be good to have a very short and very general overview of the Interreg programmes for the previous and current programming periods in order to set the stage.

Data at EU level extracted from KEEP is the following:

- for 2007-2013 period: 9800 projects from a total of 10461, or 94% representativeness.
- HEI - the project partners have been filtered according to the following criteria: any type of Universities¹, Foundations, Science and Technology Park, Research and Technology centre where Universities contribute. 7950 have been identified as HEIs, from 45567 partners, out of which, 7173 from the EU.
- The data is tabled so that it allows filters at NUTS2, Member State and project theme level.
- NUTS2 statistics from Eurostat to correlate with the HEI participation at regional level.

The list extracted contains all funded partners for the period 2007-2013. Then, HEI have been filtered manually. The list is based on an extended view of HEI - the project partners have been filtered according to the following criteria: any type of Universities, Foundations, any type of Science and Technology Park, Research and Technology centre where Universities contribute. The name of the partners in the system have been

¹ Universities here are discussed, as presented by the European Commission in its 2006 Communication "Delivering on the modernisation agenda for Universities: Education, Research and Innovation": *In this document "universities" is taken to mean all higher education institutions, irrespective of their name and status in the Member State*



considered. Then the data has been mapped, filtered by theme, region and country and the presence of correlations with Eurostat NUTS2 indicators was investigated in PSPP. The following ones have been considered: GDP, population, purchasing power standards, tertiary education attainment, employment, human resource in science and technology, intramural R&D expenditure, number of researchers.

Overview map of HEI Interreg participation:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=13v0VqzpK22QRsB9TmNtCOWxQGdkNBWMg&usp=sharing>

The most obvious conclusion from that mapping is that the cross-border regions have much higher participation in Interreg projects. Which implies that regions participating in several different types of strands have a higher participation of regional actors such as HEIs. Some regions, which do not share a land or river border with another country do not have cross-border programmes, and thus, have a lower participation level (e.g.

Valencia Region in Spain, French Aquitaine or the Northern parts of Scotland).

Another observation is the fact that in the 2007-2013 period, HEIs around the oldest EU border cooperated more than the ones from the newly adhered Member States. The regions in central Europe present quite active participation.

Extract of the results:

The statistical overview of the territorial and thematic participation shows which countries and regions have the highest HEI participation in Interreg projects and in which themes. For example, although France is the country with highest HEI participation in general, Spain leads in topics like agriculture and economic cooperation. At regional level, it is the region of Zahodna Slovenija that has the most HEI participations.

For the period 2007-2013, the topics in KEEP are 42 and there is high dispersion among the participation. However, there is definitely preference for economic cooperation, agriculture and fisheries, education and health. Here below, the most popular themes could be observed.

Clustering and economic cooperation	572
Agriculture and fisheries and forestry	475
Education and training	475

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Health and social services	391
Regional planning and development	359
Renewable energy	336
Coastal management and maritime issues	285
SME and entrepreneurship	278
Cultural heritage and arts	263
Climate change and biodiversity	257
Institutional cooperation and cooperation networks	253
Sustainable management of natural resources	244
Managing natural and man-made threats, risk management	236
Scientific cooperation	236
ICT and digital society	225
Energy efficiency	201
Innovation capacity and awareness-raising	201
Knowledge and technology transfer	191
Tourism	151
Waste and pollution	137
Water management	136
Green technologies	123
Transport and mobility	122
New products and services	116
Soil and air quality	83
Waterways, lakes and rivers	80
Urban development	76
Evaluation systems and results	73
Labour market and employment	68
Social inclusion and equal opportunities	68
Demographic change and immigration	67
Governance, partnership	61
Logistics and freight transport	57
Infrastructure	56
Community integration and common identity	48
Improving transport connections	44
Rural and peripheral development	43
Multimodal transport	38
Construction and renovation	23
Safety	12
Cooperation between emergency services	6
Traditional energy	4

The University participation per country respectively is the following:

France	669
Spain	635
Germany	575
Italy	556



Finland	477
United Kingdom	470
Sweden	352
Slovenia	325
Portugal	300
Greece	278
Romania	276
Poland	267
Belgium	235
Austria	234
Hungary	191
Denmark	188
Estonia	163
Lithuania	146
Netherlands	146
Czech Republic	131
Ireland	111
Latvia	110
Bulgaria	103
Slovakia	92
Croatia	53
Cyprus	41
Luxembourg	33
Malta	20

However, at regional level, it is interesting to observe that it is Zahodna Slovenija that has the higher rate of HEI participation, closely followed by several Finnish regions and the Baltic countries.

In that sense, it is interesting to search for correlations with other indicators at EU level. The correlated indicators show moderate correlation to population, accession to the EU and number of researchers, but a weak one to GDP or R&D expenditure. A more in-depth analysis could search a causality and case studies could develop the reasons behind the University participation in territorial cooperation in different regions. These first results could serve to raise awareness among the policy makers and the practitioners about the importance of HEIs as partners in Interreg projects.

The overview of the European HEI participation in inter-regional cooperation projects shows that more than 17% of Interreg partners are HEI. Based on the available data regional differences have been identified and the participation was correlated to indicators at NUTS2 level.



Interreg projects are in the periphery of policy makers and researchers' interests alike. Often for practical reasons (e.g. accessibility of data), studies have focused on the regional programmes.

Nonetheless, the current pandemic period has proved the necessity of cooperation and efficient cross-border and transnational relationships to tackle shared unexpected challenges.

A better knowledge of the different types of partners participating in Interreg projects will allow a better use of instruments and improve participation and results. Given the increasing importance of HEIs in regional development, it is essential to evaluate their role in this kind of projects and their capacity to support the search of solutions to complex problems.

Keywords: Universities, Interreg, European Territorial Cooperation, ERDF
JEL codes: I2, R5