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Identifying critical factors for success in Cross Border Cooperation (CBC) development projects

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ABSTRACT

Border interactions have reached unprecedented levels in recent decades, not only due to their potential for territorial integration but also considering their role in supranational processes, such as infrastructure construction and planning activities all over the world. These interactions gained increasingly more emphasis when we know that in several countries more than half of the population lives across the border, tending to be more affected by common policy-making, and by the gaps that plague such policies. This scenario is particularly evident in European countries. In this regard the identification of influential factors of territorial success in cross-border areas is considered to be critical to achieve sustainable development through Cross-Border-Cooperation (CBC) Strategies, which lead to a consequent improvement in quality of life of the population living in these regions. This study explores expert attitudes and perceptions towards the identification of a set of critical factors for success of CBC projects. Throughout the present research 20 CBC European case studies were assessed, described and analyzed, enabling the identification of 14 critical factors to achieve success in development projects based on Cross-Border-Cooperation principles. These factors were briefly explained considering the goals of this research and their influence for success statistically described, and individually analyzed both by case study and by factor. From the identified critical factors, the research pointed out that there are 3 of utmost importance to promote territorial success in CBC projects: (i) the definition of clear common objectives and master plans; (ii) the promotion of political transparency and commitment towards the decisions related to the CBC project; and (iii) the promotion of connectivity and movement between cities.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades' border areas gained great importance on the international scene regarding their potential and integrative functions such as exemplified along the unification of Europe (Fadigas, 2010; Martín, 2013; Dominguez Castro & Varela Alvarez, 2015; Trillo Santamaria, González, & Paül, 2015).

The experiences of cross-border cooperation (CBC), undertaken not only in Europe but all over the world, as is the case of several CBC Projects between United States of America and Mexico, China-India (Asia), Argentina-Chile or Brazil-Bolivia (South America), among many other examples through the globe (Task Force of

United States-Mexico Border, 2009; Lee & Na, 2010) fostered the creation of a global network of relationships among people and states, which enabled the achievement of several political, economic, environmental and sociocultural win-win-situations (Bacova, Puskas, & Vrablova, 2015; Fadigas, 2015). These networks have been increasingly recognized by urban planners, landscape architects and other urban development specialists, as crucial elements which enable the introduction of recent urban development challenges and paradigms (Slotterback et al., 2016; Follmann, 2015; Joseph, Wang, & Wang, 2014; Yu, 2014; Norman, 2009; Saavedra & Budd, 2009; and; Loures & Panagopoulos, 2007) into future planning activities, affecting both project acceptability and design quality (Ismail & Said, 2015; Rega & Baldizzone, 2015; Loures et al., 2015; Mauerhofer, 2016; Milan, 2016; Schroeter, Scheel, Renn, & Schweizer, 2016). Still, when in 1985 five Member States of the European Union decided to abolish checks at internal borders – originating the Schengen Area

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(European Commission, 2016), there was no clues on the impact this change in country relationships would have on trades between people, goods and infrastructures among Member States (Veemaa, 2012). Currently, Europeans citizens make more than a billion travels into the Schengen Area every year (European Commission, 2016), demonstrating not only the amazing ease of movement within the European space, but also the great benefits that were created by this bilateral way of cooperation.

However, the progressive transformation urban and rural landscapes alongside border areas have raised global concerns increasing the need to rethink not only the way cities should grow (McCann & Ward, 2012; León & March 2014; Loures, 2014; Wen, Bu, & Qin, 2014; Wragg & Lim, 2015) but also the way countries should cooperate among each other in order to strengthen the benefits of possible CBC projects at different levels (De Sousa, 2003; Loures, 2011; Loures et al., 2015; Panagopoulos & Loures, 2007, pp. 71–72; Portney, 2003). While common land transformation and cooperation policies, have been considered an important tool for cross-border cooperation, fostering urban development and revitalization (Adams & Watkins, 2002; Urban Land Institute, 2004; Willem, 2009; Loures, Panagopoulos, & Burley, 2015), the principles and factors that contribute to strengthen on the one hand urban sustainability (De Jong, Wang, & Yu, 2013; Joss & Molella, 2013; and; Frantzeskaki, Wittmayer, & Loorbach, 2014) and on the other hand the cooperation among countries regarding CBC projects continue to be understudied and poorly valued (Waddell, 2007; Nicolini & Pinto, 2013; Yigitcanlar, Dur, & Dizdaroglu, 2015; Binswanger & Deininger, 2016; Kurowska-Pysz, 2016).

Though recognizing that European Union cohesion policies carried out by Brussels central administration were crucial for the proper functioning of some of the implemented CBC projects (Kurowska-Pysz, 2016; Namyslak, 2014; Sohn & Giffinger, 2015), the fact that more than a third of the European population lives in border areas, which are the most affected by EU policies, as well of the gaps these policies still shows (Martín, 2013), highlights that there is still a long way to go in order to fully implement the ideas put forward by Emil Gött on late nineteenth century according to which borders should not be seen as limiting factors, but as something that means growth and prosperity among the nations.

In this scenario, it is increasingly recognized that CBC projects can contribute to better life quality among member states while reducing the deep economic deterioration that many developed countries have come to feel along the last decade, enabling the achievement of resilient and collaborative boarder cities, in which cultural, environmental and economic issues are identified and assessed comprehensively by both countries (Baptista, Cabezas, Fernández, & Pinto-Gomes, 2013; Yigitcanlar et al. 2015).

It is a fact that for European countries borders became to be progressively just lines on maps. Still, recent political decisions regarding the terrorism phenomenon in the European continent, and latter intentions of implementing new geographic boundaries (as example the recent situation in Crimea (Ukraine) with Russia) led to an increasingly fractious debate about free movement in Europe as well as the resurgence of a sense of extremist nationalism among European peoples awakening old ghosts of the Cold War and the Second World War (Dale, 2016; Holmes, 2016). This scenario coupled with the ongoing economic crises in Europe or even the latest, Brexit, lead us to the urgent need of finding new strategies and approaches, through which it is possible to achieve greater territorial cohesion and cooperation between countries. In this regard the identification of critical factors for territorial success became a serious objective for several countries, since CBC projects can contribute not only to tackle the aforementioned problems but also to create resilient and sustainable cities.

For this reason, and considering that there is still little information on which factors influence the success of cross-border areas, the present research aims to identify and analyze the main factors that influence “CBC Areas”, fostering their success, according to those who actually work and live in these areas. In order to achieve this goal, the present research, was based on an exploratory methodology similar to the one developed by Loures (2011) based on the case study research method, put forward by Robert Yin (1994). Considering the application of this method 20 European CBC case studies were identified and analyzed in order to define the critical factors for success in CBC projects.

2. Methodological approach

Considering the purpose of the present research a significant amount of time and attention was dedicated to the development of the methodological framework, since the study required the use of several methods throughout the research, including indirect and direct research methods and tools. In this regard the methodological approach was divided into four main phases (Fig. 1), ending with the identification of critical factors for territorial success in cross-border cooperation projects and the assessment of their relation according to CBC Planning Specialists.

2.1. Data collection

Data for the study was collected through site analysis (considering the process of planning and design of each case study), talks and informal interviews with technicians, experts and main actors of the CBC process, aiming to determine the interest of this research as well as the most relevant issues that should be answered throughout the present research.

The developed literature review had the intention of cover a wide range of issues, such as the state-of-the-art regarding CBC projects and the main processes and legal schemes that frame the way border cities compete and cooperate.

2.2. Case studies selection criteria and analysis

As mentioned before, in the scope of the research 20 European CBC case studies have been identified and analyzed. The CBC selection was made considering some pre-established criteria. In this regard in order to be selected CBC projects should highlight a deep cooperation between cities in: transportation, spatial planning, economic development, tourism, culture, research, education, and employment (Fig. 2).

Besides the aforementioned pre-established criteria, the selected projects should also meet five specific principles:

- Cities must have done previous work on CBC.
- The CBC project should demonstrate forethought on the integration of environmental, sociocultural and economic development goals.
- Cities should have relationships with multiple stakeholders organized in a group or association created to develop and strengthen the various aspects inherent to CBC.
- The distance between cities could not be greater than 60 km.
- At least one of the cities should be a medium size city.

Regarding the analysis developed for each of the selected case studies, several sources of data were used and analyzed in order to deeply understand not only the main challenges and setbacks faced by each CBC partner, but also the main benefits and advantages obtained with the CBC project. Issues such as population; distance between cities; territorial development strategy; border typology;

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