



Executive Summary

Evaluation research on Interreg III B CADSES in Poland

The conducted research shows that participation of Polish institutions in a CADSES programme was a limited success - in terms of scale & intensity of contacts, projects effects as well as established sustainable cooperation.

The research follows an analytical model that covered 3 stages of projects' life-cycle (their generation, application and implementation) combined with the assessment of their effects. Methodology consisted of interviews, case studies, desk research and survey of all Polish institutions participating in CADSES projects (return rate 66%). Moreover for the assessment of cooperation we have applied an innovative method - network analysis.

Out of 80 Polish institutions participating in CADSES programme, only 4 undertaken the position of a leader. Others have been partners. Their role has been quite limited at the stage of network building and project generation (75% of them has been invited by foreign partners to the fully-established project idea), while their cooperation in a network intensified only at the stage of implementation. Usually this cooperation (and what follows - their contacts after project closure) were directed at project leaders.

Also the tangible products and effects remain moderate. On the one hand the self-assessment of the beneficiaries has been highly optimistic in terms of their goals fulfilment and the utility of the projects affects (62% and 90% of the surveyed group respectively). However, on the other hand, only narrow group of surveyed population (40% and 11% respectively) was able to present a concrete products and a specific group target group that benefited from the project's effects

When considering the wider goal of CADSES programme - building the cooperation network in the region - there is no doubt that there were positive effects for Polish participants. Thanks to the Programme almost half of them extended their international cooperation network. However, 24% of surveyed did not use the opportunity to enter the European network of cooperation, while 16% clearly have been discouraged towards their former project partners. Moreover comparing this registered increase in cooperation with the scale of the potential network in which Polish partners operated (over 500 partners) the picture became mixed. Polish participants want to cooperate only with every 6th partner they met.



The positive finding is that significant majority of the Polish participants of CADSES projects (75%) declared their interest in the participation of future territorial cooperation programmes. What is distressing however, is the fact that, despite the experience gained, they usually want to be a partner (67%) not leaders of the future projects.

On the basis of our analysis of all stages of the project cycles as well as their effects we have identified five key problem issues that are roots of the current situation.

The first issue has been a systemic and external one. It is a delayed possibility of full participation in CADSES (e.g. as project leaders) which is the result of later Polish accession to EU (programme ran from 2002). This resulted in the few cases of leadership in projects, as well as lower (in comparison to institutions from EU15) experience in such undertakings.

The second issue (also external from the projects' team perspective) was over 1 year long blockage of payments (at the level of the programme). This undermined the trust between partners and towards project leaders. It also made CADSES a difficult experience for institutions with limited financial capacities.

The third identified issue that limited Polish participation and strength of long-term cooperation (so called "soft effects") had been institutional weakness of Polish participants. Their initial low knowledge (lack of project ideas) and know-how in EU project management, coordination and simultaneous cooperation in a bigger, international networks. We regard this as main problem and challenge for future. It is confirmed by the statements of Polish CADSES participants. They listed such barriers as: lack of experience in such projects, finding reliable partners that share similar vision of the project, convincing leader about financial allocation, limited financial & organizational resources that could be devoted for frequent meetings, communication & management with geographically widespread partners.

The fourth issue was a low level of involvement of Polish partners at the early stages of projects (generation and application). It was caused by already discussed lack of experienced but also actors' passiveness, time pressure and their reluctance to commit to potential (that is unsure) project. Thus, ideas and initiative came from more experienced foreign partners. In the latter stages of the projects this resulted in enforced projects' visions, lower commitment and sense of project ownership, lower understanding of projects objectives and planned effects and - last but not least - contacts directed mainly at project leader.

The last issue, more general, springs from the functioning of the INTERREG III B programmes. It is the characteristic of networks and the process of projects visions created



in their frameworks. Broad networks, with extensive number of partners worked less effectively than smaller, denser networks. Furthermore, project visions (aims, scope, expected outcomes) were often developed in a unilateral manner (by leader), in a hurry at the application level. It often resulted in incoherent definitions, misunderstandings, and later on problems with explaining obtained results and reaching target groups. Our research confirms that vast networks developed around ambiguous project visions and with low partners' involvement, are not useful in establishing long-term cooperation.

In the case of this last, fifth issue, it is also worth notice that Polish participants had relatively weak understanding of advantages and specificity of "soft" - network projects. Polish beneficiaries, after EU accession, had been usually oriented at searching for the financing for infrastructure-development undertakings and had limited interest in cooperation projects.

It is obvious, that first from the above discussed problems is an issue specific to CADSES and it won't be repeated. However the other four issues in our opinion, remain as valid challenges for the future territorial cooperation programmes. We address them in the last part of our report by presenting 13 recommendations, grouped around 4 questions: How to minimize negative effect of the financial delays coming from the programme level? How to strengthen participation, knowledge and experience of Polish institutions in planning and management of network projects? How to intensify, widen and consolidate network cooperation within projects? How to convince that "soft" projects can bring tangible results and enhance the development of coherent, clear and joint projects visions?

In our opinion there are two keys to the future successful participation of Polish institutions in similar programmes. First these are trainings on project management and cooperation in multi-partners undertakings. Second, it is enforcement of closer, more structured cooperation and discussion around project vision (objectives, scope, expected outcomes) between all the projects partners, during first months of projects implementations.