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## CROSS-BORDER INTEGRATION OF THE FUNCTIONAL METROPOLITAN AREA OF BRATISLAVA

Final draft

Compiled by CESCİ

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## The context

The present document is an outcome of a Resilient Borders project co-financed by the European Commission under the management of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) and the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT). The project titled 'Cross-Border Integration of the Functional Metropolitan Area of Bratislava' was implemented by the City of Bratislava (SK) and Győr-Ménfőcsanak County Council (HU), and it lasted from February to September 2025. The project aimed at designing the joint governance structure for managing the cross-border suburban region of the Slovak capital city and its Hungarian vicinities, and to integrate this new governance framework into the existing Slovak-Austrian baum\_cityregion initiative.

To identify the potential governance solutions and the joint development fields for the tri-border area, the lead partner contracted the Budapest-based Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI), which delivered the action plan by the end of August 2025.

## Resources for the study

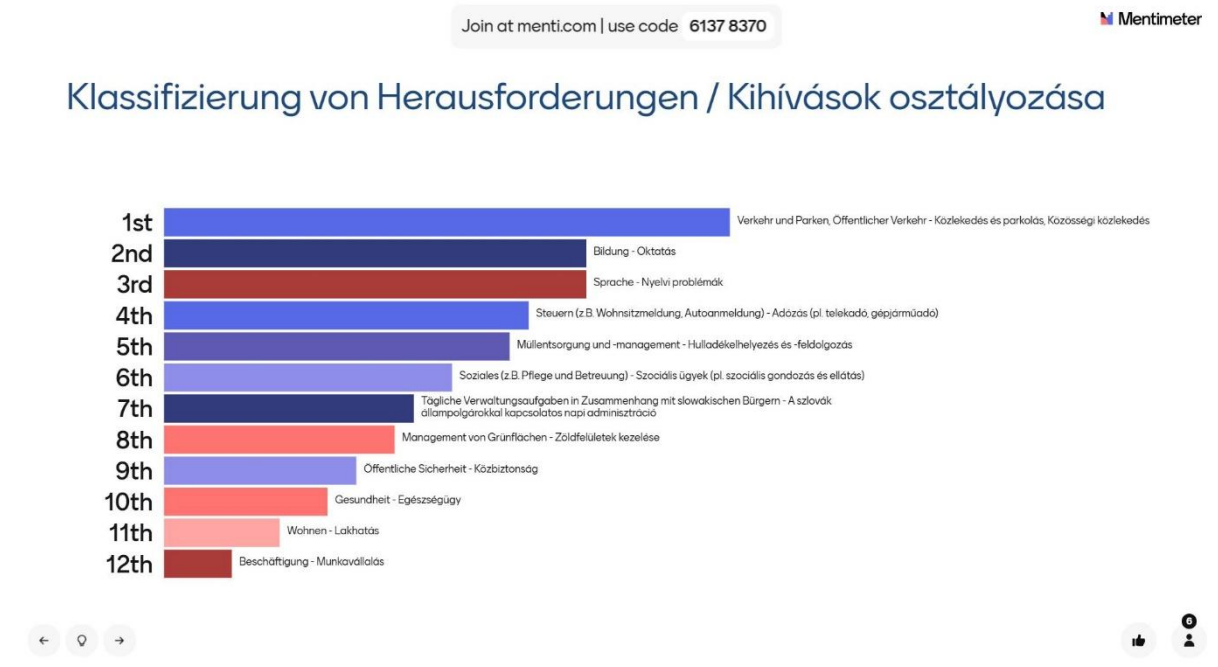
To better align the plan with the current status and the prospects of the border region, the following resources were used.

## The results of the workshops organised during the project implementation

The project partners organised four workshops between March and May 2025. At the first workshop, held on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March in Bratislava, and attended by the representatives of 6 neighbouring Hungarian municipalities, Pavla Štefkovičová, expert of the baum\_cityregion office, presented the genealogy, the structure and the achievements of the Slovak-Austrian model. The Hungarian participants agreed that a similar structure is necessary in the Slovak-Hungarian context as well.

The partners organised the 2<sup>nd</sup> workshop in Rajka, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, where the leaders of 5 Hungarian and 5 Austrian municipalities affected by cross-border residential mobility were present and discussed the challenges the phenomenon generates for them. With the help of an online tool, the participants identified the most frequent 12 challenges, from among which the first three were discussed in detail.

Figure 1: The most frequent challenges identified by the local mayors in Rajka<sup>1</sup>



However, the meeting was so fruitful that the mayor of Kittsee invited the participants to another workshop, already beyond the frames of the Resilient Borders project. This meeting was held in Kittsee on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June, where the remaining topics were also discussed. The success of the meetings can easily be justified by mentioning the next invitation issued in Kittsee by the mayor of Dunakiliti, where the partners can continue their exchanges.

At the 3<sup>rd</sup> workshop, the partners convened 15 local and regional spatial, regional and strategic planners and researchers (5 from each country) to discuss the biggest challenges of the cross-border metropolitan region. The meeting was designed to be held in person, but due to the foot and mouth disease in Hungary, cross-border mobility was dramatically limited. Accordingly, the meeting was held online on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April. The planners listed and discussed the major challenges, mapped the interests defining the development directions, and reviewed the most urgent development topics around Bratislava in a systematic way.

<sup>1</sup> The listed challenges are: (1) Traffic and parking, public transport; (2) Education; (3) Language problems; (4) Taxation (e.g. real estate tax, vehicle tax); (5) Waste collection and management; (6) Social issues (e.g. social care); (7) Daily administration of Slovak residents; (8) Management of green areas; (9) Public security; (10) Health; (11) Housing; (12) Employment

cross-border cooperation

challenges

- different administrative systems
- many stakeholders with different interests
- different interests urban vs. rural
- different timelines for the development of different topics / strategies in each country
- lack of joint strategy for development, in general but also for specified sectors, like e.g. energy, recreation and tourism, site development, settlement development, etc.
- lack of coordination body
- lack of common understanding of problems
- different legal systems, different security systems, infrastructure, etc.
- responsibility is always assigned to the institutions within one country, the cross-border cooperation is usually not the main responsibility nor primary goal of these institutions/ administrative units/policies
- legal issues / authority

development vs. sustainability

- Environmental protection and energy efficiency
- Transport mobility and lack of integrated mobility
- unnecessary commuting distance and volume
- Social and health care - 30% increase in civilization diseases in the last 10 years
- demography and suburbanization / uncontrolled spatial development -> high pressure on public services
- urban sprawl
- suburbanization
- brokers of culture, and administration

1.) Cross border public transport - initiation of new lines, 2.) To get information in time about relevant building development projects close to the border, 3.) Suburbanization in AT, SK, HU, 4.) the different responsibilities of regional/local government layers in AT, SK, HU, 5.) The number of actors to be coordinated

Finding the right people to talk to

- policy stability
- lack of established relationships
- Multilingualism as a potential barrier

identifying the possible funds and subsidies

- lack of cross-border data
- lack of statistical data
- lack of funding programme for the tri-border area
- funding of measures

lack of RLA level territorial planning

## Steering Group meeting

## Online survey

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the suburbanisation process of Bratislava. The survey was open from 26 March to 25 April, and 6 answers arrived from 5 Hungarian municipalities.

## Desk research

The CESCO team studied 19 scientific articles dealing with different aspects of Bratislava's suburbanisation phenomena, the Bratislava 2030 strategy, the Bratislava 2050 strategy (analysing the demographic forecasts for the city and its surroundings), and the Territorial Transport Master Plan of 2015; as well as the Final Report of the ESPON METROBORDER project, which also discussed the Vienna-Bratislava twin city area.

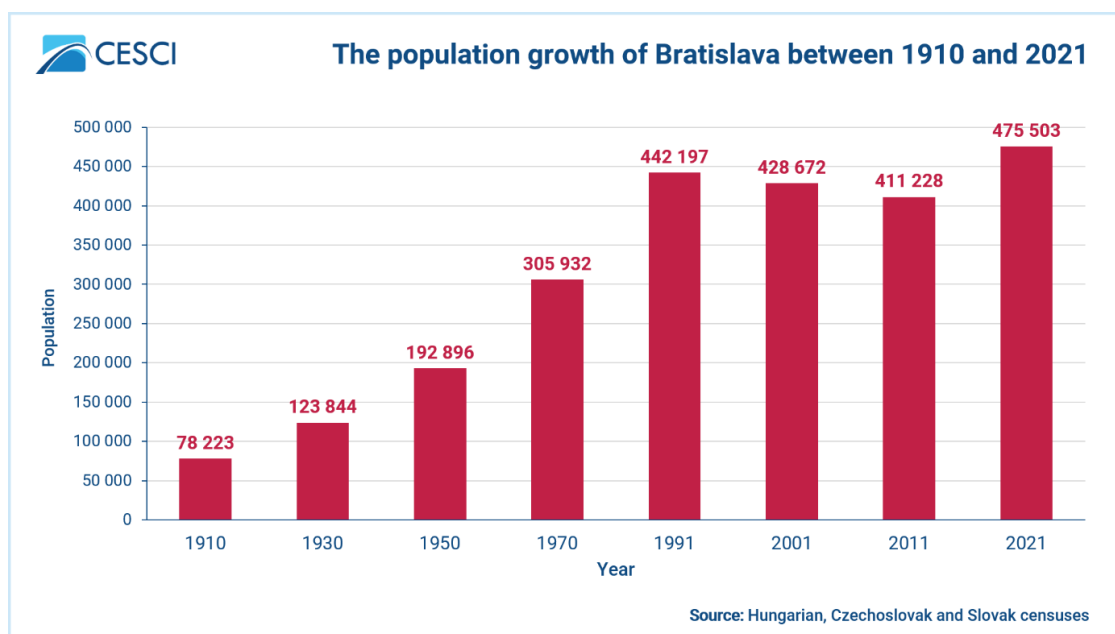
## Earlier investigations

In 2024 and 2025, within the framework of the #ACCESS project, CESCO organised so-called reference group meetings along the Slovak-Hungarian border, convening the stakeholders of cross-border urban influencing areas. Two of the stakeholder workshops were held in the suburban area of Bratislava, preceded by a spatial analytical work based on statistical data and a literature review. The analytical document was used to facilitate the discussion during the workshops. The second workshop, held in October 2024, has generated the Resilient Borders project idea. The analysis and the results of the workshops have also been used during the compilation of the present action plan.

## Brief introduction of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava

Bratislava is the capital city of Slovakia, located at the western edge of the country, directly bordered by Austria and Hungary. Historically, it already played an important role during the Ottoman wars: it became the administrative centre (Council of the Royal Governor) of the Hungarian Kingdom under Habsburg rule in 1536, it was the coronation seat, and the seat of the Parliament. Thanks to its administrative significance and its location along the Danube at a commercially important position, at the age of the First World War, it became the 6<sup>th</sup> largest city of the former Hungary with more than 78,000 inhabitants. The city belonged to the hinterland of Vienna, which was the fourth largest city in the World at that time (Šveda – Štefkovičová – Tolmáči 2020). In 1919, it became the capital of Slovakia within the Czechoslovakian Federation. During the communist era, as one of the most important industrial and administrative centres of Czechoslovakia, the city had been remarkably growing: compared to 1950, by 1980 the population had doubled, expanding the number of 380,000, and this expansion continued in the 1980s, especially through domestic migration (Mariš 2020). Since the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 1993, it has been the capital city of the independent Slovakia. This was the time when the urbanisation phase reached its peak with more than 450,000 inhabitants<sup>2</sup>.

Figure 3 – The population change in Bratislava between 1910 and 2022

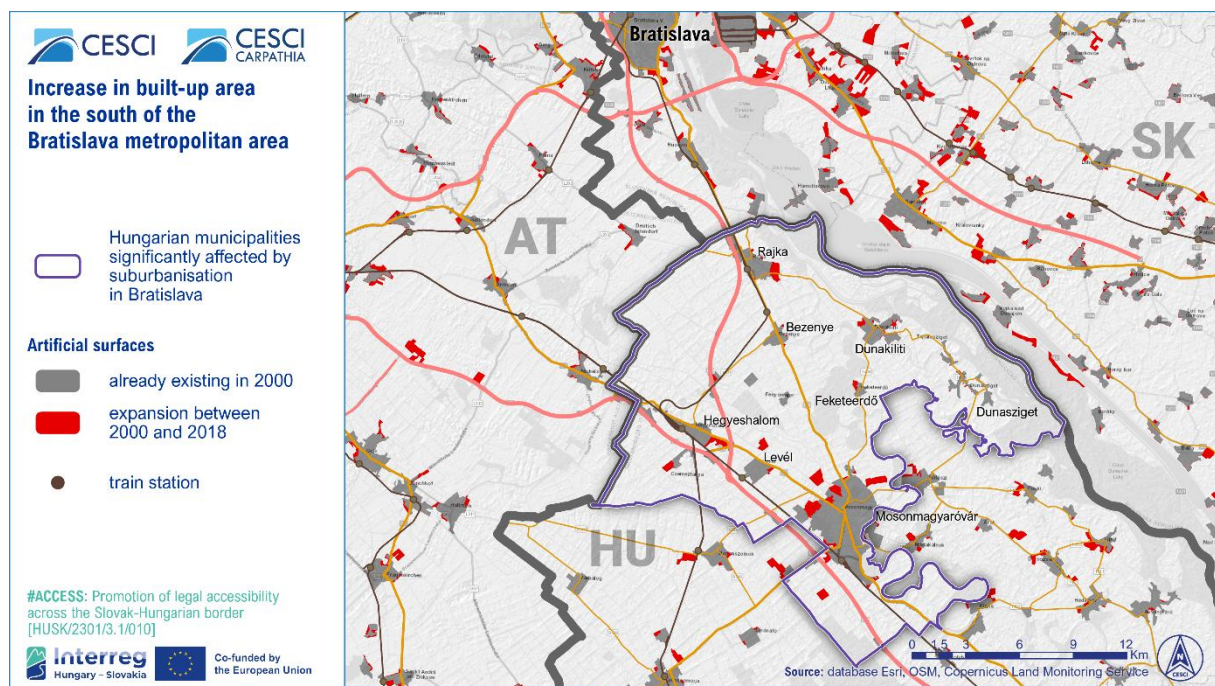


<sup>2</sup> In 1996, 452,288 people lived in Bratislava. In the next year, the population has started slightly decreasing (Slavík et al. 1996).



After the millennium, the suburbanisation tendencies have strengthened: the population of Bratislava started decreasing, while, especially from the late 1990s (Farkas – Klobučník 2021; Výboštok – Štefkovičová 2023), the hinterland of the city has been expanding, generating the so-called urban sprawl phenomenon therearound (Slavík et al. 2011).

*Figure 4 – Geographic expansion of built-up areas in the south to Bratislava between 2000 and 2018*



Source: CESC 2024

In the most recent years, the first signs of re-urbanisation can be demonstrated, partly thanks to massive real estate construction projects within Bratislava, partly as a consequence of population density increase in formerly less urbanised districts like Rusovce, Jarovce, Čunovo, etc. (Slavík et al. 2011). As a result, nowadays the immigrants outnumber the emigrants again, except for the years of COVID-19. According to the most probable scenario, in 2050, Bratislava, which is characterised by a high fertility rate (in some districts it exceeds the value of 2), will give home to 519,000 people (MIB 2022).

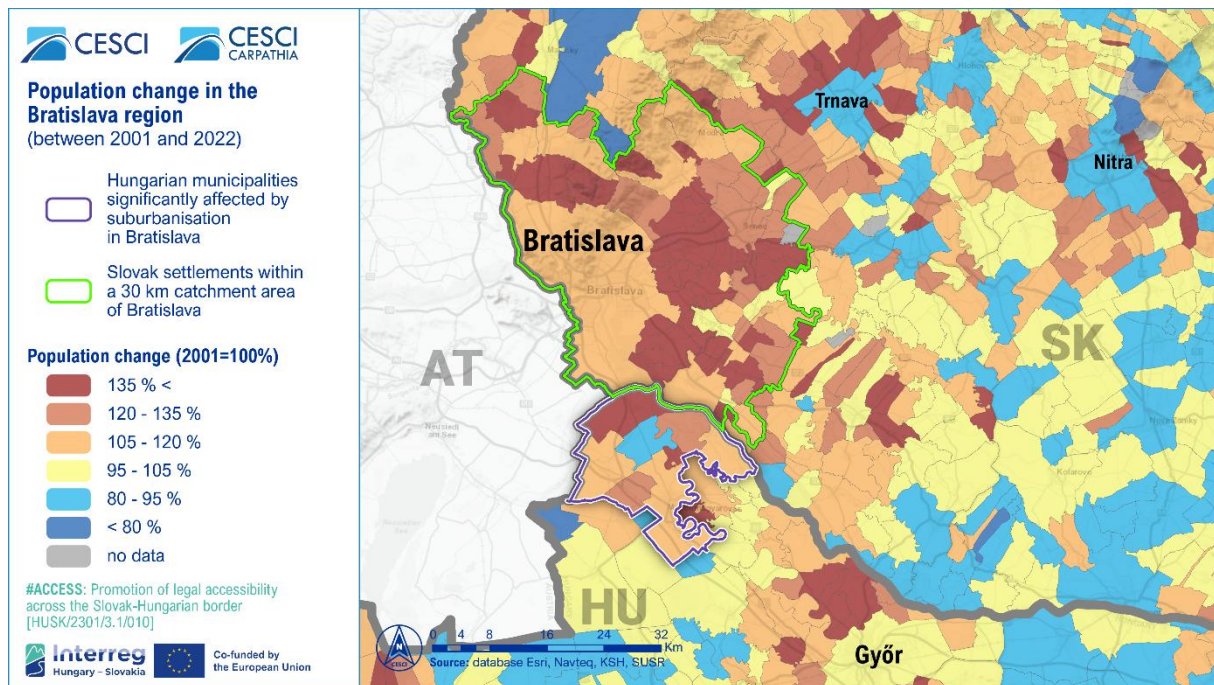
Bratislava is one of the most dynamic growth and innovation poles of the former communist bloc, with remarkable indices:

- The Bratislava Self-Governing Region, including the capital city, produces 28.4% of the total GDP of Slovakia;
- The GDP per capita of the region exceeds the EU average by more than 30%;



- The rate of inhabitants with a tertiary degree (47%) is much higher than in Vienna (35.6%) and in the EU on average (34.7%);
- The R&D&I expenditures (more than 627,000 EUR/capita) exceed the Slovak average by almost 4 times;
- The level of income by families is close to the EU average (95.3%), which is even more remarkable compared with the same indicator at the turn of the millennium (it was 32.7% that time), etc.

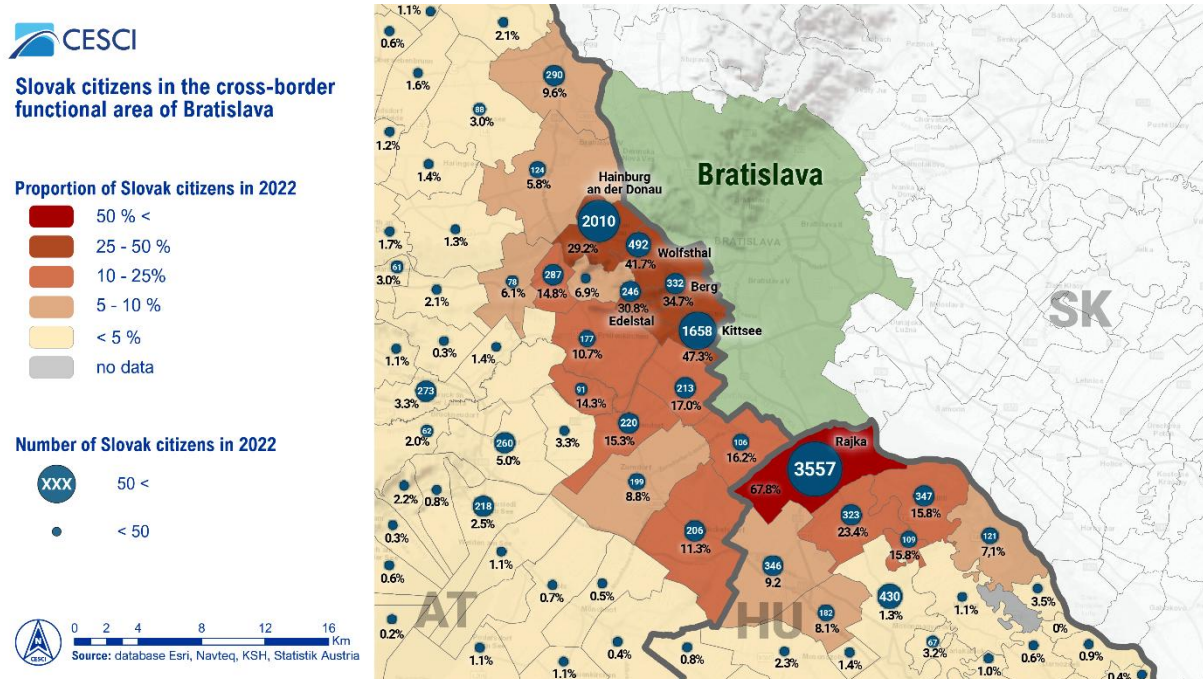
Figure 5 – Population change in Bratislava and its surroundings between 2001 and 2022



Source: CESCİ 2024

In compliance with its outstanding economic performance and administrative role within the country, Bratislava and its surroundings have a huge attracting power towards the remaining territory of the country. The number of inhabitants of the hinterland area (30 km from the city centre) has increased by more than 50% (the population even quadrupled in some municipalities) between 2001 and 2022, and the suburban area has saliently expanded beyond the state borders, to Austria and Hungary, too. The number of Slovak citizens living in the two neighbouring countries around Bratislava exceeded 13,000 in 2022, and the tendency has not stopped, even if the very attractive real estate prices have been balancing across the border (Výboštok – Štefkovičová 2023).

Figure 6 – Slovak citizens living in the Austrian and Hungarian suburban area of Bratislava (2022)



Thanks to the lower real-estate prices<sup>3</sup>, the green, safe, and friendly environment, cultural similarities, and the good road connections (it is faster to get into the city centre from these municipalities than from the Slovak vicinities), more and more Slovak citizens buy a house or a flat beyond the border, and commute every day to Bratislava (Slavík et al. 2011; Balizs – Bajmóczy 2018; Šveda – Štefkovičová – Tolmáči 2020; Farkas – Klobučník 2021; Kézai – Dömötör – Fekete 2022). It is worth mentioning that cross-border commuting (labour mobility) at the Slovak-Hungarian border has its antecedents during the communist era (Balizs – Bajmóczy 2018). On the contrary, due to the Iron Curtain, the contacts between Vienna and Bratislava and their surroundings were rather sporadic, and they have been slowly developing after the system transformation (Dillinger 2004; ESPON 2010). At the same time, in 2010, 3 years after Slovakia's joining the Schengen Zone, 75,000 commuters crossed the Austrian-Slovak border every day (Patti 2016).

Before the borders were open, the spatial scope of Bratislava's development was rather narrow and limited to the Northeastern direction (Šveda – Štefkovičová – Tolmáči 2020). Today, one can witness a double-faceted real estate development phenomenon: on the one hand, more and more internal urban areas are restructured and revitalised through the emergence of new residential areas; on the other hand, more and more Slovak

<sup>3</sup> To rent a flat requires 46.2% of the monthly salary of a citizen in Bratislava (MIB 2022, 50).

citizens move beyond the administrative borders where the real estate companies provide special offers designed for the new Slovak residents (Farkas – Klobučník 2021).

Cross-border residential mobility generates many challenges, from traffic to health care, from education to taxation, from administrative matters to communication, etc. These challenges can be grouped into two: a) thematic challenges referring to the development needs of the cross-border metropolitan area; b) governance-related challenges focusing on the joint management of the common space. The present document gives an overview of these two aspects to feed into a larger planning process.

## Challenges

The cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava is characterised by a complex composition of challenges. These challenges can be classified under two headings.

**Challenges stemming from suburbanisation** – These challenges are independent from the state borders, they are common in every suburbanising area; like: heavy traffic, changing townscapes and landscapes, increase of real-estate prices, environmental effects, increasing pressure on energetical networks and utilities, lack of integration of newcomers, etc. The phenomena mentioned above are common in every suburban area where the urban and rural ways of living, the mentality of the original residents and the newcomers confront (Balizs – Bajmóczy 2018). Urban sprawl changes the environment and the spatial behaviour of millions of citizens today in a uniform manner everywhere in the modern world.

**Challenges stemming from border effects** – The second type of challenges is generated by the coexistence of two administrative systems, languages, cultures, etc., like the use of language, lack of / or limited interest in local educational institutions, difficulties of cross-border public transport; altering national administrative and legal systems (e.g. on health and social care); tensions of waste management, etc. These phenomena are common in cross-border contact zones, especially around urban centres. The situation of Bratislava is even more complex due to its closeness to two countries. This is a unique challenge, which characterises only a few urban centres in Europe, e.g. Basel (CH/FR/DE), Luxembourg (LU/BE/FR/DE), and Maastricht (NL/BE/DE). In these examples, common are the geographic-physical and functional ties, economic and social interdependencies, regardless of the borders, but their management sometimes raises serious problems, as cross-border challenges also include structural barriers. While within a country, the effects of urban sprawl can be treated within the confines of national legislation and with the help of existing governance mechanisms, in a cross-border context, there is a need for legal harmonisation and the development of cross-border governance structures that cross-cut national jurisdictions. These obstacles hinder cross-border integrated spatial planning activities and the integrated management of the agglomeration. During the workshops of the Resilient Borders project, it became clear that the governance problems are multiple: the local and regional municipalities miss the relevant competences to resolve the problems occurring at local level (there is a need to *involve the national authorities*); there is a fluctuation of staff at the national authorities which hinders effective advocacy (there is a need for a *permanent structure or institution acknowledged by the national authorities*); the cross-border functional area is not thematised (there is a need for a structure which *makes the borderland visible*);



communication between the municipalities, the authorities and (especially) the citizens is missing (there is a need for *participatory solutions, bodies*); many issues reach beyond the borders of three states, not only two; the increasing number of cross-border residents would require the development of *cross-border public services*; the *politicians* are to be convinced of the significance of the above challenges. Joint planning is hindered by the lack of (cross-border) data, the different planning cultures and nomenclatures of the three countries, and the differences between the set of competences (Austria is a federal state, Hungary and Slovakia are unitary countries with a similar level of centralisation/decentralisation). Consequently, the effects of suburbanisation, which are common everywhere in the modern Western states, are much harder to address in this tri-border area. What is more, when designing the interventions to compensate for the shortages, the planner needs to approach the challenges with special care due to the sensitive cultural and historic conditions characterising this part of Europe.

## Challenges and actions related to spatial diagnosis and planning

To ensure the harmonised and spatially and environmentally sound development of the cross-border metropolitan area, the plans of the diverse actors within the area must be discussed and aligned. Integrated cross-border planning presupposes access to geographic and statistical data as well as the existence of a platform that enables exchanges and joint design.

### Production of data

The primary challenge of the entire project is the unreliability of the data and its scarcity.

Historically, the first Slovak citizens appeared in Rajka and its surroundings in the late 1990s and at the beginning of the 2000s. The newcomers represented the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia. Their resettlement was generated by their family relationships, the closeness of Bratislava and the common language and culture. The next wave of 'migrants' started after Slovakia and Hungary joined the EU in 2004, and, especially after the two countries' joining the Schengen zone in 2007. This was the period when the first Slovak inhabitants appeared in Wolfsthal, Kittsee and Hainburg (Austria). In 2005, their share within the local population did not exceed 5%. In 2010, the same data were above 5% in four municipalities. In 2015, Kittsee numbered 50% Slovak, and in 2020, the rate of Slovak inhabitants exceeded 25% in 5 municipalities (Kittsee, Wolfsthal, Berg, Edelstal and Hainburg) (Farkas – Klobučník 2021). As the real estate prices between the Austrian settlements and Bratislava became balanced around 2020 (Výboštok – Štefkovičová

2023), the volume of the movement of Slovaks to Austria has been decreasing, and they have been targeting farther municipalities (like Nickelsdorf or Prellenkirchen) (Farkas – Klobučník 2021).

In Rajka, until 2008, only 10% of the population was of Slovakian origin. In 2015, they represented half of the population. At that time, Balizs and Bajmóczy (2018) forecasted a peak of 7000 inhabitants to be reached in Rajka in the future. The 2022 census showed more than 5,200 local residents (nearly 3/4 of them are Slovak), indicating that the process is continuing (two years later, the number of inhabitants reached 5,600, and a new residential area is under construction). At the same time, it is impossible to acquire the real picture of the number of Slovak citizens in Hungary, because many of them don't register themselves in their new home settlement. This is a common phenomenon in Slovakia, too: in a study published in 2019, Šveda, Barlík and Podolák identified approximately 100,000 residents living around Bratislava without registration, based on the localised data of mobile phones (Šveda – Barlík – Podolák 2019). According to the estimations of the mayor of Rajka, Mr Vince Kiss, around 1,000 inhabitants of the municipality are not registered. The situation is even worse in Mosonmagyaróvár. Here, the population officially is around 34,000, but according to estimations, nearly 60,000 people live in the town. In 2024, there were elections in one of the local districts, when the voters had been registered. The administration of the elections revealed that nearly 1/3 of the district population was of Slovak citizenship.

Šveda, Štefkovičová and Tolmáči (2020) demonstrated that the Slovaks living in Rajka consider themselves residents of Bratislava (75%) or other Slovak municipalities. Almost nobody identified themselves as Rajka residents. On the contrary, 2/3 of the Slovak citizens living in Kittsee named the Austrian municipalities as their residence. This is the Austrian legislation which partly explains the different attitudes: in Austria, (1) the municipalities can oblige the new land owners to register themselves locally and to complete the construction of the new house in a certain period; otherwise, the municipality can use its repurchase pre-emptive rights ("Vorkaufsrecht"); (2) the new residents are obliged to register their address as their main habitual residence („Hauptwohnsitz”), otherwise, their children are not allowed to attend the kindergarten and the primary school. Likewise, in Hungary, the foreign residents have to pay an educational fee at the school which would force the new residents to register, but most Slovak parents don't want their children to attend the Hungarian school. In Hungary, a higher tax rate applies to the second home; however, local municipalities lack the necessary instruments and access to information to control the existing ownership of a home beyond the border. Consequently, they have no tools to force the new residents to



register<sup>4</sup>. It is a common practice that one person per family registers with one car, but there are 3-4 more persons living in the same flat owning one more car. This is the way to avoid tax burdens. Paradoxically, the approximate number of the Slovak citizens could be measured during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the borders were controlled, and only those citizens had permission to cross the border who could demonstrate that their residence and their job place were located on two different sides (CESCI 2021; Hardi – Nárai – Uszkai 2023). After the pandemic, the former system returned: it is hard to estimate how many Slovak citizens reside in the Hungarian suburban area of Bratislava. The picture is further complicated by the emigration of the original residents who cannot afford to live among the new conditions (Šveda – Štefkovičová – Tolmáči 2020). Accordingly, even the number of the inhabitants of a municipality cannot be established. What is clear: more people use the local infrastructure than the official data shows<sup>5</sup> (Balizs – Bajmóczy 2018).

To sum up, the planners have no access to correct data when designing the developments and other interventions within the border area.

Furthermore, even if one can estimate the volume of the affected population, there is no access to data on cross-border flows. Information on cross-border road traffic is deductible from the traffic counting statistics along the border crossing roads (the daily traffic at the three border crossings at Rajka exceeds 20,000 vehicles), but the destination of the travellers is not known (at the highway crossing, the vast majority of the vehicles are of transit character). The number of people using public transport can be estimated through the tickets and passes sold.

Access to more sophisticated data (e.g. on cross-border educational mobility, business cooperation, shopping and other forms of tourism, use of public services, etc.) presupposes close cooperation of statistical offices and other institutions. In many cases, these data are gathered by different organisations with different competences, and along different methods, which further complicates data comparison and harmonisation.

As a result, delivering a correct and reliable diagnosis of the spatial processes within the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava is a challenge. Without this diagnosis, the joint and integrated development of the border area is not feasible.

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<sup>4</sup> The municipality of Rajka adopted a new local decree during the compilation of the action plan, which obliges the new Slovak residents to cancel their Slovak residence if they want to live in Rajka, which may raise jurisdictional concerns.

<sup>5</sup> Bratislava faces a similar challenge: while the citizens move to the suburban areas, they still use the public services in the capital, which generates extra financial burdens for the municipality.

## Good practices

To gather and process cross-border data is a challenge for every cross-border functional area. However, there are good examples. Apart from the regional initiatives like those of the Greater Region and the Upper Rhine area, two good practices should be mentioned. The Statistical Office of Basel Canton (CH) has been collecting and displaying cross-border data for more than 10 years including the French and German hinterlands of the Swiss town. The two national statistical offices operate the Örestat portal providing information on the cross-border area around Copenhagen (DK) and Malmö (SE). It includes demography, labour market (commuting), housing, innovation, tourism, business, etc. data.<sup>6</sup> The joint statistics have been built with the support of different Interreg Programmes since 2000, when the Öresund Bridge was opened. Örestat III project, co-financed by the Interreg IVA Öresund – Kattegat – Skagerrak Programme during the 2007-2013 budgetary period, resulted in the construction of the joint data base. After the project's completion, the financing of the database became uncertain, but it is now operational thanks to the financial support of the Skåne Region in Sweden.

## Integrated cross-border spatial perspective for the metropolitan area

The spatial effects of the suburbanisation around Bratislava are similar to other examples. In each case, these phenomena require harmonised interventions and comprehensive monitoring procedures on behalf of the representatives of the urban centre and its surroundings. Otherwise, the processes evolve in an uncontrolled way, damaging the living conditions, as can be seen in many agglomerations.

Harmonised interventions presuppose the existence of a) a governance solution, a platform where the planners, the decision-makers and the representatives of the civil society can meet and discuss the spatial challenges; and b) certain legally binding documents (master plans) ruling land use and housing projects. In a cross-border context, both conditions are hard to achieve, due to nationally defined competences, procedures and rules.

The need for and the significance of a platform are acknowledged by the most recent development plans of Bratislava. The Transport Master Plan (CDV 2015, 15) summarises this need as follows: “Due to Bratislava's eccentric location in the structure of Slovakia, close to the state borders with Austria and Hungary, the capital city is dependent on effective foreign cooperation when planning its economic, social and spatial

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<sup>6</sup> <https://utveckling.skane.se/regional-utveckling/statistik-och-analys/oresundsdatabasen/oresundsdatabasen-orestat/orestat-in-english/>

development.” The document also envisages a zonal tariff system including 5 Hungarian and 16 Austrian municipalities. As its specific objective 39, the Bratislava 2030 strategy includes the establishment of a planning platform designed for the whole metropolitan area, whose indicator is: “number of territorial self-government/region units - also in Hungarian and Austrian border areas - participating in joint metropolitan planning” (MIB 2022, 179)<sup>7</sup>. Obviously, the management of the metropolitan area is aware of the organic connectedness of the city and its vicinities.

According to the urbanists’ forecasts (CDV 2015; MIB 2022), in the upcoming years, Petržalka and Ružinov will become the development poles of the city (altogether numbering 200,000 inhabitants), which means that the southern districts located closer to the borders will gain higher importance, which underlines the harmonisation needs. Further arguments might be that the post-socialist and neoliberal housing model is applied in an ad hoc way in Bratislava (Meyfroidt 2016), with weak consideration of sustainability (MIB 2022); parallel with the moving out from the city, the needs for better public and commercial services and infrastructure arise in the destination municipalities; suburbanisation generates air and noise pollution, bigger waste production and the reduction of green areas in rural territories as well (MIB 2022); the development plans of the Slovak capital city have direct effects on the neighbouring municipalities, at the same time, every decision made by the municipalities within the suburban area (e.g. establishment of new residential areas) has its effects on the whole cross-border region, etc. All these factors require coordinated efforts to keep the development pace of the capital city and the liveability of the suburbs.

According to the planners convened to the 3<sup>rd</sup> workshop, integrated planning across the borders is hindered by many factors: the different legal systems and share of competences, development priorities, the lack of a coordinating body, problems with a common understanding of the challenges, lack of competences beyond the border, difficult access to funding, etc. The experts also underlined the need for coordination (especially in the context of larger projects), data exchange, harmonisation of local plans and construction codes (for the harmonisation of local construction provisions), and the set-up of the governance for monitoring the processes.

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<sup>7</sup> In the yearly report 2023 of Bratislava 2030 Strategy, the indicator is re-worded as follows:  
“Establishment of a platform for cooperation within the metropolitan functional region (including partners on the territory of AT and HU) to address common development themes”.

## Good practices

French legislation enables border local and regional authorities to develop a cross-border cooperation plan (Schéma de coopération transfrontalière, SCT). The cities of Lille, Nice, and Strasbourg, as well as the Basque Conurbation, approved their SCT after a participatory planning process involving actors from the other side of the border as well. In the case of the SCT of the European Community of Alsace, the authorisation goes beyond the above-mentioned cases: it requires the alignment with existing spatial planning documents (equipping the plan with a regulatory factor), and envisages structural cross-border projects and delegation of powers, which is a unique aspect (MOT 2021).

Lille and its partners within the French-Belgian Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai EGTC (established in 2008) organise their interventions around the topic of water within the Parc Blue (Le Parc Bleu) project. The main aim is the protection and sustainable use of the wet areas within the cross-border region in an integrated way<sup>8</sup>.

The 3Land project<sup>9</sup> targets former industrial areas along the River Rhine, around a freight port in Basel (CH), based on a concept adopted by the parties in 2015. The planned investments cover territories in Basel, Huningue (FR), and Weil am Rhein (DE), and envisage the construction of new pedestrian and cycle bridges connecting housing and relaxation areas, a new campus and a transport hub along the river. The project is unique because the three local municipalities decided to realise harmonised interventions with a view to enabling access to the river and the use of the riverside for diverse purposes, which was inaccessible before due to the industrial buildings.

## Challenges and actions related to cross-border public service development

### Transport

Creating the conditions for sustainable transport is a complex challenge in every suburban area; it includes the development of the physical infrastructure (roads, cycle paths, rails, parking places, multimodal centres, etc.), the integration of different means of transport in a holistic system, tariffs included, the harmonisation of the time schedules

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.eurometropolis.eu/fr/actions/le-parc-bleu>

<sup>9</sup> <https://3-land.net/en/projects.html>

of diverse service providers, and the sensitisation and motivation of the citizens to opt for public and community transport solutions.

In a cross-border context, integration means a double challenge: the service providers operate their lines according to different national rules, subvention systems, and different tariffs; cross-border transport falls under the so-called prohibition of cabotage, which protects the domestic public transport companies against concurrence under EU law; the physical infrastructure is designed in an inward-looking way with less attention paid to cross-border elements (what is more, as railway has always been strategic military infrastructure, in many cases, even the physical conditions are different); the transport culture is different nation by nation, and the cross-border commuters and residents are not necessarily aware of the rules to respect on the other side of the border, etc. All these factors are present in the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava.

One of the main arguments to move beyond the state borders is the favourable transport connections, by car. The completion of the D4 highway between Jarovce and Kittsee and its integration with the Austrian A6 highway has stimulated massive movement of Slovak citizens towards the Austrian suburbs. Equally, the completion of the M15 highway in Hungary and its integration into the Slovak network has created more favourable conditions to commute from Mosonmagyaróvár to Bratislava. It is a common experience that getting to Bratislava city centre by car takes 15 to 20 minutes from the Austrian and Hungarian suburbs, compared to the Slovak vicinities from where the trip can even be 1 hour long. Taken into account this advantage and that in Bratislava and its surroundings the level of motorisation is more than one and a half times higher than the domestic average (nearly 700 cars per 1000 inhabitants; see Michniak 2020); as well as the demographic forecasts, it is not too hard to foresee that individual transport will continue to grow generating traffic jams everywhere and the claim for new and new roads.

The Austrian and Hungarian mayors equally reclaim the heavy traffic and its negative effects on the road infrastructure. The situation in Hungary is a bit worse, because, by estimations, half of the Slovak citizens living in Austria have a job within Austria, while almost every Slovak citizen who moved to Hungary commutes every day to Bratislava, along the same roads. At the same time, the reconstruction or further development of the infrastructure will attract even more new residents with even more vehicles, generating even heavier traffic. Consequently, the solution is the integrated development of the public transport system (Michniak 2020). The Bratislava 2030 strategy (MIB 2022) also insists on the development of the public transport infrastructure (coupled with parking areas at the gates of the city) and the suburban railway system. The City of Bratislava gradually develops the parking facilities through the so-called '*paas*' system (Bratislava Parking Assistance Service), which further complicates car traffic within the city. What is

more, the Transport Master Plan envisages the reduction of the use of cars to below 20% by 2040 in Bratislava (CDV 2015).

Still, there are components of the infrastructure where investments are urgent (e.g. the national road between Rusovce and Rajka, the border crossing included; the internal roads within the Hungarian settlements), and the construction of an integrated cycle path network would also improve the living conditions within the region. Equally, the tramline Nr3 should be constructed until Slnecnice (Južné mesto), and the suburban railway connection from Hungary should ensure direct access to the Main Railway Station, etc.

In August 2025, 25 trains are operated on weekdays between Bratislava-Petržalka and Vienna, and 11 between Rajka and the Slovak capital. The line between Bratislava Main Station and Vienna through Marchegg is currently under reconstruction. When it is operational, further more than 20 trains offer contact between the two capitals. The bus line Nr 901 serves between Hainburg and Bratislava (after a short cut during and after the COVID), while the former bus line Nr 801 to Rajka is replaced by a service provided by a private company. Compared to the former service, the ticket prices have doubled, and the new service is not integrated into the urban transport system of Bratislava. The BID (Integrated Transport for Bratislava region) currently considers the testing of a new bus line between the Austrian villages of Prellenkirchen, Edelstal, Berg and Bratislava.

Vienna Airport is accessible from Bratislava by bus services 3 to 4 times an hour, but these buses do not stop between the airport and the Slovak capital.

Due to the transport restrictions being in effect during the pandemic, some Slovak citizens have created transport communities using the car-pooling solution, which are still alive, and which also may be an appropriate solution to reduce pollution and traffic. Likewise, individual means of transport, i.e. e-bikes, e-scooters, and other innovative means, can be encouraged if the infrastructural conditions are given (i.e. separated bike paths, good connections, and an expanded tool-sharing system).

## Good practices

The Léman Express<sup>10</sup> is Europe's largest cross-border integrated suburban railway system around the Swiss city of Geneva. The 230 km-long network includes six lines and 50 stations, and it integrates the Cornavin Airport into the French railway system through a new tunnel. The lines can be used by different tickets and passes integrated within the Greater Geneva tariff system, including the cross-border tram line to Annemasse as well.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.lemanexpress.com/en/>



One of the most integrated cross-border regions of the EU is located around the cities of Liège (BE), Maastricht (NL) and Aachen (DE). The Euregio Meuse-Rhine (EMR) is a champion of cross-border integration, which introduced a euregioticket<sup>11</sup> with the support of the transport companies of the three countries. The daily ticket, which costs EUR 19, is valid at all public transport lines within the Euroregion, where 24 lines serve across the borders. The three-country train connecting the three cities has been developed with the support of the EU.

## Public services

The age structure of the Slovak residents in Austria and Hungary is very young. Generally, these are mobile young families with children and young singles moving beyond the state border. Accordingly, the educational institutions are affected by the biggest pressure in the suburban area. In the Hungarian municipalities, some Slovak residents use the services of the crèches and the kindergartens, but they are not very interested in the primary and secondary schools. In Rajka, the local primary school is operated by the Local German Minority Self-Government as the German minority is still present there, regardless of the expulsion of Germans after the WW2. The municipality offered the opportunity of tri-lingual education (German, Hungarian, and Slovak), but the Slovak residents were not interested in it. They would be in favour of English education, but the German Minority Self-Government cannot replace German with English, due to the national legislation.

The presence of quite large Croat communities is a unique characteristic of the entire region. In certain villages, education in the Croatian language is also available. Although communication between Croats and Slovaks is relatively understandable, the educational offer is not attractive for the Slovak children. On the contrary the vast majority of the newcomers consider Austria their new home. Accordingly, they prefer their children to attend Austrian schools. It generates challenges for the local municipalities because the local capacities are not sufficient for the expanded needs. For instance, teachers' salaries are financed by the Provincial Government, but the afternoon childcare workers are paid for by the local municipalities. E.g. Hainburg finances more than 30 such employees. Another challenge is that in many schools, Slovak pupils are in a remarkable majority, which forces them to speak rather Slovak than German.

In Hainburg, there are Slovak lessons at primary school 2 to 3 times a week, but bilingual education is missing in both neighbouring countries. At the same time, according to the

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<sup>11</sup> <https://youregion-emr.eu/live/transport/>

demographic forecasts, the capacities of the secondary schools in Bratislava are already unsatisfactory, and the situation continues to worsen (MIB 2022). Cross-border integration of the educational offers could compensate for this shortage.

As the age structure is rather young, social care currently does not pose a challenge for the Austrian and Hungarian municipalities. As social care services are bound to citizenship, these needs cannot even be satisfied today. At the same time, as time goes by, more and more elderly people will report these types of needs, and the municipalities should prepare for this new challenge. Due to the provisions, the situation will not be manageable without the involvement of the national authorities.

Health care is a much more urgent topic to solve. Thanks to the cooperation between the regional (Austria) and national (Slovakia and Hungary) rescue services, in 2024, the bilateral treaties enabling cross-border rescue services were signed between Austria and Slovakia and Austria and Hungary. The treaties are ratified in each country. However, the cooperation agreements detailing the procedures and creating the integration of information flows between the dispatch centres are still under preparation. With the support of the Hungary-Slovakia Interreg VI-A programme, the wording of the bilateral treaty between Hungary and Slovakia has also started. Due to the fact that in every case the model was the treaty between Austria and the Czech Republic, it is expected that in the metropolitan area of Bratislava, the rescue services will be enabled to cooperate trilaterally under very similar conditions, which is a great advantage.

Today, if a patient in Rajka calls the EU emergency number (112), the Slovak dispatch centre will answer the call (due to the stronger Slovak signals), but the rescue car cannot cross the border to take the patient from Hungary even from a distance of 2 km: usually, it is the family who transports the patient to the border crossing and put them into the Slovak ambulance car. The treaties and the cooperation agreements will change this risky regime in the foreseeable future.

At the same time, to provide inpatient and outpatient services across the borders is still a challenge despite the 2011/24 EU Directive on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare enables that practice. With the support of the Slovakia-Austria Interreg programme, the Bridges for Birth project has created cooperation between the Hospital of Hainburg (where more and more Slovak babies are born) and the National Institute for Children's Diseases of Bratislava in the field of neonatal treatments. The ice-breaking project may show the way, how the integration of health services across the border can be developed.

## Good practices

During the last 20 years, the number of cross-border health services has remarkably been increasing. Lower Austria is a Central European champion of the topic, through the HealthAcross initiative<sup>12</sup>, which triggered several cooperation projects, from the cross-border rescue services operated jointly with Czechia to the outpatient centre of Gmünd and České Velenice. With the assistance of HealthAcross, cooperation is not only being formed between the hospital of Hainburg and the Children's Hospital of Bratislava, but also between the hospitals of Wiener Neustadt and Sopron.

The highest level of health integration can be witnessed in France. The seven Cross-Border Organised Zones of Access to Health (Zones organisées d'accès aux soins transfrontaliers, ZOAST<sup>13</sup>) have been established between 2008 and 2015, based on a bilateral agreement of 2005 signed by France and Belgium. The agreement enables the regional authorities to create and operate cross-border health care zones within which the patients can use every health facility regardless of their citizenship. The costs of the treatments are refunded by the relevant (Belgian or French) health insurance institutions. The seven ZOAST cover the whole joint border between the two countries.

The first cross-border inpatient centre, the Cerdanya Hospital<sup>14</sup>, was established by the Catalanian and the French governments in 2010. The hospital is located in the Pyrenees, in an area far from the closest health institutions. The two partners decided to construct a hospital on the Spanish side of the mountains, providing treatments for the citizens of both countries, and the tourists visiting the region. The institution is managed by an EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation) which employs Spanish and French doctors, nurses and other staff. Its operation is financed by Catalonia and France jointly.

## Challenges and actions related to the integration of the new residents

Integration of the new residents is a big challenge in every suburban area. On the one hand, the cultural and behavioural patterns of the new citizens are always different from the local legacy (urban-rural differences). On the other hand, the newcomers usually move to new residential areas, and they lead a quite isolated lifestyle: they get to the urban centre in the morning, and return in the evening, they use the services in the town, not in the village, etc. These differences may generate conflicts between the two population groups.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://healthacross.noelga.at/en/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ofbs.org/cooperation-franco-belge/zoast/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.hcerdanya.eu/en/>

The cross-border context adds further factors to the picture: language and cultural barriers, legacy of historical grievances, different routines based on altered legal and administrative traditions, etc.

In the case of Bratislava, one of the main factors defining the level of integration is the Iron Curtain. Even if the physical barrier has been dismantled 35 years ago, mentally, it still has its effects (Dillinger 2004; Farkas – Klobučník 2021; Hardi – Nárai – Uszkai 2023), with weakening power. In the Slovak-Hungarian context, there are many historical grievances making integration difficult. When the first Slovak residents appeared in Rajka, their cars were damaged, aggressive graffiti appeared, and right-wing populists organised a manifestation against the “tót” (mocking name of the Slovaks). The local people did not participate in the manifestation. On the contrary, in Bezenye, some locals attacked the new Slovak residents because they did not want to respect the local traditions (Balizs – Bajmóczy 2018). However, during the last decade, resentment against the Slovak residents has gradually disappeared, and every Hungarian mayor considers the relationship between the locals and the ‘migrants’ peaceful. At the same time, this does not mean that the new residents are integrated into the local communities. The biggest obstacle thereto is the language barrier (Hardi – Nárai – Uszkai 2023). The majority of the Slovak citizens do not speak Hungarian (many of them don’t speak any other language than Slovak), and they hardly feel they should learn it. Unlike the case of the Austrian municipalities, where they are forced to use the official language, and it is in their interest, instead in Hungary, these are the local municipalities, which try to communicate also in Slovak: they translate the official documents to Slovak, they release bilingual leaflets, publish bilingual posters, and they address the Slovak citizens with special information. Thanks to the co-existence, the local administrators understand more and more Slovak. Some new residents speaking both languages usually provide their ‘interpreting services’ upon request. If it is the local municipality which launches a procedure, they have to provide an interpretation of the municipality’s costs, as Hungarian laws prescribe. It is expected that artificial intelligence (AI) will help tackle these problems.

Interestingly, the integration of the Slovak citizens in the Austrian municipalities, where they must speak German, is more advanced than in the Hungarian ones, where they can communicate in their mother tongue. In certain Austrian local self-governments, the Slovaks have representatives.

On the Hungarian side, attempts have been made to involve them in the local cultural life, with modest results. In Feketeerdő, a group of new residents organised a cultural event during Advent 2024. However, the new residents are rather cosmopolitan citizens: they are not bound to Slovak national traditions, as the mayor of Rajka stipulated;

consequently, they cannot contribute to the ethnically diverse local culture. Furthermore, they “consume” cultural goods in Bratislava.

It is not incidental that the Slovaks living in the Austrian suburbs identify themselves as Austrian inhabitants, which is not the case on the Hungarian side. Their reluctance to be integrated in the local community can also be observed in examples, when they avoid taxation: they don’t want to participate in the financial burdens of their new home settlement. It is a problem hard to manage for the small Hungarian municipalities.

### Good practices

The German Frankfurt/Oder and the Polish Ślubice started cooperating right after the reunification of Germany. Among many other achievements, the twin cities organised the Future Conference on Cross-border Development with a horizon of 2030 in 2021<sup>15</sup>. The conference aimed to identify joint developments for the two towns based on the recommendations and project ideas of 80 citizens convened from the two sides of the border. The participants triggered planning processes targeting a new bridge and better utilisation of the riversides.

In Austria, Citizens’ Councils have a long tradition. These instruments enable the residents to be involved in local and regional decision-making processes and future planning. The Tyrol – South-Tyrol – Trentino Europaregion EGTC<sup>16</sup> adapted the model in 2022, when organising the first cross-border Citizens’ Council to boost participatory procedures when shaping the joint future.

The Euro-Institut of Kehl<sup>17</sup> facilitates mutual rapprochement of the French and German citizens around Strasbourg through different activities. They organise language courses, develop and manage cross-border projects for cooperating local institutions, and promote the exchange of civil servants across the border. Through these activities, they successfully involve the local citizens in cross-border cooperation.

The Meuse-Rhine Euregion manages the trilateral Interreg Programme’s Small Project Fund<sup>18</sup> facilitating the development of cross-border contacts and encounters of the

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<sup>15</sup> [https://www.frankfurt-oder.de/Verwaltung-Stadtpolitik/Verwaltung/Frankfurt-S%C5%82ubicer-Kooperationszentrum/Aktuelles/Frankfurt-Slubicer-Zukunftskonferenz-zur-grenz%C3%BCberschreitenden-Stadtentwicklung-2030.php?object=tx\\_2616.27001.1&NavID=2616.1787&La=1](https://www.frankfurt-oder.de/Verwaltung-Stadtpolitik/Verwaltung/Frankfurt-S%C5%82ubicer-Kooperationszentrum/Aktuelles/Frankfurt-Slubicer-Zukunftskonferenz-zur-grenz%C3%BCberschreitenden-Stadtentwicklung-2030.php?object=tx_2616.27001.1&NavID=2616.1787&La=1)

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.euoparegion.info/en/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.euroinstitut.org/fr/english>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.euregio-mr.info/en/foerderung/small-project-fund/>

Dutch, Belgian and German citizens through micro (up to EUR 2000), small light (up to EUR 40,000), and small maxi (up to EUR 100,000) projects.

## Challenges and actions related to the governance of the tri-border area

### State of play

In 2025, the City of Bratislava as well as the Provinces of Burgenland and Lower Austria established the *baum\_cityregion* Working Community (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft / pracovné spoločenstvo*), which will be a governance body without a legal entity status<sup>19</sup>. The new structure can be considered as the accomplishment of a one and a half decade-long institutionalisation process involving the Austrian suburbs of Bratislava. The BAUM (Bratislava Umland Management) initiative started as a stand-alone project in 2011, following the model of the SUM (Stadt Umland Management<sup>20</sup>) of Vienna. The latter one was set up by the City of Vienna and the Provincial Governments of Vienna and Lower Austria in 2006, to harmonise the suburban development activities around the Austrian capital, with a special focus on spatial planning, transport and environmental issues. The SUM plays a coordinating role between these territorial actors under the strategic orientation of the Advisory Body (Beirat), composed of regional developers and the delegates of Vienna and the local municipalities of Lower Austria. Daily work is managed by two coordinators hired by Lower Austria and the Province of Vienna. Their mission includes the coordination of the planning activities, the establishment and operation of platforms facilitating exchanges between experts, decision makers and civil society in different subjects (e.g. the Vienna-Schwechat Dialogue Platform; the Leopoldau round table platform to manage the parking challenges, etc.), the organisation of the SUM Forums where the local stakeholders meet the relevant provincial departments upon needs, and the annual City-Region Conference, where politicians, leaders of the administration, researchers and other actors involved in regional development can encounter.

The SUM is a non-formalised, loose cooperation structure, without a legal entity, operating within the national confines<sup>21</sup>. Its external relations towards Czechia, Slovakia and Hungary are rather sporadic. Earlier, the consultation forum involving the larger metropolitan area was provided within the framework of the Centrope initiative

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<sup>19</sup> The establishment process will be completed once the members of the different bodies are nominated during the autumn of 2025.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.stadt-umland.at/>

<sup>21</sup> While SUM is not an independent legal entity, its activities are managed by the Verein Niederösterreich-Wien - Gemeinsame Entwicklungsräume.

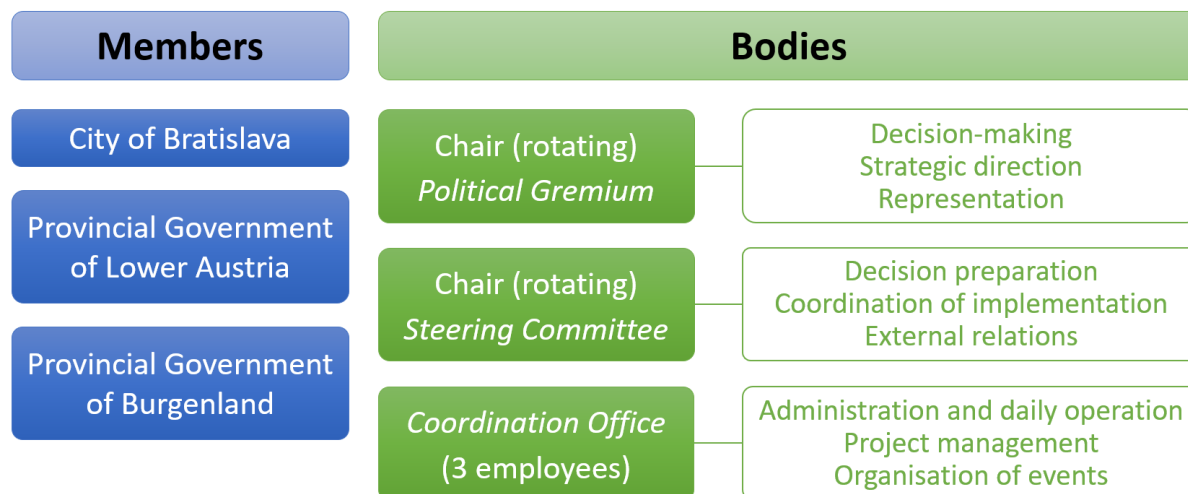


established in 2003, but, during the last 7 years, it has politically emptied. At the same time, the SUM played a decisive role in the establishment of the BAUM initiative; the ties between the two bodies are still lively.

The BAUM (Bratislava Umland Management) initiative started as a cross-border project, implemented between 2011 and 2014. The primary goal was to deliver an integrated development plan designed for the Slovak-Austrian cross-border metropolitan area. The second project (titled *baum2020*) lasted from 2017 to 2020, and it resulted in the establishment of the joint office, the launch of the mayors' forums and the BAUM conference, and the organisation of working group meetings on different subjects. The third project (titled '*baum\_cityregion*', and also supported by the Slovakia-Austria Interreg Programme) aimed to create the governance framework for the BAUM initiative. The Working Community (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft*) established as a result of the project, is based on a loose Cooperation Agreement coupled with Statutes and a Financial Agreement, but without a legal entity status. The founding members are the City of Bratislava and the Provincial Governments of Lower Austria and Burgenland.

The main decision-making body is the Political Gremium, consisting of the high-level representatives of the founding members, convened at least once a year. It has the competences to amend the Statutes, to define the joint strategic orientations, to approve the working and budget plans, and to adopt the reports of the annual plans. The decisions of the leading body (including the annual plans) are prepared by the Steering Committee, composed of the representatives of the three founding members, who coordinate the activities of the office. The *baum\_cityregion* Office plays a coordinating, administrative and executive role, which delivers its activities according to an annual plan. Similar to the SUM, the BAUM office is managed by three coordinators, who are employed by the City of Bratislava and the two Austrian Provinces. Their role is very similar to the coordinators of the SUM: to coordinate the joint activities of the founding members in four thematic fields (culture and tourism; nature and climate; space and human, meaning social and regional development; and mobility) with a special attention to sustainable spatial development; to administer and promote the activities of the cooperation; to organise the meetings of the bodies; as well as to prepare and manage joint projects. As Patti (2016) highlights, a major shortage of the structure is the lack of citizens' participation.

Figure 7 – The current structure of the BAUM Working Community



The Financial Agreement establishes the funding rules prescribing the share of duties between the members, separately. For instance, the three employees of the baum\_cityregion Office are financed by the City of Bratislava and the two Austrian Provinces, subsequently. Bratislava covers the costs related to design and the maintenance of the joint web page, while the two Austrian provinces take the burdens of translation and printing expenses.

The structure can be enlarged, and the Statutes envisage this expansion towards the Hungarian partners, which was also included in the annual activity plan for 2024 of the Bratislava 2030 Strategy (MIB 2022). The geographic expansion of the BAUM initiative towards Hungary has already been included in the objectives of the 3<sup>rd</sup> project, implemented between 2021 and 2022, but the Working Community has not yet involved the Hungarian partners. The expansion process has also been stimulated by the #ACCESS project (supported by the Interreg VI-A Hungary-Slovakia Programme), aiming to create a structured framework for the cross-border development of functional urban areas along the Hungarian-Slovak border.

As Mr Ján Mazúr, Chief City Strategist of Bratislava, summarised it at the first workshop of the Resilient Borders project, the expansion aims to create the frameworks for information exchange and advocacy of the cross-border residents.

The current document is designed to facilitate the selection of the appropriate institutional format for the expanded initiative.

## Principles

When designing the governance solution of a cross-border initiative, the following principles are worth respecting.

**Relevance** – The selected solution should be relevant in terms of the tasks to be delegated thereto. It means that the members should have the relevant competences and the right of delegation. Taking into account that the administrative systems of the three countries are different, and the competences are owned by different-level institutions, this principle might lead to a multi-level governance solution involving different tiers of government. As every region is different, the solutions cannot and should not be copied. In each case, the founders should find their own way.

**Maturity** – The selected solution should fit the maturity of the initiative. Some structures prove to be premature, when a structure institutionalised at the highest level is established by partners who do not even know each other. This happened to several EGTCs along the Hungarian borders. Institutionalisation usually has an evolving character, i.e. the process is worth starting with a lower level. In this context, three phases can be distinguished.

- (1) The informal level lacks the formalised models: the partners are cooperating in an ad-hoc or project-based way, in a consultative format. Cooperation can be based on a joint (political) statement or a partnership agreement, without the establishment of permanent bodies. The main advantages of this solution are its high flexibility, the opportunity for large (civil) participation, and the freedom from over-bureaucratisation. At the same time, it lacks stability, which might endanger long-term sustainability and long-term strategic cooperation goals; and it misses the clear orientations regarding competences, responsibilities and financing.
- (2) The second level of institutionalisation is formalised cooperation without establishing a legal entity. Collaboration is based on a signed agreement describing the responsibilities and duties of the parties, and it is structured on a basic level. The existence of an official agreement and different bodies equipped with a set of responsibilities offers stability and accountability to the structure. Loose frameworks do not require the establishment of complicated decision-making procedures, and keep the administrative burdens at a low level. At the same time, the cooperation is provided with a long-term perspective. The biggest challenge to these half-institutionalised formats is funding: the way of financing the activities, the staff and the projects. This shortage can limit the operability of

the structure: when the activities are expanded and supported by larger projects, further institutionalisation is inevitable.

- (3) The highest level of institutionalisation is represented by the existence of an independent legal entity. This entity can be given diverse legal forms depending on the level of trust between the parties, the administrative levels involved, the competences owned by the founding members, the cultural differences, the existing national provisions and international agreements, etc. The main advantages of this level are representativeness (i.e. the entity can represent the stakeholders of the entire cross-border area), visibility (which facilitates branding and identification), a stabilised budget (the members take the responsibility for the entity from both political and financial points of view), capability to create and operate further bodies established by the legal entity. At the same time, it presupposes a high level of trust between the founding members coming from different cultural background (which is impossible without a successful prehistory of the cooperation); it generates complex administrative procedures and a system of competences (with the danger of overcomplicated administration); and the more institutionalised they are, the bigger is the chance to become a mere managerial institution, without contacts with the everyday citizens (the level of citizens' engagement is reduced).

The selection between the above solutions should be aligned with the level of maturity of the cooperation. Too ambitious options might lead to early disappointment and the destruction of original trust. Too reluctant decisions might reduce the output legitimacy of the cooperation, which may strengthen the wish for a leaving strategy among the members. The most successful models follow an evolving path, starting from the lowest level towards the highest one.

**Representativeness** – The structure will be more successful if it clearly and consequently represents its members' interests, and territorial responsibilities. The founders can contract an existing management body or a consultancy to deal with the tasks related to the structure, but it will reduce the level of ownership and engagement, even if it is successful in delivering results. Likewise, if the relevant territorial actors are excluded from the body, it will lose its energy and recognition. Accordingly, it is advised to establish a structure which is based on the will and engagement of the potential founders and that well represents the objectives of the joint mission.

Representativeness also refers to the appropriate geographic size of the organisation. In the 1990s and the 2000s, the Vienna-Bratislava axis was a popular concept to define the

framework for the metropolisation of Bratislava. Researchers considered the functionally homogenous twinning area the future development pole of Central Europe (together with Győr, it was called “the gold triangle”), requiring well-structured and close cooperation of the public and private stakeholders of the two cities (Jaššo 2007; CDV 2015).

The Jordes project, co-financed by the 2000-2006 Austria-Slovakia Programme, revealed that the development of the cross-border agglomeration around the two cities (completed with Győr) presupposes the existence of a cooperation platform involving the territorial actors.

As Husar and Ondrejčka establish it (Husar – Ondrejčka 2017), by the mid-2010s, this cooperation axis had been weakened. They mention the example of Vienna’s smart city strategy, which does not reflect on Bratislava’s vicinity. Accordingly, Bratislava has also developed its own smart city strategy.

In 2021, Ondrejčka and his team drafted three scenarios for the future spatial organisation of Bratislava. The first version includes a compact city, which gradually exploits its internal territories for development, and applies modern technologies to enhance internal cohesion. The second version advises a polycentric solution, where the different parts of the city have their own role and significance, and they are well interconnected. The third scenario puts specialisation into the focus, which offers different roles to the city parts and its suburbs.

As the authors of the Bratislava 2030 strategy stipulate, coordination even within Bratislava is a challenge due to the varied character and diverse interests of the districts and city parts. The governance picture is further complicated by the Bratislava Self-Governing Region, which is more or less identical with the direct catchment area of the capital, and the cross-border aspects of suburbanisation. To avoid the mistake of uncontrolled and unregulated housing and spatial development (which one can see in the eastern suburbs of Bratislava), there is a need for comprehensive, harmonised steering of urban development, which does not hamper the realisation of the infrastructural projects, but can subordinate them to higher functional interests. It is not enough to ensure the well-being of the residents without a holistic approach favouring a polycentric setting of solutions. This is a challenge which cannot be resolved without consulting the national-level institutions. To facilitate harmonised development of the agglomeration, the document recommends the establishment of a planning platform as a minimum goal, which can coordinate spatial planning projects across the administrative borders (MIB 2022).

In this perspective, the current geographic scope of the *baum\_cityregion* Working Community could be improved. The Austrian local municipalities affected the most by

the suburbanisation tendencies do not take part in decision-making processes, nor can the Slovak citizens' groups have their voice. Equally, the Slovak suburbs of Bratislava should also be part of the platform.

If we opt for the Greater Bratislava concept, these challenges should be responded through the governance structure.

## Good practices

To govern cross-border agglomerations, stakeholders within the EU use diverse solutions depending on the history, culture and legal frameworks of the relevant countries. Perhaps it is France which has the largest toolkit designed for cross-border cooperation. It is rare that these solutions lack the formalised status as in the case of the Nice Côte d'Azur Metropolis. The vast majority of the French bodies are registered as independent legal entities (MOT 2021). Some solutions are aligned with French domestic provisions, others with international bilateral or multi-lateral agreements based on the so-called Madrid Outline Convention; finally, France actively uses the tools developed by the European Union.

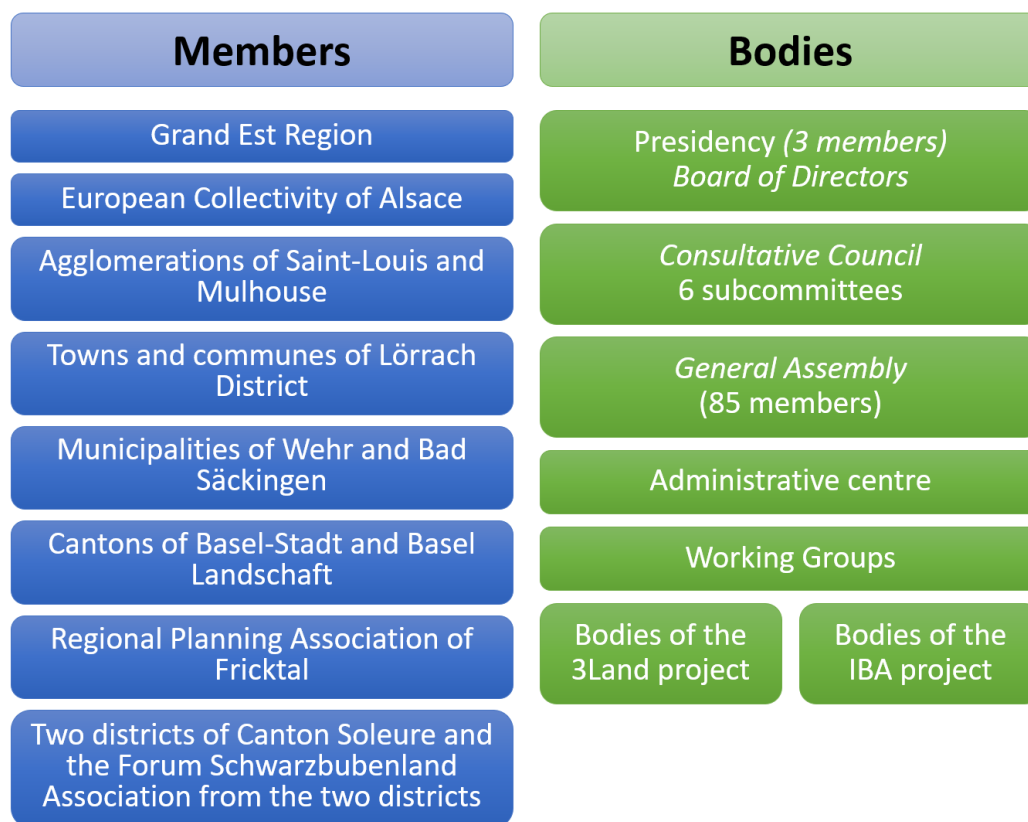
The Council of Europe adopted the Madrid Outline Convention on 21 May 1980, enabling local and regional authorities of the countries adopting the document to establish cross-border structures. The Convention connected this opportunity to bilateral interstate agreements. The French government signed the Treaty of Rome with Italy (26 November 1993), the Treaty of Bayonne with Spain (10 March 1995), the Treaty of Karlsruhe with Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland (23 January 1996) and the Treaty of Brussels with Belgium (16 September 2002), enabling the establishment of such structures under diverse formats. The joint feature of these structures is that they are legal entities, registered as Cross-Border Local Groupings (Groupement local de coopération transfrontalière, GLCT) (e.g. the Greater Geneva GLCT and the Urban Agglomeration of Doubs GLCT with Switzerland, the Belgian-French Lille Eurometropolis GLCT), which have a public law status; private law associations (e.g. the Trinational Eurometropolis of Basel with Switzerland), or *consorcios* (e.g. the Pyrenees Working Community and the Consorcio Bidasoa-Txingudi with Spain) (MOT 2021).

One of the good examples referred to the most frequently is the Trinational Eurodistrict of Basel, which has a sophisticated multi-level governance structure. The launch of the cooperation dates to the construction of the Basel Airport in French territory, in 1946. The Regio Basiliensis, which became a model for many cross-border euroregions afterwards, was established in 1963. The Eurodistrict was set up in 2007 according to French law, and



it involves 83 of the 250 municipalities belonging to the cross-border suburban area of Basel. The main decision-making body is the General Assembly of the association, composed of the representatives of the 85 members (including cantons, local municipalities, regional associations and, among others, the Grand Est Region from France). The coordination tasks are delivered by the Board of Directors, including 9 elected persons per country and the Consultative Council with 20 Swiss, 15 German and 15 French members. The administrative centre located in France manages the daily performance of the Eurodistrict and the activities of the working groups. The picture is further complicated by the IBA (Internationale Bauausstellung) project uniting stakeholders from the three countries to start joint development ideas and projects; and the 3Land project, which contains investments across the River Rhine in three countries according to a harmonised spatial plan. Both long-term projects have their own management structures within the Eurodistrict's governance structure. Thanks to the grant scheme of the Swiss Federation designed for agglomerations, investments within and around Basel can be supported, even beyond the state borders.

Figure 8 – The structure of the Trinational Eurodistrict of Basel



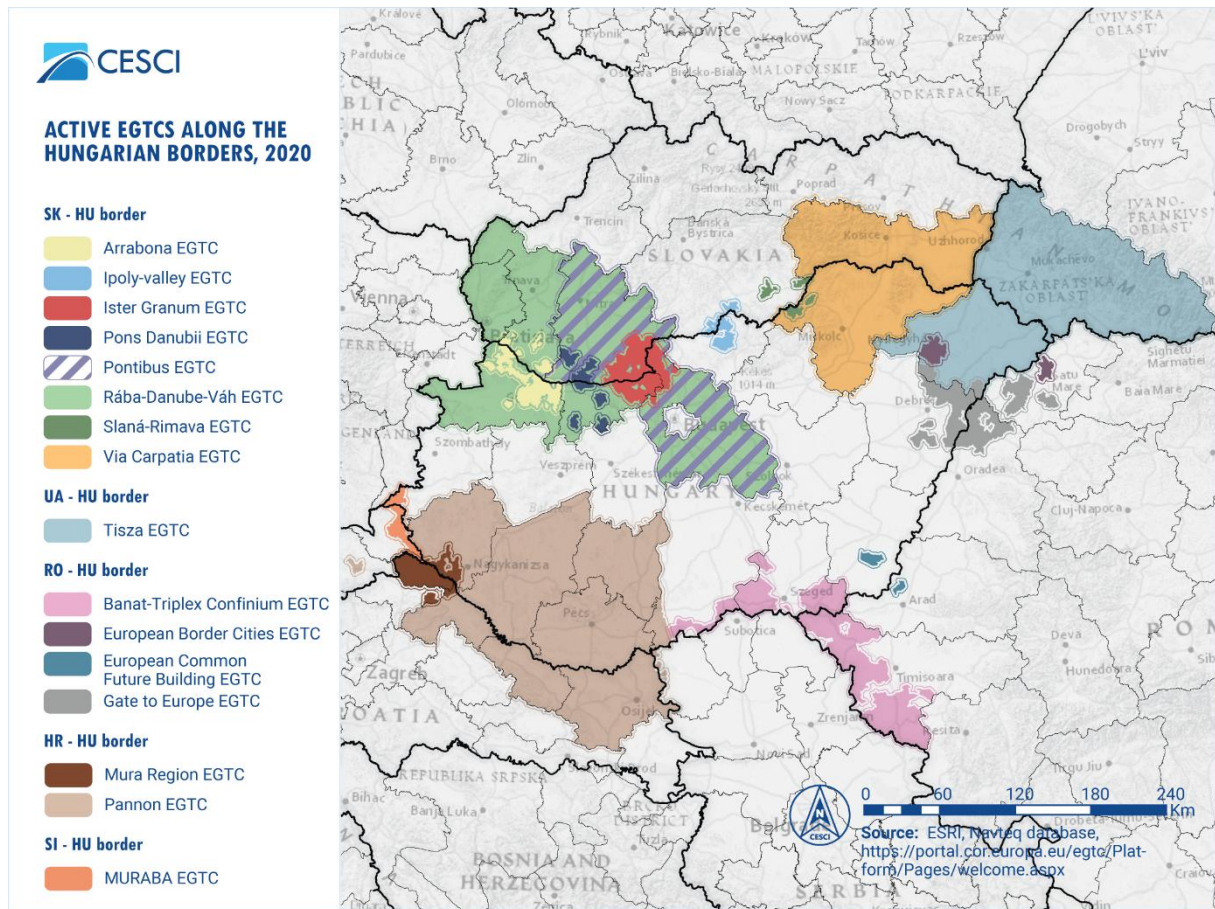
Source: <https://www.eurodistrictbasel.eu/fr/>

In many cases, these structures have been transformed into EGTCs (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation), which is the most advanced institution of cross-border cooperation (like in the case of the Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict and the PAMINA Eurodistrict with Germany). An EGTC is an independent legal entity acknowledged in all countries represented by its members, which can directly hire employees from both sides of the border; it can establish institutions and non-profit enterprises to provide public services, whose tariffs can be defined by the decision-making bodies of the grouping, etc. The Greater Region EGTC, covering territories from France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg, manages the Interreg fund within the territory of the grouping, which makes their cooperation around Luxembourg highly effective.

Its independent status makes this instrument highly adaptable to different needs with its own budget. 29 of the 91 EGTCs established so far (32%) have French members.

Hungary and Slovakia are also in favour of this solution: the number of the groupings set up so far with Hungarian participation is 26, and with Slovak participation is 19. What is more, the Slovak-Hungarian is the most frequented EU internal border by EGTCs. In Hungary, the government established a separate fund dedicated to the operational costs of the groupings with an annual budget of half a million euros, which is a big motivation to establish groupings. The subventions are distributed based on a call for applications according to the performance of the groupings which encourage innovation in territorial cooperation. Two of the Slovak-Hungarian EGTCs manage the small project fund of the relevant Interreg CBC Programme, and seven of them are implementing integrated cross-border tourist destination development action plans between 2025 and 2029.

Figure 9 – EGTCs established around Hungary

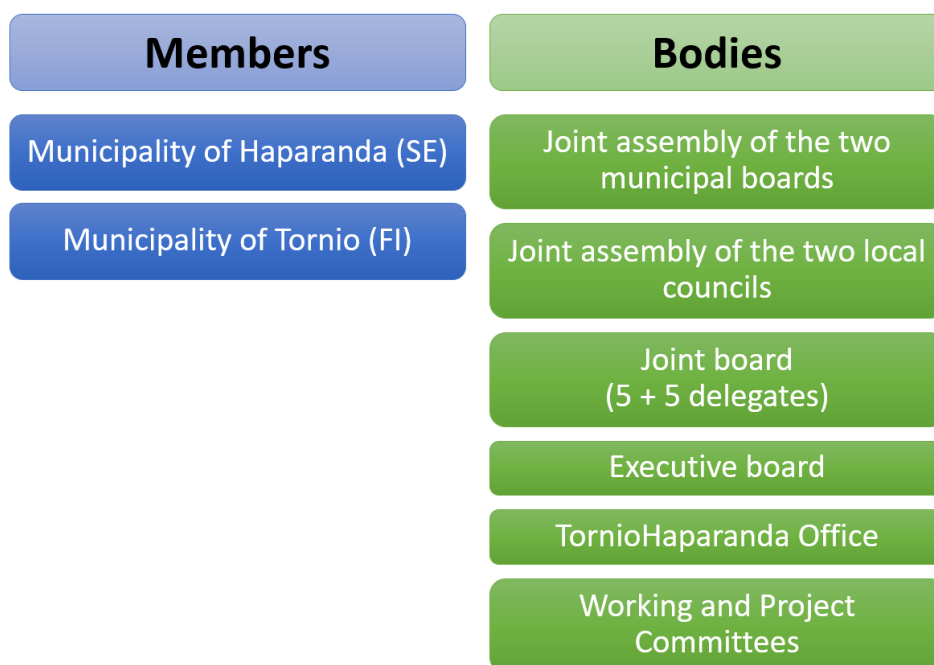


In Austria, the EGTC has become a bit more popular instrument during the last 5 years, when five of the existing eight groupings with Austrian participation have been established. Their common characteristic is that they had been preceded by long-term, less institutionalised cooperation. The Tyrol – South-Tyrol – Trentino Europaregion EGTC was established in 2011 by the provinces cooperating since 1998. The Euroregio Connect EGTC (2021) involves the regional tourist marketing centres of the same territory. The Wissenschaftsverbund EGTC was created in 2022 by 25 tertiary educational institutions around Bodensee, where the International Lake Constance Conference has been strengthening the integrated management of the environmental and historic assets of the affected four countries since 1972. The Karawanken Geopark EGTC manages the cross-border geopark established together with Slovenia. The grouping has been set up to ensure the joint management of the cross-border geological heritage, which was formerly managed separately by the partners. The youngest Austrian grouping is the B&G RAD EGTC, elevating the historic twin-city cooperation of Bad Radkersburg and the Slovenian Gornja Radgona to a higher level. Other similar initiatives, which missed the prehistory, like the 24 Cities and the Neusiedlersee – Fertő EGTCs, failed.

The Scandinavian countries do not prefer formalised solutions. The number of EGTCs they take part in is extremely low: only 2 EGTCs have Scandinavian members. Instead, cooperation in the Nordic countries is based on rather loose cooperation agreements creating Euroregion-type structures, and is focused on pragmatic joint projects.

The twin city cooperation between the Finnish Tornio and the Swedish Haparanda started in the 1960s, and it resulted in projects like the joint bilingual elementary school, the joint travel centre, a cross-border golf court, a joint sewage system, a joint cross-border district heating system, etc. The two towns signed a cooperation agreement in 1987, creating Provincia Bothniensis, without legal entity status. Cooperation has been renamed to TornioHaparanda (FI) and HaparandaTornio (SE), and the structure became more complicated, but the level of institutionalisation has not changed. The leading bodies of the two municipalities meet 2 to 3 times a year. The two local councils organise a joint meeting annually. The coordinating body consists of 5 Finnish and 5 Swedish members delegated by the local councils. The daily work is managed by the joint office, whose workers are employed and financed separately. Their activities are supported by development and project committees. The system is very similar to the *baum\_cityregion* structure.

Figure 10 – The structure of the TornioHaparanda twin city cooperation

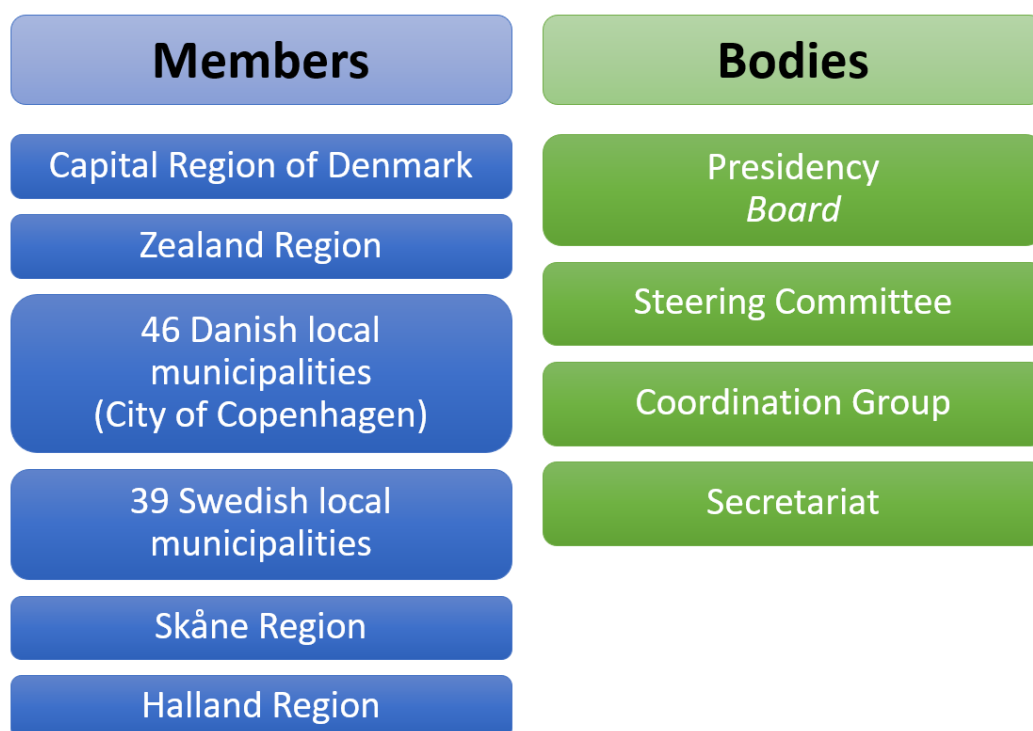


Source: [www.tornio.fi](http://www.tornio.fi)

Likewise, Greater Copenhagen, covering the largest metropolitan area of Scandinavia, was established by two Swedish and two Danish Regions and 85 local municipalities (46

Danish, 39 Swedish) located within these regions, without a legal entity. Historically, Greater Copenhagen meant the suburban region of the Danish capital, within the national confines. The opening of the Öresund Bridge in the year of 2000 has fundamentally changed the geopolitical and socio-economic situation around Copenhagen, resulting in the creation of the bilateral Öresund Committee. Due to the remarkable integration process across the Öresund Strait, Greater Copenhagen and the Öresund Committee were merged in the current structure in 2016. In 2024, a new Statutes was approved, but the political character of the cooperation remained. The Presidency is composed of the representatives of the four regions and the city of Copenhagen, and its chair is rotating between the two countries. The Board includes the members of the Presidency and further 13 members representing the regions and member municipalities. The decisions of the Board are prepared and executed by the Steering Committee composed of directors (technical level) of the regions and municipalities represented in the Board. The Secretariat is hosted by Copenhagen, consisting of 7 advisers. The Secretariat organises the meetings of the diverse bodies; manages the work of the Coordination Group meeting monthly; organises one conference per year; and manages the funds of the joint structure. The daily operation is funded through the Greater Copenhagen Committee to which the members pay the membership fee.

Figure 11 – The structure of the Greater Copenhagen Committee



Source: <https://www.greatercph.com/>



Greater Copenhagen is globally known for its leading role in green energy, circular economy, technological innovation (with a special focus on health), and business integration, but these activities are managed through project partnerships and networks.

This model is also quite close to the baum\_cityregion initiative, but it has membership fees, which ensures broader room for funding the activities; and it involves the local mayors in the decision-making processes, which enhances interest representation, ownership and identification.

## Action plan

### Intervention logic

Figure 12 – The intervention logic of the action plan

General objective	To create the conditions for the integrated development of the metropolitan area of Bratislava			
Specific objectives	SO_1 To improve the conditions of integrated planning and development around Bratislava	SO_2 To facilitate the functional integration of the cross-border metropolitan area	SO_3 To strengthen social cohesion within the tri-border area	SO_4 To create the governance framework for the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava
Actions	A_1.1 Cross-border database of the metropolitan area of Bratislava	A_2.1 Integrated Transport Master Plan of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava	A_3.1 The microproject fund of Greater Bratislava	A_4.1 The governance model of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava
	A_1.2 Integrated spatial perspective for the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava	A_2.2 Integrated tariff system of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava	A_3.2 The Citizens' Council of Greater Bratislava	
		A_2.3 Cross-border integration of health services around Bratislava		
	A_1.3 Establishment of a cross-border planning platform	A_2.4 Educational forum of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava		
		A_2.5 Enhancing multilingualism within the border area		

The general objective of the action plan targets the integrated development of the cross-border metropolitan area of the Slovak capital. The achievement of this objective is supported by four specific objectives referring to integrated planning, public service provision, improvement of social cohesion and the establishment of an appropriate trilateral governance structure. The specific objectives cover all the aspects relevant to cross-border integration of the metropolitan area, preparing the development of the Greater Bratislava brand.

The actions reflect the challenges identified during the workshops, but they do not cover all potential topics. For future cooperation, the actions identify the thematic fields, i.e. spatial planning, cross-border public services (with a special focus on transport, education and health), social cohesion, and regional branding.

## Actions

<b>Title of the action</b>	<b>A_1.1 Cross-border database of the metropolitan area of Bratislava</b>
<b>Specific Objective</b>	SO_1 To improve the conditions of integrated planning and development around Bratislava
<b>Content of the action</b>	<p>Within the framework of the action, the statistical database of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava will be developed. As a first step, a metadata table will be compiled by the representatives of the City of Bratislava, the Bratislava Self-Governing Region, the Regions of Lower Austria and Burgenland and Győr-Moson-Sopron County Council, with the involvement of the three national statistical offices. The local and regional actors will identify the most important data they need for their joint development efforts.</p> <p>The database will be generated and displayed by the statistical offices. Regarding cross-border flows, primary data collection is to be included in the project.</p> <p>The biggest challenge will be the maintenance and updating of the database, which requires remarkable financial resources. The database will be available online, equipped with a data search tool. Maintenance also includes the publication of analyses, reports, which could be delivered by the research institutes and the universities located within the metropolitan area. Cooperation with the Centropemap initiative is inevitable.</p>
<b>Potential funding</b>	ESPON, Interreg
<b>Partners</b>	City of Bratislava, Statistical Office of Slovakia, Hungarian Central Statistical Office, Statistik Austria, Bratislava Self-Governing Region, Provincial Government of Lower Austria, Provincial Government of Burgenland, Győr-Moson-Sopron County Council
<b>Expected outcomes</b>	Searchable digital statistical database displaying data on the tri-border area, including cross-border flows

<b>Title of the action</b>	<b>A_1.2 Integrated spatial perspective for the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava</b>
<b>Specific Objective</b>	SO_1 To improve the conditions of integrated planning and development around Bratislava
<b>Content of the action</b>	<p>The action aims to deliver a comprehensive spatial diagnosis and planning document referring to the diverse challenges generated by the cross-border suburbanisation processes around Bratislava. The spatial perspective will determine the confines of the planning area with external references to the Vienna-Bratislava axis and the Centrope region; the major challenges of the suburbanisation process and the metropolitan ambitions of the Slovak capital city; the long-term spatial vision for the cross-border area; the principles of land use in harmony with the national, regional and local provisions; and the intervention areas.</p> <p>The document must align with the existing Austrian (e.g. ÖREK 2030 – Raum für Wandel; Stadtregion+, etc.), Slovak (Bratislava 2030; the PHSR of Bratislava Region, etc.) and Hungarian (National Development and Territorial Development Concept; Territorial Development Concept of Győr-Moson-Sopron County 2021-2027, etc.) spatial planning provisions, planning documents and concepts.</p> <p>The planning process presupposes the active participation of the relevant territorial actors and authorities, the development agencies, and the universities of the metropolitan area, as well as access to data (see: Action A_1.1).</p> <p>The planning action should be coordinated by the City of Bratislava, and it should involve the representatives of the civil society, especially those affected by the suburbanisation process (e.g. cross-border commuters, representatives of the Slovaks living beyond the border, the mayors and civil associations of the suburban area, etc.).</p> <p>The process will contain the following activities: (i) analysis of the existing local and spatial development plans (master plans included) and strategies; (ii) analysis of statistics developed by the national statistical offices; (iii) consultation process: series of expert workshops to identify the different national, regional and local competences and rules related to spatial planning; (iv) design workshops to define the spatial vision of the cross-border metropolitan area; (v) planning; (vi) consultation with the civil society actors; (vii) finalisation of the spatial perspective; (viii) adoption of the document by the local and regional decision-making bodies.</p>

<b>Potential funding</b>	ESPON, Interreg, national funds
<b>Partners</b>	City of Bratislava, Bratislava Self-Governing Region, Provincial Government of Lower Austria, Provincial Government of Burgenland, Győr-Ménfőcsanak County Council, regional development agencies, relevant universities, CSOs from the cross-border metropolitan area
<b>Expected outcomes</b>	Spatial perspective of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava



<b>Title of the action</b>	<b>A_1.3 Establishment of a cross-border planning platform</b>
<b>Specific Objective</b>	SO_1 To improve the conditions of integrated planning and development around Bratislava
<b>Content of the action</b>	<p>The most recent strategic documents of the City of Bratislava highlight the need for a planning platform involving the relevant territorial actors and authorities from Slovakia, Austria and Hungary in the future design of the cross-border metropolitan area.</p> <p>To ensure the comprehensive design (planning), the adaptability (decision-making) and the recognition (legitimacy) of the new spatial perspective of Bratislava, the governance framework is to be established.</p> <p>This governance framework should be set up during the implementation of Action A_1.2, and maintained for decades to guarantee the harmonisation of diverse spatial interests emerging within the cross-border area.</p> <p>Through the action, the planning platform (a body without legal entity) will be set up and operated. The platform should be incorporated into the comprehensive governance framework of the metropolitan area.</p>
<b>Potential funding</b>	ESPN, Interreg, national funds
<b>Partners</b>	City of Bratislava, Bratislava Self-Governing Region, Provincial Government of Lower Austria, Provincial Government of Burgenland, Győr-Ménfőcsanak District Council, regional development agencies
<b>Expected outcomes</b>	The cross-border planning platform of Bratislava

<b>Title of the action</b>	<b>A_2.1 Integrated Transport Master Plan of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava</b>
<b>Specific Objective</b>	SO_2 To facilitate the functional integration of the cross-border metropolitan area
<b>Content of the action</b>	<p>The action addresses the complexity of transport challenges across the borders around the Slovak capital city. This complexity includes the infrastructural aspects, the expansion of the transport network beyond the state borders, and the integration of the services coupled with a governance solution. To respond to the challenges of cross-border transport, the design process starts with a needs assessment reflecting the expectations of the commuters, which can be realised during the elaboration of the spatial diagnosis (see Action A_1.2). Parallel with this, the existing capacities and the transport plans of the affected regions are to be analysed. The design process necessitates the involvement of the national transport authorities and the relevant companies.</p> <p>The action will include the diagnosis, the identification of the assets and resources, the study of existing good practices and solutions, the design of the cross-border integrated transport services and the governance framework to operate the system.</p>
<b>Potential funding</b>	Interreg, EU and national transport funds
<b>Partners</b>	Dopravný podnik Bratislava, Železničná spoločnosť Slovensko, ÖBB, MÁV Csoport, GYSEV – Raaberbahn, BID (Bratislavská integrovaná doprava), VOR Verkehrsverbund Ost-Region, NÖVOG, VBB Verkehrsbetriebe Burgenland, NÖ.Regional, Mobilitätszentrale Burgenland, the City of Bratislava, Bratislava Parking Assistance Service, The Provincial Governments of Lower Austria and Burgenland
<b>Expected outcomes</b>	Transport Master Plan of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava

<b>Title of the action</b>	<b>A_2.2 Integrated tariff system of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava</b>
<b>Specific Objective</b>	SO_2 To facilitate the functional integration of the cross-border metropolitan area
<b>Content of the action</b>	<p>The action aims to develop an integrated tariff system covering the whole territory of the cross-border metropolitan area. This solution will enable the commuters to use the same ticket or pass within the border area in a zonal system, applying different reductions. The action also includes the harmonisation of the timetables.</p> <p>By developing the system, the use of public transport means will become more attractive.</p> <p>With a view to identifying the possibilities and agreeing on the financing methods and the share of burdens and incomes, the implementation of the action starts with consultations among the service providers.</p> <p>Subsequently, the experts will design the lines and define the zonal areas.</p> <p>Finally, the service providers sign the agreement on the services.</p>
<b>Potential funding</b>	EU and national transport funds
<b>Partners</b>	Dopravný podnik Bratislava, Železničná spoločnosť Slovensko, ÖBB, MÁV Csoport, GYSEV – Raaberbahn, , BID (Bratislavská integrovaná doprava), VOR Verkehrsverbund Ost-Region, NÖVOG, VBB Verkehrsbetriebe Burgenland, NÖ.Regional, Mobilitätszentrale Burgenland, the City of Bratislava, The Provincial Governments of Lower Austria and Burgenland
<b>Expected outcomes</b>	Integrated tariff system of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava

<b>Title of the action</b>	<b>A_2.3 Cross-border integration of health services around Bratislava</b>
<b>Specific Objective</b>	SO_2 To facilitate the functional integration of the cross-border metropolitan area
<b>Content of the action</b>	<p>The project is designed to replicate the first diagnostic project of the HealthAcross initiative implemented between 2008 and 2010. The action will consist of an inventory of the facilities and current and future capacities of the health care institutions operated within the tri-border area. The state-of-play analysis will reveal the parallel and complementary endowments and services, and the shortages of health service provision.</p> <p>The second activity will include a survey of the health conditions of the residents of the metropolitan area, which will unfold the most urgent and future challenges that the interventions need to address.</p> <p>Finally, the plan for integrating the services will be compiled and discussed by the relevant actors of the border area.</p> <p>Thanks to the previous efforts, cross-border emergency services will be harmonised in the upcoming years. Consequently, this component does not need to be included in the action.</p>
<b>Potential funding</b>	Interreg, EU4Health
<b>Partners</b>	Health authorities of Slovakia, Hungary and the two Austrian provinces, hospitals operating within the region, national and provincial ambulance services
<b>Expected outcomes</b>	Spatial diagnosis of potentially shared services; Assessment of the health conditions of and the biggest threats for the residents of the cross-border metropolitan area

<b>Title of the action</b>	<b>A_2.4 Educational forum of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava</b>
<b>Specific Objective</b>	SO_2 To facilitate the functional integration of the cross-border metropolitan area
<b>Content of the action</b>	<p>The challenge, which the action intends to respond to, is the very young age structure of the metropolitan area. Many young families have been moving to the suburban areas where children need quality education. In every agglomeration, the citizens moving from the city to the province expect more green areas, a more friendly and quiet environment, but the same-level services as they are accustomed to in the urban centre. It is even more true in the case of education: the parents want to ensure the best possible schooling for their children.</p> <p>The primary and secondary schools in Bratislava face capacity challenges due to the high fertility rate within the city and the age structure of the immigrants. Some of the local municipalities around Bratislava have difficulties with keeping their institutions alive due to the shrinking traditional population, and the lack of interest in the local schools on behalf of the new residents. On the contrary, others face problems with the high interest, which requires the expansion of the staff, partly hired and funded by the municipality.</p> <p>This complex problem will not disappear in the next years. Accordingly, the experts and decision-makers of the three educational systems should establish a forum where they can exchange their experiences, opinions, and identify potential interventions and cooperation initiatives through which the above-mentioned challenges can be addressed. The forum would be a rather loose cooperation platform, convened twice a year, at maximum, but it could facilitate exchanges of teachers and pupils and the development of cross-border curricula, which can bridge the current situation with a more integrated cross-border educational space.</p> <p>Besides, the forum is an appropriate platform to design the development of a bilingual educational system around Bratislava.</p>
<b>Potential funding</b>	Interreg, Erasmus+
<b>Partners</b>	Provincial and regional educational authorities; representatives of the schools located within the cross-border metropolitan area; education experts
<b>Expected outcomes</b>	Cross-border Educational Forum of Bratislava; mini-Erasmus programme for teachers, pupils and classes; cross-border curricula in secondary schools facilitating cross-border labour mobility

<b>Title of the action</b>	<b>A_2.5 Enhancing multilingualism within the border area</b>
<b>Specific Objective</b>	SO_2 To facilitate the functional integration of the cross-border metropolitan area
<b>Content of the action</b>	<p>One of the biggest challenges to the integration of the cross-border metropolitan area is the multilingual environment. The picture is very complex. On the one hand, there are the three official languages, whose certain level of knowledge is inevitable once somebody moves beyond the border. Likewise, the language skills of the local civil servants also need to be developed to ease communication with the new residents.</p> <p>On the other hand, there are different cultural patterns inherited from the past. As a consequence of the legacy of the German-speaking minority and the access to the Austrian TV channels as early as the communist era, there are quite many people on the Hungarian side speaking German, even in the local mayor's offices. The new Slovak residents would rather speak English. In Austria, the use of the official language is required from the new residents, and they prefer to learn German considered an advantage. On the contrary, to learn Hungarian by Slovaks is burdened by historic injuries and prejudices. The situation is further nuanced by the quite large Croat communities within the tri-border area, who speak a Slavic language, which is relatively easily understandable for Slovak people.</p> <p>The fast spread of AI solutions in the field of multilingualism will ease cross-border communication, but personal encounters and seamless discussions will further necessitate to learn foreign languages, which is always coupled with getting acquainted with another culture.</p> <p>Accordingly, the action will support interactive language courses where the representatives of different cultures can meet; the printing and online publication of tri-lingual materials related to housing rules, social rights, traffic rules, etc.; and the tri-lingual communication in gastronomy and the hotel industry.</p>
<b>Potential funding</b>	Interreg, national, regional and local funding
<b>Partners</b>	Language schools, local and regional authorities, restaurants, hotels
<b>Expected outcomes</b>	Tri-lingual publications, language courses, tri-lingual menus

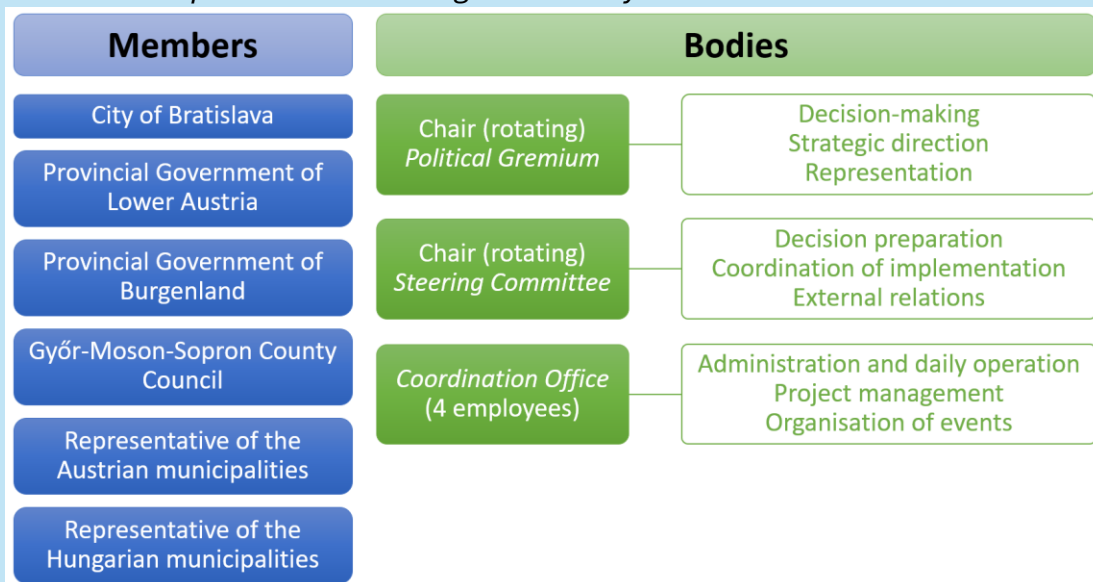


<b>Title of the action</b>	<b>A_3.1 The microproject fund of Greater Bratislava</b>
<b>Specific Objective</b>	<b>SO_3 To strengthen social cohesion within the tri-border area</b>
<b>Content of the action</b>	<p>Integration of new residents is a challenge everywhere. However, cross-border residential mobility generates extra difficulties due to the meeting of different languages and cultures. To decrease the separating effects and promote encounters and mutual rapprochement, microprojects initiated by local citizens, civil associations, schools, cultural institutions, etc., can have a decisive role.</p> <p>Microprojects amounting from EUR 500 to 5000 can cover the costs related to meetings, workshops, small festivals, exchanges, exhibitions, training courses, study visits, etc., and they don't require remarkable resources on behalf of the promoters. A grant of EUR 50,000 per year can support even 50-70 microprojects vitalising the entire border area.</p> <p>The action includes the development of the grant scheme, its online application package, the guides, the assessment grids, the reporting and monitoring rules, and the set-up of the management body.</p>
<b>Potential funding</b>	Members' contributions
<b>Partners</b>	The City of Bratislava, the Provinces of Burgenland and Lower Austria, the Assembly of Győr-Ménfőcsanak District
<b>Expected outcomes</b>	An operational grant supporting dozens of small activities cross-cutting the borders

<b>Title of the action</b>	<b>A_3.2 The Citizens' Council of Greater Bratislava</b>
<b>Specific Objective</b>	<b>SO_3 To strengthen social cohesion within the tri-border area</b>
<b>Content of the action</b>	<p>Citizens' Councils enhance the spirit of responsibility, participation, and enable spatial identification. The cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava includes more the 600,000 people, whose problems, needs and expectations are not tested today. However, these are the dwellers of the cross-border regions for whom the elected bodies are working. Within the framework of the activity, three Citizens' Councils will be organised in the three countries, and another joint council in Bratislava, where the outcomes of the three councils will be summarised.</p> <p>The selection of the participants can be made through an open online call. Each "national" council involves 50 to 60 participants representing the original and the new residents. The first three councils aim to unfold the potential local conflicts, their solutions, the needs of the two segments of the local population, and the expectations towards the cross-border partnership.</p> <p>The final council should enable the discussion of the problems of the agglomeration with the decision-makers and professionals.</p> <p>The Council should be organised regularly in the future.</p>
<b>Potential funding</b>	<b>Members' contribution</b>
<b>Partners</b>	The City of Bratislava, the Provinces of Burgenland and Lower Austria, the Assembly of Győr-Ménfőcsanak District, local municipalities located in the cross-border metropolitan area, civil associations and social media groups of the residents
<b>Expected outcomes</b>	<b>Organisation of four Citizens' Councils within the metropolitan area</b>

<b>Title of the action</b>	<b>A_4.1 The governance model of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava</b>
<b>Specific Objective</b>	SO_4 To create the governance framework for the trilateral cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava
<b>Content of the action</b>	<p>To ensure harmonised development of the metropolitan area, the affected stakeholders have to establish a joint governance body. Today, this is the baum_cityregion Working Community. Its expansion towards Hungary will generate challenges that the governance structure should respond to. The action can result in different outcomes depending on the legislative framework and the ambitions of the founders, in line with the principles enumerated above.</p> <p><b>Option_1 – Enlargement of the Working Community</b></p> <p>The simplest solution is to enlarge the membership of the Working Community. It will require the amendment of the Founding Letter, the Statutes, and the Financial Agreement accordingly. The structure will be completed with the Győr-Moson-Sopron County Council as a full member bearing the same responsibilities and rights as the current members, and contributing to the costs of the joint office with the salary of one part-time Hungarian employee.</p> <p>However, it is advised to create a permanent consultation platform between the county and the local municipalities. The Resilient Borders project has shown that there is an interest on behalf of the local mayors in regular encounters, which are also missing from the current structure. If the founding documents of the Working Community are modified, it is worth reconsidering the structure and involving the local municipalities in the decision-making processes, especially for the sake of harmonised spatial development (local provisions included). They don't need to be represented in the Political Gremium, but they should be invited into the Steering Committee. The concerned municipalities from both sides (Austria and Hungary) could delegate a representative there based on a rotating system.</p> <p>NB! It is worth considering the involvement of the Bratislava Self-Governing Region.</p>

Figure 13 – New governance structure of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava – Option 1: The Working Community



This solution has several advantages. First, it does not require the creation of a new structure: the existing Working Community has its own founding letters and internal procedures, which will be simply amended. In this way, the structure will keep its simple character, avoiding complicated decision-making rules. Through its enlargement by the delegates of the local level, it will be enabled to represent the entire cross-border area, including the most affected territorial authorities. The Coordination Office will be developed by one more part-time worker. At the same time, the enlarged organisation will still miss competences over public services in Hungary (where these competences are owned by the national authorities), the partners cannot guarantee access to data, and its financial conditions will remain rather modest (which will impede the realisation of the major part of the actions included in the action plan). The entire territory of the cross-border metropolitan area will not be represented by this solution due to the lack of Slovak settlements and regions of the agglomeration. The examples of Basel and Greater Copenhagen show that it is easier to resolve the problems of an agglomeration if the relevant territorial authorities are members of the structure. Finally, there is a need to involve the residents of the suburban region, to define the relationship with Vienna and the city of Győr, and to create the communication channels and the regional brand, which will require further mechanisms.

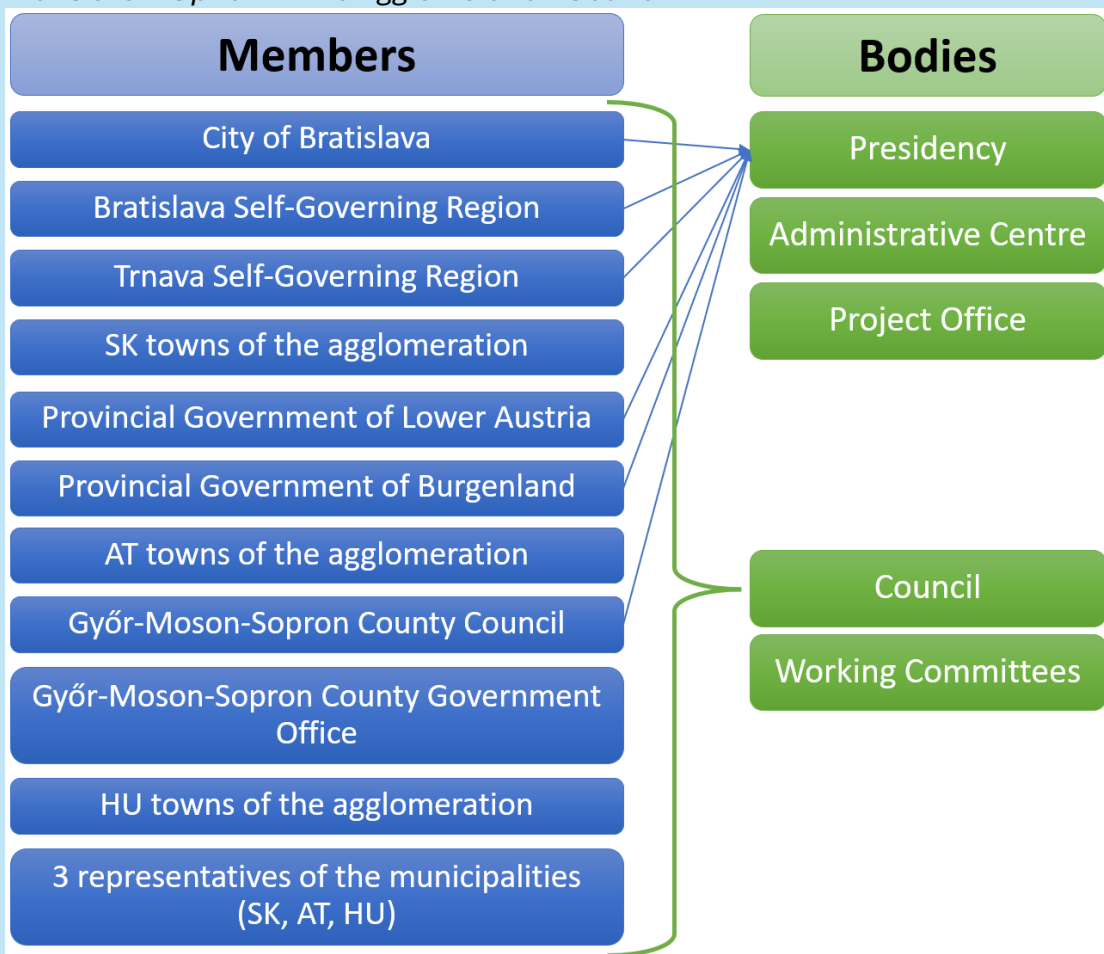
#### Option\_2 – The Greater Bratislava Council

The second option may partly compensate for the shortages of Option\_1. The Greater Bratislava concept focuses on the entire agglomeration. In this case, it is not a mere coordinating body, but an entity which is designed to tackle the

challenges of the agglomeration. For this purpose, the institutions having the competences need to be incorporated into the structure.

The legal format of the Council can be the Working Community (without a legal entity) or an association based on Slovak private law. In the first case, the management tasks can be delivered by a nonprofit company (this is the model of the Budapest Agglomeration Development Council). The latter solution is similar to Basel's.

*Figure 14 – New governance structure of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava – Option 2: The Agglomeration Council*



The main advantage of the second option is the involvement of all actors affected by the suburbanisation tendencies, and having the competences for harmonised spatial planning and development, including the provision of certain public services. This setting makes the structure more effective and enables the development of a real cross-border brand around Bratislava, which brings along better visibility on the international scene and eases identification. Greater Bratislava may become a cross-border actor within the EU, internationally acknowledged like Copenhagen or Strasbourg.

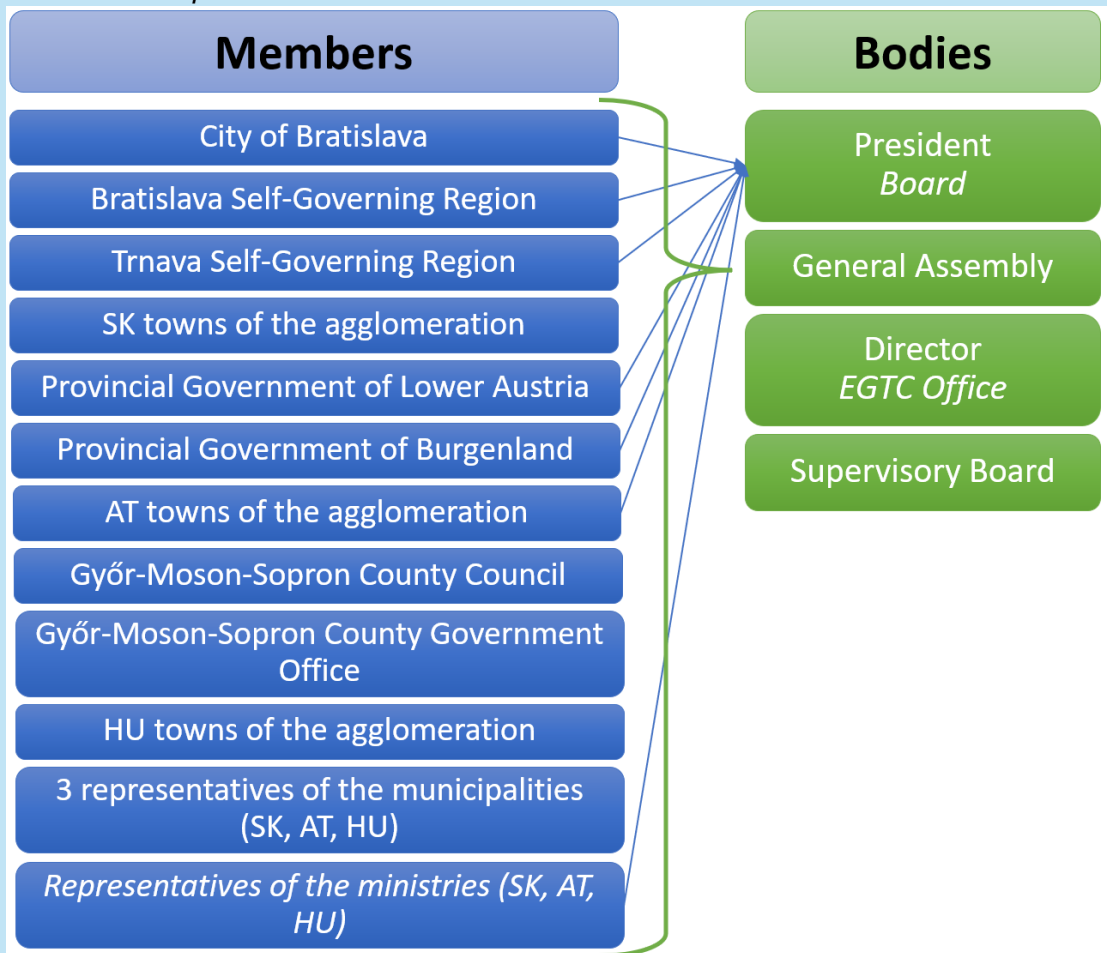
The disadvantage of the second model is its structure, which is more complicated than the first option, coupled with a more sophisticated set of responsibilities and

administrative procedures. The operation of the council is more costly (the staff is larger), but the financial burdens are distributed among more entities. The separation of the Administrative Centre and the Project Office (which can be an independent legal entity) enables active project development and management activities, which do not burden the administrative capacities. The selection of the second option will require the establishment of a new and complex structure presupposing a long negotiation and interest harmonisation process, even if the result is an organisation more stable and more efficient than the first version.

### Option\_3 – The Bratislava EGTC

The third option can be a replication of the council in a simplified manner, within an EGTC.

Figure 15 – New governance structure of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava – Option 3: The EGTC model



EGTC has an advantage compared to any other structure: it can involve the governmental level. This aspect can compensate for the mismatches stemming



from the different administrative systems. Austria is a federal state, where the provincial governments have autonomy and competences in many fields. This autonomy is missing from the local and regional municipalities in Slovakia and Hungary; it is owned by the national-level institutions.

An EGTC is an independent legal entity, which can realise interventions and manage public services even beyond the state borders within the confines of its members' competences, making the initiative extremely effective. The EGTC can represent the agglomeration with appropriate authorisation (visibility, easy identification). It can manage a separate Interreg CBC programme covering the territory of the trilateral agglomeration. Thanks to these factors, the grouping can realise investments in the three countries in the interest of the entire agglomeration.

At the same time, the model can hardly tackle the changes at the national level (fluctuation of civil servants, changes in the responsibilities of the ministries, etc.), which can paralyse its operation, if the national authorities have a membership within the grouping. As the EGTC is a legal entity, it will establish complex procedures, and it must respect a larger set of legal provisions than a simple entity without a legal status.

The action includes the activities related to the establishment of the new structure. The next steps have been defined during the Steering Group meeting held in Bratislava on 9 September 2025. The participants agreed on a step-by-step strategy regarding the enlargement of the current structure, which is just being established by the Slovak and Austrian partners. To opt for the second or the third model would require a long negotiation process with many new actors, and the design of a brand-new organisation in the establishment and kick-off period of the Working Community. Gradual enlargement, on the contrary, ensures careful design, puts less burden on the shoulders of the current members, and enables a safe learning process for the new one.

Accordingly, Győr-Ménfőcsanak District Council will join the Working Community with observer status if the Political Gremium of the Working Community approves the proposal at its meeting of 12 November 2025. Upon a positive decision, the representatives of the Hungarian partner can participate in the Steering Committee meetings from December 2025 onwards. The observer status will enable the new member to get familiar with the Working Community, its internal rules, activities and members, as well as to identify potential further (Hungarian) members (e.g. the Government Office of Győr) to join the cooperation. The enlargement of the structure should happen simultaneously, involving every new member, instead of continuous changes in the membership generating recurrent administrative problems. The weakest point of this solution is that the new member will not financially contribute to the operational costs (e.g.

	<p>interpretation into 3 languages). At the same time, the County Council is ready to take part in joint projects.</p> <p>The participants also agreed that there is a need for a platform where the local municipalities can represent their interests, share their problems, and exchange their experiences. The relevance of such a platform is justified by the fact that the challenges to respond to are occurring at the local level. At the same time, the platform should not be listed among the official bodies because the municipalities' particular interests do not always harmonise with the strategic aims of the cooperation. The mayors' platform should operate in parallel with the Working Community, whose organs should regularly be informed about the outcomes of the platform meetings. The operation of the proposed platform requires capacities (organisation, content-wise preparation, logistics, documentation, etc.) on behalf of the Working Community.</p> <p>The competent national authorities (e.g. in the field of health, education, transport, etc.) should also be involved through the existing institutional frameworks. Their inclusion in the governance structure would generate complex administrative burdens and permanent delays in decision-making. Furthermore, the bigger the structure, the more complicated its operation. Consequently, the communication platforms should be rather loose with the authorities.</p> <p>As a next step, Bratislava Self-Governing Region could join the structure as it has competences over territorial development, and is affected the most by suburbanisation and urban sprawl tendencies around the Slovak capital city.</p>
<b>Potential funding</b>	Own funds of the founding members
<b>Partners</b>	Depending on the selected solution.
<b>Expected outcomes</b>	The new governance structure of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava

## Timing and synergies of the actions

The different actions fit different time frames (short, medium, and long-term), and they have synergies and interdependencies.

Figure 16 – Time frames of the Action Plan

Short term		Medium term	Long term
GOVERNANCE			
A_4.1 The governance model of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava			
1 <sup>st</sup> phase: enlargement		2 <sup>nd</sup> phase: council	3 <sup>rd</sup> phase: EGTC
A_1.3 Establishment of a cross-border planning platform	A_3.2 The Citizens' Council of Greater Bratislava	A_2.4 Educational forum of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava	A_3.1 The microproject fund of Greater Bratislava
PLANNING			
A_1.1 Cross-border database of the metropolitan area of Bratislava	A_1.2 Integrated spatial perspective for the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava	A_2.1 Integrated Transport Master Plan of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava	
PUBLIC SERVICE DEVELOPMENT			
A_2.5 Enhancing multilingualism within the border area		A_2.2 Integrated tariff system of the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava	A_2.3 Cross-border integration of health services around Bratislava

The development of the governance frameworks of the cross-border metropolitan area will be a process stretching over the three phases.

- (1) **In the first phase (short term)**, the current Working Community will be enlarged with Győr-Ménfőcsanak District Council and, potentially, with Bratislava Self-Governing Region. Parallel with this, the mayors' platform and the fora designed to facilitate the development of cross-border public services (representatives of the national authorities included) will be created.

To ensure integrated planning, it is also the first phase, when the planning platform is established, involving the delegates of the Working Community members and external experts. This is the platform which will enable the design of the integrated spatial perspective for the cross-border metropolitan area (in the first phase) and the Transport Master Plan (in the second phase). The design of these two plans presupposes access to territorial and statistical data on the area and on the cross-border flows. Consequently, the first project to be implemented will target data gathering and processing, facilitating to unfolding of the spatial dynamics and trends within the tri-border area. To deliver a well-grounded spatial perspective, the local citizens affected by the cross-border spread of the suburban area should be involved in the planning process through the Citizens' Council.

To promote cross-border integration of the metropolitan area, the realisation of the interventions targeting multilingualism should also be kicked off.

- (2) **In the second phase (medium term)**, based on the spatial perspective (the strategic document), a new governance solution, i.e. an agglomeration council, can be created. The spatial perspective should discuss the way of the setting and the structure of the council, which does not need to follow the model Nr2 of the Action Plan. More important is the fit-for-purpose character of the council, and the purpose should be identified in the strategic document.

The new structure will guarantee the conditions for the establishment of the educational forum, which can pave the way for a bilingual or trilingual educational system within the border area.

To improve the conditions for cross-border mobility, in line with the local transport plans of Bratislava, the cross-border Transport Master Plan will be drafted, and the integrated tariff system will be launched.

- (3) **In the third phase (long term)**, an EGTC will replace (or supplement) the former models. The management body bearing an independent legal entity will be able to manage even a cross-border cooperation programme (Interreg) with a budget dedicated to the tri-border area. If this aim is not achievable, a grouping still can manage a small project fund (including the programming, the set-up and operation of the management bodies, the publication of the calls, the evaluation of the projects, contracting the selected project partners, and monitoring the implementation of the projects).

In compliance with the EU Regulation, an EGTC is also authorised to provide public services, like public transport, education or health. The cross-border integrated health system can be managed by the planned grouping, or another grouping can be established for this purpose.

The exact timing of the implementation of the Action Plan cannot be defined yet. The external conditions are permanently changing, which requires a certain level of flexibility in the design of the actions. The the decision-making bodies of the Working Community can decide on the priorities and the sequence of the interventions through the annual working plans. The accomplishment of the actions also depends on the available funds and the financial conditions.

By the adoption of the Action Plan, the Political Gremium will define the frameworks for future interventions. Then, it will be the task of the Steering Committee, the cooperating authorities and the Office to make the plans real.

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