

Centres in Cross-border Cooperation Governance in Italy

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The European Union has witnessed a significant evolution in cross-border cooperation governance in recent years, encompassing various institutional mechanisms and arrangements. Interreg programs, Macroregional strategies, the b-solutions project, and more complex institutional cooperation structures such as Euroregions and European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) demonstrate that the territorial collaboration landscape has become increasingly articulated and mature. With its strategic geographical position, Italy participates in numerous cross-border initiatives along its Alpine and maritime borders, highlighting the growing importance of institutionalized cooperation frameworks.

While research has extensively analysed formal cooperation structures and their legal frameworks, the role of support organizations and informal networks in facilitating cross-border cooperation remains understudied. These entities, including cross-border information centres, civil society organizations, and advisory bodies, operate as binational or multinational non-profit organizations. They are characterized by their cross-border focus, institutionalized nature, and advisory function supporting the Four Freedoms of the European Single Market, serving as vital intermediaries between different levels of territorial governance.

This paper examines the interaction between formal cooperation structures and support institutions in Italian cross-border regions through a multidisciplinary approach, combining a taxonomic analysis of existing realities in the national case with specific case studies. The research investigates how these organizations support cross-border cooperation in three key areas: strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and administrative and cultural barrier reduction. The study explores the contribution of various institutions, including Euradria in the Italian Slovenian context, ARGE ALP in the Alpine area, the TEIN network, and research centers such as Eurac and Informest.

The findings reveal that support organizations are crucial facilitators for successful cross-border cooperation, particularly in providing information, technical assistance, and stakeholder coordination. The analysis of Italian cases demonstrates their significant contribution to overcoming administrative, cultural, and operational barriers that often hinder cross-border initiatives. Furthermore, the research highlights how these organizations enhance EU cohesion policy implementation by providing specialized expertise and facilitating multilevel governance processes. The study contributes to the theoretical understanding of cross-border governance mechanisms beyond more formal and institutional frameworks. It provides evidence-based recommendations for strengthening the institutional framework of cross-border cooperation, ultimately improving the effectiveness of European territorial integration.

Keywords:

Cross-border Cooperation; Multi-Level Governance; Institutionalised Support Centres; European Territorial Cooperation

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