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Abstract

The Finnish–Russian border is a border of remarkable economic, political and cultural differences. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the border has been re-opened and has seen an increase in cross-border interaction. The European Union aims to promote regional cooperation across its external borders through its financing instruments. After Finland became an EU member state in 1995, the Finnish–Russian border became the only border between the EU and the Russian Federation and a new form of cooperation across the border became possible. The EU promotes Finnish–Russian cooperation projects using the Interreg and Tacis funds. An increasing number of cross-border cooperation projects are carried out in the fields of local and regional democracy, local economic development, urban and regional services and policies, as well as energy and environment. Nevertheless, several difficulties have been identified in the Finnish–Russian projects, many of which are due to the differences in culture and mentality between the two countries.

The aim of the study is to find out to what extent cultural differences affect EU-funded cross-border cooperation (CBC) projects between Finland and Russia. Furthermore, it is aimed to investigate what kind of difficulties the different culture on either side of the border creates as well as what could be done in order to avoid difficulties in Finnish–Russian cross-border cooperation projects. The research questions are answered by examining existing literature on the subject as well as by interviewing people who have experience in Finnish–Russian Tacis CBC projects. The differences in Finnish and Russian culture and mentality as well as the emerging difficulties in CBC projects are examined within Trompenaars' seven dimensions of culture.

The main research finding is that cultural differences affect EU-funded CBC projects between Finland and Russia to a great extent, especially in the beginning of cooperation. The difficulties due to cultural differences slow down projects and, thus, make them more complicated to carry out and successfully complete. Getting to know the Russian culture and mentality as well as becoming better acquainted with project partners would certainly contribute to the success of CBC projects. After solving the difficulties caused by the different mentalities and cultures it is easier to concentrate on overcoming the remaining difficulties, which are mainly caused by the unfavourable conditions for cooperation in Russia as well as the time-consuming bureaucracy related to the EU's financing instruments.

Key words	Cross-border cooperation (CBC), projects, cultural differences, Russia, Finland, European Union, Tacis, Interreg
Further information	