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## Cross-border Governance, De-Bordering and Re-Bordering in Border Twin Towns and Cities. Europe in Comparative Perspective

### 1. Introduction

Borders and border relations used to be extremely problematic elements of international relations and social interactions between states and nations in the 20th century. However, together with post 1989 wave of globalization, many parts of the world have witnessed a remarkably quick proliferation of local cross-border cooperative initiatives. Border twin towns and cities (BTTaCs) especially, understood as urban settlements located directly on state borders and having a similar neighbor on the other side (Schultz, Stokłosa, Jajeśniak-Quast, 2002), additionally sharing similar problems and opportunities (van Houtum, Ernste, 2001), began to play a role as collaboration and integration laboratories. It was there, where inter-state relations have been tested in micro-scale, combining different legal, cultural, economic and social systems in everyday coexistence (Gasparini, 1999–2000). These are settlements that represent, very often, different political, economic, social and cultural realities (Dolińska, Makaro, Niedźwiecka-Iwańczak, 2018). The main questions of the analysis are: what are the tools and models for governing BTTaCs? How do European and non-European cases differ? What are the reasons for the various models of cross-border governance in BTTaCs in different global regions?

This paper's aim is to outline the challenges related to governing cross-border settlements in Europe in the context of European integration, and to compare them with non-European cases, representing other trends and regularities. North America and Africa were chosen as revealing two alternative models (Mikhailova, Garrard, 2023). The *governance* approaches form a theoretical context for the analyses. The investigation focuses on the multi-level character of the governance of BTTaCs, where joint management of the public sphere has to involve not only the administrative structure of the divided towns, but also non-governmental organizations and the inhabitants, as well as businesses, states and EU levels in the case of the Old Continent. In the case of the other continents looked at, only some of these actors are present. Additionally, de-bordering and re-bordering tendencies contribute to different patterns of governance.



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## 2. Theoretical contextualization: BTTaCs and cross-border governance as a political and economic challenge

The relation between cities and borders reveal several tensions in how these urban structures can be governed across state boundaries.

First, BTTaCs are, as Jan Buursink claims, a product of territorial division (together with border relocation), duplication (when the existing settlement is “copied” on the other border side) or connection (together with infrastructure creation over a natural barrier) (Buursink, 2001).

Second, this relation lies, among other things, in the relation between separation and control, vs. openness and freedom. Towns and cities on state borders not only collide with the classical Westphalian model of security and sovereignty (Sohn, Lara-Vallencia, 2013) which, on the other hand, has been strongly modified by globalization (Agnew, 2009) and regional integration, making borders resources instead of obstacles. This allows, in many cases, for the development of cross-border urbanism. The question remains, however, to what extent debordering processes are “linear”, one-dimensional processes. Strong arguments about the changing nature of borders and replacing “border lines” with socially constructed divisions go alongside classical border (re)hardening.

Third, in Westphalian logics, borders are locations where the “processes of state centralization and national homogenization are disrupted, precisely because most borders are areas of such cultural diversity” (Donnan, Wilson, 1998, p. 26) Additionally, many of them attract immigrants, who consider BTTaCs “gateways” offering new opportunities (Nugent, 2012, p. 559), often being pushed by oppressive political and economic conditions (Coplan, 2009, p. 79). This creates an additional “diversity challenge”.

Fourth, institutionalization of interactions plays a key role, regardless if placed within classical international relations theories (Joenniemi, Sergunin, 2017) or in a multi-level approach. The former especially downplays the role of twinning, by labeling it a “laboratory” and “experiment”, and so being considered peripheral and not significant. But “cities engaged in twinning hence figure as entities that are less exceptional and instead stand out as part of broader border-transcending processes constitutive of an international system different from the traditional one” (Joenniemi, Sergunin, 2017, pp. 445–456). This is especially so in a post-Westphalian environment, where interconnectivity has dominated state strategies.

Finally, BTTaCs, due to their border-ignoring approach, are often seen as incubators of innovations in political, economic and social processes (Joenniemi, Jańczak, 2017, p. 427).

## 3. Border twin towns and cities in Europe

European borders have been created in the long-lasting and mainly conflictive environment of territorial disputes, which formally ended together with the Second World War, practically, however, being an object of ongoing processes, as the Balkan wars

in the 1990s and the Russian war against Ukraine illustrate well. When comparing maps of Europe in 1899 and in 1989, one notices that only ten states maintained their borders unchanged (O'Dowd, Wilson, 2002, p. 20). State border fluidity and territorial uncertainty resulted in two interesting processes. The first was related to the economic and social underdevelopment of state peripheries in many cases. Resources were located in more secure centers. The peripheries, as endangered with conquest, were often treated as defensive lines, and were additionally poorly connected with the centers. Second, the implementation of the Westphalian model resulted in *defrontierization* and *boundarization* (Jańczak, 2017) of European state borders, which manifested itself in internal linguistic, cultural and legal homogenization – which often meant disconnection with the opposite side of the border. Despite the debordering role of European integration processes, borders in Europe are still considered a product of the past, and their modification involves the past's modification, too (O'Dowd, Wilson, 2002, p. 8).

The number of border twin towns in Europe is estimated at twenty four pairs (spread across the entire continent)<sup>2</sup>, additionally three cross-border metropolitan spaces can be found<sup>3</sup>. In the first group, towns of a rather small population dominate, with some exceptions. Big cities are represented only in a limited number of cases. In interpreting the origins of BTTaCs, most of the cities appeared in Europe as the result of the division of non-border towns by a newly established, or shifted border. Sometimes duplication was the case. In the last half century, connection can be detected in a limited number of cases (Jańczak, 2013, pp. 76–77).

These BTTaCs have appeared in Europe in several waves (spatially moving from the west to the east of the continent): remaining from the feudal-medieval order, resulting from the Napoleonic wars, first world war, second world war, disintegration of the Soviet empire and finally infrastructural construction (the building of bridges) (Jańczak, 2013, p. 36). Especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, together with the rise of nationalism, *boundarization* processes and the territorial, political and internal cultural consolidation of states meant they became sites of conflict, sometimes of population transfers, often related to a hostile coexistence on both sides of a closed border. Together with the post-war European integration processes, the role played by BTTaCs started to change, originally in the western part of the continent, later, especially after 1989 and 2004, in the central and eastern parts. The concept of border “laboratories of European integration” (Schultz, Stokłosa, Jajeśniak-Quast, 2002) appeared, claiming that they represent in micro-scale continental processes, but more intensively and

<sup>2</sup> Tui-Valença (Spanish-Portuguese border), Irún-Hendaye (Spanish-French), Baarle-Nassau-Baarle-Hertog (Dutch-Belgian), Kerkrade-Herzogenrath (Dutch-German), Strasbourg-Kehl and Neuf Brisach-Breisach (French-German), Rhienfelden (Baden)-Rheinfelden (AG) and Laufenburg (Baden)-Laufenburg (AG) (German-Swiss), Laufen-Oberndorf (German-Austrian), Gorizia-Nova Gorica (Italian-Slovenian), Frankfurt (Oder)-Ślubice, Guben-Gubin and Görlitz-Zgorzelec (German-Polish), České Velenice-Gmünd (Czech-Austrian), Bad Radkersburg-Gornja Radgona (Austrian-Slovenian), Český Těšín-Cieszyn (Czech-Polish), Komárno-Komárom and Štúrovo-Esztergom (Slovak-Hungarian), Haparanda-Tornio (Swedish-Finnish), Terespol-Brest (Polish-Belarusian), Valga-Valka (Estonian-Latvian), Narva-Ivangorod (Estonian-Russian), Calafat-Vidin and Giurgiu-Ruse (Romanian-Bulgarian).

<sup>3</sup> Copenhagen-Malmö (Denmark-Sweden), Geneva-towns around (Switzerland-France) and Basel-Saint Louis-Weil am Rhein (Switzerland-France-Germany).

visibly, with various cultures, economies and political structures interacting with each other in everyday activities. The more intensive the activities, the less separating the role of borders was. This was visible at several levels. First, states lost their monopoly on (classical) foreign policy, and local, cross-border paradiplomacy became a part of the European landscape. The European Union's development funds, especially INTERREG, supported joint initiatives and projects. BTTaCs were the first to experience the effects of the liberalization of economic borders together with the common market's creation, often economically booming when becoming sites of the exchange of goods and services. Overcoming their peripherality, they have built themselves as *new centers*. Metropolitan cross-border areas jumped to the top league of world cities, benefiting from their location and increased potential. Intensive institutionalization of cooperation has manifested itself additionally in formal agreements, joint policies and bodies, with the brand of *Eurocities* being the most popular manifestation.

Consequently, cross-border governance in European BTTaCs has been deeply associated with the governance model of the European Union, merging institutional actors from the EU, national and local levels, and additionally involving local inhabitants (often in the form of non-governmental organizations) and business involved in cross-border activities. The European Union frames the cooperation financially, and often politically and legally. The national level often supports cross-border interactions in pursuit of symbolic and political interests (often related to reconciliation or economic development). Local authorities are usually problem-oriented, and eagerly use the opportunities created by the higher levels to lobby for the local, cross-border interests. They employ the strategy of "integration founders" (stressing their role in initiating continental integration), "integration forerunners" (claiming a higher level of "Europeanness" and advancement in participating in the continental project than the state levels) or "good marriages" (distancing themselves from the EU, and instead emphasizing much longer close cross-border cooperation legacy) (Jańczak, 2018). Civil society acts in favor of reconnecting divided communities (in case of the same culture, ethnic group dominates on both border sides) or for mutual understanding in the case of differences (often assisted by conflicted legacies). What needs to be however mentioned are the pairings located on the external borders of the European Union that experience opposite processes – those of rebordering and separation. Pairs like Narva-Ivangorod (Estonian-Russian border) illustrate the symbolic and functional disconnection, "fortification" and separation, despite the counteracting activities undertaken (Lundén, 2009). This process deepened (also in other couples on the eastern EU border) along with the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

#### 4. Border twin towns and cities in North America

North American BTTaCs are practically located on two borders: US-Canada, that was mainly negotiated and followed the Great Lakes system and 49 north parallel, and US-Mexico, established through a process of conflict and colonization in the middle of the nineteenth century. The last, over a century long period, is marked with border *statism*, making the modern history border-absent, in comparison to Europe. Conse-

quently, both borders seemed to be of secondary importance, with the northern one becoming a functional space of economic cooperation, together with the Great Lakes system creation, and the southern one relabeled as a (highly problematic) space of migratory movements. But the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks undermined many of the cross-border initiatives, bringing a new security component (Ackelson, 2005) and attracting attention towards them.

One can identify fourteen pairs located on the southern border<sup>4</sup> and eight on the northern,<sup>5</sup> stretching from the Pacific to the Atlantic Ocean. The pairings represent various sizes, starting with metropolitan areas of over a million inhabitants (San Diego/Tijuana) and ending with smaller towns (like Nogales). In the case of the northern border the bigger metropolitan pairings are concentrated on the western coast (as represented by the Cascadia cross-border region) and in the Great Lakes area, where industrial, human and social economic resources are located, making them (currently or in the past) among the most dynamic areas in both states. This is followed by the creation of transportation corridors in the areas of the Cascade Gateway, the Detroit-Windsor region, and the Buffalo-Niagara Falls region (*Border...*, 2018). Most of the cities on the southern border appeared as the result of duplication after setting the new border (Sohn, Lara-Valencia, 2013). On both borders, some developed as a result of migratory movements and dynamic economic growth.

The US-Canada border demonstrates the conditions of a peaceful neighborhood legacy, with trade growing over decades (especially together with the FTA, OCTA and NAFTA), but at the same time neither being of primary importance for national governments, nor reveling in cross-border togetherness (Clarke, 2002, p. 3). Despite recent tensions between Canada and the US in the context of questioning the NAFTA agreement, regional level cooperation seems to be accelerating as represented by Cascadia Innovation Corridor (*Regional...*, 2018). The post-2001 securitization of the border has also had a significant effect on US-Canada border towns. Central governments have invested visible human and material resources to control cross-border flows. As studies show, the securitization affected not also metropolitan areas, but also small towns, such as Stanstead, Quebec, Canada and Derby Line, Vermont, US (that used to have an open border regime and relatively free circulation of citizens in everyday routines), where local authorities became involved in border demarcation and control. This resulted in social and economic losses, but also a bottom-up reaction (Hataley, Mason, 2018, pp. 436–441). The southern border additionally displays visible economic asymmetries, contrary to the northern one. However, in case of the latter “outright competition or mutual disregard” can be observed with little shared identity and belonging (Nugent, 2012, p. 560). The former is marked by booming economies on the Mexican side, following the relocation of US businesses resulting in an influx of people from the Mexican heartland (Marquez, Padilla, 2003). In addition, the NAFTA agreement

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<sup>4</sup> San Diego/Tijuana, Calexico/Mexicali, Yuma/Los Algodones – San Luis, Nogales/Nogales, Douglas/Agua Prieta, Columbus/Palomas, El Paso-Santa Teresa/Ciudad Juarez, Presidio/Ojinaga, Del Rio/Ciudad Acuna, Eagle Pass/Piedras Negras, Laredo/Nuevo Laredo, Roma/Ciudad Miguel Aleman, Hidalgo/Reynosa, Brownsville/ Matamoros.

<sup>5</sup> Surrey/Blane, Fort Frances/International Falls, Sault Ste. Marie/Sault Ste. Marie, Sarnia/Port Huron, Windsor/Detroit, Fort Erie/Buffalo, Niagara Falls/Niagara Falls, Stansted/Derby Line.

is believed to be more beneficial for American border towns and cities than the Mexican (Ghiara, Zepeda, 2001). Within this environment, tensions between security and economic interests on the border resulted in de- and rebordering of “national interests” (Coleman, 2005, p. 200). Sometimes intensive cultural relations are observed (Kilburn, Buentello, 2018) as well as everyday crossing practices (Lara-Valencia, Dołzbłasz, 2018). Environmental concerns became one of the first themes where local authorities on both sides of the US-Mexican border had to cooperate, especially due to the remoteness of the national capitals (Nugent, 2012, pp. 561–562), similarly to climate change challenges and water supplies (Lara-Valencia, Giner, 2013). Recent decades have been marked by the activities of US citizens patrolling the border against illegal immigrants, which was soon accompanied by the consequences of the New York terrorist attack for border hardening (Nugent, 2012, p. 562), here specifically addressed against the rising crime rate in Mexican border towns and cities in 2007–2012 (Payan, 2014), the increasing drug industry there (Smith, 2009), as well as the Mexican central authorities’ losing control at the expense of organized crime groups (Shirk, 2014).

In North America, contrary to Europe, supranational institutions promoting and framing cross-border cooperation are almost entirely absent. Still, the Canadian-US border is saturated with cross-border networks which are able to jointly express to the national authorities their interests, especially in the fields of transportation, security and immigration (Clarke, 2002, p. 18). The model is characterized consequently by a “bottom-up” direction of the initiatives, as well as informality (Clarke, 2002, p. 18). Twinning is, however, scarcely institutionalized (Brunet-Jailly, 2006), which can be explained by the legal federalism system, as well as the lack of central support. Consequently, twinning in the European sense is missing. Cross-border governance is evaluated as reactive, and resulting from the use of commercial opportunities, which has consequences in some other fields, such as transportation, environmental protection or fighting crime. Legal and regulative support of the federal level is seen as a precondition to allow institutionalization of cross-border governance at the local level (Ganster, Collins, 2017, pp. 508–509). Cross-border cooperation is mainly market-driven.

## 5. Border twin towns and cities in Africa

African state borders are of different origins than the American and European ones. They result mainly from arbitrary decisions taken by colonial powers, and only internalized in the last few decades, and even multiplied with regard to cultural and economic relations (Coplan, 2010, pp. 1–2). Also the relations between center and peripheries reveal a specific interdependence there. Control over states’ edges is less important than their internal consolidation. The central authorities are often seen as oppressive, and belonging to a cross-border is more relevant than state citizenship. This translates also into the connections (human, infrastructural and functional) between the two sides of the border being more developed than between them and their respective centers. Consequently, the borders are more like connectors creating interdependence than dividers of nations (Coplan, 2010, pp. 2–3).

The number of BTTaCs can scarcely be estimated in Africa. Analyses show their multiplicity (with still new pairings emerging) and diversity across the continent. They consist of capital metropolitan areas of border twin nature (as represented by Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Brazzaville, Republic of Congo), several capitals neighbored by towns or cities across a border, but also city-city and town-town pairings (Soi, Nugent, 2017, pp. 536–538). Following the generic model of Jan Buursink, most of the African border twin towns and cities are duplicates (due to administrative and trade reasons), very rarely are they partitioned (which is sometimes reflected in a common name), and most recently connected by infrastructure (Soi, Nugent, 2017, pp. 536–538).

There have been three main phases of the creation of BTTaCs and their interactions in Africa. First, was the colonial period, which was determined by the setting of borders and administrative capitals/military outposts at various territorial levels (usually in places where settlements had not existed before, Nugent, 2012, p. 566; Ladan, 2018). This was followed often by a similar, symmetrical, move by another, neighboring colonial power, often occurring along rivers. Second, the post-colonial period, resulting from independence movements, differentiation of economic and tax systems, and trade, including smuggling, as one of the driving forces behind mutual contacts. This, in turn, makes border urban structures driving forces of national economies in many cases. Additionally, influxes of refugees and displaced populations concentrated in BTTaCs, make security reasons one of the key elements in their growth, especially in the 1990s. Third, and more recently, their creation has been manifested in inter-connecting with the global economy (sometimes more closely than with their own interior) and infrastructure construction (Soi, Nugent, 2017, pp. 539–543), often with the help of Chinese capital and technology. This has been framed by the creation of the Regional Economic Communities, the proliferation of free-visa regimes and numerous trade liberalization agreements in the region (Nugent, 2012, pp. 568–569). It seems that trade, using supplementary structures and potentials, have been the driving factor behind current rapid development of BTTaCs in Africa. This corresponds with more general developments related to the creation of trans-African transportation corridors (Nugent, 2012, p. 570).

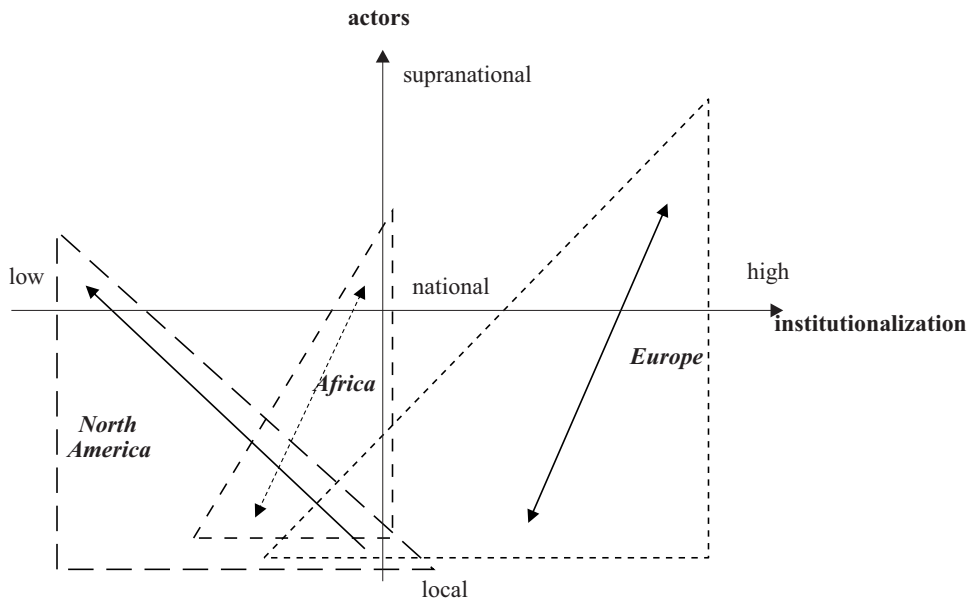
Consequently, cross-border governance in Africa concentrates on conflict resolution and integration into state structures. In both cases, local actors, especially local authorities, are almost entirely excluded (Aning, Pokoo, 2017, p. 64). Pan-continental organizations frame the policy creation here, recognizing, “the importance of local communities as key stakeholders in the management of borders in Africa. Local communities include the people who live on both sides of a border, border traders, border civil society organizations, local government administrative authorities, and other locals who in one way or another could play a role in the way borders are managed” (*African...*, 2012), as materialized in the African Union Convention on Cross-Border Cooperation (*African...*, 2014). As Isabella Soi and Paul Nugent picture in their investigation, “there is almost no twinning at the institutional level, and municipal and district authorities are actively discouraged from communicating directly with one another: it almost all happens from below” (Soi, Nugent, 2017, p. 536). Governance also reveals a specific pattern, focusing first of all on challenges (especially health

care in the light of the HIV epidemic), privatization of violence and security (weak state presence on borders replaced by militant initiatives to control trade), but also private-public partnership governing the new transportation infrastructure (Nugent, 2012, p. 569). Cross-border practices are at the same time characterized by formal centralization, with local actors being not equipped with tools of involvement. African international organizations seem to have noticed this problem, however centralization, border securitization and inefficiency of decision implementation are undermining this process (Aning, Pokoo, 2017, p. 64).

## 6. Discussion and concluding remarks

As Pertti Joenniemi claims, “city-twinning is approached as an ideal case, one premised on togetherness and a desire to be like the other” (Joenniemi, 2017, p. 429). An empirical look reveals, however, a much more complex picture of interrelations between BTTaCs, as well as the ways they are governed.

**Figure 1. Model of cross-border governance in BTTaCs in Europe, North America and Africa**



Source: The author,

Trying to answer the questions posed in the Introduction, it should be stated that in Europe institutionalized “multi-level governance” represents the new layer of territoriality, whereas in North America one can see mainly informal and non-territorial institutions, and socioeconomic exchange networks dominate instead (Blatter, 2001). In Africa it is highly privatized. Consequently, as Paul Nugent claims, “it is within border towns and cities that it is possible to discern the emergence of new and



hybridized forms of governance. In some cases, what is apparent is an attempt by the state to impose its will in traditional fashion, while in others what is more striking is the emergence of powerful nonstate actors who derive their wealth and influence from their strategic position in transnational networks and whose operations sets limits on the exercise of sovereignty” (Nugent, 2012, p. 558). Still, in Europe, the bottom up impetus is framed (or sometimes even inspired) by top-down policies, with numerous actors involved and border urban structures reflecting continental integration processes in a downscaled perspective. In North America, local actors dominate, barely institutionalizing the relations and fueled by functional motives of an economic profile. Finally, in Africa local actors are not equipped with formal tools, and are limited by centralization tendencies. In practice, however, they still play the key role in cross-border relations, replacing their national centers as economic and social drivers.

### Author Contributions

Conceptualization (Konceptualizacja): Jarosław Jańczak

Data curation (Zestawienie danych): Jarosław Jańczak

Formal analysis (Analiza formalna): Jarosław Jańczak

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Writing – review & editing (Piśmiennictwo – sprawdzenie i edytowanie): Jarosław Jańczak

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### Summary

Together with post 1989 wave of globalization, and proliferation of local cross-border cooperative initiatives, border twin towns and cities – urban settlements located directly on state borders and having a similar neighbor on the other side – began to play a role as collaboration and integration laboratories. Inter-state relations have been tested there in micro-scale, combining different legal, cultural, economic and social systems in everyday interactions. This paper’s aim is to outline the challenges related to governing cross-border settlements in Europe in the context of European integration, and to compare them with non-European cases, representing other trends and regularities. North America and Africa were chosen as revealing two alternative models. The *governance* approaches form a theoretical context for the analyses. The main questions of the analysis are: what are the tools and models for governing BTTaCs? How do European and non-European cases differ? What are the reasons for the various models of cross-border governance in BTTaCs in different global regions? The investigation focuses on the multi-level character of the governance of BTTaCs, where joint management of the public sphere has to involve not only the administrative structure of the divided towns, but also non-governmental organizations and the inhabitants, as well as businesses, states and international levels.

**Key words:** border cities in Europe, border cities in Africa, border cities in North America

## Zarządzanie transgraniczne, de-bordering i re-bordering w miastach bliźniaczych i przygranicznych. Europa w perspektywie porównawczej

### Streszczenie

Wraz z falą globalizacji po 1989 roku i rozprzestrzenianiem się lokalnych inicjatyw współpracy transgranicznej, graniczne miasta bliźniacze – ośrodki miejskie położone bezpośrednio przy granicach państw i posiadające podobnego sąsiada po drugiej stronie – zaczęły odgrywać rolę laboratoriów współpracy i integracji transgranicznej. Relacje międzypaństwowe zostały tam przetestowane w mikroskali, łącząc w codziennych interakcjach różne systemy prawne, kulturowe, gospodarcze i społeczne. Celem artykułu jest zarysowanie wyzwań związanych z zarządzaniem rozliczeniami transgranicznymi w Europie w kontekście integracji europejskiej oraz porównanie ich z przypadkami pozaeuropejskimi, reprezentującymi inne tendencje i prawidłowości. Jako przykłady alternatywnych modeli wybrano Amerykę Północną i Afrykę. Model *governance* zastosowany został jako kontekst teoretyczny dla analizy. Główne pytania analizy brzmią: jakie są narzędzia i modele zarządzania transgranicznego w granicznych miastach bliźniaczych? Czym różnią się przypadki europejskie i pozaeuropejskie? Jakie są przyczyny różnych modeli zarządzania transgranicznego w granicznych miastach bliźniaczych w różnych regionach świata? Badanie koncentruje się na wielopoziomowym charakterze zarządzania (*multi level governance*), gdzie wspólne zarządzanie sferą publiczną musi obejmować nie tylko strukturę administracyjną podzielonych miast, ale także organizacje pozarządowe, mieszkańców, przedsiębiorstwa oraz poziomy państwowy i międzynarodowy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** miasta transgraniczne w Europie, miasta transgraniczne w Afryce, miasta transgraniczne w Ameryce Północnej