## European Cross-border Cooperation:

EU instruments as drivers of convergence?

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About IPS

The department International Planning Systems (IPS) puts its main focus on international trends of spatial and urban development such as shrinking cities and regions, the comparison of spatial planning in Europe and how international trends affect spatial development and planning strategies on national and regional levels. Various methods are utilized to compare planning systems and underlying frame conditions which leads to an exchange of experiences concerning challenges and possible solutions. Exchange of experiences is also being fostered by an international network of research and practise.

PlanIt!

European Cross-border Cooperation: EU instruments as drivers of convergence?
Vol. 1/2014

The online journal „PlanIt!“, which was designed by Prof. Pallagst, publishes selected student theses carried out at the Department of IPS (Diploma, Bachelor, Master) in the form of articles on specific topics. The students thus get the opportunity to make their thesis accessible to a broad audience and to create their first publication, usually in English on 10 pages per article. The second issue of the journal PlanIt! has appeared as a special issue in July 2014 and is titled „European Cross-border Cooperation: EU instruments as drivers of convergence?“ and includes four articles.

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Cover Picture:
Beate Caesar (2010)

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ISSN (online) 2198-4514
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Introduction

Due to new spatial challenges like demographic change and EU requirements in line with territorial cohesion, planning conditions and planning requirements in border areas are in flux. The situation is gaining in complexity as different planning systems and different planning styles confront each other in border regions. What does planning in a cross border context imply today?

From a political-administrative view, a border is simply put a space where administrations meet. When looking at the origins of borders they are deeply embedded in history, often with a symbolic meaning, and it has to be noted that they can change in the course of time, for example after the fall of the iron curtain in central and Eastern Europe when new borders came up between Czech Republic and Slovakia.

When looked at the people residing in border areas and crossing borders, a border might as well represent a place for opportunities, where people and institutions benefit from existing chances. But opportunities also call for a regulative framework, and border space requires that the movement of people and goods is regulated, controlled, discussed and also hidden. In the context of western (EU) Europe, however, since creating the single European market in 1993, borders have become more and more permeable through time.

Planning in this particular setting is challenged to a large extent, as particular aspects arise from the cross-border setting, which are in general:

1. Different planning traditions and planning cultures: planning cultures are assumed to be congruent with nation states, but even within nations there might be various planning cultures. In turn, border regions are accommodating multiple planning cultures which have brought about different planning styles and different planning tools.

2. A lack of cross-border knowledge on planning processes and planning tools: planning practitioners are operating in their specific administrative setting, be it a local entity (planning office of a community or district,) or a regional body. As planning across the border is operating under different conditions and is bringing about new legal or operational
changes on an infrequent basis, keeping up with the evolvement of planning is a challenge in itself, and this is often not at the heart of the planners’ day-to-day work.

3. Different governance styles: Operating and implementing planning is in line with national governance styles, and usually on a formal basis planning is intertwined with existing legal frameworks entrusting planning competencies to governmental bodies. This means that for some planning tasks there is no matching counterpart on the other side of the border.

But even when there are wide-ranging challenges, usually at the same account opportunities come up. For the specific situation of planning for border regions these are:

• In terms of the evolvement of planning: The opportunity of bridging cultural gaps by reaching out across planning cultural boundaries.

• In terms of conceptualizing planning: The chance of creating (although not always implementing) joint territorial visions for parts of or the entire border region.

• In terms of governance: The possibility of building strong partnerships and networks which in turn help to enhance the flow of knowledge between cross-border planning realms.

• In terms of planning’s implementation: The ability to create, explore and apply new tools specifically tailored to the situation of border regions.

• In terms of the supranational (EU) level: The prospect of becoming testing labs for the grand European scheme of territorial cohesion.

This volume introduces planning as a contested discipline which has to deal with changing conditions and uncertainties. For border regions these challenges are aggravated by particular features arising from planning cultural differences. How planning operates in a cross-border regional context will be scrutinized by the following articles.

The first paper by Beate Caesar presents the new tool “Grouping of European Territorial Cooperation” (EGTC), which is dedicated to facilitate territorial cooperation across national borders.
within the EU. It explores the application of that tool in the territorial non-contiguous cooperation based on the example of the E.G.T.C. Amphictyony that consists of French, Italian, Greek and Cypriote members.

The added value of EU funded INTERREG projects for project partners and individuals is presented by Dennis Metzler. He investigates the qualitative influence of INTERREG projects that was not incorporated in the EU evaluations of the Structural Funds. The analysis is based on an empirical survey with INTERREG project partners that sheds light on difficulties that were experienced by the project partners.

Regina Köchling investigates in her paper the special case of cross-border cooperation between universities. In this context she presents the two university cooperations “European Confederation of Upper Rhine Universities” (EUCOR) and the “University of the Greater Region” (UniGR). She focuses her analysis on the University of Kaiserslautern, being part of the UniGR and investigates amongst others the students’ perception of the UniGR.

The role of stakeholders in cross-border cooperation lies in the focus of the paper presented by Lisa Eibler, Elena Gilcher and Karen Ziener. It presents the case of the “Groenmetropol”, a cross-border cooperation area with German, Dutch and Belgian partners and analyses the cooperation’s strengths and weaknesses.

The results of the individual papers illustrate the variety of ongoing European cooperation & development and the way of the European Union towards convergence.

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Network-EGTCs

Application of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) in the Transnational and Interregional Cooperation

Abstract

The ‘European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)’ is a new tool of European Territorial Cooperation with its own legal personality. It was introduced in the programming period 2007-2013 of the Structural Funds of the European Union. 45 EGTCs have been established until present and more EGTCs are under preparation (Committee of the Regions 2014).

The European Territorial Cooperation consists of cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. However, most of the currently existing EGTCs belong to the cross-border type, in which the EGTC members are situated in a spatial adjacent area. So far only the members of five EGTCs have shown a longer distance among each other. Because of their spatial distances they are called ‘network-EGTC’. This network type applies to the transnational respective interregional cooperation.

In this paper the application of the instrument EGTC in the transnational and interregional non-contiguous cooperation is demonstrated based on recent research done by the author.

About the author:

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Introduction

This paper explores the application of the new tool of European Territorial Cooperation called ‘European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation’ (EGTC) in the transnational and interregional cooperation. Thus cooperations whose members are not located spatially contiguous to each other and establish a so-called ‘network-EGTC’ are to be analysed.

This topic is of high importance: Most EGTCs have been established in cross-border cooperation (cross-border cooperation in this paper is understood as territorial contiguous cooperation among entities from different nations that border each other) and only very few in spatially non-contiguous cooperation. This is the case although EGTCs are open to all strands of territorial cooperation. Therefore network-EGTCs are to be analysed to find out why there is such a high imbalance between cross-border cooperations and territorial non-contiguous cooperations.

So far there have been many scientific studies on EGTCs, but none of them has analysed network-EGTCs and the application of EGTCs in spatially non-contiguous cooperations. This research gap shall be filled.

In the paper first the character of network-EGTCs is to be analysed. The practice of network-EGTCs is presented based on a case study. Here the characteristics, the establishment process and the practical execution are analysed in depth. At the end of the paper recommendations for territorial non-contiguous cooperations that consider establishing an EGTC are given.

Figure 1: Map of the members of the E.G.T.C. Amphictyony

Source: Own illustration, Bonn, August 2012, based on E.G.T.C. Amphictyony, 2012
Practice of network-EGTCs: characteristics, establishment and practical execution

Until December 2013 four network-EGTCs have existed: the E.G.T.C. Amphictyony, the AR-CHIMED EGTC, the EGTC Efxini Poli and fourth, the EUKN EGTC (Committee of the Regions 2013). The CETC EGTC was recently registered on 24th March 2014 (Ciesielska 2014) and more are planned. In this paper the network-EGTC E.G.T.C. Amphictyony is analysed in depth.

Spatial characteristics of network-EGTCs

The E.G.T.C. Amphictyony is seated in Athens, Greece, and consists of members from Greece, Cyprus, Italy and France (E.G.T.C. Amphictyony 2008).

The EGTC is classified as a network-EGTC because its members are not spatially close to each other but spread in the Mediterranean area, often on islands. Very long distances exist between the Cypriot communities and the French community Garons (E.G.T.C. Amphictyony 2012). The west-east span comprises approximately 1,700km (Daft Logic 2012). The Greek communities compose the core area of the cooperation as most members are Greek (see figure 1).

The principal characteristic that distinguishes network-EGTCs from ‘normal’ EGTCs is the spatial distance of their members towards each other. Their members are often separated by sea but can also be separated by longer distance on main land. Network-EGTCs demarcate the scope of their cooperation area by the geographical scope of their members. They do not necessarily experience difficulties in doing that.

Aims and tasks of network-EGTCs

The E.G.T.C. Amphictyony is a multi-purpose grouping. Its aims are mainly political but also related to territorial development. The objective of the EGTC is the further development of the Mediterranean area in a peaceful and constant manner towards European cohesion. Additionally it promotes a less bureaucratic EU which is less ruled by strict economic needs and concentrates on the European citizens and their needs. Furthermore territorial cooperation and the realization of EU-funded programmes shall be facilitated and the exchange of information and the cultural identity of the Mediterranean area are to be fostered by this cooperation. These aims are similar to those the cooperation had before the EGTC establishment (Xenos-Gabrielis 2012).

The EGTC’s tasks are the organization of conferences, meetings and seminars for the cooperation. Additionally an EU funded initiative, the “Mediterranean Youth Forum”, shall be implemented by the EGTC (Xenos-Gabrielis 2012).

Network-EGTCs have different aims and can have several purposes at once. Their tasks dif-
fer from case to case as well. Network-EGTCs can focus on political topics but territorial development is not excluded. The CETC EGTC, for instance, will concentrate on the implementation of infrastructure projects (Ciesielska 2012). However, a strong contribution to territorial development as demanded by the EGTC regulation can be questioned in some cases. The objectives and tasks of the original cooperations are usually taken over in network-EGTCs and sometimes complemented. Although the members of a network-EGTC do not show a spatial closeness towards each other, they often aim at developing a common larger area.

**Organisational structure of network-EGTCs**

The E.G.T.C. Amphictyony was not established at the beginning of a cooperation but based on a former cooperation of twinned cities in the Mediterranean Sea that had existed since 1997 (E.G.T.C. Amphictyony 2008). The reason for this cooperation was that the local administrations wanted to bundle their politics and gain a bigger attention to influence the politics on the European level. The cooperation was started by European countries but after some years also members from Albania, Israel, Palestine and Turkey joined. Members from these countries could not join the EGTC. Still the cooperation saw that the advantages of EGTC establishment outweighed the loss of members (Xenos-Gabrielis 2012).

The registered office of the E.G.T.C. Amphictyony is seated in Athens, Greece. Greece was chosen because the idea of an EGTC came from Greek mayors. The city of Athens is not a member of the EGTC but no other city applied for it (Xenos-Gabrielis 2012). According to the Greek national provisions on EGTCs it is a private entity (Karvounis 2012). It currently consists of 57 members (E.G.T.C. Amphictyony 2014). The number of members has increased since 2012 (46 members) (Koutsaki 2012). The members are local authorities or unions of local authorities and have 600.000 - 700.000 inhabitants each. The EGTC would also be open for regional authorities to join the grouping. National levels, however, are not supposed to join the EGTC. The former cooperation members - not coming from EU countries - have not been able to join the EGTC so far. It would be welcomed by the grouping if this became possible one day. Most members of the EGTC knew each other already from the previous cooperation. They share common historic traditions, a similar culture and similar challenges. Additionally they have an interest to influence EU politics. The EGTC did not define a sole working language – instead all official languages of its members (Greek, Italian and French) and English as intermediary language can be applied. For conferences translators will be available (Xenos-Gabrielis 2012).

The EGTC consists of five organs. The General Assembly consists of the representatives of its members. These meet once a year and take decisions about the EGTC. Every two years the assembly elects 13 persons that will become members of the Board of Directors. Within this board
their president, secretary, treasurer and two deputy presidents will be elected. The board meets four times a year and can decide to start working groups or employ third parties. The President’s task is to represent the EGTC and sign all documents. Additionally there is the Executive Committee that is in charge of the EGTC’s practice (E.G.T.C. Amphictyony 2008) and the Audit Committee which monitors the finances of the EGTC. Apart from the annual meeting of the representatives there is some communication via phone, fax or email (Xenos-Gabrielis 2012). The EGTC is financed by membership fees. This might be complemented by grants, funding by the EU, national or international organizations, donations and other resources (E.G.T.C. Amphictyony 2008). The duration of the EGTC’s existence has been limited to 25 years because of the Greek national provisions. The General Assembly, however, can decide about an extension (E.G.T.C. Amphictyony 2008). The EGTC employs only two permanent staff members at the registered office to keep the costs low. Both are Greek. Anyhow, the nationality is not restricted. To prevent problems with international staff the EGTC is supported by external collaborators when needed (Xenos-Gabrielis 2012).

Network-EGTCs are not established at the beginning of a cooperation but are based on earlier cooperations. Despite their spatial distances among each other, the members of a network-EGTC share common features. These are usually the basis for cooperation. The members of a network-EGTC do not usually have a similar mother-tongue and therefore introduce English as additional working language. In cases where the members of a network-EGTC dominantly come from one country, the official language of that country might stay the main working language. English is sometimes not spoken by all members. This might lead to problems. In official meetings, the language barrier is bypassed by translators. These meetings, however, in which all members meet, take place only once or a few times a year. So the cooperation within network-EGTCs stays without frequent communication in the rest of the year.

Also the character and number of members of network-EGTCs differ. They do usually not have a maximum amount of members and can include more members over time. The network-EGTC that was presented excluded members from a certain level so that it did not fully apply the principle of multi-level governance. It depends on the aims of the cooperation which kinds of members bring an added value. It has been impossible so far to involve non-EU member states as full members in network-EGTCs.

Network-EGTCs consist of more organs than needed according to the EGTC regulation but employ a small number of staff which is in theory not restricted to certain nationalities. Network-EGTCs are mainly financed by membership fees. However, they also wish to be supported by EU funding.

The nature of network-EGTCs depends on the country’s national provisions on EGTCs in which the network-EGTC has its registered office. They can either be private or public. This is also
true for the limited liability. Some are limited in time.

**Establishment process of network-EGTCs**

The E.G.T.C. Amphictyony is the first network-EGTC that was established (December 2008). The establishment process took about one year. As the EGTC regulation was very new, most EU Member States had not implemented their national provisions on EGTC so far and the instrument itself was not well-known. Therefore the national governments of the cooperation members involved had to be pressed to adopt their national legislations. At the end the national provisions of these Member States were very similar and did not pose many restrictions so that the statute of the EGTC was accepted directly by all national authorities. Another positive component was that all members – even those of non EU countries – supported the idea and secured the establishment by paying membership fees. Yet because of the economic crisis the public was less involved into the EGTC establishment. Another negative precondition was that the cooperation did not get as much support as expected from national and EU institutions. Furthermore the cooperation could not learn from the experiences of other EGTCs because none had existed before (Xenos-Gabrielis 2012).

The distances between the members of the EGTC did not lead to problems – instead they were seen as an incentive to further intensify the political work. The president of the EGTC met the instrument EGTC on the internet and proposed the idea for the cooperation. The establishment of an EGTC quickly found favour with the EGTC’s members so that the formal decision was taken in 2008: The need was felt to adjust the existing cooperation charter to the current EU legislation. Furthermore with the legal existence of the EGTC it became possible to apply for EU funding as well as to administrate common money and get financial support of all members. Another reason was that the cooperation was expected to become more visible on the European level – the common representation was to be improved (Xenos-Gabrielis 2012).

About the time the network-EGTC was in its establishment phase INTERACT published a model statute which the cooperation adopted and amended to its aims. In addition a convention was created (Xenos-Gabrielis 2012). Both legal documents need to be written for an EGTC (European Commission 2011). After three months all cooperation members replied positively to their notification and ratified the legal documents. Within this time the competences of the EGTC’s members and the tasks of the EGTC were decided being based on the former cooperation’s tasks. All members that applied to join the EGTC have been accepted by the national responsible authorities so far. After the statute was ratified by the Greek courts and published in the Official Journal of the European Union the EGTC became legal and was officially established (Xenos-Gabrielis 2012).
Network-EGTCs are mainly established to improve earlier cooperations and to demonstrate their up-to-dateness. It is attractive to establish a network-EGTC because this a cooperation gets a legal nature with competences like managing a common budget and representing all members. Additionally, it might be easier to get access to EU funding. The establishment process depends strongly on the preconditions and courses of action of each individual case. The decisions to establish an EGTC, where to locate the registered seat and which tasks the EGTC shall fulfil, are taken fast. The EGTC’s tasks are mainly adopted from the previous cooperation. Network-EGTCs do rather not follow role models and do not exchange experiences with other network-EGTCs. This is due to the reason that not many network-EGTCs have existed so far. They do not strongly involve the public into the establishment process. Therefore they do not face much opposition but - at the same time – get no strong public support either. Additional support in the establishment process would have been welcomed. It depends on the case and the member states involved how long an establishment process can take. The presented network-EGTC’s establishment was completed after one year, the CETC-EGTC in contrast needed almost 4 years to be established (Ciesielska 2014). Network-EGTCs tend to exclude former cooperation members because of reluctances and fears connected with the new instrument. Further reasons are national regulations, not coming from an EU country and the degree of national support. Especially important is that no special problems have been experienced in the establishment process because of the spatial distances between the members.

**Practical execution of network-EGTCs**

The E.G.T.C. Amphictyony considered that the *flexibility* of the instrument was reduced because the EGTCs tasks are limited to the support of economic and social cohesion. Still it offers the opportunity to apply for EU funding which is very important for the cooperation. If the EGTC contributed to *European cohesion* and *simplified territorial cooperation* is questioned, EGTCs should be able to fulfil more tasks and have an easier access to funding to be able to support these aims better. As the cooperation focuses on political cooperation and not on *territorial development* in terms of building infrastructure and houses – this is excluded fundamentally because of the spatial distances among the partners – it is not eligible for the Mediterranean Territorial Cooperation Programme (Xenos-Gabrielis 2012).

Thanks to the EGTC regulation, the *legal forms* of the participating countries have been *standardized*. The cooperation gained in *continuity* and *stability* because its members committed themselves to participate in the EGTC. However, the grouping is limited to 25 years at first. When decisions are taken communities with a high number of inhabitants are privileged because they have more representatives that can vote. Therefore an *equal* status of the members is not guaran-
teed. The EGTC itself, however, is neutral towards its members. Thanks to the EGTC establishment the cooperation gained a higher political and economic power. A higher planning reliability towards staff and finances could not be observed though because the EGTC is influenced by day-to-day politics. According to the EGTC’s director the communication among the members was facilitated and decisions were taken faster. Still the communication with some Greek cooperation members was not sufficient. These are located in the Mediterranean Sea, far away from the registered office in Athens. This leads to the obvious assumption that the spatial distances between the members have a negative impact on the cooperation’s communication. However, there is a good communication with the members of Italy and France located even farther away from Athens. The grown Euroscepticism of the Greek citizens related to the economic crisis might have a negative impact on the cooperation. The EGTC had not implemented joint actions of the members at the time of the interview so it could not be assessed if the EGTC had positive impacts on the implementation. Although the EGTC represents the cooperation on the national and European level, it is not felt that the public appearance has grown much after the EGTC establishment. Still it made European integration - to a small extent - more visible. The EGTC helped to improve the financial situation of the EGTC: more revenues combined with constant expenses - the EGTC legally enabled a common budget. However, it was still hard to get EU funding (Xenos-Gabrielis 2012).

The case of E.G.T.C. Amphictyony shows that some potentials attributed to EGTCs in general are fulfilled in the practice of network-EGTCs but limitations exist. The flexibility of the cooperation is higher. How much network-EGTCs contribute to the intensification of territorial cooperation and to economic and social cohesion depends on the thematic focus of each network-EGTC. The EGTC regulation contributed to the harmonization of different national regulations on territorial cooperation. Some differences within the national provisions of the member states exist though. These decide about certain legal characteristics of an EGTC. The legal character of network-EGTCs guarantees the continuity of a cooperation, at least for a certain time, and stabilizes it. In addition the EGTC is neutral towards its members. The EGTC establishment can lead to a higher economic and political power of the cooperation if the establishment does not go hand in hand with the loss of many members. If a higher planning reliability is achieved depends of the influence by day-to-day politics. The frequency of communication in network-EGTCs might be impacted by the spatial distances among their members but also depends on the members’ initiative. There is also frequent communication despite far distances. The EGTC ensures regular meetings but more efforts might be needed to meet all members of a network-EGTC. An easier and faster decision-making can be achieved by network EGTCs. However, the individual characteristics of each network-EGTC impact the potential. Binding decisions taken by the EGTC members contribute to the implementation of common actions. A higher public appearance because of the EGTC is only achieved to
a certain degree. The measures taken by each network-EGTC decide about an increased visibility. Network-EGTCs improve the financial characteristics of cooperations but the support of EU funding is not automatically linked to that.

After the practice of network-EGTCs has been presented the next chapter offers recommendations for cooperations that consider establishing a network-EGTC.

**Recommendations For Spatially Non-Contiguous Cooperations**

The recommendations concern three different development stages. First, cooperations are advised in how to find out if the EGTC establishment is the right choice. Second, recommendations that concern the optimal course of action in the establishment process of an EGTC are presented and third, advice is given for the practice of network-EGTCs. These recommendations are derived from the experiences that have been made by the existing and planned network-EGTCs and aim to offer a guideline for potential future network-EGTCs.

*Decision-making process: Information, experiences, motivation, financing*

Before it is decided about the EGTC establishment it is important to check if certain preconditions are fulfilled that make an EGTC establishment reasonable.

- Information about consequences of EGTC establishment: After the idea to establish an EGTC is born it is very important to gather information what consequences will result from an EGTC establishment. Therefore existing network-EGTCs should be contacted and asked about their experiences in practice. The information gained should then be disseminated among the members of cooperation to make sure that every member is aware of the changes an EGTC would make. Only on that basis they can take a profound decision. Furthermore, the EGTC regulation needs to be clarified to the members of the cooperation. Difficulties in understanding should be directly addressed to the European institutions responsible. In addition, the national provisions of the countries involved should be studied and translated into a language each member understands. The study of these provisions can ease the decision about a possible location of the EGTC’s registered office and avoid problems in the establishment process.

- Definition of experiences, competences and tasks: The members of cooperation should formulate their expectations of the EGTC establishment. These expectations should be
compared with the practice of existing network-EGTCs to get a feeling if they are realistic. Additionally, the cooperation members should compare their competences to find commonalities. Only common competences can be transferred to the EGTC. With the knowledge of the possible competences the future tasks of the EGTC can be discussed and decided on. This information is needed for the cooperation members to take a profound decision about their participation in the EGTC.

- Motivated members: As network-EGTCs should be based on previous cooperations, all the members of cooperation or at least most should be in favour of the EGTC establishment and willing to become members of the EGTC. If this cannot be secured the EGTC should not be established because the cooperation would be weakened.

- Possible additional members: As EGTCs offer the possibility of multi-level governance it should be considered if the composition of members is sufficient or if new members should be recruited to make the cooperation more efficient. Potential new members should be contacted as soon as possible.

- Financing: The financing sources of the EGTC need to be clarified as early as possible. It is possible that an EGTC leads to a higher expenditure. This needs to be taken into consideration. In practice EGTCs cannot easily access EU funds. Therefore an EGTC should not depend on them.

*Establishment Process: Lobbying, location, legal documents*

- Lobbying: When the decision to establish an EGTC is taken the responsible national authorities of each country involved should be informed. During the whole establishment process they should be kept informed about the status to get to know the cooperation better and to take decisions faster about the approval of the EGTC and the members’ participation. The national authorities might then give recommendations to the cooperation and support the establishment process. Also the public should be informed about the EGTC and its tasks. This contributes to a greater visibility of the cooperation.

- Location of the EGTC’s registered office: The decision about the location of the EGTC’s registered office needs to be taken with caution as the location will decide about the applicable law of the EGTC. All national provisions should be taken into consideration. To establish the EGTC in a country already experienced with EGTCs might be an advantage as the responsible authorities might take decisions faster and might be more open-minded
towards EGTCs. However, also other criteria should be taken into account. If the place of location is not directly involved in the cooperation the neutrality of the EGTC is underlined towards its members.

- Legal documents: The exchange with existing EGTC’s is also very important in the establishment process. This also concerns the legal documents. Statutes of other EGTCs can be used as guidelines as well as the model statute of INTERACT to learn from others and fasten the process. It is recommended to publish the legal documents in all national languages of the countries involved and in English to make sure that every member understands their contents. By this the exchange with other EGTCs is also simplified. The legal drafts should not be kept as a secret but instead published for discussion so that the cooperations can learn from other EGTCs and improve their documents due to important recommendations. The method of decision-making should depend on the number of EGTC members. Larger cooperations should rather take majority decisions. Otherwise it might be impossible to get a unanimous decision. The duration of EGTC’s should not be limited as this contradicts the long-term perspective of EGTCs. Anyway, in urgent cases it is possible to dissolve EGTCs under the conditions agreed upon. It is recommended that cooperations lay down special communication rules in their EGTC operating provisions. This could for instance be special internet-based communication methods that facilitate the communication in network-EGTCs. Nevertheless personal meetings at conferences should be maintained.

Practical execution: Communication

- Communication: Because the members of network-EGTCs are farther away from each other it is harder to communicate. Therefore special efforts need to be taken to strengthen their communication. First, the staff employed by a network-EGTC should have a good command of English. English is important as it shall be used as intermediary language. English is also important as contact language to the European institutions. Second, concrete contact persons that are fluent in English should be named by each EGTC member. Third, the EGTC should establish a frequent contact towards its members and inform them about current actions not only on regular meetings. Fourth, also the public visibility needs to be maintained. The public and the national levels should be kept informed about the actions of the EGTC.

If all these recommendations are taken into account it is expected that the network-EGTC will be of great value for the non-contiguous cooperation and be unproblematic in its practical
execution.

Conclusion

This paper shows the character of network-EGTCs. These are not that different from EGTCs established in the cross-border cooperation. Also EGTCs in cross-border cooperation experienced problems in practice and not all potentials have been fulfilled. If certain preconditions are fulfilled network-EGTCs are definitely applicable in the transnational and interregional cooperation.

The low number of network-EGTCs is related to the low awareness level that EGTCs can be applied in non-contiguous cooperations and to the missing experiences and best practices. Additionally, less non-contiguous cooperations probably feel the need to establish a legal structure.

Additional studies should be done in the future. Newly emerged network-EGTCs should be explored as well to widen the knowledge about network-EGTCs.
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Dennis Metzler

The Added Value of INTERREG-Projects for Project Partners
An Empirical Analysis & Recommendations for Organizations, Individuals and Projects

Abstract

As a part of the European cohesion policy, INTERREG projects deal with a variation of territorial problems on cross-border, transnational and interregional scale. Based mainly on a positivistic, indicator-led approach, the evaluation methods that measure the impact and the added value of INTERREG were derived from the evaluation methods of the structural funds. These methods, however, have not grasped the qualitative impacts of INTERREG projects, consequently leaving one question answered insufficiently so far: what are the ‘soft’, qualitative added values for project partners when taking part in INTERREG projects? In other words: how do the project partners, on organizational as well as on individual level, benefit from taking part in those projects? After defining the main characteristics of INTERREG projects, the paper answers this question and sheds light on the most significant difficulties that arise out of a project participation. Based on these findings, recommendations for actions for organizations and individuals as well as for projects as a whole are formulated.

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Introduction

In 1989 the European Commission launched the INTERREG Community Initiative as a means to balance and harmonize the development and integration of the European territory, alongside the objectives of convergence as well as regional competitiveness and employment. Following this principle, it is up to the project partners who participate in INTERREG projects to put life into this instrument and to build “Europe from the bottom up” (BMVBS 2007) by means of distributing their projects’ results in their respective networks consisting of actors from different political and administrative levels.

Against the background that INTERREG is an instrument mainly focused on networking, innovation and learning, an thus, on the creation of non-measurable results (cf. Dühr and Nadin 2007) it is not surprising that traditional evaluation methods are unsuitable to grasp the qualitative effects of INTERREG projects (cf. Colomb 2007). This lack of knowledge eventually leads to critical voices who speak of INTERREG projects as a “wining and dining” culture, only consisting of a “succession of superfluous meetings, from which nothing visible emerges at all” (BMVBS 2009).

In the light of these issues, this article initially points out the characteristics of INTERREG projects with regard to the projects’ subjects, duration, financial aspects, personnel, structure as well as information and communication. Based on a qualitative and a quantitative empirical approach, the article then demonstrates the added values for organizations as well as individuals arising from participation in INTERREG projects. Linked with the already mentioned focus of INTERREG, the emphasis is placed on the soft, non-quantifiable factors. As a counterpoint to the benefits, the article also points out the relevant difficulties that come along with project participation. Based on these results, the article eventually formulates recommendations for action aiming on achieving and amplifying as well as avoiding and mitigating the identified added values and difficulties respectively. The recommendations include three levels: organizations, individuals and projects.

Characteristics of INTERREG projects

INTERREG projects are characterized by an international orientation, demonstrated by the three INTERREG strands: cross-border (IV A), transnational (IV B) and interregional (IV C). The different Operational Programmes (OP) are correspondingly focused on problems that require actions across national borders. For example, the South Baltic Cross-Border Co-Operation Programme sets its priority on environmental issues and sustainable development because of the coastal location of the eligible area (cf. South Baltic Programme 2007). Against this background, INTERREG projects
are only eligible when they deal with such problems and are compatible with the priority axes of the relevant OP.

INTERREG projects usually have a *limited duration* of up to 42 months, which can be divided into several phases: contracting phase, implementation phase, project closure phase (cf. South Baltic Programme 2011; Baltic Sea Region Programme 2011). Each phase requires different (administrative) tasks to be accomplished, such as drawing up contracts between the project partners and the programme authorities as well periodical progress reports.

In financial terms, INTERREG projects are mainly characterized by the aspect of *co-financing* of the project partners through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). This means that organizations must raise a certain amount of their respective project budget themselves. Depending on the programme area and their geographical location, project partners receive up to 85% of their budget as a grant out of the resources of the ERDF. Nevertheless, project partners need to *pre-finance* their project activities. The total project budget comprises the ERDF co-financing and the own contribution of the project partners and is dependent on the projects’ topic, the number of project partners and the duration. Costs of project activities which the whole partnership will benefit from, such as an external project management may be shared among the project partners with the help of the so called cost sharing. Furthermore it is possible - again depending on the programme area - to include project partners from outside the respective eligible area and to provide them with a budget of up to 20% of the total project budget. Whereas, for example, the Baltic Sea Region allows projects to include partners from all EU countries (cf. Baltic Sea Region Programme 2011), the North Sea Programme limits the flexibility rule to partners from the adjacent programme areas (cf. North Sea Region Programme 2008).

INTERREG projects are further characterized by the *partnership principle*, meaning that projects have to be conducted by a project consortium, made up by organizations out of several nations. This *transnationality* has to be demonstrated with the project application. Albeit there is no existing definition of this criterion, the ERDF regulation as well as the various OPs set minimum requirements in terms of the composition of the partnerships. According to this, IV A and IV B projects need to include at least two project partners from two different countries (cf. European Parliament and Council of the European Union 2006). The individual programme areas however can deviate from the minimum requirements, such as the Baltic Sea Region and the Northern Periphery Programmes: here, projects have to include at least three partners from three different countries (cf. Baltic Sea Region Programme 2011; Northern Periphery Programme 2009). In addition to this *interculturalism*, the partnership principle also implies the aspect of *interdisciplinarity*, since the project partners do not only differ in terms of their geographic area of interest (local, regional, national) but also in terms of their respective disciplines and organizational type. Against
this background, eligible project partners are all national, regional and local bodies as well as „bodies governed by public law“, defined in Art. 1 (9) of the Directive 2004/18/EC (cf. European Parliament and Council of the European Union 2004). For example, the South Baltic Programme considers inter alia national, regional and local authorities, schools, universities and other educational institutions, research institutions as eligible project partners (cf. South Baltic Programme 2011). All INTERREG strands work with the so-called Lead Partner Principle, meaning that one project partner takes over the leading role within the partnership and with it, the financial and organizational responsibility of the project (cf. European Parliament and Council of the European Union 2006).

A horizontal and vertical cooperation becomes manifest in the projects’ structure and work packages/components. In INTERREG projects, the work packages/components are used to break down the activities into similar thematic groups (cf. Baltic Sea Region Programme 2011; South Baltic Programme 2011). Here, the participatory character of INTERREG projects is revealed: all project partners are actively and equally involved in the project implementation. In terms of project coordination, the programme areas recommend forming so-called project steering committees or steering groups (cf. Baltic Sea Region Programme 2011; IVC Programme 2012), which are responsible for setting the strategic direction and represent the decision making body of the project. To further ensure a smooth running of the projects, they must designate a project- and financial manager (cf. Baltic Sea Region Programme 2011).

INTERREG projects have a dualistic communication structure: internal and external. The internal communication refers to the communication between the project partners. This comprises instruments such as project meetings, an intranet, websites, internal newsletters and printed materials (cf. South Baltic Programme 2011). External communication refers to the communication to stakeholders outside the projects. Here, the projects should implement activities by which they can publicly present their (intermediate) results, such as project meetings, conferences, press releases, project websites and media articles (e.g. in newspapers, radio, TV) (cf. South Baltic Programme 2011). Both internal and external communication channels may be defined in the so-called communication plans. Depending on the programme area, the communication plans are either mandatory (e.g. in the BSR; see Baltic Sea Region Programme 2011) or optional (e.g. in the South Baltic Programme; see South Baltic Programme 2011).

**Added values of INTERREG projects for organizations**

The organizations surveyed in the research of the author act as project partners in various INTERREG projects. They confirm that they were able to expand their organizational networks and international cooperation with the help of INTERREG projects. This is reinforced by interview part-
ners who experienced the projects as useful instruments to extend their professional networks which are also of use when the projects have ended. Most of the project partners also stated that the project work helped them to improve their intercultural competences and soft skills. To that effect, the interview partners acknowledged the project work having a positive impact on their understanding and tolerance for other cultures and mentalities.

Also the financial benefits of taking part in INTERREG projects were emphasized by the interview partners, since – as an example - the funding allowed them to hire an employee dedicated solely to the project work.

In reference to the aspect of gaining know-how and exchange of experiences with the help of INTERREG projects, one interview partner argued that his organization was able to gain insight into different working methods of the project partners and to learn about different working time models, training methods and approaches on personnel management. This was further underlined by another interviewee, whose organization gained insight into new methods of vocational training. Learning about the different approaches of Eastern European, Scandinavian, as well as Russian project partners were further mentioned by the interview partners and represent

Figure 1: Added values for organizations - Average rating by the surveyed project partners (0.0 less important – 5.0 most important)

Source: Own illustration, Kaiserslautern, 2013.
an important added value of INTERREG projects. In addition to that, the interviewees appreciated the project work and the regular contact with the project partners as a source of inspiration in order to develop their organizations’ business portfolios and new project ideas. This, however, was considered as the least important added value of INTERREG projects. It was pointed out by one of the interviewees that his organization uses the participation to develop and improve the international profile and visibility as well as the organizations’ reputation. With the help of media appearances INTERREG projects serve as “showpieces” which make the organizations’ work visible on a large scale.

**Added values of INTERREG projects for individuals**

On individual level, the first added value to be mentioned is the broadening of each participating individuals’ horizon. This is fostered by the active participation in the project work, which results in travelling to the different project partners’ locations due to the regular project meetings and other project related events. By working in an international environment the interviewees confirmed that they were able to win and exchange cultural, personal and professional experiences.

**Figure 2: Added values for individuals – Average rating by the surveyed project partners (0.0 less important – 5.0 most important)**

![Bar chart showing added values for individuals with ratings for different categories: Improvement of soft skills (e.g. communication skills, conflict handling skills, team working skills, etc.), Improvement of language skills, Extension of personal network, Inspiration for new project ideas and new working routines, Broadening of individual horizon by means of travelling, working in a different environment, etc.]

Source: Own illustration, Kaiserslautern, 2013.
INTERREG projects enable individuals to expand their professional networks. One interviewee underlined that the contacts from previous projects still exist and may serve as intermediaries when it comes to searching for project partners for future projects. Since these contacts result from the cooperation with international project partners, the individuals are forced to use a common language – generally English. One interviewee confirmed that he improved his language skills through “learning by doing”, meaning that the active use of foreign languages in INTERREG projects leads to the improvement of language proficiency.

Another interviewee mentioned that he appreciates the confirmation that the specific problems and ideas he encounters in his daily work are shared by his European colleagues. The project work does not only improve the intercultural and interpersonal competences but also promotes tolerance for other cultures and mentalities. Using the projects as a source of inspiration, the interview partners acknowledged that they were able to gain insight into the working routines of their project partners, for example in terms of organizing meetings. With regard to the development of the individuals’ soft skills, one interview partner stated that he learned new methods of leading workshops and improved his presentation and communication skills.

**Difficulties of participating in INTERREG projects**

Based on the results of the empirical analysis it becomes obvious that the project partners consider the financial aspects as one of the major problems that arise out of an INTERREG participation, especially in terms of pre-financing their project activities. This is due to the fact that the organizations need to pay for the costs of their activities in advance and receive the reimbursement not before the next reporting period, which poses a financial risk. A critical remark from one interview partner also refers to the financial aspects of INTERREG projects, as he is not sure whether his organizations’ own contribution to the budget actually corresponds with the benefits of participation in these projects. He furthermore criticizes the fact that potential revenues have to be deducted from the eligible costs, which may limit the financial attractiveness of INTERREG projects.

The administrative requirements caused by the contracting and reporting system of INTERREG have also been mentioned as a significant problem. The interview partners confirmed that the semi-annual reports as well as the alignment between internal and project-related regulations caused considerable administrative problems. Directly connected to this administrative burden is the increased work load for the employees, since they generally need to take care of the project activities in parallel to their usual duties.

With regards to intercultural and interdisciplinary differences one interview partner...
brought up the issue of different levels of professional knowledge between the project partners causing several problems during the project work. Here, the differences are consequences of the horizontal and vertical nature of INTERREG partnerships, which are not only interdisciplinary, but also include partners with varying geographic areas of interest. It can be assumed that, as an example, a local authority has a different level of knowledge than a university. Furthermore, one respondent stated that he found it difficult to overcome the concerns among his colleagues that EU projects are too complex and that they are not able to express themselves in English well enough. This on the one hand points out the administrative burden as a major problem again and, on the other hand, identifies the lack of language skills as a barrier to participation in INTERREG projects. The aspect of language barriers however, as well as dwindling motivation and lack of experience in European projects, are not perceived as serious problems by the majority of the surveyed project partners.

Finally, one interview partner also mentioned problems coming into existence in connection with the coordination of the project work. Here, it was reported on cases where individual project partners were not able to carry out the agreed activities and communication so these organizations failed almost completely.

**Figure 3: Difficulties of project participation – Average rating by the surveyed project partners (0.0 lowest significance – 5.0 highest significance)**

![Source: Own illustration, Kaiserslautern, 2013.](image-url)
Recommendations for action on organizational and individual level

The empirical analysis revealed that both organizations and individuals gather a variety of added values from the participation in INTERREG projects. However, it was also shown that they encounter difficulties arising from participation. This leads to the question how the added values can be utilized in practice and how to deal with the occurring difficulties.

Organizations acting as project partners are recommended to use the partnership consortium to expand their organizational networks, since the contacts gained during the project work can serve as contacts for future projects, even outside of INTERREG. The expertise of the project partners and their respective networks can be used for the search for experts or speakers. The international partnership structures of INTERREG projects are moreover suited to gain a better understanding of cultural differences and different ways of working and can serve as a starting point to provide intercultural training seminars for employees, to gain experience with international project partners and to familiarize with Europe.

INTERREG projects should be further utilized by organizations to gain knowledge and expertise not only on technical but also on an organizational level. During the project work it is possible to gain insight into the administrative, personnel and organizational practices of the European project partners, for example in relation to different working time models, training methods and personnel management. By making available the acquired expertise, organizations can use INTERREG projects as a means to grow their reputation and international profile.

The projects are qualified to serve as showcase objects with which it is possible for organizations to make their work more present to the general public. This can be done by means of media appearances and contributions (e.g. newspaper articles or various social media channels). The projects can also act as catalysts through which the organizational networks can be expanded and their visibility can be improved, especially when they include local organizations, such as associations or foundations into the project work, e.g. via workshops or seminars. Through the involvement of local partners it is moreover possible to increase the legitimacy and acceptance of EU-work at the local level.

INTERREG projects may also provide a source of inspiration for the development of the project partners’ business portfolios, since the interdisciplinary work stimulates the evolvement of new ideas and innovation processes. It therefore should be ensured by the project partners that the acquired knowledge and expertise must not remain with the individual employees but is disseminated within the entire organization. This can be done, for example, by means of periodical meetings with colleagues and supervisors in which not only the progress of the project work but also new ideas in regards to content and organizational matters are shared. The projects further-
more enable organizations to contribute their own ideas at the European level, allowing an active creation of solutions for territorial problems.

In regard to the project development and partner search, project partners should first of all use their respective networks out of which project ideas can evolve and project partners can be recruited. In the interviews it was also stated that projects have been initiated internally, e.g. from the own employees. Hence, it is recommended that organizations survey their staff if project ideas already exist.

The individual project team members may use the work within the international project partnerships to improve their individual language skills. Since the project work is carried out in a multicultural environment, a cultural, personal and professional development takes place. Hence, individuals should utilize INTERREG projects to become acquainted with different mentalities, to improve their social skills and to gain professional expertise. The project work further results in individuals experience “Europe live” and create a “European view” on subject-related problems. They moreover will receive a confirmation, that these problems are shared by their European colleagues.

Based on the international project partnerships, individuals can use INTERREG projects to expand their personal professional network. These contacts should be maintained even after the project duration is over and be used as contacts for prospective projects. The projects also help gaining not only content related expertise but also ideas for new work routines. With the participation in events organized by the project partners, new ideas in reference to organizing and conducting events, such as project meetings or workshops, can be acquired. Here, individuals may notice differences between, for example, Scandinavian, Eastern European or even Russian project partners.

Eventually, the employees should use the international project work to improve their individual soft skills. Team- and communication as well as presentation skills are trained by holding seminars or workshops.

**Recommendations for action on project level**

The empirical analysis evidenced that the implementation of the regulations of INTERREG projects have a direct impact on the added values as well as on the occurrence of difficulties. In addition to the recommendations for organizations and individuals, it is appropriate to make adjustments on project level as well in order to achieve the added values and to mitigate the problems. Whereas some of the following recommendations are consequences of the programme areas’ regulations and hence obligatory, other recommendations were derived from the results of the empirical ana-
With regard to the thematic requirements of INTERREG projects it is recommended for projects to set concrete and achievable objectives. They should approach the INTERREG Contact Points and the responsible Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS), since they can help with the creation of a project outline and with the search for project partners. In terms of searching for project partners it is advisable for projects to use the project databases of the individual programme areas.

Preparation time for projects may take more than one year. It is therefore advisable to start project development workshops already at an early stage, in which potential project partners can provide substantial input and contribute with their ideas. It also should be noticed that projects need a certain time to “warm up” until communication structures, a common working language and mutual trust have been established. Hence, complex project activities should be scheduled at a later stage.

INTERREG projects have to dimension their budgets according to the project’s duration, the agreed activities and the number of project partners. Further, it is advisable to make use of the opportunity to include project partners from outside the respective programme area, since several programme areas allow projects to use up to 20% of the projects’ budget to include such partners. In order to finance activities from which the entire project partnership will benefit, projects can use the cost sharing principle, which makes it possible to share these costs between all project partners and thus, reduces the financial burden for each partner.

In terms of personnel there is no guideline figure as to the optimal size of a project consortium. However, small consortia may result in the criterion of transnationality not being achieved, whereas a large number of project partners may lead to problems in terms of organization, communication and coordination of the project work. In order to meet the criterion of transnationality all nations that are regarded as important to tackle the respective project subject may be included. It is further advisable to include project partners from all necessary geographical levels (i.e. local, regional, national) as well as different organization types (i.e. authorities, universities, NGOs, research institutions) and thus, pursue both a horizontal and vertical mixture of the project partners. As the responsible project partner for project- and financial management, contracting and reporting as well as contact for the programme authorities, the Lead Partner has a prominent position within the partnership. It is strongly recommended to make sure that the Lead Partner has the financial resources and personnel capacities to carry out these activities.

Projects are recommended to keep their project structure (e.g. working packages, activities) simple as this will reduce administration and coordination issues. They should not formulate the expected results too ambitious. Competent working package responsibles are important to guarantee that the agreed activities are carried out in each working package by the respective
project partners. Hence, it is recommended to install working package/component responsibilities, who have adequate personnel capacities, expertise and - if possible - experience in working in INTERREG projects. All project partners should be actively involved in the project work (e.g. being responsible for carrying out a specific activity), since the active participation promotes the identification with the project and stimulates the added values that arise out of the project work. Whereas an external project- and financial manager helps to reduce the administrative burden for the project partners, a decision-making body (e.g. a Project Steering Group) helps to efficiently manage the project and meet strategic decisions. Its structure being legitimized by all project partners, ideally all participating countries are represented in this committee. Periodical project meetings make it easier to discuss the progress and the challenges of the project and to coordinate the activities.

With regard to the information and communication requirements of INTERREG, projects may improve their public exposure with the help of public events, such as workshops, seminars and excursions. Here, projects should try to involve local organizations as well as multipliers (e.g. journalists) who ensure that the project results are made available to a broader audience. In order to give the project more legitimacy and public acceptance, projects should invite stakeholders from politics, foundations, NGOs etc. to take part in the project implementation, for example as speakers or experts. In order to improve the internal communication, a sufficient number of project meetings with all partners should be organized. Good communication can be further facilitated with the help of a project website, a project intranet or a newsletter. Moreover, the projects are recommended to get in contact with thematically related INTERREG projects and try to collaborate with them, e.g. through joint project meetings/events or position papers. They should also take part in events of other INTERREG projects as well as in other external events, such as fairs and conferences. Finally, projects should implement appropriate measures with which they can reach their respective target groups directly. Here, brochures, handbooks or documentations are useful means to present the project activities and results to the target groups in an illustrative way.

Conclusion

The results of the empirical analysis provide evidence that there are numerous added values arising out of participation in INTERREG projects: organizations and individuals benefit not only from one specific added value but from the characteristics of INTERREG projects on a broad basis. These added values can be considered as consequences of the characteristics of INTERREG projects. First of all the partnership principle needs to be mentioned, which enables project partners to gather new (professional) contacts and to expand their networks, being of use also after the projects’
duration. The co-financing also implies a paramount added value, since it allows organizations to develop new funding possibilities and hence, enables them to carry out actions that would have not been possible without financial support through the ERDF. The interdisciplinary nature of the project partnerships makes it possible for project partners to exchange experiences, professional expertise and know-how, whereas the participatory element fosters the development of intercultural competences, soft skills and language skills. What is more, the interaction with the public promotes the internationalization of organizations and improves their public image.

The added values for individuals are predominantly located in the area of cultural, interpersonal and professional development promoted by the international working environment. INTERREG projects enable individuals to expand their professional networks and let them gain professional expertise as well as experiences in terms of working methods.

In addition to the added values that are implicated by the characteristics of INTERREG projects, difficulties emerge as well, both for organizations and individuals. Here, the principle of co-financing implies that the project partners have to pre-finance their activities and wait for the reimbursement for up to one year, which poses a significant financial risk for them. Due to the various requirements in relation to the contracting and reporting schemes, high administrative barriers and an increased workload come into existence. With the majority of the respondents agreeing on that issue, it is safe to argue that the administrative requirements of INTERREG projects result in a high burden. Against this background it is also possible to explain why organizations can use INTERREG projects as a source of inspiration only to a limited extent, since it can be assumed that the administrative burden and high work load are prejudicial to a creative execution of the projects. Furthermore, the participatory nature of INTERREG projects impedes the communication between the project partners and the coordination of the project. The "soft" factors on the other side, such as language barriers, dwindling motivation and lack of experience, are perceived as less important problems arising out of an INTERREG participation.

The identified difficulties prevent a better utilization of the added values and thus, reduce the attractiveness of INTERREG projects. Therefore, adjustments at the organizational and individual level as well as on the project level seem to be necessary. Possible adjustments were presented in form of recommendations for action, which on the one hand aim to increase the added values both for organizations and individuals and the other hand try to mitigate or even avoid the difficulties that have been revealed.

Despite the obstacles that arise out of a participation in INTERREG projects, the projects are instruments which allow organizations and individuals to gain a multitude of benefits. This is underlined by the fact that the majority of the surveyed project partners agreed that the added values outweigh the difficulties and that they want to participate in INTERREG projects in the new
funding period 2014-2020 again. In this context, they expressed the desire to make their work more visible on an international scale and want to implement ideas that resulted from projects in which they have taken part in the funding period 2007-2013.

The success of the instrument INTERREG is also revealed by the fact that the majority of surveyed project partners have already participated in several INTERREG projects before. Hence, it can be reasonably assumed that these organizations already identified the benefits of taking part in cross-border/transnational/interregional project themselves. By increasing the acceptance and legitimacy of EU work on local level, added values such as organizational and individual networking, the exchange of experiences and know-how across national borders and disciplines, the personal development as well as the public-oriented presentation of project results, INTERREG projects play a significant role in developing “Europe from below”. Due to the “European experience” that the organizations and individuals gain, INTERREG projects help to bring Europe closer to the citizens (cf. European Commission 2011).
Bibliography


Regina Köchling

Design and Potentials of a University Cooperation Across National Borders

A Comparison of the University of the Greater Region with the Confederation of the Upper Rhine Universities

Abstract

In the current context of globalization and demographic change, it is essential to work together in border areas in order to be attractive in an increasing competition for workers and employers. A starting point for a cooperation can be the educational sector at the university level. The European Confederation of Upper Rhine Universities (EUCOR) and the University of the Greater Region (UniGR) are university cooperations with German participation. EUCOR already exists for over twenty years and is in place very well. The UniGR, however, is a very young cooperation and is currently facing the difficult task to continue and create sustainable structures after the EU funding stopped. The cooperations followed different approaches but still have much in common. Numerous opportunities of cooperation between universities show great potentials for border regions, such as innovative developments and a strengthened economy. Border regions will have to deal with the issue of university cooperation in the future if they want to remain attractive for workers and residents.

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Introduction

In Europe cross-border cooperation has played an important role since many years. At the same time, cooperation in the educational sector has become more popular over the years. The following article presents two case studies of established cross-border university cooperation. Based on the experiences made in the two cases it is shown how cross-border university cooperations are designed, which stakeholders are involved and what should be taken into account when establishing such a cooperation. After that the potentials of university cooperations are highlighted. The paper ends with giving recommendations for university cooperations.

University Cooperation

The term university cooperation was defined by the German Council of Science and Humanities in May 1992 as a cooperation relationship between several university administrations based on an agreement (German Rectors’ Conference 2013).

According to the Centre for Higher Education Development a university cooperation is:

- based on a core area as teaching or research
- institutional and explicit (contracts, decisions)
- strategically relevant
- actively designable
- promoted by university administrations
- considered equal by all partners
- has a real identifiable and verifiable benefit and
- representable to the outside (Hener et al. 2007).

Furthermore, a university cooperation is influenced by the motives of its foundation. The national political motives, motives of the university management, motives of the professional level and motives of individual actors have a strong impact. Additionally, the character of a university cooperation depends on the form of cooperation (institutionalized cooperation, project-based cooperation, cooperation in networks and shared facilities) and the fields of cooperation as teaching,
research, administration, services as well as on university development (Hener et al. 2007).

The investigated case studies share a special characteristic: the university cooperations cross national borders. They consist of partners from at least three countries or regions.

**Cross-border university cooperation in practice**

The practice of cross border university cooperations is presented in the following based on two case studies. The first case study analyses the relatively young cooperation *University of the Greater Region* (UniGR), the second presents the over twenty years old cooperation *European Confederation of Upper Rhine Universities* (EUCOR).

**Case Study 1: The University of the Greater Region (UniGR)**

The area in which the first university cooperation takes place is called Greater Region. It consists of the regions Saarland, Rhineland-Palatinate in Germany, Lorraine in France, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, Wallonia and the German-speaking Community in Belgium (Geppert 2007; Herrmann 2001). The Greater Region lies in the centre of Western Europe (University of the Greater Region 2013b) and covers an area of 65,401 km² (Greater Region 2013a) (see figure 1).

**Figure 1: The Greater Region in Europe**

![Subregions of the Greater Region](Image)

**Source:** Own illustration, Kaiserslautern, 2013
In 2009 the Greater Region had around 11.4 million inhabitants and a population density of 173.7 inhabitants per km². Half of the population lives in Rhineland-Palatinate and Wallonia (Greater Region 2013b). The economy of the Greater Region is affected by structural change. The former mining and industrial region lost its importance. This resulted in economic problems (IBA 2010). Now, the region focuses its economy on the service sector (Operational Programme of the Greater Region 2007).

The University of the Greater Region (UniGR) was established as part of a project of the INTERREG IV A programme Greater Region. The project started in 2008. Until the end of EU-funding in 2013, a common internationally visible association of universities was to be established. The association’s aim is to facilitate the cooperation of students, graduate students, lecturers, faculties and researchers across borders. Therewith the mobility of students, lecturers and researchers is to be enhanced. Additionally the course programme and research profiles are to be enriched (University of Kaiserslautern 2013; University of the Greater Region 2010). The UniGR involves the Universities of Kaiserslautern, Liège, Luxembourg, Lorraine, Trier and the Saarland University (University of the Greater Region 2013f). At the beginning of the project in 2008, around 115,000 students and 6,000 teachers and researchers were enrolled or employed at the partner universities. In summer 2013, the number of students had grown to 123,700 (University of the Greater Region 2013b) (see figure 2).

**Figure 2: University locations of UniGR with student numbers**

The organizational structure of the cooperation comprises a “bottom-up” and a “top-down” approach. This shall ensure that the needs of all stakeholders are taken into account when the Council of the UniGR takes decisions (University of the Greater Region 2013e).

The UniGR is financed by funds from the EU, the federal states of Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland, the regions of Wallonia and Lorraine, and the partner universities (University of the Greater Region 2013d). The total budget during the project period was 6,534,200€. 3,267,100€ came from the European Regional Development Fund (University of the Greater Region 2010), the other 50% were co-financed by the project partners.

Various administrative structures have been set up for students and postgraduates including the UniGR student status, a mobility fund, cross-border study programs, joint degrees, joint libraries, cafeterias & events as well as language courses and exchange studies at the partner universities (University of the Greater Region 2013a).

**Case Study 2: The European Confederation of Upper Rhine Universities (EUCOR)**

The EUCOR cooperation is situated in the Upper Rhine region that consists of German, French and Swiss regions: Alsace, North-Western Switzerland, parts of Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate (Deutsch-französisch-schweizerische Oberrheinkonferenz 2013b).

The Upper Rhine region is located in the centre of Western Europe and borders on the Greater Region presented before. The total area comprises 21,500km² and is divided by the course of the Rhine.

**Figure 3: The Upper Rhine Region in Europe**

![The Upper Rhine region in Europe](source: Own illustration, Kaiserslautern, 2013, based on EURES 2013.)
of the river Rhine. Alsace and Baden-Württemberg, cover about 76% of the area (Oberrheinkonferenz 2012) (see image 3).

In 2010, in the Upper Rhine Region lived 6 million inhabitants, this equates to a population density of 279 inhabitants per km². Around 40% of the population lives in the region Baden-Württemberg (Oberrheinkonferenz 2012). The Upper Rhine region is equipped with a good transport network which is essential for its economy. Apart from the well-expended roads, highways and rail network, the Rhine is an internationally important waterway. The economy of the Upper Rhine Region is characterized by both international corporations and medium-sized enterprises. There is a high variety of businesses that show a high growth potential. In addition to these business enterprises, there are many industrial sites and highly developed service industries such as retail, finance and insurance (Trinational metropolitan region of the Upper Rhine 2013).

The European Confederation of Upper Rhine Universities (EUCOR) was created in 1989. Seven universities from Germany, France and Switzerland established a cross-border network to cooperate in teaching and research (University of Freiburg 2013 URL): The Albert-Ludwig-University of Freiburg, the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), the University of Basel, the Universities Louis Pasteur, Marc Bloch and Robert Schuman in Strasbourg and the University de Haute Alsace in Mulhouse and Colmar (University of Freiburg 2013 URL). In the winter term 2008/09 around 111,000 students were enrolled at the universities and more than 11,000 teachers and researchers.

The network was formally established by the rectors and presidents of the Upper Rhine. The first impulse for a systematic collaboration “le ronde régionale” organized by the Council further support from Alsace, the Basel cantons Baden-Württemberg. The confederation wait and has not established a common budget so far.

EUCOR was designed to support the individual universities in the Upper Rhine region. The structure was to be as easy and flexible as possible. The governing body of the cooperation is the Bureau (Wächter 1995). In addition to contact persons at the respective universities, a coordination point (EUCOR 2013c). An own (Universität Freiburg 2013; EUCOR 2013). The cooperation between the different students' committees at EUCOR-level (EUCOR 2013c).
The establishment of the confederation was not funded by the EU. It was built on its own and is supported by the universities. However, the projects of the university cooperation try to get EU support (Wächter 1995).

The students and graduate students of the EUCOR benefit from special administrative structures as free access to libraries, cafeterias and computer centres, bi-national and tri-national studies, the completion of course content by external lectures, the mutual recognition of courses, as well as subsidies to the students’ public transport tickets of the partner universities (University of Freiburg 2013; EUCOR 2013).

**Comparison of the case studies**

The comparison of the two case studies shows that the two cooperations have a similar structure. However, there are more differences than similarities (see table 1).

**Table 1: Similarities and differences of the two case studies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarities</th>
<th>Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only universities involved</td>
<td>Spatial structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>Spatial orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative structure</td>
<td>Partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational structure</td>
<td>Establishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral programmes</td>
<td>Establishment approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students’ Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation of the cooperation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own illustration, Kaiserslautern, 2013

The strongest differences concern the establishment and the financing. The UniGR was established within an INTERREG project. At the beginning, the EUCOR, however, solely conducted informal meetings of the university presidents. Later they signed the EUCOR convention. Furthermore, the organization of the UniGR is based on a top-down and a bottom-up approach whereas the EUCOR only pursues the top-down approach. In EUCOR therefore all decisions are taken by the upper bodies. At the UniGR, in contrast, students and expert panels can participate and approach the university administration with suggestions.

Another difference concerns the cooperation's financing. The UniGR accessed EU funding during the project lifetime and is now dependent on other financial means such as resources from its universities. EUCOR has been funded by its universities since the beginning. Only in the last few
years additional EU funds have been requested for individual projects.

Despite the differences the cooperations show similarities in their design. The administrative structures are almost identical. There are subsidies to the students’ public transport tickets, students have an easier access to services and facilities of the partner universities and the performances of the students shall be mutually recognized. Also the organizational structures have similar elements: both university cooperations have a central secretariat, each university has contact persons, there is a council of the university presidents and students are involved in decisions by the Student’s Council.

The microsite Kaiserslautern as part of the UniGR

To get an insight into the stakeholder structures of a university cooperation, its public relations and the perception of a university cooperation by students the University of Kaiserslautern being part of the UniGR is to be investigated in depth.

Involved stakeholders

A university cooperation involves many stakeholders either from the political-administrative level or from the university level. The political-administrative level of the UniGR consists of three stakeholder groups:

- the political-administrative level of the sub-regions
- the environment of the political-administrative level
- the organizations of the Greater Region (Beck 2006).

On the political administrative level the University of Kaiserslautern involves the State Chancellery and the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture of Rhineland-Palatinate (Beck 2006). This level is further influenced by the national government, the European context concerning studies and education and the European funding schemes as ERASMUS (Beck 2006). The organizations of the Greater Region involved are the Summit of the Greater Region, the Regional Commission and the Interregional “Parlamentarierrat”.

The Summit of the Greater Region is the highest ranking form of cooperation at the political level: The governmental and administrative heads of the region come together and may set impulses for the cooperation within the Greater Region (Greater Region 2013c). Besides the Sum-
mit, the Regional Commission is another important central body in the Greater Region. It consists of various working groups e.g. the group for higher education. As a forum for comprehensive university policies it plays an important role for the UniGR (Beck 2006). The Interregional “Parlamentarierrat” gives advices on topics of cross-border cooperation and receives recommendations of the working groups (Interregionaler Parlamentarierrat 2013). On university level, the university administration, the university management, the scientific staff and the students are involved in the cooperation (Beck 2006).

The case shows that different levels with various stakeholders are involved in the establishment of a university cooperation. Besides the national government and its ministries for higher education European trends such as exchange and scholarship programmes have an impact on a university cooperation as well. In addition to the political level, the university itself plays a major role. The university administration and the university management are key participants in the establishment of a university cooperation. Only if these create attractive offers and structures the largest group of players, the students, will join the universities.

**Perception of the UniGR by students and its public relations**

To make a university cooperation perceivable it must be represented to the outside. Therefore it is crucial to pursue good public relations. In the following it is presented which public relations activities are applied by the TU Kaiserslautern. It was analysed how the UniGR is perceived by the students. Although approximately half of the students had already heard of the title “UniGR”, 70% didn’t know what the title stands for. The benefits and offers of the university cooperation were not known. In addition, even after the benefits had been explained, the majority of students (74%) was not sure to use the services in the future. This shows that there is still a great need to inform the students about the benefits of the UniGR.

However, the UniGR started various measures of public relations: the UniGR is represented on fairs and local and regional events. In Kaiserslautern it is represented on university events. In addition, there are various flyers of the UniGR and articles are published in the university journal on a regular basis. Even the local daily newspaper reports on the UniGR (Hansen, Jörg. Interview July 05, 2013).

However, although many measures have been taken, the students do not perceive the UniGR properly. Other measures need to be applied that are more effective to directly address the students.
Potentials of a university cooperation

The potentials of cross-border cooperation in higher education are diverse: The collaborations can create benefits for the research landscape and the economy of a region. Innovative research fields and developments are created, which in turn can be a competitive advantage against other regions and strengthen the local economy.

The collaboration of researchers from different fields influences the research landscape and can lead to the emergence of new research areas. In addition, interests and skills of researchers can be merged. A specialization in one or more subject areas creates a virtuous cycle of innovation within the region. Furthermore, the capacities of researchers are increased which might make it easier to get access to research grants. Additionally, the existing research facilities can be used to capacity.

Another potential can made use of in teaching and research offers: The profile of the university will be strengthened through the university cooperation. Innovative study programmes may be created so that the attractiveness of the university for regional and international students is improved. Therewith degree programmes can be used to capacity.

Researchers within a university cooperation can benefit from the possibility to establish new contacts, to initiate new projects and to mutually assist each other.

For students the potential of a university cooperation is to acquire intercultural skills to improve their language skills, to establish ties and to obtain cross-border qualifications through bi or tri-national studies.

Recommendations

Based on the current research on university cooperations and the analysis of the two case studies it can be seen that there are various factors that influence a university cooperation and vice versa. However, not all factors are influenced equally strong.

The demographic development, aging and shrinking can be influenced in a positive way by a university cooperation. To achieve this, the additional offers of the university cooperation must be so attractive that it is strongly perceived from the outside. To keep the students permanently in the region the labour market needs to be customised to the university graduates. In addition the cultural offer has to be attractive for young people.

Within a university cooperation, the location of the universities plays an important role because their position is unchangeable. Especially for the establishment of new cooperations it is important to consider the distances between the universities involved. A far distance might affect
the functionality negatively. A well-developed transport network and special pricing rates for the public transport can diminish the problems related to far distances.

Existing cooperations should pay particular attention to the financing and its public relations. A regular evaluation of the public relations can prevent undesirable developments. A secured financing is the basis for the implementation of projects. Therefore, it is important to stay informed about national and European funding opportunities.

New university cooperations need to consider more aspects. As stated above, the position of the campuses is very important. Moreover, the organization of cooperation and the administrative structures must be set. In addition, the financing should be secured.

Public relations play an important role for both, existing and new university cooperations. The university cooperation should be broadly presented, as it is important to inform as many interested parties as possible. The public relations should be applied on two levels:

1. non-university level: information events at schools, on local and regional events in public space

2. university level: Information events on the campuses, advertisement through the distribution of posters or flyers etc., information about courses at the partner universities, joint projects or seminars.

Conclusion

Cross-border university cooperations gain in importance. How these cooperations are organized differs: The spectrum covers cooperations between individual teaching areas up to a comprehensive cooperation in teaching, research and administration. As the case studies have shown, it is advantageous to set up inter-university structures such as a common student status. Especially because of the increased competition for students it can bring important benefits to the universities and the region. A strengthened university profile, unique study offers, new research fields and a positive momentum for innovation are just some of the potentials offered by a university cooperation.
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Uploads/media/Jahresbericht.pdf


Cross-border Cooperation
The Example of the German-Dutch-Belgian Border Region „Groenmetropol“

Abstract

In summer 2013, the master project at the department International Planning Systems at the University of Kaiserslautern addressed the topic of cross-border cooperation within Europe. The project’s focus were the stakeholders’ experiences and the success of the cooperation within a European cross-border region regarding joint regional development. Long-lasting opportunities for the border regions and difficulties that could arise through such types of cooperation are illustrated. In this way, possible recommendations for action for further cooperation were derived. The German-Dutch-Belgian border region project Groenmetropol defined the research area for cross-border cooperation. One aim of the master project was the evaluation and analysis of the cross-border cooperation between the German, Dutch and Belgian partners regarding the stakeholders’ and cooperation’s structure. Further aims are the analysis of general requirements to cross-border cooperation, problems and difficulties, the cooperation’s strengths and weaknesses and the stakeholders’ composition within the study area. Basis of the analysis is a comprehensive literature research regarding cross-border cooperation in general and related to the study area. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with the involved stakeholders in the course of a four-day excursion to the cross-border region in May 2013. The gained experiences were the basis for the evaluation and analysis of the cross-border cooperation. As a result, strengths and weaknesses of the cooperation are illustrated and recommendations for action can be given.

In the following, the study area “Groenmetropol” and the general results of cross-border cooperation are illustrated. Then strengths and weaknesses of the cooperation are illuminated. At the end recommendations for cross-border cooperations and the Groenmetropol are derived.

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**Introduction: The German-Dutch-Belgian border region „Groenmetropol”**

The term “Groenmetropol” is an art term that should combine the post-industrial landscapes in the German, Dutch and Belgian border region. In this sense, the Groenmetropol is not a typical geographical area. It is rather a cooperation area between German, Dutch and Belgian territories with the same geologically past. The Groenmetropol’s area was the cradle of industrialization on the European continent. In the past, this region was highly embattled due to natural resources and its central location in Europe (EUREGIONALE 2008 AGENTUR GMBH n.y.). The natural resources contributed to a prosperous economic development. Their removal left marks in the history linking the three countries and intensively shaped a cultural landscape. The “scars” of the industrial use still characterize the relief and the society of the area. They also provide new challenges to the region with the end of the industrial society (EUREGIONALE 2008 AGENTUR GMBH n.y.).

The cooperation in the Meuse–Rhine Euroregion has taken up this challenge with the working title „Groenmetropol” for creating a joint identity. The concept was developed in the context of the EuRegionale 2008 (the first cross-border promoting instrument by the regionalized structural policy of the federal state North Rhine-Westphalia) and was the winning project in a competition named “Industrielle Folgelandschaft”. An international team under the direction of the French landscape architect Henri Bava designed the concept. The concept Groenmetropol won the German price for urban development in 2006 (Deutscher Städtebaupreis) as well as the European Urban and Regional Planning Award 2008 (PROJEKT GRÜNMETROPOLE n.y.).

The concept was the basis for the INTERREG III A-Project „Industrielle Folgelandschaft” with the sub-project Groenmetropol. The region should be developed across borders and new perspectives should be created. In this way, the trinational area should remain attractive in the competition of Europe’s regions. The aims of the project Groenmetropol were the unification of the region despite linguistic and cultural differences, the promotion of a national identity and community awareness as well as the creation of impulses for a more touristic and economic future. For this purpose, a green route – for traveling by bike – and a metropolitan route – for traveling by car – were developed. They are intended to encourage residents and tourists to explore the region (PROJEKT GRÜNMETROPOLE 2013). After the end of the INTERREG funding period the project Groenmetropol continued through the INTERREG IV A-Project TIGER (Touristic Valorization of the cross-border European Region). It pursued the target to enhance the profile of the German-Dutch-Belgian border region. The funding period for TIGER ended in August 2013 (URLAUB IM HERZEN EUROPAS 2013).

On the German side, the association Grünmetropole e.V. was founded in 2009 by 14 partners of the districts Aachen, Dueren and Heinsberg. Its tasks include the elaboration of touristic services with the topics (eu-)regional culture, industrial heritage and nature. It focuses on
improving the quality of touristic infrastructure.

To conclude, different concepts, projects and collaborations can be understood under the term Groenmetropol, related to the German-Dutch-Belgian border region. In the following figure, the individual partners in the different collaborations are simplified represented.

**Principles and general requirements to cross-border cooperation**

The Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) laid down four principles for cross-border cooperation. Cross-border cooperation in European border regions should be oriented towards these principles for creating the cooperation as successful as possible: Partnership, subsidiarity, presence of a joint cross-border development concept or programme and joint structures at regional/local level as well as own sources of funding. These “principles are generally recognized and form the basic prerequisites for European support programmes” (AGEG 2000).

The *principles* of partnership and *subsidarity* refer to the sense of responsibility of regional and local stakeholders. A number of difficulties could occur due to the differences in the adminis-
tration and the skills. Partners taking the initiative can overcome these difficulties. Strengthening the local instances and the lower levels should have priority. At this level, the necessary flexibility is available and a quicker reaction to local circumstances is possible (AGEG 2008). Furthermore, joint concepts and strategies have to take account of existing national and European programmes and plans. Thus far, these were developed on the legal basis of agreement and application contracts.

The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) is a European instrument to simplify and promote cross-border cooperation. In this way, partners within the EU are equipped with an own legal personality and are capable of acting. Accordingly, an EGTC is subject to the law of the member state where it is based (BUNDESMINISTERIUM FÜR WIRTSCHAFT UND TECHNOLOGIE 2013). Difficulties in cross-border cooperation structures are often different systems that have to be coordinated and managed. Thus, creating a permanent cross-border quorum organizational structure is from significant importance (AGEG 2000). On the one hand, they can be oriented to a specific case. On the other hand, they can affect a durable strategic and developmental cooperation. At the beginning of a cross-border cooperation, particular initiatives are often depending on individuals. A long-term strategic cooperation for the development of a border region requires a detailed analysis of the area and the development of joint visions, goals, priorities and fields of action in each case. The naming of the strategy should also not be underestimated. The identification of the citizens with the projects is carried out by the naming of the cooperation (AGEG 2000).

Certain hierarchies must be clearly defined and cooperative control forms must be selected to cooperate across borders despite legal difficulties and the informal character (e.g., cross-border governance). Thereby, the EU acts on the principle of multi-level governance. It is the “coordinated, partnership-based approach of the Union, the member states and the regional and local authorities for the elaboration and implementation of policies of the European Union” (ADR 2009). A cross-border programme management is necessary to bundle threads. The implementation of the individual projects should be the task of the individual partners, who are already active with their professional knowledge on each side of the border (AGEG 2000). Material resources take on a particularly important role. Through the tight government budgets, the financial aspect is of great significance for the cooperation with other municipalities and higher levels. In border regions, cooperation is an important mean to pool resources for the development due to the acquisition of EU subsidies and national programmes. “In some cases, the joint goals of cross-border activities are only limited to the acquisition of European subsidies” (KNIPPSCHILD 2008). In addition to legal, institutional and material requirements for cross-border cooperation, the stakeholders’ constellation plays an important role. In particular, the personal trust between and among the stakeholders is essential (KNIPPSCHILD 2008). The motivation of cooperation of each partner is also of signifi-
cant importance, as the participation in the process is mostly voluntary. It is also crucial to find a consensus on the stakeholders’ goals and interests. In cross-border cooperation, this is more difficult due to the lack of language skills and to the wide thematic framework (KNIPPSCHILD 2008).

**Strengths and weaknesses of the cooperation**

Commenting on the principles and general requirements should have given a rough overview on the aspects that impact cross-border cooperation. In the following it shall be clarified to what extent these theoretical approaches were implemented in the Groenmetropol-cooperation. First, assumptions that were considered to lead to a successful cooperation were formulated. Then it was figured out if those assumptions were implemented in the Groenmetropol with the help of interviews. The one-on-one interviews were conducted with representatives of the district administration Dueren (D), the Kathy Beys Stiftung (D), the district of Aachen (D) and Parkstad Limburg (NL) as well as with a representative of VVV Zuid Limburg (NL). A paper-and-pencil interview was conducted with a representative of the German-speaking community of Belgium (B). The results of the interviews and the comparison with the adopted assumptions lead to an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the cross-border cooperation.

Regularly scheduled meetings are positive aspects regarding the internal cooperation in the INTERREG-projects Groenmetropol and TIGER. According to statements of the interviewees, all stakeholders have attended the meetings. Thus, communication plays an important role, as it is one of the most significant elements of cross-border cooperation. However, personnel changes often took place in the steering committee. This generally disrupted the flow of information.

Compared to border regions between two nations, three languages are spoken in the border triangle between Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. Dialects in South-Limburg and in North Rhine-Westphalia are similar which makes communication easier between German and Dutch partners. However, communicating with partners from Belgium is more difficult because of language barriers. Besides, Belgium itself is divided into three language areas (French, Dutch, German). Especially in the first months of the cooperation activities, language differences led to communication problems between the stakeholders. Fortunately, these problems could be solved with introducing English as intermediary working language in all meetings.

The motivation for cross-border cooperation is generally evaluated to be high due to voluntary participation in project activities. The possibility of funding from the EU within the context of INTERREG is a reason for a voluntary participation in the cooperation. All stakeholders agreed that the cooperation could not have been realized without the funding of the EU. In this way, the
acquisition of funding may be regarded both as strength and as weakness of the cooperation. Investing in the development of the trinational border region was feasible within the INTERREG programme. It would not have been possible to this extent without the EU funds. By this also small municipalities have the opportunity to implement measures that they cannot manage alone. However, the eligibility criteria to receive EU funds are very strict. The billing of the funding is also an additional time exposure and amount of work, especially for the lead partner.

In the INTERREG III A-Project Groenmetropol as well as in the INTERREG IV A-Project TIGER stakeholders of different organizational forms cooperated or cooperate. This can be a weakness of cooperation. Especially the different levels of formalization in German, Dutch and Belgian administrations are problematic, as the ways of working within the administrations may differ widely. For example, the level of formalization and therefore the preparation time for a project in the German administrations is higher than in the Dutch administrations. In this way, temporal disputes can arise. This leads to misunderstandings between the stakeholders and adversely affects the building trust. There are not only differences regarding the way of working between the authorities of different countries – also between administrations and other organizational forms, such as the cooperating foundations and associations. Additionally, the financial risk of organizations is generally higher, as they invest their private funds in the cooperation. Thus, they have a more economical way of thinking. However, the participation of the different organized stakeholders in cross-border projects can be considered as positive. Rigid thinking can possibly be avoided and an exchange of know-how occurs. Administrations give the cooperation certain stability and an official character. Foundations and associations encourage a faster implementation of project ideas.

Another negative aspect is that an agreement on a few specifically formulated objectives is difficult as there are many different organized stakeholders from various sectors. A variety of interests must be taken into account and each stakeholder wants to feel taken seriously. The stakeholders in the tourism business pursue clear touristic objectives for the cooperation area. The administrations and even the sustainability-oriented Kathy Beys Stiftung pursue multiple goals that are not necessarily driven by the touristic valorisation of the border region. The cooperation in the purely touristic-oriented INTERREG project TIGER is therefore more promising. The ambition at the beginning is clearly defined and the expectations of the individual stakeholders are rather met than in wide range projects like the predecessor project Groenmetropol. In the latter case, especially the main focus on tourism during the project could pose a problem, although the concept Groenmetropol provided the implementation of other measures, too. For the project Groenmetropol, a long-lasting notice by the policy would also be important, as sustainable changes cannot be obtained within a period of three to four years. In retrospect, all the stakeholders do not consider the project as successful in the light of the promising concept. For example, the
designated creation of a transnational identity for the region and the increase of the level of awareness at international level are aims of the concept. So far, these aims are only partially successful (EUREGIONALE 2008 AGENTUR GMBH n.y.).

During the excursion, the students spontaneously approached and asked some citizens of Aachen, what they associate with the term “Groenmetropol”. None of the interviewed persons had heard the term before, although all of them live in the region. A reason for this aspect can be that the term “Groenmetropol” misses a geographical localization due to cooperation activities. In this way, the term is difficult to grasp for the residents of the border region and other stakeholders.

The cooperation activities only have sustainable benefits, if they are further pursued or replaced by suitable successor structures after the end of funding. Within the Groenmetropol this worked out successfully – at least for the development of the tourism sector in the form of the INTERREG IV A- follow-up project TIGER. In August 2013, the funding for TIGER ended and a successor structure is to be established. This implies a good cooperation of the partners and the willingness to advance the region jointly and across borders. During the period of the excursion (May 2013), no suitable organizational form for the successor structure was constituted. Yet, conversations between the stakeholders already took place. The funding of eventual follow-up projects, which are not co-financed by the EU anymore, needs to be secured. In the long term, a successful implemented project changes practically nothing, if the cooperation ends with the expiration of the funding. However, the issue of funding still remains open for the stakeholders and could not be resolved conclusively.

An advantage of the cooperation is that some stakeholders like the Aachen district, the Parkstad Limburg and the tourist association Toerisme Limburg had worked together on the project TIGER before. Because of this long-term cooperation the stakeholders trust each other and existing contacts can be intensified within the “Groenmetropol”-cooperation.

However, there is no leading institution being responsible for marketing or for grouping activities together. Besides, marketing activities could not be realized so far due to limited finances. The already existing “Groenmetropol” logo is not printed in all of the information brochures, although this would be important to establish a corporate identity.

Due to the lack of an evaluation a final conclusion concerning all aspects of the project cannot be made. Nevertheless, some strengths and weaknesses of the cooperation can be listed (see table 1).
### Table 1: Strengths and weaknesses of the Groenmetropol cooperation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+ Exchange of knowledge between different organizations (e.g. foundations, associations, administrations)</td>
<td>- Different levels of formalization  &lt;br&gt;- Different working methods  &lt;br&gt;- Stakeholders have individual interests and objectives  &lt;br&gt;- Consensus has to be found  &lt;br&gt;- Dependent on political decisions  &lt;br&gt;- Politics only show short-term interest in cooperation activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ No problems in communication with South Limburg because of similar dialect</td>
<td>- Language- and understanding problems with partners from Belgium  &lt;br&gt;- No evaluation of projects so far  &lt;br&gt;- „Groenmetropol” is only a concept without concrete localization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Financial support for INTERREG-projects</td>
<td>- Financing of projects at the end of the funding period is not secured  &lt;br&gt;- Realization within the projects not successful in all aspects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Stakeholders of TIGER and “Groenmetropol” projects meet frequently and are motivated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Concept of the “Groenmetropol” is a good vision for the region</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Intensification of contacts through cooperation activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Stakeholders want to cooperate after the current funding period</td>
<td>- No consensus about how to continue after the end of the funding  &lt;br&gt;- Cooperation does not involve companies, scientific institutions and citizens as stakeholders  &lt;br&gt;- Expectations of some stakeholders are too high  &lt;br&gt;- Some stakeholders can’t identify with the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Good opportunity for small municipalities to take measures with the help of their partners</td>
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</table>

Source: Own illustration, Kaiserslautern, 2013.
Recommendations for cross-border cooperations

Establishing long-term structures
Stable cooperation structures have to be created to achieve sustained access with the projects. The stakeholders have to enter into dialogue with politicians. It is important that projects do not end with the funding period and are continued over a longer period. Small local associations should be integrated in the activities of the cross-border cooperation and new partners on both sides of the border should be engaged. Besides, public participation should be a part of the project.

Stakeholders should meet frequently to strengthen their relationship and therefore improve the cooperation. There should also be a manager coordinating all activities within the cooperation and being a contact person for the stakeholders.

Clearly defined project aims for a long-term participation and motivation of the stakeholders
For a long-term participation of the stakeholders it is important to define clear objectives, which are identified from the very beginning of the cooperation. Those goals shouldn't be changed during the cooperation. Apart from that, there should not be too many goals at one time, but measures that are easy to understand and to realize. Stakeholders should only cooperate if they have the same vision and want to solve problems together.

Common structures support cross-border cooperation
Common structures should be created in order to achieve comparability between the different cooperation activities and to evaluate the success of cross-border cooperation.

This also makes it easier to create the legal and institutional framework for the cooperation. For example, this could be attained by establishing an EGTC and a regional management. The Grünmetropole e.V. could also be integrated in the Samenwerkende VVV’s Limburg (SVL) which unites all tourism associations in Limburg. Thus the “Groenmetropol” could be marketed on a national and international level.

The additional value of the cooperation must be clear for all stakeholders
As the stakeholders have different aims and interests, a consensus concerning the strategy and the objectives of the cooperation has to be reached. An impartial moderator accepted by all stakeholders should lead the project meetings. In this way, the goals and interests of all stakeholders are considered equally, notwithstanding their size or organizational form.
Planning long-term project funding

The cross-border cooperation is supported by INTERREG only for a limited period of time. Therefore it is important to assure the long-term funding of projects right from the start and to work on a strategy to finance cooperation activities after the end of funding. The cooperation should use alternative ways of financing to be not entirely dependent on EU funding. One way in the Groenmetropol case could be the marketing of cycling and trekking maps, information brochures or regional products. Donations and membership contributions could be a source of income, too. After the end of INTERREG funding the stakeholders should intend to collaborate with private companies and try to gain sponsorships for cross-border projects.

A common working language promotes trust

English as the universal language is an adequate working language for the meetings. It is easier to avoid misunderstandings, if everyone speaks the same language and if there is bilingual staff. An interpreter implies additional expenses.

Realizing the “Groenmetropol”

The term “Groenmetropol” should be established in the whole border region. However, the “Groenmetropol” should not only remain a conceptional term. It should represent a defined area. Currently the residents cannot identify themselves with the “Groenmetropol”. Promoting the cross-border cooperation through information brochures and newspaper articles, advertising the results of the cooperation and providing measures of participation can help to strengthen the citizens’ identification. Another important point is the placing of the “Groenmetropol”-logo on brochures, information signs and regional products as an element of connectivity.

Conclusion

In total, strengths as well as weaknesses could be noted in the cross-border cooperation. One of the strengths is the common concept for the area of interest. This concept serves as a basis for further projects, for the acquisition of funds and for the motivation of the stakeholders. Weaknesses noted are the different interests and goals of the stakeholders as well as linguistic barriers. Furthermore, not all aspects of the concept could be realized as planned in the beginning and therefore not all expectations were satisfied.

For a long-term success of the cross-border cooperation, well-defined project-aims are important. Otherwise, stakeholders might not be interested in participating in the cooperation over a longer period. The projects should be evaluated from time to time to show the success and the
added value of the cooperation.

Even if there are still some weaknesses, the cooperation between German, Dutch and Belgian stakeholders is important for the border region and the project’s development has been promising so far. However, it should be pointed out that theoretical requirements are not always easy to realize. The existing structures have to be strengthened and the cooperation has to be continued. Against the background of globalization, it is important to create strong and attractive European regions and to compensate for disadvantages often caused by the peripheral position of the border-regions.
Bibliography


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