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Outlook: Border Futures – On the path to a sustainable future for border regions

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OUTLOOK: BORDER FUTURES – ON THE PATH TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR THE BORDER REGIONS

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Abstract

This outlook summarises the key findings of the Subsection and discusses them in the context of obstacles and opportunities as well as the future viability of cross-border cooperation.

Keywords

Cross-border cooperation – border regions – spatial development

1 Findings from the previous papers: What lessons can we learn from cross-border observation and analysis?

Part 1 described the foundations of cross-border cooperation, with the paper by Beate Caesar and Karina Pallagst initially outlining differences and similarities in the development paths of cross-border cooperation. This enabled placing the current framework conditions and contemporary developments in the border regions under consideration in a region-specific context. A short portrait of the Greater Region and the Upper Rhine region – both of which fall within the territorial remit of the Hesse/Rhineland-Palatinate/Saarland Regional Working Group – was provided by Andrea Hartz and Beate Caesar. Despite their spatial proximity and comparable starting point, the differences in territorial structure, institutional set-up and future prospects become clear.

The paper by Karina Pallagst/H. Peter Dörrenbächer/Thomas Weith looked at how cross-border cooperation is shaping up as a field of application for European spatial development. The current discourses on the requirements of European integration, new regionalism and the reorientation of governance structures in border regions offer different approaches and a new impetus for cross-border cooperation overall.

Finally, Gerd-Rainer Damm's paper explored the challenges of cross-border cooperation. Empirical evidence (interviews with relevant actors) revealed that successful cooperation across the border is largely driven by the self-motivation of the stakeholders involved. The survey reveals that cooperation is stagnating in some fields of action of cross-border cooperation, which suggests that there is a need for strengthening governance in the border regions. This could be achieved by improving personnel continuity, continuing training for specific fields of cross-border cooperation and making the exchange of information and experience more consistent and constant.

Part 2 addressed strategies of cross-border cooperation in an integrative spatial view. The paper by Karina Pallagst and Beate Hartz demonstrated that spatial planning in the national sub-regions of border regions is organised in quite different ways, and not merely in regard to the normative foundations and types of plans, but also in regard to values, paradigms and planning cultures. Border regions are, however, always decisive for the emergence of new spatial planning strategies up to the creation of new spatial development instruments – both in a national and cross-border context. For example, the spatial category of metropolitan border regions was introduced in Germany as part of the guiding principles for spatial development. Cross-border development strategies also offer approaches for a genuinely cross-border discourse in regard to spatial planning. In some cases, new spatial types and instruments are being created, which results in border regions emerging as laboratories for cross-border spatial planning. The existing diversity, or perhaps even fragmentation of the instruments (at the national and cross-border level) creates particular complexity for cross-border spatial planning, which makes it difficult rather than easier to pursue a future-oriented approach to shaping these areas.

The paper by Andrea Hartz sets out the opportunities offered by the concept of metropolitan border regions, which provides decisive stimuli for both the Greater

Region and the Upper Rhine region: the concept can contribute to adapting cooperation structures and spatial development to the needs of an increasingly interconnected world, a converging Europe and increasing competition between regions. Nevertheless, the metropolisation strategies in border regions come up against substantial structural and political obstacles. It remains unclear how successful the implementation of the guiding principle of a metropolitan border region will be, and what added value this process will bring to the different (national) sub-regions. This will not succeed without broad-based political support, proactive implementation of key measures as part of metropolisation strategies and the bold further development of existing cooperation structures.

Petra Schelkmann's paper describes the development and status quo of the metropolisation strategy of the Greater Region as a highly complex political process which must navigate the tensions between large-scale regionalisation, pronounced polycentricity and region-specific multi-level governance.

Part 3 focused on the residents of border areas and examined the different ways of life in the border areas.

The paper by Antje Schönwald, Annette Spellerberg and Florian Weber adopted a theory-led approach to constructs and concepts of borders, identities and home in a cross-border context. National borders become 'blurred' to some extent, as border crossings between France, Germany, Luxembourg and Belgium are part of everyday life in many areas. On the other hand, borders tend to be remarkably persistent – whether in people's minds or on an administrative level.

The paper by Annette Spellerberg/Antje Schönwald/Katharina Engelhardt/Florian Weber raised a provocative question about life at the border and thus opening and crossing borders: 'Where would we end up?' Empirical surveys in twin villages testify to everyday activities and events that are characterised by pragmatism and multiculturalism. The border 'as such' is hardly perceptible anymore: residents rather appreciate the advantages provided by the border location and the specific opportunities available on both sides of the border. Both old and new challenges arise in connection with crime prevention, demographic change or language.

The paper by Christian Wille and Ursula Roos examined cross-border life on the Luxembourg border. The empirical study, based on the example of cross-border commuters and residential migrants, showed that residents along the Luxembourg border certainly do live what can be described as cross-border lives. Within the research area, the everyday activities of border area residents tend to attenuate the impact of internal European borders. It is true that latent spatial fragmentation persists and is perpetuated by systemic national differences (taxes, residential land prices, etc.). Yet, precisely these differences – motivated by individuals striving to maximise their benefits – are conducive to a truly cross-border way of life.

Finally, **Part 4** was devoted to current fields of action in regard to cross-border cooperation.

The paper by Frank Baur and Barbara Dröschel illuminated cross-border cooperation in regard to energy, describing the approaches to action and projects for the area of the Greater Region to date. Action is needed in the development of support structures, including a platform for the exchange of information and experience, and in the creation of networks, which should also be reinforced through additional personnel. It also calls for the development of research excellence in the fields of energy/climate protection.

The paper by Beate Caesar/Michael Heilmann/Jörg Saalbach/Werner Schreiner looked at the expansion of cross-border public transport with special attention to the framework established by EU policy. The consideration of various cross-border transport projects reveals how closely transport development is interwoven with other aspects of cross-border cooperation, e.g. the labour market, commuting or local services. Transport infrastructure acts as a ‘cross-border link’ between these fields of action and is thus one of the key policies of cross-border cooperation.

Jörg Saalbach’s paper described not cross-border cooperation, but rather interregional cooperation in the Rhine-Alpine Corridor. This large-scale cooperation area extending from the Rhine delta on the North Sea to Genoa was initiated by an INTERREG B project. In a thus far unique dimension in Europe, the stakeholders have chosen the framework of an EGTC to organise their cooperation. The relations between the various constellations of stakeholders can be highly charged, hence this is a very complex process, but also a highly interesting laboratory for transnational and cross-border cooperation.

The paper by Kirsten Mangels and Julia Wohland focused on safeguarding the provision of public services in the rural sub-regions of the Greater Region. Demographic change and the associated shrinking and ageing of the population present a major challenge, especially for rural border areas. Safeguarding the provision of public services collides with the specific requirements and needs in these border regions. The empirical study highlighted the obstacles, in particular due to language barriers and different national laws, regulations and powers, for example in the healthcare sector, but also success stories and the opportunities of cross-border approaches to safeguarding public service provision.

H. Peter Dörrenbächer’s paper raised the question of the extent to which a cross-border vocational education and training area has been able to develop in the Greater Region. The significance of cross-border education and training has increased considerably in recent years; various framework agreements support new, pragmatic forms of cooperation. However, due to the enormous hurdles for cross-border vocational education and training and the small number of trainees affected, the region cannot yet be described as a cross-border vocational education and training area. Future changes, for example through territorial reform in France, suggest that new impulses are emerging here, but there are few indications that a cross-border educational region will evolve.

The contribution by Patrice Harster and Frédéric Siebenhaar looked at the cross-border labour market in the Eurodistrict PAMINA. A comprehensive strategic ap-

proach is being taken in this regard, which is to lead to a joint action plan. A key consideration in this regard is the organisation of the dynamic network structures typical of the labour market and the insufficiency of the usual hierarchical governance and policy mechanisms, when vigorous multi-level governance is required instead.

Franz Schafranski's paper looked at cultural heritage and cultural tourism as a resource for the development of the rural border areas of the Greater Region and the Upper Rhine region. This development is deemed desirable and is encouraged by European institutions, although only rudimentary spatial strategies and concrete concepts have been put in place to date.

2 Obstacles and opportunities in cross-border cooperation: Where do we stand?

The **obstacles and opportunities** of cross-border cooperation have been addressed in all the papers in this volume, albeit from different angles. However, fundamental aspects that are not new but are still essential for the success of cooperation processes in border regions serve as a common thread.

One of these is the fundamental issue of **language**, which is crucial for political and planning coordination and decision-making processes. The language skills of the actors involved vary widely; multilingualism cannot be readily assumed. Especially in official cooperation processes, participants often rely on costly simultaneous translations, which are not available for informal discussions. This makes it difficult to develop political and planning routines to deal with complex issues, procedures or even conflict situations.

Another key aspect lies in the different **planning cultures**. According to Knieling and Othengrafen (2009: 43), planning culture refers to 'the way in which a society possesses institutionalised or shared planning practices. It refers to the interpretation of planning tasks, the way of recognising and addressing problems, the handling and use of certain rules, procedures and instruments, or ways and methods of public participation. It emerges as the result of the accumulated attitudes, values, rules, standards and beliefs shared by the group of people involved. This includes informal aspects (traditions, habits and customs) as well as formal aspects (constitutional and legal framework)'. Especially in the cross-border context, different normative regulations, policies, strategies and plans, but also values and philosophies of planning come into play. Since no change is foreseeable in the future due to the national regulatory powers for spatial planning, the exchange of knowledge on different planning policies, processes and instruments will be a core competence in cross-border cooperation in the long run. The more systematically such processes can be designed and the better they reach and involve key political, economic and social actors, the greater their chances of succeeding.

Especially in cross-border cooperation at the level of the Greater Region or the Upper Rhine region, different forms of **governance** and their dislocations and fault lines are manifested at the interfaces between supra-local and municipal actors. In addition,

variable geometries of administrative and functional units are created within border regions, which can overlap spatially and sometimes work on similar tasks (e.g. regional development strategies). On the one hand, the subsidiarity of the levels and the allocation of responsibilities between them must be defined more clearly; on the other hand, it is important for the respective committees and organisations to avoid the appearance of being ‘closed shops’, including with regard to the efficiency of planning processes. In order to achieve vigorous multi-level governance, the challenge of ensuring communication and coordination at different levels and creating the necessary interfaces should be taken up. This could help to steer the use of resources, the exchange of planning know-how and also conceptual development in a more targeted and participatory manner.

Some of the papers in this volume have highlighted the crucial role of **INTERREG funding** in the development of cross-border cooperation and projects in recent decades. However, it should not be overlooked that INTERREG, or more recently, European Territorial Cooperation, even if it follows the implementation of a programmatic structure, is based on an incrementalist approach, which usually supports individual projects. It is therefore not primarily aimed at cross-sectional, coherent and inclusive spatial development in the border regions. In addition, spatial development concepts (regional development concepts, visions) are often elaborated, but these remain informal and therefore non-binding for all spatial stakeholders in the border regions. Concrete implementation is often stalled due to political coordination processes, national priorities or a lack of resources. In the interests of ensuring the capacity of spatial planning to act, the project and concept level need to be significantly better interlinked in order to take into account the claim of wanting to work in a cross-sectional, inclusive manner. In addition, spatial impact assessments of the individual programmes and measures would be desirable, as well as long-term qualitative and quantitative spatial observation.

Metropolitan border regions are now recognised as a spatial category. However, whether they are shaped in a manner that is viable in future is subject to considerable debate, especially because metropolitan border regions are not homogeneous areas, but generally regions with pronounced spatial disparities. There is still need for further research, e.g. with regard to the use of planning instruments (spatial observation, development strategies, etc.) and also the operationalisation of the principle of equivalent living conditions, which is an important planning paradigm for Germany. There is a growing need for discussions that can navigate the tension between safeguarding the provision of public services in rural sub-regions, on the one hand, and the need to structure and shape the metropolitan core area on the other. Polarisation would not be constructive here, but the implementation of the concept of metropolitan border regions requires a clear prioritisation.

The question of how the **spatial dimension of the region** affects the conduct and shaping of cross-border cooperation also arises in this context – especially in the case of the Greater Region, where the region’s large territory was created based on national administrative boundaries. Since this means that the impact of the border area is not equally evident in all sub-regions, this aspect must be given greater consideration. In principle, there are two options: an examination of the entire area

in all spatially relevant aspects and processes, or a more detailed study in core zones of cross-border cooperation for selected strategies. With regard to the cross-border regional development strategy for the Greater Region, for example, after extensive discussions on the best approach, a political consensus has been reached to establish the strategy for the entire region. There is still need for further discussion on how to proceed in core zones: Who defines these core zones, and how can cross-border cooperation proceed at different speeds without neglecting the potential development of other areas?

3 The future viability of cross-border cooperation: What action is required?

The potential, new and well-known opportunities and obstacles to cross-border cooperation were described and critically examined in the previous papers on the basis of selected areas. With regard to the future prospects for border regions, three fundamental aspects can be derived from these different perspectives, which should be taken into account at all levels by the stakeholders from the fields of science, everyday practice and politics for the sustainable development of cooperation within border regions. These aspects are listed below and shown schematically in Figure 1.

3.1 The need for resources ('support')

The role of financial support through the INTERREG Community Initiative has emerged as an important resource and often as a driving force for cross-border cooperation. Continued INTERREG support is therefore essential to ensure intensive cooperation in border areas in future. This would include a long-term commitment on the part of the EU to create a perspective for cooperation in border areas beyond the period of the programme.

However, human resources are also crucial for the efficient implementation of cross-border cooperation. Two trends are emerging in this regard: the smaller the territorial unit, the fewer human resources are available for day-to-day spatial planning tasks to actively contribute to shaping the spatial development of the border regions. Cross-border cooperation is often driven decisively by individuals, who are able to ensure continuity and actively act as catalysts within the networks and processes of cross-border cooperation. As key figures, they have shaped the respective border regions significantly over many years. This continuity on the personnel side is certainly a factor for success.

The establishment of reliable human resources at all levels of spatial planning and for all territorial units should be an important concern and should also be a fundamental consideration independently of INTERREG projects. Equipping cross-border structures and work areas with their own budgets is a sensible way to enhance professionalisation and to ensure that cross-border cooperation is more consistent and constant.

3.2 Focusing on critical points of development (‘bottlenecks’)

Despite a tradition of cross-border cooperation spanning decades, significant cross-border developments, including in rail-based mobility, have not been decisively advanced. In fact, it appears that cooperation was advanced and promoted over many years, in particular in supposedly non-critical areas of cooperation, such as culture or tourism. This was doubtless necessary in order to test cooperation structures and processes and demonstrate successes that could pave the way for projects with more complex needs for coordination. The discussions within the Border Futures Subsection of the Regional Working Group, as well as in the 2015 Planners’ Forum of the Regional Working Group, led to the repeated demand and expectation – expressed from different professional perspectives – that the time had now come to address key problems and critical points. Addressing the existing bottlenecks, which are the key obstacle to integrated spatial development, would represent the next dimension of cross-border cooperation.

3.3 Allowing new ways of thinking and innovating (‘innovation’)

Since there is consensus that cross-border cooperation requires a financial and human foundation, and although, at the same time, there is a substantial body of experience and success in cross-border cooperation in spatial planning gained over many years, it nevertheless seems necessary not to dwell on traditional structures and patterns of thought. The emphasis should rather be on the role of sustainable border regions as laboratories of innovation for spatial developments, planning and strategies. For example, how can useful examples be conveyed systematically to other border areas? How can innovative solutions and new concepts and ideas be made to work, e.g. in the context of ‘metropolitan border regions’? These and other questions make border regions a future-oriented focus area for spatial science research and practice. From the point of view of the Border Futures Subsection of the Regional Working Group, border regions are particularly suitable for establishing laboratories for comparative approaches and integrative strategies of spatial planning that ‘work’ independently of or in addition to the respective national logic. In these discursive learning processes for spatial planning and spatial development, cross-border responses to changing framework conditions can be interlinked with intercultural discourses.

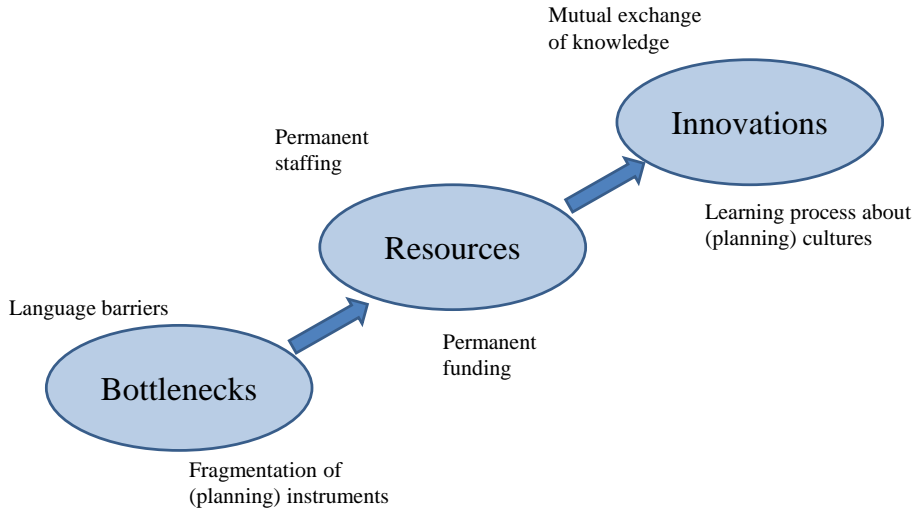


Fig. 1: Diagram of the obstacles and opportunities in cross-border cooperation /Source: The authors

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