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A short profile of the Greater Region and the Upper Rhine region

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A SHORT PROFILE OF THE GREATER REGION AND THE UPPER RHINE REGION

Contents

- 1 Introduction
 - 2 A short profile of the Greater Region
 - 3 A short profile of the Upper Rhine region
 - 4 Outlook
- References

Abstract

The institutionalisation of border regions has a long history. Initial forms of cooperation usually emerged in relation to a specific event. The 1970s were decisive for the emergence of cross-border organisations in both the Greater Region and the Upper Rhine region. Over the decades the structures were consolidated, although regionally specific adaptations and developments continue both on a conceptual and practical level. The European INTERREG A programme has played a significant role in improving cross-border cooperation, and INTERREG continues to be an important factor in the implementation of cross-border projects. Efforts to further develop the institutional framework and cooperation structures in recent years demonstrate that there are still many challenges but also unexploited potential in the Greater Region and the Upper Rhine region.

Keywords

Greater Region – Upper Rhine region – cross-border cooperation – institutionalisation – INTERREG

1 Introduction

This volume of papers focuses on cross-border cooperation within the territorial remit of the Hesse/Rhineland-Palatinate/Saarland Regional Working Group at the Academy for Territorial Development. Two border regions with a long tradition of cross-border institutional cooperation, which are funded in the framework of the territorial cooperation of the EU, form part of the Regional Working Group's territory: the Greater Region¹ and the Upper Rhine region² (see Fig. 1). The two regions are briefly described below.

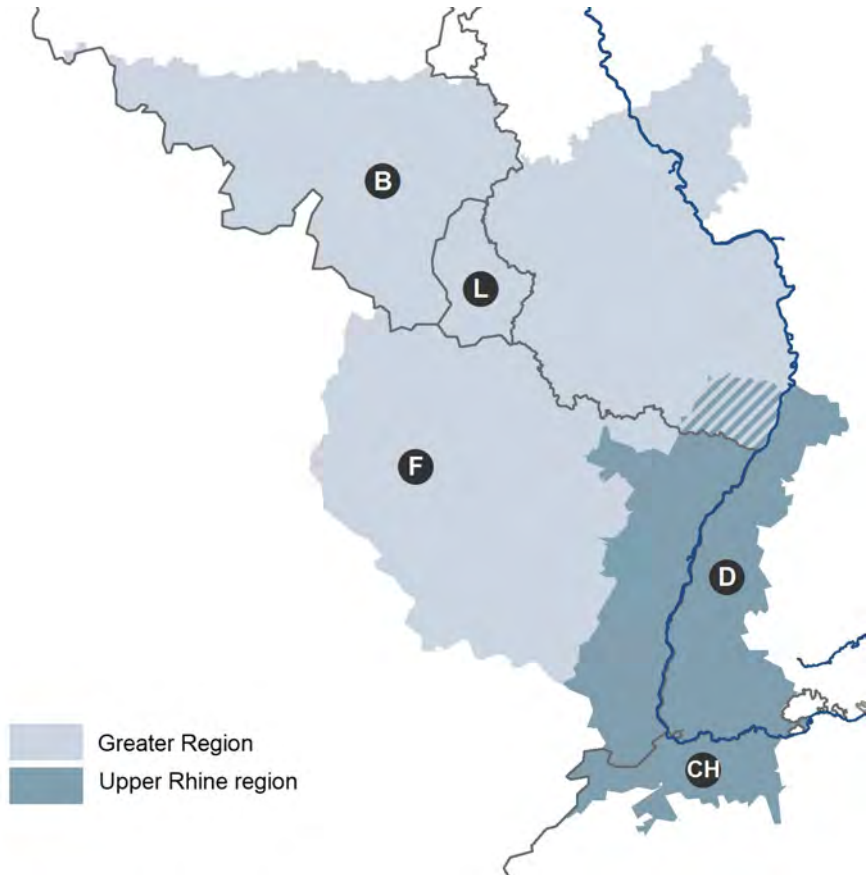


Fig. 1: The Greater Region and the Upper Rhine region within their territorial boundaries /Source: The authors

1 The 'Greater Region' is an abbreviation which stands for 'Großregion Saarland – Lorraine – Luxemburg – Rheinland-Pfalz – Région Wallonne – Communauté Française de Belgique und Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft Belgiens' (official designation) [translated as Greater Region Saarland – Lorraine – Luxembourg – Rhineland-Palatinate – Walloon Region – the French Community of Belgium and the German-speaking Community of Belgium].

2 In addition, the southern sub-regions of the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion overlap with the northern area of the Greater Region within the boundaries of the Regional Working Group.

2 A short profile of the Greater Region

The Greater Region (French: *la Grande Région*, German: *Großregion*) is the further development of the SaarLorLux+ cooperation area and is located in the four-nations border area formed by Germany, France, Luxembourg and Belgium, embedded in an economically thriving European area between the European metropolitan regions and metropolitan areas of Brussels, Rhine-Ruhr, Rhine-Main, Rhine-Neckar, Basel/Mulhouse and Paris (see Fig. 2). It is a region with a turbulent history. Over the past two centuries, the military conflicts alone often gave rise to shifting national borders in the region. The Lorraine territories, for example, were annexed by Germany post-1871, while the Saarland fell under French control several times, including after the Second World War.

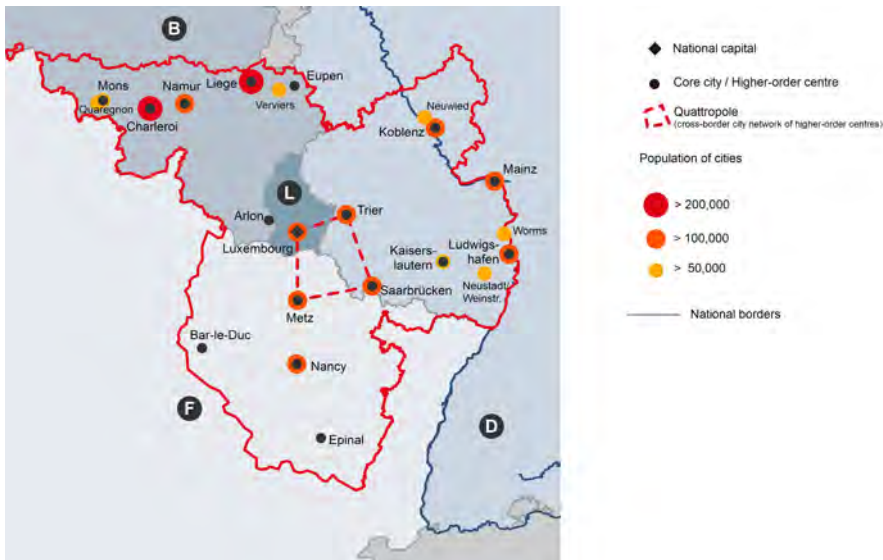


Fig. 2: The Greater Region and its urban system / Source: BMVBS (Federal Ministry of Transport, Construction and Urban Development) (2011), the authors' own illustration (modified)

Basic information about the Greater Region

The Greater Region consists of the German federal states of Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland, the French region of Lorraine (which is now, after the French territorial reform, a sub-region of the new French Grand Est region), the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the Walloon Region in Belgium and the German-speaking Community of Belgium. It spans a total area of 65,401 km², making it one of the largest border regions in the EU. In 2013, the region had a population of 11.4 million; the average population density was 175 inhabitants/km². The population is, however, spread very unevenly across the territory: the population density varies from 2,000 inhabitants/km² in the densely populated metropolitan areas, e.g. along the Rhine corridor in Rhineland-Palatinate or in the northern part of Wallonia, to around 400 inhabitants/km² in Saarland or even below 30 inhabitants/km² in sparsely populated regions in

Lorraine (GeoPortal of the Greater Region 2013). The outlook for the future development of the population is similar (Saarland Ministry for Finance and Europe 2014: 8 et seq.): According to the current population forecasts, the population of the Greater Region will continue to show an overall positive trend until 2030. Different development dynamics are, however, to be expected for the respective sub-regions. While a continued declining trend in population is expected for Saarland, Wallonia and the German-speaking Community of Belgium show signs of slight growth. For Luxembourg, an increase of 23% is projected. Rhineland-Palatinate expects a slight decline or stagnation in population, while a slight growth or stagnation is forecast for Lorraine. At the same time, the shift in the age structure will continue with a smaller cohort of young people (under 20) and an increasingly older population (over 60) in the Greater Region and in all its sub-regions. The same is also true of the working age population: It is expected that by 2030, only 48% of the population in the Greater Region will be in this cohort of 20 to 59 year-olds. Luxembourg, Lorraine and Wallonia, for which population growth is projected, are above average, while for Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland, which is experiencing a population decline, and the German-speaking Community of Belgium, the forecast value in 2030 is only 46%.

The region has a distinctively polycentric structure (Interregional Labour Market Observatory 2014: 7): the centres – Luxembourg-Ville, Liège, Charleroi, Namur, Mons, Metz, Nancy, Trier, Saarbrücken, Kaiserslautern, Mainz, Ludwigshafen and Koblenz – characterise the agglomeration areas, which partly extend across national borders and are closely enmeshed. They are surrounded by rural, sparsely populated areas with several nature parks. The City of Luxembourg, as a national capital, has a prominent status in the Greater Region, especially due to its economic significance and its European relevance as the seat of several European institutions. ‘Within the areas of the Greater Region, each partner is solely responsible for the organisation of their spatial and settlement structure. Using the respective spatial planning instruments and plans at the national level and the federal state level, the central-place functions and development areas are defined with due respect for the corresponding political and legislative powers of each partner’ (GeoPortal of the Greater Region 2012).

There is a high level of mobility across the national borders: the economy is tightly interwoven, and the commuter flows are at a peak – with more than 213,400 inter-regional cross-border workers – in a European comparison (Interregional Labour Market Observatory 2014: 10) (see also the paper by Wille and Roos in this volume). 160,000 people alone commute regularly for work purposes to Luxembourg and back (cf. WSAGR [Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region] 2014: 79). In addition, there are very close functional interactions in the fields of education and research (Summit of the Greater Region 2016). In the field of tourism, the Greater Region is jointly promoted by the sub-regions (Greater Region Tourism 2017).

Since the 1960s, multifaceted cross-border cooperation in regard to the economy, society and politics has evolved, which will continue to be expanded.

Cross-border cooperation and institutionalisation

An initial trigger for cooperation was the common economic upswing in mining and in the iron and steel industry, but especially the subsequent economic decline of the coal and steel industry in the border region. These common challenges necessitated a collective effort. This set decisive impulses for the establishment of cross-border institutions.

Cooperation in the Greater Region goes back to the early 1970s and has been shaped through various institutions. In 1970, a German-French intergovernmental commission was established, to which Luxembourg acceded in 1971. The objective of this commission is to create formal prerequisites for cooperation across national borders. The commission today comprises regional representatives of the four nations; the Belgian representation only joined in 1981. The ‘regional commission’ was created to serve as the regional executive organ of the commission (see Groß/Wille/Gengler et al. 2006: 59).

The Summit of the Greater Region has been the political representation of the cooperation area since 1995 and provides the strategic framework for common projects and issues (steering level). It is composed of the highest political representatives of the participating regions, who meet at regular intervals. Summit resolutions are implemented at the level of the various themed working groups (Greater Region, undated a).

To shape cross-border institutional cooperation more efficiently in the wake of the accession of the Belgian territorial authorities – the Walloon Region, the French and German-speaking Community of Belgium – the ‘New Architecture’ (see Fig. 3) was adopted by a summit resolution (Saarland, undated; Summit of the Greater Region 2005, 2006). The structures of the Summit and Regional Commission were merged. The relevant development guidelines are decided by the Summit of the Executives. The Summit is assisted in its deliberations by an Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region (*Wirtschafts- und Sozialausschuss der Großregion, WSAGR*) established in 1997. Its task is to ‘address problems in connection with economic, social and cultural development and with spatial planning in the Greater Region in the form of official statements or resolutions’ (Greater Region, undated b). The WSAGR is unique in Europe (Köppen/Horn 2009: 101).

The Interregional Parliamentary Council (IPC), which is composed of members of the parliaments of the participating German federal states and the corresponding committees of the other regions, does not have legislative powers, merely a consultative function (Greater Region, undated c).

In 2014, a further step was taken towards solidifying the institutional cooperation through the establishment of the ‘Summit Secretariat of the Greater Region’ as a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) in the House of the Greater Region in Luxembourg. The EGTC is the permanent secretariat for the executive bodies of the Summit of the Greater Region. Its key responsibility is to support and coordinate the work of the Summit of the Greater Region and its working groups. It is the first point of contact for stakeholders, citizens and for parties interested in the

Greater Region and ensures continuity between the rotating presidencies of the Summit. In addition, the Secretariat is charged with the communication about the activities of the Summit (Greater Region, undated d).

Other forms of cooperation, apart from the official organs of the Greater Region, were established in the sub-regions. The SaarMoselle European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, for example, was established in 2010 from an association for cross-border cooperation between Saarbrücken and the French Département Moselle (SaarMoselle Eurodistrict, undated). Another example is the QuattroPole city network comprising the cities of Luxembourg, Metz, Saarbrücken and Trier, which was created in 2014 as ‘Verein QuattroPole e.V.’ (QuattroPole association, undated). In addition, the University of the Greater Region was established in 2013; it is an association of six universities from the Greater Region cooperation area. The general objective of the cooperation is to increase the mobility of students and lecturers between the partner universities and to expand the range and diversity in teaching and research, e.g. through the establishment of joint study programmes and research projects (University of the Greater Region 2016).

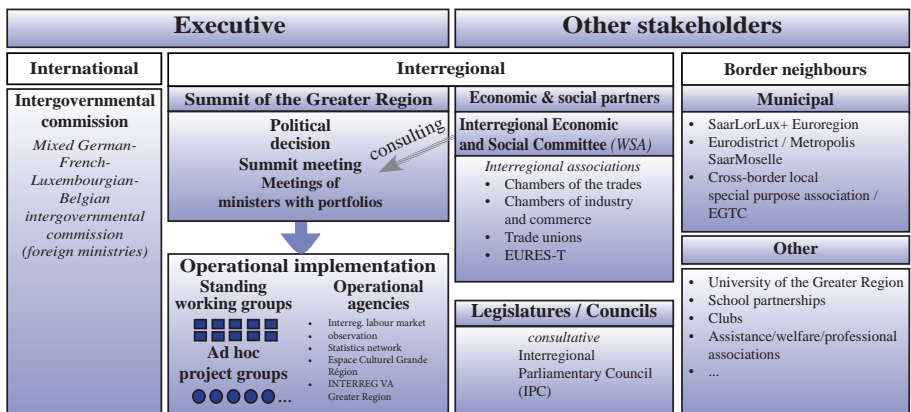


Fig. 3: Overview of the architecture of the institutional cooperation of the Greater Region and its various stakeholders /Source: BMVBS (2011), the authors' own illustration (modified)

INTERREG in the Greater Region

A clear intensification of cross-border cooperation resulted from the launch of the INTERREG European Community Initiative in 1990 (Beck/Pradier 2011). Since the early 1990s, cross-border projects and measures can be co-financed through European subsidies from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) as part of the objective of ‘European Territorial Cooperation’ and the focal point of ‘Cross-border cooperation’ (INTERREG A). In the Greater Region, numerous project partnerships have made use of the possibilities of EU funding across four programme phases. The financial support provided by INTERREG plays an important role in the implementation of cross-border cooperation activities and projects (Euro-Institute 2010: 8).

The ‘Greater Region’ cross-border cooperation programme for the fifth funding period for 2014 to 2020 is currently running (INTERREG Greater Region 2017). The programme provides funding in four focal areas or ‘priority axes’, which are in turn composed of a total of ten specific objectives:

- > Priority axis 1: Advancing the development of an integrated labour market by subsidising education, training and mobility
- > Priority axis 2: Ensuring environmentally-friendly development of the Greater Region and an improvement of the living environment
- > Priority axis 3: Improvement of living conditions
- > Priority axis 4: Enhancing the competitiveness and attractiveness of the Greater Region

The programme is managed by an EGTC (Greater Region 2017).

Further development of the institutional structure and cooperation

In recent years, the Greater Region has developed a strategic approach to expand the existing metropolitan potentials. At the same time, the Greater Region ‘strives to develop its structures in future in the context of a European policy of social and economic cohesion and in line with the “Europe 2020” Strategy for intelligent (employment, research, innovation), sustainable (environment, energy, climate) and inclusive (education, social integration and the fight against poverty) growth’ (*Mission Grande Région* 2016: 9). This is to be achieved by exploiting shared potentials and intensifying cooperation.

The 13th Summit of the Greater Region confirmed in January 2013 that the future objective of the cooperation would be to develop the Greater Region into a ‘cross-border, polycentric metropolitan region’ (CBPMR) (Summit of the Greater Region 2013). The implementation of this objective was actively advanced as part of Rhineland-Palatinate’s presidency of the Summit in 2013/2014 (Summit of the Greater Region 2013, 2014a), and subsequently by Wallonia’s presidency from 1 January 2015 for the next two years. The aim was to make the Greater Region competitive in the long term compared to European metropolitan regions, based on a metropolitan development strategy. The strategy is oriented towards polycentric territorial development to take the different functional conditions of the individual sub-regions and the spatio-structural character of the Greater Region into account appropriately. In principle, this begs the question of to what extent the establishment of a CBPMR is a suitable response to the current challenges and whether the existing governance structures must be adapted to fit with this new strategic orientation. Schelkmann addresses this issue in this volume.

The establishment of a CBPMR was underscored by the resolution as part of the 13th Summit to compile a spatial development strategy for the Greater Region (*Raumentwicklungskonzept der Großregion, REKGR*) ‘in which spatially relevant functions such as the economy, housing, leisure time and the environment are identified and

mutually reconciled from the perspective of mobility and accessibility' (Summit of the Greater Region 2014a, see also Schelkmann's paper in this volume). It serves 'as a framework for action for comprehensive, integrative and coherent spatial development of the Greater Region' and is to be elaborated as part of an INTERREG project (2018 – 2021) (MDDI [Luxembourgian Ministry of Sustainable Development and Infrastructures] 2017, Summit of the Greater Region 2014b).

Further activities followed in recent years, such as the continuous development of a geographic information system for the Greater Region (*Geographisches Informationssystem der Großregion, GIS-GR*, see also the papers by Hartz and Schelkmann in this volume) as a monitoring instrument or the conclusion of the joint 'Framework agreement on cross-border vocational education and training in the Greater Region' on 5 November 2014. They illustrate the aim to establish the metropolitan border region on the broadest possible basis and to act in various areas at the cross-border level (Summit of the Greater Region 2014c; Pallagst 2014).

3 A short profile of the Upper Rhine region

Unlike the Greater Region, the name of this cooperation area is to some extent indicative of the composition and location of the cooperation. The Upper Rhine region comprises the German-French-Swiss border area between the metropolitan areas of Karlsruhe and Strasbourg in the north and Basel in the south. The Upper Rhine region is characterised by its cultural diversity as well as by its particular economic strength compared to other European regions (TMO [Trinational Metropolitan Region of the Upper Rhine] 2016a).

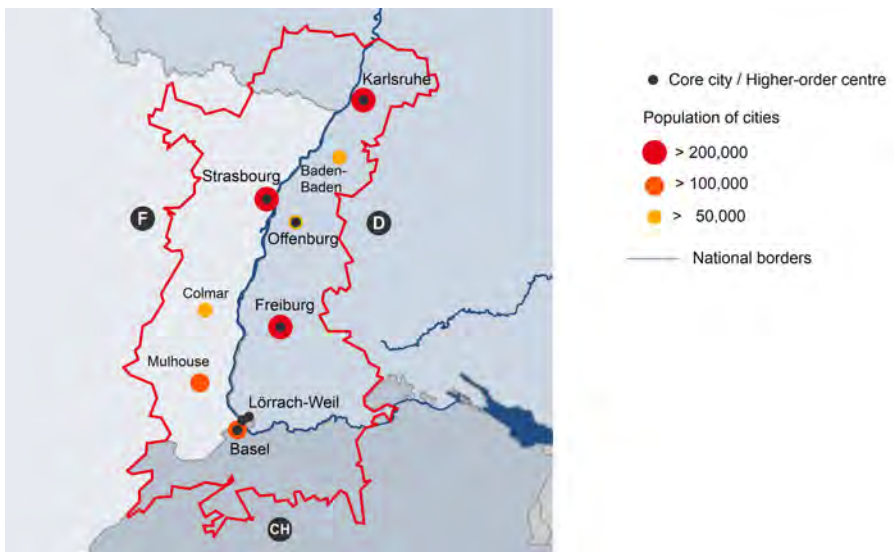


Fig. 4: The Upper Rhine region and its urban system /Source: BMVBS (2011), the authors' own illustration (modified)

Basic information about the Upper Rhine region

The cooperation area of about 21,500 km² extends across three countries: Germany, France and Switzerland. It is located in the Rhine plains, where the Rhine also largely serves as a natural border between the three countries. The participating regions are Alsace (which has been part of the French Grand Est region since January 2016), Northwestern Switzerland, Baden and the southern Palatinate. About one-fifth of the approximately 6 million inhabitants live in the metropolises of Karlsruhe, Strasbourg, Mulhouse, Freiburg and Basel. Despite the high proportion of mountainous areas, the population density in the Upper Rhine area is 278 inhabitants/km² on average (Upper Rhine Conference 2015: 44 et seq.). However, the population is not evenly dispersed across the region: The very high population density of Northwestern Switzerland (385 inhabitants/km²) stems from the intensive densification within the Basel metropolitan area; the Baden region with 299 inhabitants/km² is in second place. Alsace (222 inhabitants/km²) and the southern Palatinate region (200 inhabitants/km²) are clearly more sparsely populated. Nevertheless, these values are still above the corresponding average values for France, Switzerland or the EU-28 as a whole (TMO 2016a). Hence, the organisation of the Upper Rhine region also has a strong polycentric character.

Compared to western European standards, the region is a highly thriving economic area and boasts numerous universities and other educational establishments at university level (BMVBS 2011: 29 et seq.). Yet the cross-border (labour market-related) interactional flows with 93,000 daily commuters (Upper Rhine Conference 2015: 45) remains clearly below the Greater Region despite Switzerland being an ‘employment magnet’.

Cross-border cooperation and institutionalisation

As in the case of the Greater Region, the national borders in the Upper Rhine region have shifted repeatedly in the past. The Rhine with its adjacent territories was a bone of contention between France and Germany for nearly two centuries. Germany gained control of Alsace several times, while the French formation of a nation state was based on the notion of the Rhine as a natural border.

Since the end of the 1940s, cross-border cooperation in this area has steadily evolved from an initially informal to an institutionalised form of cooperation. In 1975, an intergovernmental commission and two regional committees were established to jointly meet the then cross-border challenges. In 1991, the regional committees were merged to form the German-French-Swiss Upper Rhine Conference. Ever since, this body has been the central platform for organising and coordinating the cooperation, which takes place mainly in themed working groups and expert committees. Another body is the Upper Rhine Council, which was established in 1997. It provides recommendations and opinions and discusses policy issues (BMVBS 2011: 28 et seq.). In the meantime, a closer cooperation between the Upper Rhine Council and the Upper Rhine Conference is emerging.

In the Upper Rhine region, there are other sub-regional associations, e.g. the Eurodistricts PAMINA (see the paper by Harster and Siebenhaar in this volume), Strasbourg-Ortenau and Freiburg/Centre et Sud Alsace region and the Basel Trinational Eurodistrict (*BMVBS* 2011: 31; see Fig. 5). The establishment of the Eurodistricts represents the phase of ‘level-specific differentiation’ in the border regions, which started in 2000 (Euro-Institute 2010), although the cooperation in the PAMINA area commenced earlier and has been organised in the form of an EGTC since the end of 2016. In an overview based on a comparison with other border regions, ‘the Upper Rhine is currently the only area where a consistent, level-specific differentiation in regard to cross-border cooperation is apparent, where there is not merely an institutional approach, but also an approach that is structured in accordance with the relevant tasks or functions for a vertical division of responsibilities between the (inter) national (intergovernmental commission), pan-regional (Upper Rhine Conference, Upper Rhine Council) and sub-regional level (Eurodistricts)’ (*BMVBS* 2011: 62).

As in the case of the Greater Region, the Upper Rhine region has a cross-border association of universities: the European Confederation of Upper Rhine Universities (‘EUCOR’), which was established in 1989 (EUCOR 2016). This association is the framework for cooperation between the universities of Basel, Freiburg, Karlsruhe, Mulhouse and Strasbourg in academic teaching, research, culture, sports and administration. With initiatives such as ‘Dialog Science’ (cross-border yearly series event on specific topics in the wide-ranging field of science of the Science Pillar) or the Science Offensive (SO) of the Trinational Metropolitan Region of the Upper Rhine (*TMO*), which funds cross-border flagship projects in the region through financial and technical assistance for the elaboration and implementation of INTERREG applications in the field of Research and Innovation, the *TMO* is committed to promoting cross-border research activities (*TMO* 2016 a, b).

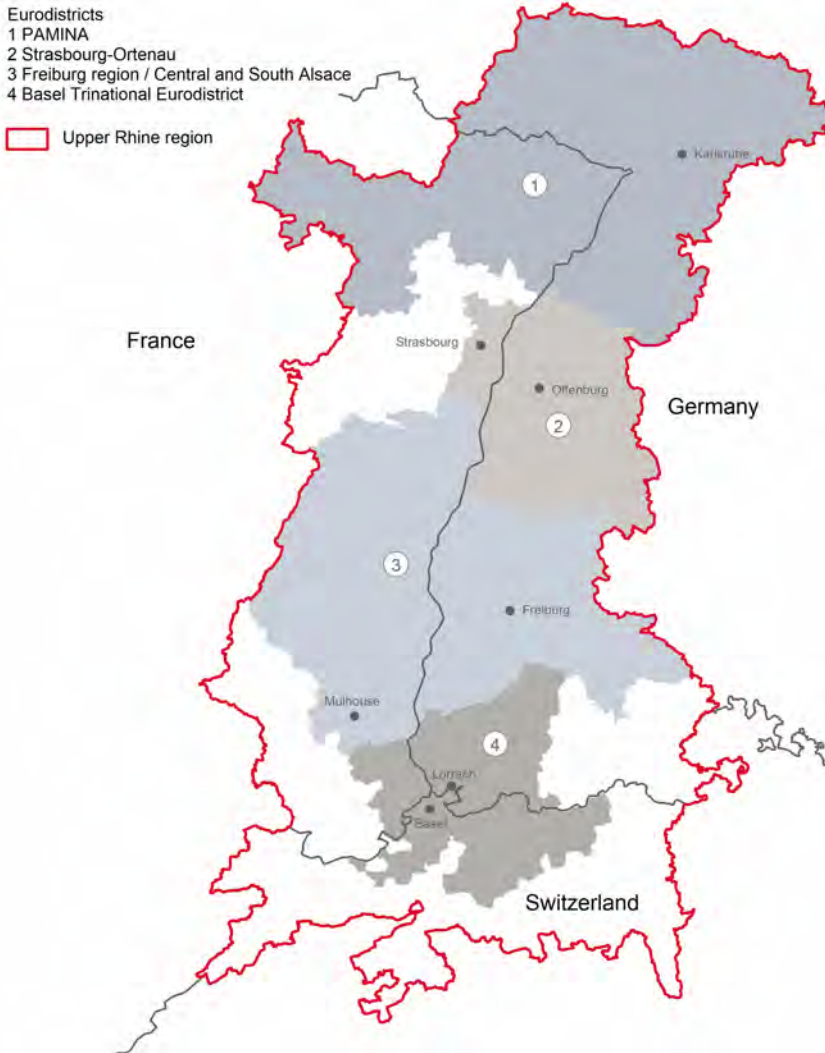


Fig. 5: Eurodistricts along the German-French border /Source: BMVBS (2011), the authors' own illustration (modified)

INTERREG in the Upper Rhine region

INTERREG funding in the preceding programme phases has proven to be a catalyst for numerous projects and activities in the Upper Rhine. In addition to and independent of the above, cross-border cooperation has been professionalised to solidify and further expand this cooperation: in some cases, the institutional cooperation partners 'have even created their own cross-border budgets that can be used to fund smaller projects autonomously and very flexibly' (Euro-Institute 2010: 8). On 16 December 2014, the European Commission approved the operational Upper Rhine INTERREG V (A) programme (France – Germany – Switzerland) for the fifth programming period. The current programme phase envisages mainly the implementation of mea-

asures for intelligent, sustainable and integrative growth along the Upper Rhine and the promotion of territorial cohesion through cross-border cooperation between administrations and citizens (INTERREG Upper Rhine, undated).

Further development of the institutional structure and cooperation

Since 2010, the cooperation area has been known as the ‘Trinational Metropolitan Region of the Upper Rhine’ (*TMO*). This designation expresses the objective, which was formulated in 2008, to establish a cross-border metropolitan region (*BMVBS* 2011: 31, see also Hartz’s paper in this volume). At the outset, the *TMO* was based on the idea of ‘sustainably promoting the development of the Upper Rhine area into a European region of the utmost competitiveness with an attractive living environment’ (*TMO* 2016a). The objective of the *TMO* is ‘to further advance the resources of the Upper Rhine as an economic space, to develop a joint spatial planning policy for spatially-relevant projects, to shape the region into an attractive living environment and to optimally position it with national and international competition’ (*TMO* 2016a). In this regard, the region’s strategic position within Europe, its high profile in the educational and research sector and its economic power, as well as the advantageous polycentric regional structure, are seen as a good starting point. It is emphasised, however, that the aim is not to create new administrative structures but rather to strengthen the existing forms of cooperation and to launch platforms and networks (*TMO* 2016a).

Characteristic of this is the structure of the *TMO*, which is based on the four pillars of policymaking, the economy, science and civil society. This serves to improve cooperation by connecting different stakeholder arenas and aims consistently at the strategic development of the existing cross-border potentials. This approach also includes aspects of multi-level governance and the linking of the Eurodistricts (intermunicipal) and the entire region (interregional) to allow for the establishment of a useful and efficient division of labour (*BMVBS* 2011: 66). To secure an appropriate external positioning, a focused lobbying strategy at the level of the EU and the national governments of countries involved was established (*BMVBS* 2011: 66).

4 Outlook

A general concern is how cross-border cooperation in the Greater Region and in the Upper Rhine region will be shaped in future, not only from a geographic perspective but also from a political and administrative standpoint. This aspect will be discussed in the following sections from different perspectives.

Last but not least, the territorial reform enacted in 2015 in France took effect on 1 January 2016. It reduced the number of French regions from 22 to 13. The objective of this merger of regions is to strengthen the regions as economic areas by creating larger territorial entities and to provide them with greater political and legislative powers and instruments in regard to economic development. Alsace and Lorraine now form, in conjunction with the Champagne-Ardennes region, the Grand Est region (see Fig. 6). For the Upper Rhine region and the Greater Region, this means that sub-regions on the French side, which were previously administratively separated –

Alsace and Lorraine – have now been merged into a single large region. Grand Est comprises about 57,000 km² (Fehlen 2016: 80) and is therefore almost as large as the cross-border Greater Region including all sub-regions (see the paper by Harster and Clev in this volume).

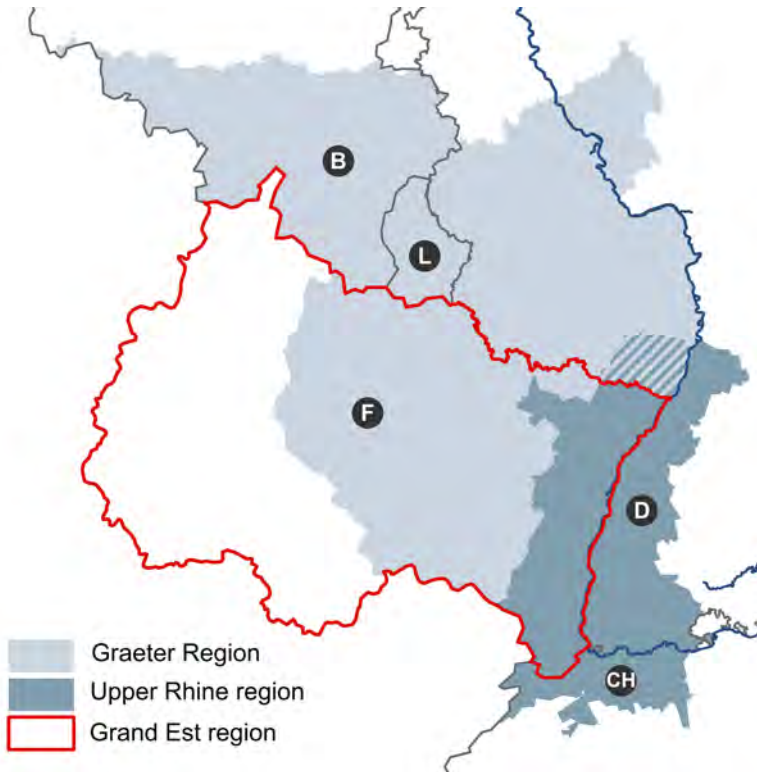


Fig. 6: The new French Grand Est region /Source: The authors

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