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Challenges of cross-border cooperation in the Greater Region – interviews with relevant actors

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CHALLENGES OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN THE GREATER REGION – INTERVIEWS WITH RELEVANT ACTORS

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Abstract

This paper presents and analyses interviews held with decision-makers and actors involved in cross-border cooperation in the Greater Region, exploring the difficulties and constraints of the collaboration. In addition to problems caused by the different languages, administrative cultures and variations in the tasks and jurisdictions of the individual partners, the organisation of the Greater Region is also mentioned as a hindrance. Yet many difficulties concerning cooperation are minimised and in some cases overcome by the high level of commitment of the individuals active in cross-border cooperation. The paper concludes with recommendations to improve the working methods of cross-border cooperation.

Keywords

Importance of cross-border cooperation in the Greater Region – important projects – language skills – administrative cultures – effectiveness of the committees – steps to improve cross-border cooperation

1 Introduction and methodology

Cross-border cooperation in the Greater Region is generally, and often accurately, described as a great success story. Yet in practice, cooperation is characterised not only by its successes but also through difficulties and constraints (see the paper by Caesar and Pallagst in this volume).

An outlook on the future viability and further progress of cross-border cooperation would not be complete without determining the obstacles in addition to listing the factors that have contributed to its success. Hence, the following section will shed light not on the familiar legal obstacles but rather on the difficulties of practical, daily cooperation across and beyond the border.

The author has sought out and identified these difficulties with the help of decision-makers and actors in cross-border cooperation at different administrative and action levels based on semi-structured interviews. Unlike standardised questionnaires, semi-structured and topic-focused interviews offer the opportunity to place the motives and experiences of the interviewees within an ideas- and argument-based context. The semi-structured interviews were conducted either in the form of face-to-face, one-to-one conversations or by telephone, and lasted 30 to 40 minutes. The interviews were recorded electronically and subsequently transcribed, and then thematically structured and anonymised. As the interviewees from Lorraine had sufficient knowledge of German, the interviews were held in German.

The choice of interviewees does not claim to be representative of all parties involved in cross-border cooperation activities. However, the author chose interviewees who are currently or were in the past actively engaged in and responsible for cross-border cooperation within the Greater Region. They moreover represent each partner region and administrative level. For reasons of timing or organisation, interviews were ultimately conducted with only 12 people from the nation states of Luxembourg, France (Lorraine) and Germany (Saarland) instead of the 18 that were originally envisaged. The interviewees represent the administrative levels of ministries (for Lorraine, the prefecture of the region and the *Conseil régional de la Moselle* [Regional Council of the Moselle]), the intermunicipal level (urban association, European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation [EGTC]) and municipality as well as an independent consulting firm for intercultural communication and development. Their spread across the countries or regions, as well as across the administrative and hierarchical levels, is shown in Tables 1 and 2.

In addition to the guided interview questions,¹ other insights and information provided by the interviewees were also taken into consideration in the analysis and evaluation of the interviews.

	Luxembourg	Lorraine	Saarland
Ministries and comparable levels	2	2	4
Intermunicipal level			2
Municipal level		2	1
Independent planning firm			1

Table 1: Distribution of interviewees according to national affiliation and administrative level / Source: The author

	Luxembourg	Lorraine	Saarland
Political leadership		2	2
Management or comparable function			2
Employees in executive roles, head of departments or comparable role	2	2	2

Table 2: Distribution of interviewees according to national affiliation and hierarchical level / Source: The authors

2 Evaluation of the interviews

2.1 Importance, constraints and difficulties of cross-border cooperation

The evaluation is structured analogously to the guided questions posed in the interviews.

Importance of the cross-border cooperation within the interviewee's own sphere of responsibility and importance for the border region overall

As the interviewees without exception are or were actively engaged in cross-border cooperation, it is hardly surprising that almost all of them attach great importance to it. This applies to both their own remit and for the border region as a whole. Merely one interviewee expressed clear frustrations. Even though this person considered the cooperation to be highly necessary for the future development of the Greater Region, he believed that the actual policymakers did not attach great importance to it.

¹ The guided questions for the interviews were as follows:

- How important is cross-border cooperation in the field within your remit and how important is it for the border region overall?
- What important projects and measures have been carried out?
- Where do you see difficulties and constraints to successful cross-border cooperation?
- Which committees and organisations exist for cross-border cooperation and how do you rate their effectiveness?
- How has cross-border cooperation changed over time?
- How do you rate the importance of the INTERREG programmes for cross-border cooperation?

Almost all interviewees stated that they were willing to engage in even greater cross-border cooperation within their own remit. However, there were temporal, personal and financial limits to this engagement. Interviewees frequently expressed the opinion that their commitment was not matched by corresponding appreciation from the top tiers of their administration and organisations. Interviewees who were themselves at the helm of an authority often found such appreciation to be lacking at the next higher level within the federal state or comparable tier or in the committees of the Greater Region.

The greatest importance is attached to cross-border cooperation at the local level, where it is also assessed to be generally successful.

All interviewees referred to the high level of cross-border interactions in the Greater Region and the resulting necessities of cooperation. The following aspects were mentioned most frequently: the joint labour market, youth unemployment, cross-border public transport, the educational system, healthcare, joint management, joint spatial planning for cross-border agglomeration areas and the associated coordination.

All interviewees believed that more intensive cross-border cooperation would generate considerable synergy effects. The political significance and economic standing of the Greater Region would be significantly boosted through improved cross-border cooperation, both compared to other regions and at the European level and in relations with the EU.

Some interviewees considered that this insight was in principle also shared by those responsible politically but that the actual policymakers would often attach no or very little importance to it. Interviewees were also critical of the fact that while the political decisionmakers in principle appreciated the opportunities associated with the realisation of a cross-border polycentric metropolitan region, they would not use those opportunities – or made only inadequate use of them – as a basis for specific actions, decisions or projects.

At the local level, concerns were expressed that the municipal activities of cross-border cooperation did not find sufficient attention, support and recognition from the higher-level tiers.

Interviewees occasionally suggested that a sense of competitiveness and egotism between the partners in the Greater Region dominated many individual decision-making processes and that the synergy effects of a holistic approach were therefore ignored or neglected.

Importance of the cross-border cooperation within the interviewee's own

In their response to this question, the interviewees focused on the most important and current projects and measures in their work environment. Nearly all interviewees stated that the success of cross-border cooperation in the Greater Region depended on specific projects with visible results and noticeable improvements for life in the border region.

The ‘Task Force on Cross-border Workers’ and the associated benefits for cross-border commuters in the Greater Region were the most frequently mentioned examples. The responsibility of the Task Force on Cross-border Workers is to elaborate proposals for legal and administrative solutions to general problems experienced by cross-border workers and the companies that employ them. The task force was initially funded through the INTERREG programme.

The associated University of the Greater Region was another frequently mentioned example of a successful project. It consists of a network of six universities in the Greater Region. This region comprises the Saarland and Rhineland-Palatinate in Germany, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the French region of Lorraine and Wallonia in Belgium, with the Saarland University, the Université de Lorraine, the University of Luxembourg, the Trier University, the TU Kaiserslautern and the University of Liège. In addition to the INTERREG funding in the starting phase, the fact that the vice-chancellors of the universities involved have made this project their top priority was said to be a decisive factor for its success. The cooperation has thus far resulted in joint study programmes and research cooperation, such as the UniGR Center for Border Studies.

The joint Summit Secretariat of the Greater Region, newly created in 2014, is considered an important step towards a better organisation of the collaboration at the Summit level. The Secretariat, based in the House of the Greater Region in Luxembourg, is tasked with preparing for the Summit meetings and further advancing cooperation between the Summits. It is organised in the legal form of an EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation) and is jointly supported by the Summit partners.

The framework agreement on cross-border vocational education and training with the associated projects was mentioned as a further significant measure for the future of the Greater Region. At the time of the interviews, this measure was still in preparation. This initiative is intended to counteract youth unemployment in parts of the Greater Region as well as the looming shortage of a skilled workforce. At the same time, interviewees considered the previous cooperation between Saarland and Lorraine in regard to vocational education and further training to have been deficient. The deficits were said to be caused by the significant discrepancies between the different vocational education systems and responsibilities for vocational training.

The improved cooperation between Lorraine and Saarland in regard to healthcare, in particular emergency medical care for heart disease, was also mentioned repeatedly as an important aspect. The sense of relief among the interviewees about the realisation of this project was palpable as the coordination and negotiations had taken more than 20 years.

The organisations of the four partners of the Greater Region (tourist information services of Saarland, Lorraine, Luxembourg, Rhineland-Palatinate and of the Eastern Cantons – *Tourismus Zentrale Saarland*, *Comité Régional du Tourisme de Lorraine*, *Office National de Tourisme du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg*, *Rheinland-Pfalz Tourismus*, *Office du Tourisme des Cantons de l’Est*) – have elaborated the first joint tourist marketing concept for the Greater Region with the help of INTERREG

programmes. This collaboration of the organisations responsible for tourism in the Greater Region is mentioned as a positive but long overdue example of cooperation across the borders.

The German-Luxembourg Schengen Lyceum is described as an extremely successful project. The Lyceum in Perl in Saarland is a school for students from Luxembourg and Saarland, where they are taught in mixed, multilingual classes. The teaching staff, curricula and school certificates of this secondary school are designed to provide transnational, European education and qualifications. The Schengen Lyceum is highly popular and appreciated on both sides of the German-Luxembourg border. Even parents from Lorraine seek to have their children schooled there, although this is officially not possible.

Another exemplary model project in Perl is the shared sewage treatment plant for German and Luxembourg municipalities. However, the establishment of shared water supply services, which would make sense technically and economically and is desired by the affected municipalities in Saarland and Lorraine, failed due to opposition from superordinate institutions in Lorraine.

The measures to improve cross-border public transport systems were considered to be only partially successful by the interviewees. Conflicting economic interests and funding problems on both sides of the border between Saarland and Lorraine prevent the further expansion of the Saarbahn railway service into Lorraine. The measures taken so far to improve public transport systems between Saarland and Luxembourg are likewise not judged to be entirely satisfactory.

Another failure (so far) is the envisaged cross-border nature park in the trilateral border area. In this case, the different philosophies underlying the nature park policies of the partners of the Greater Region could not be harmonised into a joint project.

At the level of planning and strategies, the following projects and measures were deemed successful:

- > The Greater Region has set the objective of establishing a metropolitan development strategy to position itself at the European level as a ‘cross-border polycentric metropolitan region’ (CBPMR). To strengthen this metropolitan dimension and ensure the coherent, integrative development of the entire Greater Region, the Summit of the Greater Region has decided to elaborate a spatial development strategy for the Greater Region (REKGR).² The first step is to identify the correlations and existing and potential synergy effects between the sub-regions in the Greater Region in the fields of the economy, settlements, transport, tourism, culture, leisure time and the environment. The Spatial Development Strategy of the Greater Region will not be a formal binding planning document. However, it is to become the basis and framework for decisions on specific measures of the Summit of the Greater Region and is to have the nature of a recommendation for the individual regional planning documents of the partners. Several interviewees had great

² Resolution of the 12th Summit of the Greater Region of 24 January 2011.

expectations for the stimuli that the elaboration of a metropolitan development strategy and the Spatial Development Strategy of the Greater Region would provide for future cooperation. Nevertheless, due to their experiences of the extremely arduous and time-consuming preparation this project required with four national partners and the three French departments involved, not inconsiderable scepticism was expressed about a successful outcome.

- > To create a shared, comparable database that could be used for both spatial planning requirements as well as for the public relations work and the information provided to residents in the Greater Region, the partners of the Greater Region are busy establishing a common geographic information system for the Greater Region (GIS-GR).³ The GIS-GR is a harmonised, cross-border database for the entire Greater Region. It strives to create a ‘common language’ and approach to the issues and their cartographic visualisation. The GIS-GR aims to facilitate a comparison of the actual geographic conditions in the regions with each other and to improve the understanding of the spatial dynamics observed in the Greater Region.
- > For joint cross-border spatial development and better planning coordination between Luxembourg, Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland, these partners have elaborated and jointly financed the “Oberes Moseltal” (Upper Moselle Valley) development strategy. This development strategy should also revisit the subject of the cross-border nature park, which has failed thus far. The project is designed to initially be binational between the partners in Germany and Luxembourg, because the coordination, consultation and organisation of the financial participation of Lorraine has thus far proven to be too difficult. The binational project is intended to play a pilot role. In the mid-term, the Lorraine partners will have to be involved in the project in order for it to be successful in the border region.⁴
- > As part of the *Das Blaue Band der Saar* (The Blue Band of the Saar River) INTERREG project,⁵ seven project partners from Sarralbe to Völklingen are elaborating a shared, cross-border vision for the future of the Saar Valley under the lead of the SaarMoselle Eurodistrict. Several measures, from road links along and to the Saar river, the construction of cycling paths and bridges to the creation of recreational spaces along the water, have already been executed.

Difficulties and constraints of successful cross-border cooperation

Almost all interviewees devoted considerable space to this question in their responses. It offered an opportunity to provide a general assessment on the work of the cross-border cooperation.

All participants addressed the matter of language skills. Successful cooperation across borders requires that the people involved should have at least a passive understanding of the language of the partner region. The use of interpreters makes it

³ Resolution of the 11th Summit of the Greater Region; the current results of the GIS-GR can be viewed and downloaded at www.gis-gr.eu.

⁴ The preliminary study for the Upper Moselle Valley development strategy was completed in November 2015. The principal study has been awarded and is currently being elaborated.

⁵ Saarland Ministry for Environment, Energy and Transport, Department for Federal State Spatial Planning (Ed.) (2010).

possible to hold formal meetings and discussions as well as work in committees. Many interviewees, however, also attach great importance to communications on the fringes of meetings, to feedback and discussions outside of the formal sessions and to telephone or email communications. For these interactions, generally no interpreting services are provided. Language skills are therefore considered to be an important element for establishing the mutual trust that is necessary for cooperation. One interviewee expressed these sentiments as follows: ‘I believe that language is needed to open the door to establish contact in the first place.’ For their own immediate sphere of work and responsibility, however, most interviewees stated that they themselves generally had these language skills. Yet this is not the case for everyone actively engaged in the cross-border cooperation. The existing high level of language skills is largely attributed to the fact that many inhabitants of Lorraine (still) have a good command of the German language or the Lorraine dialect. In part, oral communications are also conducted in the shared Moselle Franconian dialect. Concerns were expressed, however, that the command of German or of the Lorraine dialect would decline in future. Those responsible for cross-border cooperation in Luxembourg are, like all Luxembourgers, at the very least bilingual (French, German/Luxembourgish). On the German side, (at least passive) command of the French language was and is being ensured through personal commitment and language training on the part of the interviewees.

All interviewees point to cultural differences between the German and French partners in regard to working methods, administrative action and decision-making as a difficulty for cross-border cooperation. The strict working methods of the German partners that focus on arriving at solutions from the outset can easily irritate the French participants. On the other hand, the somewhat more expansive and sometimes more philosophical and creative approach of the French partners at the launch of a joint process may alienate the German side. One interviewee described their experience as follows: ‘In the course of a project, the French will go out for a meal together to express how pleased they are to be working with each other. The project itself is at most a secondary topic of discussion during the meal. Germans, on the other hand, will meet for a working lunch only after the project has been completed to celebrate its success.’

All interviewees explained, however, that after some practical experience of cross-border cooperation and given the shared desire for the collaboration to be successful, such differences in culture and working methods ceased to present a major obstacle. This applied in particular to cooperation at the municipal level, where the parties generally have longstanding experience in cross-border cooperation and have known each other for a long time, often on a personal level as well.

Nevertheless, different administrative structures, at times disparate administrative powers and often significant differences in the decision-making processes do remain impediments to cooperation. When German partners turn questioningly or in frustration to their French colleagues to enquire who on the French side would be responsible for a given aspect of the work, their French colleagues sometimes reply only half in jest that they did not know themselves. In fact, the administrative powers and demarcations between the central state, the regions, prefectures, regional and general councils,

associations of municipalities and municipalities are extremely complex. This complexity and the dominant role of the central state are described by some interviewees as clearly obstructive factors for cooperation and cross-border projects. This applied in particular when individual levels pursue different objectives, sometimes on a politically motivated basis.

Some interviewees also said that decisions on the French side were motivated to a greater extent by political considerations. This meant that even senior employees have to consult more intensively with their elected political representatives than was the case for the German partners, who have more clearly defined and often broader decision-making powers. This discrepancy, it was claimed, would sometimes lead to considerable delays. The German partners at the superordinate levels, on the other hand, engage in legalistic argumentation and have more formal decision-making processes. This would then impede simple, pragmatic solutions, especially at the municipal level. But at this level, the involvement of all parties and of citizens plays a greater role in cross-border cooperation than at the superordinate levels.

Most interviewees commented that the Greater Region and the narrower border region did not yet have a sufficiently strong identity. The cross-border area was not yet perceived and conceived as an entity. This lack of identity was considered to be the cause of the egotistic concerns and competitiveness that still prevailed far beyond the necessary competition between the individual sub-regions. This meant that decisions were often delayed or even entirely obstructed due to individual interests. The added value of cross-border cooperation was said to be insufficiently acknowledged, which in turn severely obstructs the ability to present a unified appearance outside of the region. The border region would thus miss an important development opportunity.

Nearly all interviewees stated that cross-border cooperation could only proceed in a focused manner if there was a high degree of personal commitment in a given field of work or if such commitment was developed. For almost all interviewees, the task of cross-border cooperation competed with other activities they had to carry out. Nearly all interviewees pointed to insufficient staff and financial means for cross-border tasks. One interviewee expressed this as follows: 'There is all the normal work you have to do, so you have to do the work for the Greater Region on the side, simply because you believe in the idea and because you want to make progress at the level of the Greater Region. The cross-border cooperation depends on the people who motivate it and collaborate on it, and when they aren't committed and don't take the time, then nothing will come of it.'

The interviewees considered that the lack of financial support for cross-border cooperation also impeded cooperation across the border. Likewise, the funds needed to make INTERREG applications that were deemed to be useful were often said to be lacking.

It was frequently noted that the political leaders often touted the importance of cross-border cooperation in their 'soapbox speeches'. But this appreciation and due attention to cross-border cooperation was lacking in everyday work. A frequent crit-

ical comment was that the higher up in the political or administrative hierarchy, the more difficult it was to persuade the relevant actors to be enthusiastic about cross-border tasks.

Committees and organisations for cross-border cooperation in the Greater Region and their effectiveness

Almost all interviewees were to a greater or lesser extent critical of the committees of the Greater Region, and in particular the Summit of the Greater Region. On a positive note, the existence of the Summit as a political committee and the Greater Region working groups were viewed as a positive development and were seen as establishing a formal and organisational basis for cross-border cooperation. The resolutions and activities of the Summit on cross-border polycentric metropolitan regions were mentioned appreciatively. Many interviewees view this development as a great opportunity for advancing the core area of the Greater Region.

The points of criticism about the Summit of the Greater Region and its working committees were:

- > The work of the Summit is deemed to be inefficient. The Summit should meet more frequently and should not exclude contentious issues. It often proceeds too slowly and its resolutions often come too late. Decisions are taken only on the smallest common denominator. The Summit is often considered to be merely a media spectacle. The need for resolutions to be passed by a consensus of all partners only is considered to be an obstacle. The resolutions of the Summit are often considered to be very abstract or are couched in such general terms that they can scarcely be implemented at the subordinate levels. Resolutions of this nature are then of very little or no significance at the local level anymore.
- > Interviewees were critical of the fact that the Summit of the Greater Region has too many working groups and committees. As a rule, the working groups and committees have no remit or no clear remit assigned to them by the Summit and are not steered by the Summit or any other committee. The working groups and committees generally work alongside each other in an uncoordinated manner. The work they do is inadequately coordinated, and the interchange between them on technical and other topics was said to be lacking. Work results are often not apparent. Interviewees proposed that Summit working groups should be generally set up only for a limited period and with a clear remit. After the completion of their assignments, the working groups should be dissolved.

Cross-border cooperation at the local level through the EGTC and at the level of the municipalities was generally perceived in a more positive light. But interviewees were also critical of the fact that individual local interests sometimes proved to be an impediment to cooperation. Some interviewees pointed to lacking support from the supra-local level, and the lack of communication and coordination with the other committees engaged in cross-border cooperation.

In regard to the Interregional Parliamentary Council of the Greater Region, interviewees commented that it was not linked to nor did it interact with the working committees that work with the Council or implement its resolutions. The Council is said to work more or less ‘in a vacuum’. Accordingly, its impact was considered to be rather insignificant.

Development of cross-border cooperation over the course of time

All respondents emphasised that in principle the importance of cross-border cooperation had increased in the border region. Cooperation across the border had discernibly improved and had become more diverse at the same time. Interviewees pointed out that in addition to territorial authorities and public bodies, other organisations, institutions and associations on both sides of the border would increasingly cooperate.

Some interviewees also pointed to the risk that after many practical aspects of daily cross-border coexistence have been dealt with, the importance of cross-border cooperation could diminish. This could lead to a situation where fundamental and conflict-prone issues might be neglected or even ignored.

The discussion and work on the cross-border polycentric metropolitan region and the strategic planning tasks have at least provided a clear stimulus for the parties responsible for spatially relevant cross-border cooperation. However, this work should be supported more decisively from an institutional and political standpoint to ensure that the work does not fizzle out like similar projects in the past and thus cause frustration among the participants.

This frustration is already apparent in some opinions voiced by the interviewees, e.g. in comments such as: ‘Progress is simply very slow, and if you feel over time that you’re not making any real headway, and every step that you have to take is very time and energy consuming, you wonder at some point whether it really makes sense to continue with cross-border cooperation.’

The preceding critical comments relate to the cooperation within the committees of the Summit of the Greater Region with a total of five partners (Luxembourg, Lorraine, Wallonia, Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland). Bilateral cooperation between just two national parties is perceived to be significantly easier and more effective than with three, four or five partners.

Importance of the INTERREG programmes for cross-border cooperation

Great importance is attached to the INTERREG programmes for cross-border cooperation, particularly the INTERREG A programme (for a brief description of the INTERREG programme, see the paper by Caesar and Pallagst in this volume). The INTERREG programmes are said to have a decisive, stimulating impact on cooperation. Interviewees stated that numerous projects were only realised thanks to the help of INTERREG subsidies. Moreover, the INTERREG projects have had a significantly broader impact and generate more public awareness than was the case for other cooperation projects. Upon further questioning, the interviewees also explained with regret that many projects were shut down once the INTERREG funding expired.

However, interviewees criticised the terms of the INTERREG programmes for being highly complex and bureaucratic, and the funding criteria for often being incomprehensible. They also pointed out that INTERREG funding should be used in future to a greater extent for strategic projects and not only for more or less randomly selected projects.

2.2 Country-specific perspectives

The following section mentions only the aspects that reveal notable differences between the comments of the representatives of the individual nationalities.

If the interviews are analysed according to the interviewees' nationalities, it is apparent that all partners share a more or less equivalent appreciation of the importance of cross-border cooperation. The interviewees from Luxembourg refer more emphatically to the importance of the material requirements for solving the problem of cross-border commuting.

In the analysis of the constraints and difficulties, it is notable that while the partners from Lorraine also mention cultural discrepancies and different languages, they consider them to be less of an impediment than do their German partners. Interviewees point to the concern, however, that they were not sure whether the next generations of parties responsible for cross-border cooperation would still have a sufficient command of either German or the Lorraine dialect.

On the German side, the complexity of the French administrative system with its different allocation of administrative powers, and the experience that decisions were taken primarily based on political considerations, was considered to be a greater impediment to cooperation. For the French partners, the issue of centralism was of greater concern.

The criticism regarding the committees of the Greater Region was expressed somewhat more guardedly by the French partners than by the German or Luxembourgish interviewees.

2.3 Differences in perspectives between administrative levels

When differentiated according to administrative tiers, the comments show very few differences. Different viewpoints on the questions were not discernible between the intermunicipal and the municipal level; they are accordingly jointly referred to as the local level.

At the local level, the cultural and language differences clearly play a less significant role than at the supra-local level. Local representatives generally have longstanding experience in regard to cooperation across the borders and have frequent and close contact with their respective partners, with whom they are as a rule quite familiar. Moreover, it was the interviewees at the local level who mentioned the most success-

ful cross-border cooperation projects. At this level, there are the fewest complaints about obstacles to cooperation with the local partners on the other side of the border. Yet at the same time, different interests and egotistical considerations that impede cooperation are mentioned most frequently at the municipal level. An insufficient flow of information from the superordinate tiers and from the Summit, as well as insufficient coordination of the activities between the different tiers of cross-border cooperation were also criticised.

According to the interviewees, the cultural differences, different languages and disparate administrative systems were considered to be a greater impediment for the cross-border cooperation at the supra-local level.

For the other guided questions on which the interviews were based, no significant differences could be discerned between the different administrative levels in their assessments of the cooperation across the border.

3 Summary and conclusions

The group of interviewees shows that cross-border cooperation is supported at all administrative levels by extremely committed people. They are aware of the constraints and difficulties of cross-border cooperation. They try, however, to minimise them to the best of their abilities and to advance cross-border cooperation despite those difficulties. Successful cooperation across the border is driven to a great extent by the self-motivation of the actors involved. However, this positive aspect should not be overly emphasised.

Cross-border cooperation has made it possible to resolve or initiate solutions for a large number of everyday problems of cooperation and of shared life at and along the border. More complex, multidimensional or large-scale issues of the border region, however, have yet to be addressed or resolved. According to the interviewees, the Greater Region does not appear to be sufficiently well positioned as yet. This concerns in particular the organisation, working methods and thematic focus of the Summit of the Greater Region and its working committees. Fewer but better organised working groups with a clear remit and perhaps also working committees which are convened for a specific time period are thought to be necessary. The coordination of the information flows and communication of the work results must be significantly improved and, if necessary, formalised.

Many interviewees describe the work of the Summit itself as inefficient. Improvements are dependent on a clear political desire to act on the part of the partners of the Greater Region; the Greater Region should not be operated merely as a 'fair-weather' project – the parties responsible have to take up the real, material problems of cross-border cooperation and find solutions for them. Many of the parties responsible for cooperation across the borders consider a joint development strategy pursued by all partners toward the cross-border polycentric metropolitan region and the elaboration of a spatial development perspective to be a stress test for the success and the future of the Greater Region.

Viable future cross-border cooperation in the Greater Region requires a critical analysis of its working methods, an identification of the constraints and difficulties as well of the factors for success.

The constraints and difficulties described here cannot be completely resolved. Nevertheless, measures can be taken to facilitate the cooperation across the border. Steps in this direction are:

- > Staffing continuity, as far as possible, among the people engaged in and responsible for cross-border cooperation at the various institutions as well as forward-looking personnel planning and personnel selection in this field are vital considerations and must be ensured.
- > A solid relationship of trust between the parties working on cooperation on either side of the border is needed. This can be achieved by taking measures and providing opportunities to this end.
- > A cross-border exchange of personnel between institutions and organisations would be useful.
- > Advanced training in the special field of cross-border cooperation must be expanded and intensified.
- > The responsible organisational units must take the higher personnel expenditure associated with these responsibilities into account.
- > A regular exchange of information and experience as well as consultations about relevant topics between the responsible organisations and institutions is needed.
- > Such communication of information and consultation is also needed between the tiers of cooperation (municipality, intermunicipal level, federal state/region) in the individual countries concerned.
- > Recognition and appreciation of the work at all levels of the hierarchy will further support and incentivise the already very committed people working in this field.

The motivation and attitude of the parties engaged in cross-border cooperation is extremely important, in addition to all the formal and organisational improvements and changes. This is exemplified in the comments of one interviewee: ‘Cross-border cooperation requires attentiveness as far as identifying the factual conditions is concerned and the ability to tolerate the idea that there may be several other ways to achieve the overall goal than the ones we have conceived of in our little corner of Saarland or in Germany. We don’t always have to do things the way we’ve done them for the past 100 years, which is – I would say somewhat tongue in cheek – the typical ‘Germanic’ approach. “Avoid change at any cost” – this approach doesn’t work. In cross-border cooperation, I have to accept that I will sometimes work with partners who have quite a different view of the world than I do. And you just have to get together and accept it. If you’re fortunate, you will succeed in creating a third, new perception of the world, which will then function in a cross-border context.’

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