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Life in border regions – ‘Where would we end up?’

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LIFE IN BORDER REGIONS – ‘WHERE WOULD WE END UP?’

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Abstract

What is life in a border region like? This paper aims to answer this question, drawing on empirical research in four twin villages in the Greater Region. The findings, based on a postal survey in the twin municipalities and face-to-face interviews, show that both sides see the border situation as bringing financial and practical advantages. The cooperation between the municipalities is generally described very positively. In regard to a sense of identification, there are feelings of belonging to both the nation state and the (cross-border) region, although there are differences between those surveyed in the different countries. In terms of the importance of the border, there is general agreement that it is scarcely noticed anymore, and that since its disappearance life has become more convenient and has benefited. Yet there various challenges can also be identified, which represent tasks for the coming years.

Keywords

Border region – twin municipalities – cross-border cooperation – home – quantitative and qualitative research

1 Introduction: The perception of the border in twin villages

The borders between Luxembourg, France and Germany, and with the neighbouring countries (see the paper by Andrea Hartz/Beate Caesar in this volume) have shifted over time, meaning that the people who live in the border region were part of different nation states in different periods of history. This paper examines issues such as commonalities and differences in regard to regional ties, the sense of home and regional identities in cross-border cooperation (for a theory-oriented background, see the paper by Schönwald/Spellerberg/Weber in this volume). To this end, interviews on the subject of ‘Home and the perception of the border situation’ were conducted in four *twin villages* – i.e. municipalities facing each other directly across national borders – along the Saarland/Lorraine and Rhineland-Palatinate/Luxembourg borders. In addition to a semi-standardised, comprehensive survey, oral interviews were conducted as well in selected places.

In this empirically-oriented paper, we examine the issues raised in the introduction to this chapter (see the paper by Schönwald/Spellerberg/Weber in this volume), which relate to the future viability of border regions as far as everyday border demarcations, a sense of home and identification are concerned. When a woman at the German-French border was asked in 1982 to explain what would change if Europe were to become an area without border checks her reply was ‘Wo kämen wir denn da hin?’, which literally means ‘Where would we end up?’.^{*1} (cf. Schilling, undated). The 1983 film from which this quote is taken, *Grenzfall Leidingen* [The Border Case of Leidingen] by Alfred Gulden, preceded a study in the Saarland-Lorraine border area in 1984 (ibid.). At the time, about 30 years ago, various aspects of daily life in the border region were examined. The quote ‘Where would we end up?’ reflects the fears and concerns of people about a converging Europe and the dilution of internal European borders. We took up this quote in our survey and asked where we indeed ended up, how daily life in the border area had turned out to be and how people envisaged the future of the border region (their hopes and concerns) in the mid-2010s. In addition to these questions about daily life and perceptions of the future in the border area, some fairly general questions on constructions of identity and home were included in the questionnaire to be able to compare the results with earlier studies. The study should thus be viewed in the context of sociological studies on spatial identities (Sievers 2014; Weichhart/Weiske/Werlen 2006), which partly also relate to the area examined here (Kühne/Spellerberg 2010; Schönwald 2012, 2015; Wille 2012; see paper by Christian Wille and Ursula Roos in this volume).

The empirical surveys took place against the backdrop of – or parallel to – the major refugee movements in March/April 2015, which led to the partial reintroduction of border controls a few months later. It can be assumed that in the meantime people have become much more aware of the border than at the time of the interview (see also the paper by Karina Pallagst and Beate Caesar in this volume). The study focused on the following research questions:

- > What role do national borders play in daily life?
- > How do the respondents define the spatial dimensions in regard to home and regional identification?
- > Do perceived affiliations differ in the twin villages?
- > Does life in a border region create new forms of regional identity?
- > Do the residents of the twin municipalities use the infrastructure and services offered by their counterpart, or do symbolic borders remain?
- > Does a strong sense of home lead to a tendency to marginalise the municipality or region on the other side of the border?
- > Is the border region a unique place for social activities and ties?

The survey took place in the following twin villages: Wasserbillig (Luxembourg) and Langsur (Rhineland-Palatinate) as well as Heining-lès-Bouzonville (Lorraine) and Leidingen (Saarland) (cf. Fig. 1). These places were selected for the study on the basis of the variations between the two border areas: with Wasserbillig and Langsur, the choice fell on two municipalities on opposing sides of the border in a prosperous region, while Heining-lès-Bouzonville and Leidingen are affected to a greater extent by urban shrinking and an ageing population. Wasserbillig/Langsur also appeared to be a suitable area for investigation because in a previous study a person from Langsur had reported on (then) current tensions and opportunities for cooperation between the two villages (Schönwald 2012). Heining-lès-Bouzonville/Leidingen is characterised by the fact that Leidingen, a small town, is in itself a border town: part of the town is on French territory and part lies on German territory.

Wasserbillig is a town in Luxembourg with around 2,300 residents and a railway station. In addition, there are several supermarkets and discount stores, as well as boutiques and other services for daily needs. Wasserbillig is located on the banks of the Moselle and the Sauer rivers (Sûre in French), separating it from its neighbouring town of Langsur, which is in Germany (Commune of Mertert 2015). Langsur has around 1,635 residents and only a few shops for daily needs. The municipality of Langsur also includes the boroughs of Metzdorf and Mesenich. Langsur does not have a railway station (Associated municipality of Langsur 2015). Heining-lès-Bouzonville is located in France and has around 500 residents, while Leidingen, a small town with around 200 residents, lies partly on German and partly on French territory. Both towns are situated directly on the national border. There is no supermarket or bakery in Leidingen. Heining-lès-Bouzonville is within walking distance from Leidingen.



Fig.1: Geographic location of the towns in the study /Source: Department of Urban Sociology (Tim Weber) based on the annual report of the University of the Greater Region (June 2014 to May 2015)

2 Methodology

The study of the two twin villages was based on a mix of quantitative and qualitative empirical social research methods. The quantitative study was the first step, while qualitative interviews were conducted in a second step with individual participants who took part in the standardised survey. Here, one of the objectives was to gain more detailed insights to illuminate noteworthy results of the quantitative survey.

2.1 Conduct of the written survey

Ten days before the start of the survey in March 2015, local representatives of the municipality in question were contacted about the survey in a personal letter and requested to post the enclosed information about the imminent survey to local residents. In addition to the seven-page questionnaire, the households received a letter, a contact form with a declaration of consent for a further oral interview (with the request to return the form and their contact details should they give their consent), as well as a return envelope with postage paid.

The questionnaires were distributed in two ways. In three of the four towns (Leidingen, Heining-lès-Bouzonville, Wasserbillig), a student assistant delivered the questionnaires to all households that had a postbox with a person's name on it; no questionnaires were delivered to postboxes with company names. Notices were also posted in local retail shops (where present). In Langsur, the questionnaires were distributed as a supplement to the *Trierischer Volksfreund* regional newspaper, and posted to non-subscribers of the newspaper. This was done in an attempt to conduct a comprehensive survey. The questionnaires were distributed on two successive days: in Wasserbillig on 10 March 2015 to 1,060 households, on 11 March 2015 to 85 households in Leidingen and to 129 households in Heining-lès-Bouzonville. On the same day, the 640 households in Langsur received the questionnaire as a supplement to the *Trierischer Volksfreund* newspaper. In total, 1,914 questionnaires were distributed.

After three weeks, the residents of the municipalities were reminded of the questionnaire and requested to participate through notices posted in the municipality. At the initiative of a journalist, a short article on the survey also appeared in the local section of the *Luxemburger Wort* daily newspaper during the survey period.

The questionnaires were returned over a period of seven weeks, but unfortunately the average response rate was only 13% (n=253), which can be broken down by town as follows: Langsur had the highest response rate (n=123, 19%) followed by Leidingen (n=15, 18%). The response rate of the non-German towns Wasserbillig (n=105, 10%) and Heining-lès-Bouzonville (n=10, 8%) was even lower. Evidently, there was no real willingness to take part in a German study. An in-person approach, such as at a festival or other public event where the local population gathers, might have produced a better result.

2.2 Qualitative interviews

57 people (23% of the returned questionnaires) expressed their willingness to take part in a further, detailed personal interview. Four interviews were held in both Langsur and Wasserbillig in September 2015. Of the two women and six men, one is working, while the others are retired. As regards citizenship, four German and four Luxembourgers took part (interviewees are identified in the results section by the first letter of their surnames).

Qualitative interviews were held with two people each in Leidingen and Heining in June 2015. In Leidingen (Germany), the interviewee was a French woman (Ms B), who has been living in this border region all her life, although previously on the French side, and a German woman (Ms A), who moved to the border region as an adult from another part of Saarland. In Heining (France), the selection was similar: one interviewee, a German national (Mr D), moved to the border region as an adult, whilst the other (Mr C) is a native of the border village.

A guideline with biographical elements was elaborated, which provided the interviewees with sufficient scope to freely recount their views (Kühne/Schönwald 2015). The guideline included the following topics: the person’s biography, the significance of the border over time and into the future, life in the border region over time until the present day, the significance of home and an assessment of the Greater Region.

The interviews were recorded and subsequently fully transcribed. The analysis followed Mayring’s principles of qualitative content analysis, according to which an analytical summary of the contents is followed by coding and the development of categories. This method can therefore be described as inductive as the categories are derived directly from the material. To identify suitable categories given the research interest, it was first necessary to define selection criteria based on the topics in the guideline, hence this part of the process was rather deductive. As it was not possible to define any further new categories, saturation was achieved and the process of analysis began (Mayring 1996: 91 et seq.).

3 Results

For the results of the quantitative survey, only the two twin towns of Wasserbillig (n=105) and Langsur (n=123) were taken into account given the low response rate of only 25 questionnaires in total which were received from Leidingen and Heining-lès-Bouzonville. Passages and explanations from the interviews at times supplement and at times form a contrast with the quantitative findings.

3.1 Socio-structural background of the respondents

108 women and 118 men took part in the survey in Wasserbillig and Langsur, with the percentage of women in the German town of Langsur (55%) being higher than in the Luxembourg town of Wasserbillig (40%). The age of the respondents from the towns ranged from 18 to 84, with an average age of 55. Respondents under 30 were underrepresented in both towns, with merely 9% in Wasserbillig and 2% in Langsur. This also correlates to the length of their residence in the town: more than one-quarter of the respondents had lived there constantly since birth (27% in Wasserbillig, 30% in Langsur) and a further significant proportion had lived in the town since birth, but with interruptions (17% in Wasserbillig, 12% in Langsur). The other respondents had been living in the twin towns for over 20 years (20 years in Wasserbillig and 23 years in Langsur). In other words, people who had been living in the towns for many years and who had experienced life in the region before and after the opening of the border showed particular interest in the survey. The respondents in both towns clearly differed in their educational levels, which was probably due to the different educational systems (21% answered ‘other’ in Wasserbillig). Respondents in the two towns had very similar levels of tertiary education (22% and 23%) (cf. Table 1).

	Age	Gender*	Education**				
	Average	Female	Max. Hauptsch.	Mittlere Reife	(Fach-) Abitur	University	Other
Langsur	55	55%	32%	30%	15%	22%	1%
Wasserbillig	55	40%	15%	11%	30%	23%	21%

n=206-219, Cramer's V, *: p: < 0.05, **: p: < 0.01

Please note: The survey only included German school-leaving certificates: after four years of secondary school (Hauptschulabschluss), after five years of secondary school (Mittlere Reife) and after seven years of secondary school ((Fach-)Abitur). The latter serves as certificate of general qualification for university entrance.

Table 1: Social structure of the interviewees /Source: Authors' survey, March 2015

More than four out of ten respondents in Langsur live in a household with three or more people, while in Wasserbillig the percentage was still 37%. In both places, families and couples prevailed; single households accounted for a smaller percentage. In view of the border situation, the questionnaire also asked about the nationality of the interviewees. 94% of the respondents from Langsur are German nationals, while 3% have Luxembourg nationality and the rest are nationals of other countries. In Wasserbillig, 90% of participants have Luxembourg nationality, while 8% are German nationals (not shown in the table).

3.2 The uniqueness of the place of residence

The situation in both towns, Wasserbillig and Langsur, is rather special due to their border location, as their national affiliations are separated by the River Sauer/Sûre. For the survey, it was therefore interesting to examine the role that the national border played in people's awareness and in their daily activities.

The findings showed that the national border evokes almost no negative associations, but rather indifferent or neutral to positive associations. For more than half of the respondents from both twin villages, the border had no significance (59% and 55%; cf. Table 2). There is a noticeable difference as regards their agreement with the statement: 'The border connects us with our neighbours' – nearly six out of ten German respondents agreed, while only four of ten residents of the Luxembourg town agreed. A third or more than a quarter of the respondents from both towns agreed that the border made their hometown unique. In the Luxembourg town, there is a stronger sense that the border presents a disadvantage than in the German town: at least one-quarter of respondents consider that the border location entails economic disadvantages. Among German respondents, the positive aspects of the national border prevail.

Selected from list (multiple responses possible)	Langsur	Wasserbillig
	in %	
The border has no significance for me.	59	55
The border connects us with our neighbours.**	58	40
The border makes my town unique.	33	27
The border represents an economic barrier.**	11	24
The border represents a language barrier.	7	13
The border represents a cultural barrier.	6	11

L: n=123, W: n=103, Cramer's V, p: **: p: < 0.01

Table 2: The role of the national border with the neighbouring country / Source: Authors' survey, March 2015

The question about the impact of the elimination of border controls (since the Schengen Agreement of 1992) on the daily lives of the inhabitants reveals a differentiated result as well, however, with very similar outcomes as far as the two towns are concerned. More than three-quarters of all respondents stated that their daily life had become much easier, but certain aspects were considered in a far less favourable light. About one-quarter of respondents stated that cultural life had been enriched. 35% of the respondents from Wasserbillig, but only 20% people from Langsur, believe that the elimination of border controls had increased potential risks. Only a minority in each case expected cultural convergence, greater security or more complex relationships (not shown in the table).

The qualitative interviews expand the perspective that the border had been perceived as an inconvenient barrier prior to its opening, as the border controls had been time-consuming, especially for commuters and those crossing the border frequently. Inspections of foreign cars had served to control and contain the smuggling of petrol. Going further back in time, even coffee had been smuggled across the border into Germany during the post-war period.

'In those days, when you drove into Luxembourg, you would get a note telling you how many centimetres you would be allowed to take back. You would not be allowed to have more petrol in your tank, because fuel was so much cheaper in Luxembourg. [...] And there were border checks, which would cause traffic to back up in the evening when returning home. That was always less pleasant.' (Mr S, line 48)

Economic benefits are created by the differences in prices. For Luxembourgers, this concerns shopping as well as the housing and property prices in Germany, and for Germans the cheaper petrol prices and the price of coffee and cigarettes in Luxembourg (see also the paper by Christian Wille/Urusula Roos in this volume). The advantage of the economic benefits on the one side of the border are at the same time the disadvantage for the residents on the other side of the border. The cheaper petrol prices from which Germans benefit lead to increased noise and exhaust emissions in Wasserbillig with its many petrol stations. Luxembourgers, who purchase

a building plot in Langsur or rent a house or an apartment, drive up prices on the German side due to the increased demand.

‘The traffic and lorries on the narrow roads every day, on the Trierer Straße, that is quite a nuisance, very stressful. It’s almost unbearable. And that’s despite the Autobahn. It’s also due to all the petrol stations we have here.’ (Mr V, line 195)

Projects between the two municipalities can be initiated because they are eligible for EU subsidies due to their border location. The proximity to Luxembourg City is also a benefit for the structurally weak region, especially for the (young) bank employees of the border region. German tradespeople get a lot of work from Luxembourg and can thus secure their livelihoods.

‘As far as building and work is concerned, of course, because where would our young people find work otherwise in this economically underdeveloped area? We have quite a number of young people who work in the banking sector and who see this as an opportunity, a place where they can work and earn money. And the tradespeople, too, who are here in this region – 80% of our tradespeople in the HVAC and construction sector earn their money in Luxembourg.’ (Mr M, line 144)

The respondents at the German-French border still remember the border before the Schengen Agreement very well. It is described as having been a major obstacle in those days, but is also perceived as part of their own biography, e.g. Ms A (cf. also the paper by Schönwald/Spellerberg/Weber in this volume):

‘This proximity of the border that has always been part of my daily life – even when we were kids, when there were still border posts. It used to be one of our favourite pastimes – to crawl across the meadow and check them. When the border patrols were gone, we would quickly slip over into France, where we would go into a shop and buy green jam – woodruff jam, which we did not yet have on our side, in my childhood.’ (Ms A, page 2)

Ms A also described the daily work of her parents, who were farmers and had part of their farmland on French territory. According to her recollections, the farming community had always shown a mutual willingness to help each other across the border. The respondents assess the current border situation as positive; they describe it as ‘more pleasant’ (Ms A, page 2) and as an ‘absolute relief’ (Ms A, page 3) due to the elimination of controls. Mr B, who is a native of Saarland and who has been living in Heining for ten years and commutes daily to his work in Saarland, also confirms that he is glad that ‘there are very few obstacles to going from one country to another twice a day thanks to the European Union’ (Mr B, page 1). Shopping on both sides of the border has become much easier and helps people to feel ‘perhaps not quite so foreign’ to each other (Ms A, page 3). The added benefit of freedom of movement for the economy is also emphasised:

‘[there are] new building areas everywhere, and you see how many building materials suppliers from Saarland do business there, and it only works because of the permeability of the border (Mr D, page 6)

Ms A characterises the remaining differences as positive and worth retaining:

‘I still feel that I’m on holiday¹ when I’m over there. It’s simply the different speed, the different language. It has something that does you good. [...] The special qualities which give the place a general charm, this is something I wouldn’t want to see disappear.’ (Ms A, page 6, page 10)

This pattern of thought is familiar from other studies of the Greater Region: the border region is appreciated especially as unity in diversity; an elimination of all differences is not desired (Schönwald 2012, see also the paper by Spellerberg/Schönwald/Weber in this volume).

When asked in the standardised question in the quantitative survey to identify the aspects of life for which the open border was advantageous, the respondents in Langsur in particular replied that they fully agreed with the statement that they benefitted economically from the border location (57%, compared to 41% of participants from Wasserbillig; cf. Table 3). In the other aspects covered by the survey, it is apparent that the respondents from Wasserbillig tend to consider the border region to be less of an advantage than the participants from Langsur.

One-quarter of the respondents – who by virtue of having responded in the first place demonstrate a comparatively high level of interest in the topic – feel that it amounts to an interpersonal advantage. Only a minority on either side of the border perceive it to generate a sense of community, a shared culture or the same aims.

The residents of the neighbouring regions ... (on a scale of 1 to 5, ‘fully agree’)	Figures in %	
	Langsur	Wasserbillig
benefit economically from each other.	57	41
benefit on a human level from each other.	30	26
benefit culturally from each other.	24	20
share a common history.	20	14
have a sense of belonging together.	11	10
share a common culture.	10	3
share common political goals.	7	3
cannot communicate with each other due to different languages.*	3	2

L: n=118, W: n=99, Cramer’s V, *: p: < 0.05

Table 3: Special aspects of a border location /Source: Authors’ survey, March 2015

¹ When questioned in more detail, she explained that the sense of going ‘over there’ starts for her at the next larger town of Bouzonville, in other words not in the French part of Leidingen or in Heining.

The interviewees in the qualitative research referred to the shared history of both places. Due to their affiliation with the ‘Roman Empire’ (interviewee) or, more recently, the good relations prior to the Second World War as expressed in reciprocal church visits, they feel connected with the neighbouring town. However, things changed with the Second World War, which is still expressed by some of the older interviewees as an antipathy towards Germans. This aversion appears to be generational and is scarcely discernible among the post-war generations.

‘Some people hated Germans because of the Second World War. And it continues in some families. As an outsider, you won’t notice it, but locals can feel it. [...] When you have a conversation with older people, you notice it.’ (Mr J, lines 98, 103)

3.3 Cross-border cooperation

Given the challenges, such as traffic problems, a sense of uncertainty or economic barriers, the question arises of how much importance people attach to cross-border cooperation. Overall, the respondents from both towns see a great need for action. Crime control is considered to be the most important goal of cross-border cooperation and is described by more than three-quarters of respondents as ‘very important’. Cooperation in environmental issues is considered to be almost equally important and relevant by respondents from both towns. As regards other aspects, e.g. the economy and trade, the respondents from Langsur were more likely to consider these ‘very important’, although the overall distribution did not reveal significant differences in regard to the characteristics. As outlined above, traffic is a significantly more important issue for respondents from Wasserbillig than for the German respondents. Other important issues are combating unemployment and promoting language skills, although respondents from Wasserbillig attach less importance to these issues than to the availability of housing in their country. For both towns, the goal of eliminating regional differences and discrepancies was the least important issue (cf. Table 4).

Issues ranked as ‘very important’ on a scale of 1 to 5	Figures in %	
	Langsur	Wasserbillig
Crime control	78	86
Cooperation in environmental (protection) issues	75	73
Economic cooperation	70	57
Trade	69	57
Traffic development*	68	82
Energy supply	58	63
Promoting language skills	58	45
Combatting unemployment	53	44
Improving healthcare	46	47
Improving the availability of housing	45	55
Cooperation in schooling, education and research	41	45
Developing tourism	41	37
Advancing culture and cultural activities	36	25
Mitigating regional differences	25	22

L: n=118, W: n=103, Cramer’s V, p: *: p: < 0.05

Table 4: Importance of cross-border cooperation / Source: Authors’ survey, March 2015

In the qualitative interviews, people in Wasserbillig and Langsur consistently characterise the current cooperation between local municipalities and associations as positive. For example, a new tourism information office was being built, and the two voluntary firefighting services were cooperating. The national bureaucracies were generally perceived to be an obstacle to cooperation.

‘The cooperation between certain organisations and associations could still be improved. This is quite common – you’re not allowed to do this in Luxembourg, no, you can’t do that in Germany for this or that reason. Because some of the regulations are different. And this may mean that you can’t do this or that. There is a lot of bureaucracy attached to such things, which you don’t have so much in private matters.’ (Mr S, line 266)

In Heining and Leidingen, the German-French border area, the current cross-border cooperation is generally described in positive terms. While one interviewee (Ms B) complained about the lack of interest between the Germans and the French, she also emphasised the decline in resentment. All four interviewees highlighted the language problems in the region, which make and keep the borders relevant (see also the paper by Schönwald/Spellerberg/Weber in this volume). Mr C in particular expressed his concerns in this regard. Mr C, a native of Lorraine, grew up with Moselle-Franconian as his mother tongue, but residents along the German and French border rarely learn this dialect today. In addition, German as a foreign language in school curricula is declining. Mr D is very critical of this trend:

‘Our Minister of Education has now come up with the idea that the German language, that German at high school level should be reduced. For us, this is a catastrophe. It was an opportunity for us. If I hadn’t spoken German or Moselle-Franconian, I would not have been able to work in Germany. This was an opportunity for me, and it was an incredible stroke of luck in my life.’ (Mr C, page 2)

Ms A., who is from Saarland, shared this criticism and concern that the language barrier was not being eliminated and was instead even being reinforced. While Mr C, from Lorraine, initially described the language issue to be a problem on the French side and lauded the attempts of Saarland as expressed in its most recent ‘France strategy’,² Mr D, from Saarland but currently living in Heining, criticised these attempts for not yet producing any noticeable results in practice.

‘At the beginning, there seems to have been talk of efforts to promote language courses, similar to what the federal state government of Saarland was talking about, but I haven’t seen anything come of it.’ (Mr D, page 5)

In all interviews, the language problem was described as a major issue at the German-French border. Due to the waning significance of the Moselle-Franconian dialect on the French side, language is even considered to be a problem that will become increasingly important, and often even the biggest problem in cross-border cooperation.

3.4 Advantages and disadvantages of the border region

The mutual interest that the inhabitants of Langsur and Wasserbillig have in each other is expressed in the quantitative survey by the fact that more than half of the residents of both towns (55%) regularly seek information about daily events in the other country, e.g. through the internet, radio, TV or newspapers. Of particular interest are cultural events, which people enjoy attending, as reflected in the interviews.

‘Yes, of course. Sure, every now and then I read about what is happening. Maybe there’s an exhibition, concert or some other event. Saarburg, for example, has very good shows, exhibitions and festivals. And in Metz, there’s the Mirabelle Plum Festival. And in Trier, as well.’ (Mr V, line 269)

To learn more about the future significance of the border region for the respondents, the quantitative survey also asked whether they thought that border checks should be resumed. Half of the respondents from Langsur and four out of ten respondents from Wasserbillig opposed this. Likewise, the reintroduction of different national

² The ‘France Strategy’ introduced by the federal state government of Saarland in 2014 seeks to develop Saarland ‘into a high-performance, multilingual region of a German-French character within one generation. French would then serve as the language of interaction in addition to German as the mother tongue and official language, supplemented by English’ (Saarland Ministry for Finance and Europe 2015).

currencies is not desired by a majority. Nevertheless, the respondents from the Luxembourg border town consider border checks to be useful more frequently than those from the German border town. However, a clear majority disagreed with the statement that the national borders should be eliminated entirely (not shown in the table).

An increase in checks at the border had been apparent during the recent waves of migration. In early 2015, at the time of the written survey, there had not yet been any expectations that the border between the neighbouring towns would be affected. Even at the time of the qualitative interviews in Wasserbillig and Langsur in September 2015, no one imagined that the border between the towns could be closed:

‘Here, at the heart of Europe, I don’t believe in the border anymore. Not any longer. External borders, yes. But here, along the internal borders, I don’t believe in them anymore.’ (Mr J, line 216)

During the interviews in the German-French border region of Heining and Leidingen, the subject of the open borders was raised frequently. About 30 years ago, as mentioned at the outset of this paper, the major concern of residents of the border region appeared to be that the border would become too permeable, yet in the summer of 2015 the interviewees stated that they were concerned about a border closure (which still appeared very unlikely at that time) or about increased checks at the national borders as a negative future scenario:

‘And what we should actually have learnt in Europe is that it doesn’t change anything in the sense of more crime, more hardship – that no country is really worse off because they got rid of border checks.’ (Ms A, page 14)

Ms B responded to the question about which potential future changes at the border would make her sad as follows:

‘Well, that they would become more strict, less permeable again. But I don’t think that this will be the case anymore.’ (Ms B, page 9)

She expressed her wish for the future of the border region as follows:

‘It would be great if we would be Europeans then, without any borders at all.’ (Ms B, page 9)

In his interview, Mr D emphasised the importance of open borders as a positive economic factor for the region. He is content with the current situation at the border (June 2015) and does not want any changes. Borders, physically manifested by border controls, are no longer desired.

In addition to renewed, more intense controls at the border or even the closing of the borders, the interviewees were concerned to the same extent about at least one other negative future scenario: the challenges related to the demographic change in the region. The interviewees reported problems in connection with maintaining the

infrastructure in the villages: the primary school in Heining was already at risk of being closed (Mr C), church services were no longer held regularly (Ms A), large parcels of land were difficult to sell (Mr C), and the bus connection was described as ‘very bad’ (Mr C, page 3). To overcome these challenges, the interviewees suggested that cooperation was indispensable and was already underway:

‘Yes, I think that eventually cooperation will be necessary as well because there are too few of us – on all sides, regardless of how you want to look at it. You can do a lot on a small scale, and a lot has been achieved already. That we have the same... Let’s say, both mayors saw to it that we would have reasonable arrangements for sewage or street lighting – so that both sides would not start to dig and do their own thing.’ (Ms A, page 9)

The structural problems were described by the two French interviewees (Ms B on the Saarland side and Mr C on the Lorraine side) as more severe on the French side. Ms B reported, for example, that her gym club in Saarland had members from Lorraine. But she was not aware of any comparable exchange in the other direction, from Saarland to Lorraine. Mr C, too, likes to use the neighbouring infrastructure in Saarland:

‘For us cross-border commuters, this is indeed a benefit. We go to see doctors in Germany because we can speak German, and also use the hospitals there when necessary. My wife gave birth to four children in Germany.’ (Mr C, page 3)

In summary, it can be said that the interviewees believe that cooperation is not only personally desirable, but also important for the future of the border region. Mr C describes in particular the changed regional outline in France beyond Alsace and Lorraine as a hazard for cooperation, fearing that the border region will be neglected as a result of this new territorial reorganisation.

Language skills are mentioned time and again as an important factor for the future development of the border region:

‘If we were bilingual [it] would be a major opportunity for our region, because here in France, in Lorraine, Moselle, our youth unemployment rate is 20%. We don’t have any industry for young people to work in – we have nothing left. Big ones don’t exist anymore. And this would then be the opportunity to say, you can go work on the other side.’ (Mr C, page 4).

3.5 Activities in the border region

The respondents from Langsur more frequently pursue activities in Luxembourg than those from Wasserbillig do in Germany. 67% of respondents go shopping for daily needs in the other country, which is a reflection of the respective supply structures. Likewise, people frequently shop for non-daily needs such as clothing in Germany, but only rarely vice versa in Luxembourg. The distribution in connection with fuel and employment was to be expected (38% of the respondents from Langsur

work in Luxembourg while only 1% of those from Wasserbillig work in Germany). The survey shows that almost a third of the residents of Langsur make use of social associations and medical services in Luxembourg and that every 11th child of Langsur attends school in Luxembourg, while the residents of Wasserbillig rarely go to Germany for such things. The families (42%) and friends (52%) of the participants from Wasserbillig appear more likely to live in Germany. The inhabitants of Langsur attend cultural events in Luxembourg more frequently (66%) than those in Wasserbillig do in Germany (56%). Almost two-thirds of respondents in both countries make excursions to the other country, and slightly more than one-third take part in sports activities in the neighbouring country (cf. Table 5). Hence, nine out of ten respondents from Langsur and six out of ten respondents from Wasserbillig cross the border at least once a week (not shown in the table). In many everyday activities, the national border thus fades into the background.

The activities listed in Table 5 demonstrate the brisk daily interactions in the border region (see also paper by Christina Wille and Ursula Roos in this volume). The columns not marked in colour indicate the percentages for activities which are performed in the respondents’ own country.

Where do you carry out the following activities?	Figures in %			
	Langsur (G)		Wasserbillig (L)	
	Germany	Luxembourg	Germany	Luxembourg
Petrol (G)**, (L) not significant	11	95	1	96
Excursions (G)**, (L)*	92	79	70	89
Shopping (daily needs)**	98	67	67	90
Attending cultural events (G)**, (L)*	91	66	56	80
Going out (eating out, drinking, cinema)**	95	64	72	92
Visiting friends**	92	61	52	96
Work**	59	38	1	84
Sports activities**	83	35	34	77
Visiting family**	97	29	42	86
Medical services**	94	25	12	99
Shopping (e.g. clothes)**	99	21	91	57
Activities in clubs and associations**	81	21	5	81
Attending school/ kindergarten**	61	9	1	54

L: n=180–220, W: 96–101; n= Cramer’s V, p: * < 0.05, ** < 0.01; if only indicated once, the asterisk(s) apply to both countries

Table 5: Activities abroad / Source: Authors’ survey, March 2015

The interviewees on the German-French border gave varying reasons for their daily border crossings. In particular, the greater range of choice offered by the border region, e.g. shopping for daily purchases, is appreciated.

3.6 Home and regional identity

While the place of residence generally triggers a sense of home (56% in Langsur, 61% in Wasserbillig), a ‘familiar landscape’ did to a different extent in both places. 40% of the interviewees from Langsur have a sense of belonging, while only 15% of the people from Wasserbillig do. In terms of crossing the border, it is the opposite: the respondents from Luxembourg sense this significantly more than those from Germany (cf. Table 6).

What makes you feel most at home?*	Figures in %	
	Langsur	Wasserbillig
The place you live	56	61
A familiar landscape	40	15
Crossing the border	2	16
Other	1	8
	100	100

L: n=94, W: n=69, Cramer’s V, p: **: < 0.01

Table 6: Triggers for a sense of home /Source: Authors’ survey, March 2015

When asked if the adjacent region of the other country could possibly be considered home, 18% of the participants from Langsur and 16% of the respondents from Wasserbillig already considered the neighbouring region their home. The neighbouring region is considered a potential home for half of the respondents from Langsur, but only for 20% of those from Wasserbillig. Respondents from Wasserbillig were also more averse in their responses by stating they would probably not (31%) or not at all (25%) consider the neighbouring region as home. Among the respondents from Langsur, 19% stated that the neighbouring region was probably not a potential home, and 9% stated that they definitely did not consider the neighbouring region to be their home (not shown in the table).

The reasons for the choice of residential location can be found in the biographical accounts the interviewees gave in the qualitative survey. The interviewees’ current residential location was chosen mainly for social reasons, with the family playing an important role in this connection. The reasons included wanting a nice, safe environment to raise children, or because family members such as a brother or sister live close by, or because a family member needs assistance. The rural area was mentioned as a further reason for the choice of residential location.

‘So we then looked for something rural, where the children would have a bit of space to run around.’ (Mr S, line 5)

The majority of respondents felt quite rooted in the region. Special significance was attached to the place and the region where a person was born and raised. In many cases, respondents had built a house in their place of birth or the surrounding area.

‘But I have lived here from the beginning, [I’m the] third generation. [...] I have spent almost my entire career here in Wasserbillig at the school, and we built a house in Mertert and lived there.’ (Ms L, lines 4, 6)

A sense of home

Participants in the quantitative survey were asked by means of an open-ended question to list typical keywords about their home (cf. Table 7). The answers given by the respondents indicate that three main characteristics apply to both regions, but to differing extents. The landscape, which was described as ‘beautiful’, ranks in first place, along with the Rivers Moselle and Sauer. 32 respondents from Langsur and 12 from Wasserbillig mentioned wine or viticulture. Language, which predominantly means the dialect in this context, ranked third. The number of respondents giving this answer did not differ greatly between countries. Respondents from Langsur moreover mentioned a great willingness to help among local people and neighbours (it was not clear if this referred to neighbours over the border) and emphasised the friendliness of the people. Regional food was the second most frequent response provided by respondents from Wasserbillig as being typical of their home.

Respondents from Wasserbillig also mentioned aspects that were not mentioned by those in Langsur. Based on the many people from different nationalities who live and work in Luxembourg, it is not surprising that multiculturalism was mentioned eight times as a characteristic of the home region. The respondents also characterised home as defined by origins, linguistic diversity, petrol tourism and the rural character, where people all know each other (cf. Table 7). In addition to these aspects, which point to the interconnectedness of global and local influences, the overall less frequent mention of characteristics is noteworthy.

In the qualitative interviews, the question about what home meant was also put to interviewees on the German-French border. As with earlier studies on the subject (Kühne/Spellerberg 2010), the survey shows the great significance of social considerations for the understanding of home. The interviewees understand their home to be the place where they feel ‘that I understand the people here and they think like I do and I think like they do.’ (Ms A, page 11-12). Great importance is also attached to the language or dialect, as Mr C explains in regard to the Moselle-Franconian dialect: ‘So there’s the matter of language. It is the essence of the entire sense of home.’ (Mr C, page 11). In addition to these social aspects, physical and spatial factors also apply, although upon closer examination they also related to social considerations:

'[...] I would say that for me, Leidingen is home; this is where I want to stay if possible. Of course, you never know what life has in store for you, but I expect that I will stay here [...] because of the people, because of the small town, because of the proximity to the border, because of the peace and quiet you generally have here. And because I think that I understand the people here.' (Ms A, page 12)

Aspects of the landscape were also drawn on to define home, such as the 'open landscape' (Ms A, page 13), the 'beautiful landscape' (Mr D, page 8). But financial and practical everyday matters also played a role, such as things being 'within relatively easy access' and affordable land and housing prices. Another aspect of home was its history, and closely associated with history, the border location:

'The identity of our home is shaped by this border, because it has shaped its history. If you go back 75 years, there was nobody here 75 years ago because they had all been evacuated and people had lost their lives. So if you now go back 70 years, people had to find a way to come together again. This region is really steeped in history, and this is also a part of home.' (Mr C, page 10)

Associations with home	Langsur	Wasserbillig
Landscape (river region)	53	27
Wine (viniculture)	32	12
Language (dialect)	15	12
Willingness to help	11	3
Friendly people	10	3
Family and friends	10	6
(Regional) food	8	13
Proximity to border	8	2
Village idyll	7	2
Sense of wellbeing/feeling safe and secure	6	6
Festivals	5	3
History	4	1
Multiculturalism	1	8
Place of origin	0	5
Language diversity	0	4
Petrol tourism	0	4
People all know each other	0	4

L: n=170; W: n=115

Table 7: Associations with home /Source: Authors' survey, March 2015

The respondents want to understand each other (in a dual sense: they want to speak the same language as the inhabitants of their home and they want to feel understood by them in the way they think); they want a ‘beautiful landscape’, although the definition of a beautiful landscape or of a feel-good scenery is evidently shaped by their own biographies (cf. ‘the normal landscape of home’ as mentioned by Kühne 2006), and they want to know that they are surrounded by a social network.

Translating the German term *Heimat* (home) into French is complicated. Neither of the two French interviewees could think immediately of a French equivalent to the German notion. Mr C believed that the expression *mon pays* (my country) comes closest, and Ms B proposed *patrie* (fatherland) as a possible translation. In Luxembourgish, the term *Heemecht* is used.

Close ties to a place, identification with the place of residence and the border region

The responses to the question about a sense of belonging show that the majority of respondents have a sense of belonging in regard to their place of residence, followed by the region on their side of the border. 32% of the residents of Langsur include the immediate region on the other side of the border and the region on both sides of the border (30%) in their assessment, compared to a clearly smaller percentage of respondents in Wasserbillig (13% and 19%). The biggest difference is evident in the sense of belonging to the Greater Region, as the percentage of people from Langsur who expressed a sense of belonging to the Region is three times higher than those from Wasserbillig. A greater percentage of the respondents from Wasserbillig associated a sense of belonging with their nationality than those from Langsur did. The residents of Langsur have a greater sense of belonging to the Greater Region and the directly adjacent region over the border than the residents of Wasserbillig, who emphasised a very strong sense of identification with Luxembourg and their place of residence (cf. Table 8).

I have a sense of belonging ... (those answering ‘yes’ based on a scale of 1 to 5)	Figures in %	
	Langsur	Wasserbillig
to the place where I live.	70	65
to the region on this side of the border.	62	60
to the region immediately across the border.*	32	13
to the region on both sides of the border.	30	19
to the Greater Region SaarLorLux+RLP.**	33	10
to the country in which I live.	62	74
to another country.	3	1

L: n=117, W: n=96, Cramer’s V, *: p: < 0.05, **: p: < 0.01

Table 8: Sense of belonging / Source: Authors’ survey, March 2015

The participants in the qualitative survey from Wasserbillig and Langsur explained that the sheer size and expansiveness of the Greater Region was the reason why it did not generate any clear sense of belonging. The interviewees believed that constituent regions of the political association had been selected based on economic interests and not the cultural commonalities of the inhabitants.

'I think that the Greater Region exists as a landscape, but I think as far as living and working together is concerned, they're still in the early stages. [...] The Greater Region is somehow on top of everything, but that's maybe because it is so big, so anonymous, so abstract.' (Mr S, lines 184, 240)

When asked what the participants would describe as home, there are clear differences between the interviewees from both places. 63% of participants from Langsur described their own region as home, compared to only 18% from Wasserbillig. The border region is home for 42% of the participants from Langsur (compared to only 20% of those from Wasserbillig). On the other hand, 42% of the participants from Wasserbillig considered the language area as their home (25% in Langsur). Their village is considered home by the majority, while their actual house is mentioned less frequently. Here, too, the results show that the residents from Langsur apparently have a greater sense of belonging to their (border) region, while for those from Wasserbillig, the place of residence and language area played an important role in their sense of home (cf. Table 9).

What would you designate as your home? (multiple answers possible)	Figures in %	
	Langsur	Wasserbillig
My region**	63	18
My place of residence	61	54
The border region**	42	20
My house/apartment	39	46
Europe	32	30
My language area**	25	42
None of the above	3	2

L: 122, W: 105, Cramer's V, p: ** < 0.01

Table 9: Designation of home /Source: Authors' survey, March 2015

When asked about how home could be defined, the family is always mentioned first. Home can be localised based on the respondents' roots. The place where the respondents were born and raised is (also) their home. Home is also described as a person's own house and the place of residence.

*‘Due to the fact that I have travelled so much and have lived elsewhere, the centre of my life is always where I feel at home, where I live and where the people I love are.’
(MsB, line 87)*

The motivation for living on the other side of the border is explained nearly identically in both places by tax and economic reasons, although an overall lower percentage of respondents from Wasserbillig state that they could envisage living on the German side of the border.

Dimensions of home

The results have shown that home has different connotations, e.g. as the place where the family lives, the place of birth, ties to nature or familiar customs and traditions. The aspect that was most commonly selected in connection with the question ‘Home is ...’ was ‘where I feel safe and secure’ (77% in Langsur, 81% in Wasserbillig), followed by ‘where my family lives’ (70% and 66%), ‘where I live’ (69% and 67%), ‘where my house is’ (59% and 66%) and ‘where I was born’ (50% and 53%). Items that were ranked lower also show greater variation: ‘where I want to live’ (42% compared to 34%), ‘where I experience nature’ (39% compared to 31%), ‘where my dialect is spoken’ (31% compared to 38%), ‘where there are familiar customs and traditions’ (29% compared to 42%) or ‘where the border is’ (22% compared to 16%). Family and friends represent stable, reliable social relationships, while the response ‘my own house’ emphasises the participant’s own biography and achievement. By means of factor analyses, it was determined in a next step whether the individual aspects are underpinned in both places by the same structure (cf. Table 10).

Home is where ...	Langsur			Wasserbillig		
	Tradition	Ideational home	Family seat	Sense of safety and security	Long-established resident	Ideational home
my dialect is spoken.	.87			.40		.61
I was born.	.80			.62		
there are familiar customs and traditions.	.73	.31	.33	.82		
my friends are.	.57	.43		.42	.41	
any ideal place.		.83				.82
I want to live.		.70			.43	.69
I can experience nature.	.45	.63		.54	.34	
the border is.		.58		.44		.67
my house is.			.82		.80	
I live.			.79		.63	
I feel safe and secure.			.61	.64		
my family lives.			.43	.55	.31	

L: KMO: .79/Bartl. P: .00/cumul. V.: .58 W: KMO: .69/Bartl. P: .00/cumul. V.: .55

Table 10: Meaning of home – Factor loadings for the variables / Source: Authors' survey, March 2015

In both towns, three dimensions were identified for the 12 individual characteristics. In Langsur, these three aspects can be identified as tradition, an ideational home and the seat of the family. The first factor is formed by the following variables: dialect, place of birth, familiar customs and traditions, and the place where friends live. The item 'where I experience nature' also correlates with the first factor, but it is captured under the second dimension of an 'ideational home', combining the aspects of an ideal place, a desired place and the border. Factor 3 relates to the family seat with the following characteristics: house, the current place of residence, a sense of safety and security, and family.

In Wasserbillig six of the twelve characteristics form two factors, which means that the answer is much less clear than in Langsur and that it is also much more difficult to interpret the individual factors. The first dimension includes familiar customs, a sense of security, the place of birth, family and appreciation of nature – this factor

therefore focuses on a sense of safety and security. The second factor can be interpreted as being a long-established resident, because it comprises living in their own house and the spoken dialect. The third factor corresponds largely to the second factor identified in Langsur: the *ideational home*.

Even though quite different patterns are discernible in regard to the dimensions of home between the Luxembourg and the German border towns, there are hardly any differences in regard to socio-structural differentiation between the two countries. In their assessment of the individual characteristics, men do not differ significantly from women, nor younger people from older ones, nor financially well-off people from those with less resources. The responses given in the two countries differ only with regard to the educational qualifications of the respondents to the extent that those with higher education qualifications tended to have a less pronounced stance on the individual characteristics, i.e. they considered home to be less important overall.

4 Conclusions

To conclude, the key findings are summarised and answers provided to the research questions presented at the outset. Firstly, it became apparent that the border as a boundary controlled by organs of the national state is now considered to be of minor significance. The end of the border controls in the wake of the Schengen Agreement is perceived to be positive in Langsur and Wasserbillig – the border checks had previously been perceived as an obstruction in everyday life. At the same time, references to one’s own nation state do not become obsolete; distinctions between a respondent’s own country and the neighbouring country continue to be relevant. The German respondents tend to show a greater openness to their neighbouring country of Luxembourg. The respondents from Wasserbillig, on the other hand, show a stronger sense of being locally rooted. For them, the dialect and familiar customs and traditions are very important to their sense of home. Their strong ties to the Luxembourg nation is also manifested in the fact that very few respondents could envisage living in Germany.

The respondents at the German-Luxembourg border show a fairly broad notion of home. While many mentioned that their place of residence was their home, it became clear during further explanations that home was also associated with various factors, in particular socially defined factors, such as a sense of safety and security, family, dialect or the ‘specific landscape’ (the latter particularly in Langsur). At the same it is apparent that the respondents from Wasserbillig predominantly feel at home in their country, because being in a familiar language area is also important to them. The participants from Langsur, on the other hand, were more likely to consider home to encompass the region on both sides of the border. The question of whether life in a border region creates new forms of a local identity cannot be answered unequivocally because there is already an appreciation of a special space, which certainly affects identification; a specific place identity, however, concerns only a minority of the respondents.

The economic cooperation between Luxembourg and Germany is deemed to be very positive by all respondents. Approximately one-third of the respondents from Langsur works in Luxembourg, meaning that they profit from tax advantages and the wage levels. The residents of Wasserbillig mainly do their shopping in Germany, and inhabitants of Langsur refuel their cars in Luxembourg. The border location offers economic benefits for respondents on both sides of the border. However, the increased traffic and associated air pollution, compounded on the Luxembourg side by the ‘petrol tourism’ from foreigners, are viewed as negative.

A good relationship with neighbours on the other side of the border, as in the survey by Vogelsang (2011), is also discernible among participants of this survey. However, it is clear that individual respondents from Langsur would like to see better neighbourly relations through more tolerance on the part of their neighbours in Wasserbillig. Relationships with friends and family also exist beyond the respondents’ own national border. Unlike in the case of the study on cross-border commuters by Christian Wille et al. (2014), there is significant interest among the participants of this survey in events in the neighbouring country. More than half of the inhabitants of both places regularly seek information about daily events in the other country. One reason for doing so is certainly the location of both municipalities directly on the border, due to which the residents pursue various forms of regular communication and interaction with the other side, whether in a professional, private or social capacity or through excursions.

The assumption that a local identity would influence daily activities is not borne out by the results of the survey. Daily activities take place regularly and pragmatically in the adjacent country, which is reflected in particular in shopping and refuelling behaviour. At first, this finding gave rise to the impression that the border no longer existed even at a symbolic level in the area. Yet the language barrier increasingly appears to be a difficult boundary to cross. Alongside this barrier and the different regulations, which are also obstacles to cooperation, there is also a positive side to the border, which continues to exist partly as a symbolic border: the residual ‘otherness’ on the other side is still thoroughly appreciated, such as on outings or excursions.

The participants from both villages stated in the written survey that they consider the multiculturalism in the border region to be a significant advantage. At the same time, a greater affinity with the border and Greater Region is evident among the respondents from Langsur. Cultural differences are emphasised more by the respondents from Wasserbillig than by those from Langsur, although the findings were predominantly similar in the twin villages. The border region of the municipalities is generally perceived as a positive aspect and the sense of home is primarily associated with the more immediate private and residential sphere.

The results of the quantitative survey and the qualitative interviews largely coincide with the results from previous studies. As in the study by Wille and Hesse (2014), this empirical survey also emphasised that spatial affiliation is not primarily shaped by the border location. In conclusion, we would like to revisit the question with which we started this paper: ‘Where would we end up?’ – or rather ‘Where did we end up?’ In

terms of the importance of the border, there is general agreement that it is scarcely noticed anymore, and that since its disappearance life has become more convenient and has benefited in particular ways. At the same time, there are challenges, especially for cross-border cooperation, for example in regard to crime prevention, demographic change or deficits in language skills on both sides, which represent tasks for the years to come.

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