



**Observatory for
Sociopolitical Developments
in Europe**

Demographic change in border regions – Cross-border cooperation to safeguard services of general interest

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Summary

As a result of the effects of demographic change, the safeguarding of services of general interest faces challenges in many German regions. Local authorities are tasked with developing solutions to these challenges and with adapting local structures to current and future circumstances.

Cross-border cooperation is one way of tackling these challenges together with municipalities and regions in neighbouring countries. This working paper examines the opportunities, potential disadvantages, forms, obstacles and success factors of cross-border cooperation for border regions.

To do so, guided interviews with project managers as well as with those responsible in municipalities and districts were conducted and evaluated.

These are some of the major findings:

- The interviewees see a range of opportunities in cross-border cooperation, such as the possibility of tackling challenges together, learning from each other, pooling resources and creating added value for the region. The interviewed project managers as well as responsible persons in districts and municipalities do not name any disadvantages of cross-border cooperation.
- Cross-border cooperation is organised differently in the border regions, depending on local needs. Funding through the INTERREG programme of the European Union is a much-used form of institutionalised cooperation.
- Cross-border cooperation is faced with a number of obstacles and challenges, both within the projects and in terms of the framework conditions for cooperation. In turn, however, local cooperation itself can only have a limited influence on the legal, administrative and political challenges.
- Nonetheless, a large number of success factors are identified which can contribute to successful cross-border cooperation. These central factors include a) close and trustful cooperation, b) involvement and motivation of many stakeholders, in particular the participation of citizens, c) a structuring of the cooperation that corresponds to its framework conditions and objectives, d) links with existing contacts and other measures, e) increased visibility, f) political support, and g) perpetuation of cross-border cooperation.
- The challenges facing border regions in safeguarding services of general interest are also recognised at European level. In addition to existing measures geared to facilitate cooperation, the possibility of being able to apply regulations of one member state in the neighbouring member state is currently being discussed.

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1 Introduction

The effects of demographic change can be seen in many areas of life in Germany. While birth rates continue to be consistently low, life expectancy and the average age of the population rise (BMI 2015: 6).

In addition to this, rural areas often have difficulties in making young people stay in the region or attracting them to come to the region (BMVI 2015a: 16).

Safeguarding services of general interest also faces challenges in many regions. Where population figures are in decline, demand for such services of general interest usually declines as well and lower capacity utilisation makes it more difficult to offer services of general interest at a cost-covering level (ibid.). However, the safeguarding of services of general interest has a direct impact on the living conditions and the quality of life of the local population and thus forms “an essential basis for equal living conditions” (BBSR 2017: 6).

Municipalities are therefore confronted with the task of developing solutions to these challenges and adapting local structures to current as well as future conditions. This requires flexibility and openness as well as the ability to innovate (BMI 2015: 5). Such solutions are already being developed, for example with the project “Demography Workshop for Municipalities” (Demografiewerkstatt Kommunen, DWK) of the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) or the action programme “Model Projects in Regional Planning” (Modellvorhaben der Raumordnung, MORO) of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (BMI).

However, another way to address the challenges of demographic change arises for regions that lie close to a national border. Border regions can take advantage of their special spatial situation by seeking joint solutions to similar challenges and pooling resources with the region on the other side of the border. Against this background, this present working paper examines how such cross-border cooperation can be successfully developed.

The aim is to draw on the experience of already existing cross-border cooperation and to make the resulting findings available for other cross-border projects or future cooperation. For this purpose, opportunities for the participating border regions, potential disadvantages, forms of cooperation as well as obstacles and success factors for the cooperation are surveyed. The analysis has shown that with the presentation of different forms of cross-border cooperation, an entire spectrum of potential forms of cooperation becomes apparent. For a successful cooperation, it is also crucial to be aware of problems and obstacles that can occur in the context of cross-border cooperation. For this reason, besides the factors for a successfully designed cooperation, possible obstacles are also identified. These findings might also be of benefit to other municipalities and projects. For this purpose, the following research questions were formulated:

- Which forms of cross-border cooperation are being utilised?
- What opportunities and advantages does cross-border cooperation offer, especially with regard to meeting the challenges posed by demographic change? Are there disadvantages?

- Which success factors as well as obstacles for cross-border cooperation can be observed?
- Which transferable tools or processes for successful cross-border cooperation can be identified?

The following process was chosen to answer these questions: Twelve guided interviews with project managers and responsible persons in municipalities and districts from seven cross-border cooperation projects in German border regions were conducted and evaluated. The perspectives of the project managers were assessed, as they have a comprehensive knowledge of the entire respective project. Since responsibility for many aspects of services of general interest lies at the municipal level (BMVI 2016: 8), this perspective was supplemented by an assessment of responsible persons in the participating municipalities and districts. In addition, reports and studies on the projects were analysed. Moreover, the experiences of the regions, districts and municipalities with cross-border cooperation beyond the specific project were also surveyed. The results will be presented in the context of current scientific research in this field.

The analysed cross-border cooperation projects deal with the topics of local supply, mobility as well as health and care. These are three aspects of services of general interest that are relevant with regard to demographic change and are of interest to the BMFSFJ, the commissioning party of the present study, in order to be able to analyse the consequences of societal change. Projects were selected whose project conception seems particularly suitable for gaining relevant insights for the formulated research questions. It is expected that analysing these projects will result in the recognition of transferable aspects for other municipalities and their own cross-border cooperation. Projects in the German-Dutch, German-Belgian, German-Danish, German-Polish, German-Czech, German-Swiss and German-Austrian border regions were considered. These are marked by very heterogeneous preconditions: They have different structures of services of general interest and have been affected to varying degrees by demographic change. In order to include as many different framework conditions as possible, regionally and structurally different projects and border regions were selected. Furthermore, the projects are structured differently, for example with regard to the project partners involved, and are at different stages of the project process. All selected projects are funded by the INTERREG programme of the European Union (see chapter 2.2). In summary, the selection of cases has been made in such a way that the most informative and transferable findings can be obtained. The decision for a qualitative research approach was made due to expected added value in the direct exchange with contact persons from the projects, who provide a direct insight into cross-border cooperation as well as assessments and evaluations (Blatter et al. 2007: 24) while at the same time being able to reflect on the context and framework of the projects. This also ensures greater openness to aspects that the interviewees feel are relevant (Bryman 2012: 470).^{1:2} However, it should

¹ Qualitative procedures are, by virtue of the above-mentioned advantages, the norm for scientific research on cross-border cooperation (see e.g. Damm 2018; Engl 2016; Evrard 2016; González-Gómez/Gualda 2016; Svensson 2013, 2017; EU COM 2016a; Kurowska-Pysz et al. 2018; Pauli 2015; Zäch/Pütz 2014).

also be noted that by choosing this approach, the results cannot be generalised and therefore no claim is made to be representative of all types of cross-border cooperation. Rather, the focus is on gaining knowledge for the practical implementation of future cross-border cooperation, based on existing experience. For the evaluation, the interviewees are anonymised. Thus, there are no direct references to persons, projects or single interviews. In order to ensure an anonymised evaluation, the same is done with published reports on the projects.

2 Demographic change – Challenges for services of general interest

2.1 Demographic developments and their effects on services of general interest

Germany is currently facing various demographic trends. The population's average age is rising, people live longer, and birth rates go down. Different regions are affected to varying degrees by the effects of demographic change. In general, the ageing of the population can be identified as an overarching trend, though (BMI 2011: 227). In particular, the effects of demographic change on economic competitiveness and on the social security systems are at the focus of public discourse (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder 2011: 3). In addition, the Federal Government's demography report also names the areas of family and society, migration and integration, work, education and research, health and care, rural areas and urban regions, infrastructure and mobility as well as state and administration as central policy areas that are linked to demographic change (BMI 2011).

Against this background of demographic change, safeguarding services of general interest also faces a number of challenges (BBSR 2017: 7). In concrete terms, the population's ageing makes it for instance necessary to re-orient the infrastructure of services of general interest, for example in the care of very elderly people (BMVI 2015b: 25). At the same time, low population density makes it more difficult to safeguard services of general interest as the infrastructure costs per person increase (BBSR 2017: 7). Services of general interest can be understood as the supply of goods and services "which serve the common good and the development of people's lives" (BMFSFJ 2016: 28).³ Therefore, the safeguarding of services of general interest has a direct impact on the living conditions and the quality of life of the local population and thus forms "an essential basis for equal living conditions" (BBSR 2017:

² Central quality criteria of qualitative, interpretative research according to Blatter et al. (2018: 42) – i.e. transparency and intersubjective traceability, plausibility, relevance, systematic reflection of constitutive subjectivity, triangulation – are complied with in this working paper by documenting the research process and reflecting on the decisions and problems, by checking that the results are consistent, by linking them to current questions and challenges in political practice, by supervision and compliance with research-ethical standards, and by linking the results of the analysis to existing research findings.

³ Since there is no uniform definition of the term (BMFSFJ 2016: 28), the understanding of services of general interest in this study is based on the relevant publications and literature (see e.g. BBSR 2015b; BBSR 2017: 28; BMFSFJ 2016: 28; BMVI 2016: 8).

6). Important requirements for services of general interest are accessibility, quality and their availability at reasonable prices (BBSR 2017: 6f.). With regard to the understanding of services of general interest in the seventh Report on the Elderly of the Federal Government, it should therefore be the aim of the state “to empower every member and every social group in society to live and act well, and to offer them equal opportunities to participate in the life of the community” (BMFSFJ 2016: 35).

The selected and analysed cross-border cooperation projects implement projects in the areas of local services, health and care as well as mobility. Many areas of services of general interest are the responsibility of state institutions, especially the municipalities (BMFSFJ 2016: 28). The local food supply, on the other hand, is usually handled by the private sector. However, in other areas, too, responsibilities between the public and private sectors are being reorganised (BBSR 2015b). This calls for the involvement of various stakeholders: “In many areas of services of general interest, the state, municipalities, citizens and business enterprises work side by side [...], ideally together” (BMFSFJ 2016: 28, 34f.). In line with the broad understanding of services of general interest, this working paper thus includes various providers of such services of general interest.

In general, *local services* refers to the “immediate and local supply of goods for daily use” (BMVBS 2013: 3). While there is no uniform understanding of which goods are actually included in this definition, the definition always includes food products (BBSR 2015a: 3). This understanding will also be used in this working paper. The requirement of (walking) distance is particularly important in this area, especially for people who are less mobile (BBSR 2015a: 1; BLE 2013: 30). The analysed projects aim to safeguard the long-term supply of goods for everyday needs in the participating communities. To do so, model solutions, for example in the form of village shops, were discussed and tested locally.

While *health care provisions* close to people’s homes is currently regarded as “secured” in Germany, demographic developments are contributing to the fact that care in certain areas and regions is considered to be at risk in the future (Schlömer/Pütz 2011: 10). Against the background of an increasingly ageing society, the need for new concepts and solutions in the field of (elderly) care is also gaining in importance. Many of the analysed projects in the field of health and care develop innovative solutions to meet the challenges of demographic change in rural areas in order to maintain the quality of life in such municipalities. One objective of the projects is therefore the maintenance of supply as well as local capacities for action, municipal self-management, the involvement of voluntary work or measures to maintain the individual autonomy of citizens for as long as possible. Furthermore, cross-border networking in the health sector and the uptake of health services on the other side of the border are another main focus of the analysed projects.

Mobility is seen as a condition “for the functioning of modern societies in which a considerable spatial separation of functions such as living, working, education or supply has developed” (BBSR 2017: 106). Therefore, this issue is given a corresponding importance, especially in the field of local public transport, also in regional and state planning. All state spatial development plans pick up on this topic (BBSR 2017: 30). The analysed projects pursue the goal of expanding cross-border mobility, for example through improvements in

local public transport, cross-border ticketing solutions and passenger information or joint planning of transport infrastructure.

2.2 Cross-border cooperation – Meeting the challenges of demographic change together

There are 40 internal borders in the European Union and the bordering countries of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) (EU COM 2017a: 2). They play a central role in advancing the goal of the European Union's social, economic and spatial integration as agreed in the Treaty of Lisbon (BBSR 2018a). Safeguarding services of general interest is also seen as a task "to secure the economic, social and territorial development of the sub-regions in accordance with the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy" (Mangels/Wohland 2018: 252).

National borders constitute both barriers and opportunities for border regions (BMVI 2017: 13). Even if borders, national sovereignty and the associated obstacles still exist in Europe, a wide range of barriers have already been removed (Caesar/Pallagst 2018: 12). The European Single Market, the Euro as a common currency and the Schengen area are exemplary measures for overcoming the barrier effect of borders (Heintel et al. 2018: 6). They contribute to making it easier for border regions to take advantage of the opportunities offered by their location on a national border – a feature that other regions do not possess (BMVI 2017: 13).

To meet the challenges of demographic change, innovative ideas and new approaches are repeatedly called for (see e.g. Sächsische Staatskanzlei 2014: 9f.). Cross-border cooperation between projects, municipalities, districts and regions is presented in this working paper as such a potential approach for border regions – as a special type of region – in how they can meet the challenges of demographic change. Although this is an already existing approach, the following chapters show the potentials of cross-border cooperation that can also be used by other municipalities, districts and projects in border regions.

Cross-border cooperation is understood as a measure involving at least one actor from each side of a national border and aiming to achieve a common goal by pooling resources (Svensson/Balogh 2018: 126). In this working paper, cooperation between actors in border regions is understood as cross-border cooperation, whereas transnational or interregional cooperation is not the subject of investigation.⁴ A well-known form of support for cross-border cooperation is *European Territorial Cooperation*, better known as INTERREG. European Territorial Cooperation is one of two objectives of the European Cohesion Policy and an important financial instrument for cross-border cooperation programmes (EU COM 2018a; 2018b: 1). The aim of INTERREG is a coordinated economic, social and spatial development of the EU (EU COM 2018a). Cross-border cooperation within the INTERREG programme is project-based. The programme is managed by the 57 programme regions in Europe, which

⁴ Various definitions and classifications of border regions can be found in the scientific and political debate on border regions. This present study defines the eligible areas of the INTERREG programme as border regions (Strand A) (see Figure 1 in the Annex).

consist of the border regions of at least two states and which decide on the implementation of the individual cross-border projects (EU COM 2019). In Germany, there is “a total of 13 cross-border [...] programmes [...], which are managed in a decentralised manner” (BBSR 2018b). Accordingly, the border regions each determine for themselves how INTERREG projects must be designed in terms of content and administration. This is illustrated by the following example of the German-Danish border region. However, cross-border cooperation is also possible beyond the project-based cooperation within the framework of the INTERREG programme (see chapter 5).

INTERREG V A Germany – Denmark 2014-2020

Actors/stakeholders that participate in an INTERREG project and are eligible for funding under the programme are, for example, the federal government, the German Länder, districts and independent towns, municipalities, universities and universities of applied sciences, chambers of commerce, public hospitals, foundations under public law, municipal special-purpose associations, municipal umbrella organisations, nature and environmental protection associations, foundations, clubs, interest groups. They take on different functions within the project. The activities must be cross-border and involve at least one German and one Danish partner. A public or semi-public institution becomes the **lead partner**. It is thus the applicant and has overall responsibility for the project implementation. Together with the lead partner, the **project partners** are responsible for planning, financing and implementing the project activities. The lead partner and all project partners conclude a partnership agreement. **Network partners** participate in the project with experience and expertise, but do not bear any financial responsibility and do not receive any subsidies.

Content focus of the projects: Each project must determine a specific objective to which it intends to contribute, currently in the fields of cross-border innovation, sustainable development, labour market, employment and training, and functional cooperation. The project must have a cross-border added value.

Funding: Projects can receive a grant of 60% or 75% of the total eligible costs. The maximum duration of projects is 36 months, or more in exceptional cases. The German-Danish INTERREG Committee takes the decision on the approval of project funding applications.

(Interreg Deutschland – Danmark 2014-2020 2017; 2019a,b,c)

Cross-border cooperation in the field of services of general interest is expected to offer many opportunities and potential for the border regions. At the same time, it may itself pose challenges for the participating border regions (Mangels/Wohland 2018: 250). In the following, these aspects – forms of cooperation, opportunities, disadvantages, challenges and success factors of cross-border cooperation in the field of services of general interest – are analysed. For this purpose, the results of the surveys of the sample projects are utilised, as well as further publications on these projects and current research results on cross-border cooperation.

3 Opportunities of cross-border cooperation for the regions

In addition to the overall objective of being able to better counter the consequences of demographic change, project participants see a number of other advantages and opportunities arising from the cross-border design of projects. These are presented below in order to make the potential benefits of cross-border cooperation visible to other municipalities and projects. In addition, the opportunities presented can also serve as an argumentation aid to convince other actors of the merits of a cross-border approach (see chapter 6.2).

Mastering same challenges together

For many cooperation projects, a central opportunity of cross-border cooperation lies in the joint mastering of the same or similar challenges. Needed local structures break away or have been missing for a long time. Due to their peripheral location, border regions often face structural disadvantages in comparison to national central areas (BMI 2014: 5). But even urban regions have to struggle with problems such as polarisation in the form of segregation (BMFSFJ 2016: 33). According to the interviewees, in order to be able to tackle similar challenges together, these should be recognised as such in a first step. Moreover, the added value of cross-border cooperation in tackling them must be acknowledged. In the process, the way common challenges are overcome can be perceived very differently from region to region. These range from ensuring medical care, increasing the attractiveness of the region to creating new standards for ticketing solutions in local transport.



“I don’t think there have been many projects in the region before, [...] where the issue of demographic development or a potential problem had been so clearly visible. If you then realise that the partner 50 kilometres away has very similar or the same problems, this always has advantages.”

Benefitting from differences

Despite similar preconditions on both sides of the border, there are often different framework conditions and approaches to overcoming challenges. Therefore, similar challenges are sometimes met with different solutions, due to the framework conditions. Awareness regarding these differences can, first of all, help to avoid problems in direct cross-border cooperation, such as misunderstandings or different expectations. In addition to this, cross-border constellations provide an opportunity to change the view of one’s own framework conditions as well as to recognise other functioning solutions and, potentially, to make use of them, too.



“Both Germany and the Netherlands are successfully functioning countries; both have a good economy and good social systems, even though they are organised differently. This means that each other’s approach obviously works – even if it is not what you yourself might prefer or what you are used to.”

Getting to know and learning from each other

Cross-border cooperation offers the opportunity to get to know the region and the municipalities on the other side of the border. Getting to know the activities of the other country in various fields is an opportunity and a prerequisite for possible contact points and cooperation. This makes it possible to become aware of current issues and problems on the other side of the border and to compare these with one’s own regional circumstances.

The experiences and approaches to solutions on the other side of the border are considered to have great potential in the search for solutions to one’s own challenges. Border regions often face similar challenges in safeguarding services of general interest. However, differences between the social systems, legislation, philosophies and cultures as well as different framework conditions lead to sometimes very different solution approaches. In turn, this means that actors on the other side of the border can learn from these different approaches. The different approaches and, above all, the exchanges are therefore seen as an opportunity for inspiration and innovation. The surveys show that there is a great interest in not only getting to know the different experiences and approaches, but also in including them in the cooperation. In particular, there is a great interest in solutions for rural areas and in examples of good practice, which present good experiences in cross-border cooperation and give implementation ideas for others. Meanwhile, one of the mentioned limitations is that while there is always the possibility to learn from each other, solutions from one country cannot be transferred one by one to another country. Rather, they have to be adapted individually on location.



“But especially in cross-border issues – due to different laws, due to different philosophies in planning – there are interesting examples. For instance, one city may be particularly proactive in freight transport, while the other is particularly active in the field of e-mobility. And in these cases, such networks for knowledge exchange or for getting to know contact persons or for having a close connection to the planners on the other side [of the border], are definitely helpful.”

Pooling resources

In very practical terms, cross-border cooperation represents an opportunity for border regions to use synergy effects, pool resources and address issues regarding services of general interest in a financially sustainable manner. It is important to note that neighbouring regions sometimes show great similarities, but in some cases, they can also differ substantially in terms of structural features. Therefore, the joint utilisation of resources can offer different opportunities. For instance, structurally weaker border regions adjacent to structurally stronger regions have the possibility of co-using the structures and facilities on the other side of the border. With regard to health, for example, the European Commission formulates the improvement of “complementarity of their health services in border regions” as one priority of cross-border cooperation (EU COM 2017a: 13). For border regions that are structurally similar, there is often an opportunity to make better use of resources and save costs through cooperation. It is often considered too complex and expensive for each individual municipality to run projects alone; cooperation with other municipalities, in turn, is considered beneficial. In particular, the need to merge projects and activities that already exist but which have been running in parallel on both sides of the border is highlighted. The levels and intensity of cooperation can vary considerably. Examples range from joint youth work to joint economic development and joint city marketing. Other studies have also identified the coordination of services of general interest and the avoidance of duplicate structures on both sides of the border as an important advantage of cross-border cooperation (Caesar/Pallagst 2018: 20; Mangels/Wohland 2018: 250). They also point to the advantages that cross-border offers can have regarding an improved sustainability, catchment area and accessibility (ibid.).



“Thinking in cross-border regions is important just as it is important to be aware of the fact that services may still be available at the other side of the border.”

Creating added value for the region

In addition to the possibility of tackling problems together, cross-border cooperation is also seen as an opportunity for revaluing and raising the status of the region in general. For this reason, cross-border cooperation is seen in some regions as a long-term investment in the region, as a development factor for a strong cross-border region, combined with an effort to increase the significance of the region on both sides of the border. Cross-border cooperation is also said to have the ability not only to make border regions more attractive but also to reduce the differences between the centre and the periphery (Caesar/Pallagst 2018: 20; MOT 2017: 2).



“Of course, it is true that healthcare service comes with concrete costs. However, it is dangerous if you only focus on this and not the region’s development. This effectively closes the borders. Because then you can argue that the money should go somewhere else. We see things differently. We consider this a development factor for the region. And this is not only a point that regional policymakers have to consider, but also supra-regional actors.”

More activities due to additional funding, increasing visibility

According to the interviewees in some regions, the provision of additional financial resources through the INTERREG programme was the first step towards the implementation of cross-border projects. These funds are also used to increase the scope of activities within the projects. Furthermore, the experience was that the INTERREG programme increases the visibility of planned cooperation and makes it easier to address and bring together project partners, for instance. It has also been found in some cases that potential partners who had previously shown little interest joined the INTERREG project after the actual start of the project.

Setting the agenda

In terms of content, too, there are new opportunities for safeguarding services of general interest through cross-border cooperation. The additional financial resources of the INTERREG programme, for example, make it possible to work on topics that are not provided for in the local budgets. It is also stated that INTERREG projects can attract attention and increase the importance of cross-border cooperation and the respective project topics. Some interviews show that this experience is accompanied by the hope of further emphasising the added value of cross-border cooperation and, in the long term, of also addressing issues that have not yet or rarely been tackled on a cross-border basis. Examples of this are the areas of health, education and childcare. Existing studies also find this motivation among project managers of current cross-border cooperation projects: After many successful cooperation projects have been implemented in the past, for example in areas such as tourism or culture, there is now a demand to address “core problems and critical points” (Pallagst et al. 2018b: 345).

Pushing national projects, reaching better national networks

Last but not least, it is also reported that successful INTERREG projects lead to the topics initiated being often followed up in the countries themselves, be it at local or regional level. Examples of this come primarily from the fields of old age and care. This can range from brainstorming to the actual implementation of projects and the establishment of specific administrative structures, such as administrative staff responsible for contacts across

borders. It becomes also clear from the surveys that cross-border cooperation can contribute to the national networking of regions and relevant actors in one thematic field.

Avoiding deteriorations, maintaining the status quo

In addition to the opportunities and advantages of cross-border cooperation, the representatives from projects and municipalities were also asked about the disadvantages of this type of cooperation. However, such potentially adverse effects of cross-border cooperation are not perceived, neither in relation to the respective projects nor in relation to experience with cross-border cooperation in general. It is noted, however, that it is not the objective of every single cooperation project to improve the local conditions significantly. Some projects also aim to merely avoid deterioration, such as a renewed increase in obstacles to the use of cross-border public transport.



“In fact, we often work to maintain the status quo. We are not only working towards small positive changes [...] but we also try to ensure that the situation does not deteriorate.”

4 Designing cross-border cooperation – Forms of cooperation

Following the opportunities, various forms of cross-border cooperation are presented below. The basic concepts of cooperation and their concrete form in the projects will be analysed. This list also serves to inform other cross-border cooperation projects. However, it also makes clear that, depending on the form of cooperation, different objectives and demands on the results of the projects can be pursued. In addition, different success factors and obstacles for cross-border projects, depending on their design, can be identified.

In principle, alongside informal forms of cooperation, there are also highly institutionalised forms with their own legal status (De Sousa 2013: 676). Formalised forms of cooperation often develop over time from initially informal contexts (Pallagst 2018: 354). Cooperation is possible at different levels – at European level (for example with the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)), at intergovernmental level (for example with spatial planning commissions or governmental commissions), at member state level (for example with large-region projects), at regional level (for example with Euregio or Eurodistrict) or at municipal level (for example via city networks) (Pallagst 2018: 355 ff.). Special importance is attached to project-based cooperation supported by the INTERREG programme (ibid.: 358).

Two different orientations of cooperation can be identified in the analysed projects: On the one hand, joint cross-border work on certain topics and tasks in the project and, on the other hand, a national implementation of the projects combined with a cross-border exchange of

experience. Examples of joint work on specific aspects of the projects include the bringing together of concrete projects for citizens that have so far been running in parallel on both sides of the border, the introduction of cross-border bus lines and ticketing systems, and even the creation of joint municipal structures and a common image. Examples of the second orientation are national project implementation combined with knowledge transfer, collegial consultation, reflection on future development potentials or the reciprocal view of examples of good practice. In the projects examined, this categorisation is rarely found with such a clear-cut distinction. Anyhow, a tendency can usually be observed. It is also common practice that sub-projects of a specific project pursue different approaches. In the sectors of health and care as well as mobility, both orientations of cooperation can be found. In the area of local supply, a national implementation with cross-border exchange of experience can be observed. This can be attributed to the fact that offers must be available locally and ideally have to meet the criterion of walking distance.

The interviews have shown that the concrete form of cooperation in projects can also differ in whether the cooperation is continuous or selective. The question of which cooperation formats the single projects choose depends on the respective project conception and objectives and should be selected to precisely fit the project. For instance, the topic of the project and the degree of institutionalisation of the cooperation can be factors that influence the choice of project formats.

Perpetuated formats of cooperation and exchange

The analysed projects use a variety of formats in which cross-border cooperation is carried out on individual aspects of the projects. These include thematic working groups, series of workshops, case studies, sub-projects, model projects and pilot projects as well as feasibility studies. With regard to the exchange of experience, there are permanent formats such as regular meetings (regular's tables) of participating actors in the field of local supply. Regular project meetings as well as working meetings provided for by the INTERREG programme represent an institutionalised version of this permanent exchange, which, however, is usually only designed for the duration of the INTERREG project. Meanwhile, such formats have also been established outside of concrete projects, for instance through regular joint meetings of the local representatives of the municipalities from both countries. A perpetuation of cross-border contacts is also sought through the establishment of networks. Depending on the project, these networks are set up within a sector, for example in the form of an entrepreneurial network, or between many different actors on both sides of the border. Exchange of experience, regular meetings and a long-term establishment of cooperation are the objectives of many of these networks. Finally, the double city concept, in which two cities on the border merge into one (European) city, at least symbolically, is a far more advanced form of such perpetual cooperation.

Selective formats of cooperation and exchange

Stand-alone event formats such as kick-off events or conferences are used at the beginning of the project and above all for a thematic exchange. Examples are conferences on local

supply or demography. In addition, project or action days are a popular format for working together in the project on specific occasions. When doing so, focus lies on the opportunity to get to know and learn from each other. This is often combined with a publicity-effective presentation of the cooperation, which gets citizens involved in the cross-border exchange. Excursions to the municipalities on the other side of the border also serve to get to know each other and to exchange experiences on exemplary projects or on the respective local problems. Furthermore, the respective local problems and possible solutions can be illustrated to the stakeholders and decision-makers involved. Meetings at political level can also highlight the common challenges faced by border regions and the relevance of cooperation. Delegation visits to local events are mentioned as concrete, albeit punctual, formats of this kind of exchange.

5 Implementing cross-border cooperation successfully

5.1 Challenges for cross-border cooperation

Having already identified the advantages of cross-border cooperation and analysed its possible forms, the next step is to examine how successful cooperation can be achieved. To this end, possible challenges and obstacles will first be identified. These are challenges for the actors involved in the cooperation, but not, for example, specific problems for inhabitants of border regions. The effect of borders as barriers and obstacles lies in their purpose, but changes over time in Europe (Svensson/Balogh 2018: 116). Obstacles and challenges to cross-border cooperation are therefore a central subject of the scientific research on border regions. Furthermore, it is of particular interest for the actors involved in cross-border cooperation to be aware of potential obstacles in advance and to be able to take countermeasures if possible.⁵

At aggregated level, according to the European Commission (2016a) and the results of the Eurobarometer (COM 2015: 24), the most frequently mentioned challenges of cross-border cooperation are legal and administrative barriers, language barriers, physical access to the neighbouring country, economic and cultural differences, lack of interest in cooperation on the part of the authorities, and lack of trust. On regional level, however, there are very different descriptions of the challenges (Medeiros 2018b: 475). Scientific studies on cross-border cooperation name as further key obstacles a lack of political will, a lack of efficiency, bureaucratic burdens, exhausted potential and a lack of financial resources (Medeiros 2018b: 481). The fields of health and mobility are particularly affected by legal and administrative challenges (COM 2017b: 15).

Surveys and document analyses of the projects examined have shown that these fields face many of the challenges mentioned as well. This will be shown in the following part.

⁵ It is possible that some of the mentioned obstacles are not exclusive to cross-border cooperation; but these challenges are always related to the cross-border orientation of cooperation.

Differences in law and administration

Interviewees identified differences in legislation, legal frameworks, legal systems and legal codes as well as different administrative regulations, administrative systems and a different administrative organisation in the respective countries involved in the cooperation as central challenges for cross-border cooperation. Additionally, organisation, traditions and procedures in spatial planning can also differ greatly between countries (see also Caesar/Pallagst 2018; Caesar et al. 2018; Damm 2018; Mangels/Wohland 2018, EU COM 2017a, b). In concrete terms, these legal and administrative differences in the projects examined manifest themselves in different local working methods, different degrees of organisation, different local structures and organisational traditions, all of which shape the local actions. When these different systems converge, this is often accompanied by obstacles to cross-border cooperation. This is also due to the fact that cross-border administrative procedures have so far been rare and that national regulations are applied to cooperation projects (COM 2017a: 10). In the interviews, national borders were therefore also referred to as system borders. The lack of interlocked and connected spatial planning is seen as problematic. Specific examples of challenges include a lack of coordination between health insurance systems, unclear cost coverage for health services, and ongoing coordination between countries on long-term transport projects. It has in a few instances also become apparent that, due to administrative and institutional differences, it was not possible to transfer positive approaches and experiences from the partner country to one's own settings.



“But of course, it is still the case in our village that the national border is something like a system border.”

“In general, the challenges are similar everywhere. However, both sides have taken somewhat different approaches to find solutions. And both sides can learn from that.”



“There are still some agreements lacking, foremost in the field of rescue and ambulance services. One also has to underline: We are talking about the health services of two countries. These are organised on national level and not connected to another country. And of course, it is also true that healthcare services come with concrete costs and financial matters.”

Unclear responsibilities

Moreover, different legal and administrative regulations often create challenges in the allocation of responsibilities. Obstacles to cross-border cooperation arise in particular if the responsibilities for the respective topics lie at different or several government levels, or if responsibilities cannot be clearly assigned.

Some cooperation projects have revealed that the actors involved do not always have the (exclusive) decision-making authority for the subject area covered. Therefore, further administrative levels must be involved. Thus, situations can arise where municipalities get involved in cross-border cooperation, but decisions in this area have to be taken at regional level, which in the view of the interviewees makes cross-border cooperation even more complex and costly. Moreover, higher administrative levels are perceived as being less sensitive to the needs of border regions. Furthermore, the fact that processes at national level and in border regions are often isolated from each other and border regions are often confronted with decisions at national level which can be contrary to local goals and plans is another challenge for border regions. It is also pointed out that municipalities have little influence on these processes.

There are examples where one central authority on one side of the border meets several competent bodies on the other side of the border. In this context, administrative reforms represent a further challenge for cross-border cooperation. As part of a structural reform of the municipalities in Denmark, for example, many of the previously independent municipalities have lost their decision-making powers, so that responsibilities in cross-border projects have had to be rearranged, too. As a result of such vague or unclear responsibilities, some cooperation projects also show a declining commitment of partners. In contrast, a fixed attribution of responsibilities is seen as conducive to the commitment of all partners.

In addition to unclear or uneven responsibilities (EU COM 2016b; Mangels/Wohland 2018; Pallagst et al. 2018b), the varying degree of political influence on decisions is also identified as an obstacle by other studies (Damm 2018: 64).



“I believe there are real administrative problems in decision-making on the other side of the border, with the different regions and the respective responsibilities of the regions on the other side. This makes things difficult. I also think that in general, the decision-making process on the other side of the border is made more difficult due to the fact that more actors and stakeholders have to give their consent.”

“In issues where the responsibilities are not clearly defined and where it is not clear who is actually responsible for which kind of decision, who should decide [...]. This leads to a situation in which you yourself also do not recognise such responsibilities or the urgency. And then, everything bogs down quite quickly.”



Not all challenges can be solved on local level

Against the background of the above-mentioned challenges resulting from different responsibilities, it becomes clear that problems in cross-border cooperation always occur locally and are perceived as such on the ground, but that in many cases, solutions cannot be found locally (EU COM 2017a: 7). This applies in particular to legal and administrative problems that need to be tackled at national or European level (Medeiros 2018b: 480). Starting points for problem-solving at European level are discussed in the concluding chapter of this working paper.



“Structural questions do not only arise in the technological or economic fields, but also in civil society and in social areas. There can be barriers which let the border still seem like a border and which simply cannot be solved within the project. And that is a political task that should be addressed bilaterally or maybe on European level.”

Competition to national tasks

It is also reported that cross-border projects may at times compete with national objectives, concerns and tasks. There is a perceived danger that national problems and tasks are given priority to the detriment of looking “beyond the borders”. Therefore, synergies may be overlooked. This can have a negative impact on resources, motivation and commitment and thus also on the successful implementation of cooperation projects. For this reason, the success of cooperation projects is sometimes referred to as dependent on the priority given to cross-border cooperation. Study results by the European Commission show similar findings (EU COM 2016b). Centralised decisions at national level and a lack of interest in problems of border regions are identified as obstacles to cross-border cooperation. Moreover, criticism is directed at an overvaluation of short-term, positive results as compared to long-term investments. It is also pointed out that there is often a lack of awareness at national level regarding the negative effects that decisions taken at national level can have for border regions.



“Regarding cross-border cooperation, I would really like it if the nation states’ perspective could go beyond funding schemes, and across the border.”

“Until very recently, there were border controls. These disappeared some time ago, but the transport systems, especially public transport, were obviously not thought out and implemented on a cross-border basis as far as fares, services, lines and connections and marketing are concerned, and so there is a lot of catching up to do in public transport.”



Lack of political support

The involvement and support of the political level is described by the interviewees as being absolutely necessary. Depending on the responsibilities, support from different levels can be crucial. In some cases, there is also the perception that a negative attitude of individual decision-makers can already lead to the failure of cross-border projects and cooperation.

In fact, this experience has already been made in individual projects. Particularly mentioned is a strong local prioritisation of funds and topics. This is also clearly noticeable in the projects when the topic dealt with is given less priority in one country than in the neighbouring country. Accordingly, some interviewees expressed the wish for greater political support. It is also pointed out that political support for projects with a European dimension varies in local politics. Other cooperation projects have gained similar experiences (Caesar/Pallagst 2018: 20f.; Medeiros 2018b: 482). There is also a perceived discrepancy between publicly promised support and the actual implementation of these promises in cooperation (Damm 2018: 65). The top-down approach is thus decisive for the success of the project.



“Borders are still borders. And the border communities, the border regions, may have difficulties in getting heard when it comes to the particular problems that arise there.”

Physical access to the neighbouring country – Distance despite common borders

Against the background of the broad definition of border regions on which the INTERREG programme is based, it is reported that a large spatial difference makes it difficult to reach agreement in face-to-face meetings and that joint activities in one place are generally difficult to organise if this requires longer journeys. In addition, in some projects it is perceived that due to the geographical distance, the local authorities of both countries hardly come into contact with each other – despite the common border. However, this is seen as an important step towards overcoming the described administrative obstacles. A public consultation of the EU Commission also identifies this as an obstacle, particularly with regard to the lack of opportunities for more cross-border mobility due to a lack of public transport services, which are either completely lacking or no longer able to meet the demands of increasing interaction between countries (EU COM 2016a: 23 f.)

Administrative obstacles within the project

Those responsible for INTERREG projects often face administrative obstacles within their projects. In particular, high administrative requirements have to be met in the application, implementation and administration of INTERREG projects, which tie up time and workforce. Other studies on cross-border cooperation also identify this as an obstacle (Damm 2018; Medeiros 2018b). The bureaucratic effort involved in these funding procedures is sometimes deemed to be higher than for national projects. Resources needed for project administration are lacking elsewhere. In some cases, project delays due to open funding procedures and unapproved funding are also reported. The project managers see further obstacles in the frequent changes in funding regulations, sometimes unclear specifications for the application process, discrepancies between national regulations and requirements of the INTERREG programme and more difficult advice for project partners due to the complex funding guidelines. However, administrative hurdles are also identified for the application and accounting of national or regional funding programmes, albeit to a lesser extent.



“I have this feeling that the issue of EU funding is likely to mean somewhat more efforts than might be the case with national funding projects. I would argue that it takes a little more administration and effort to push through with EU projects.”

“Time is money. Every minute is a euro. That’s clear. [...] These are obviously problems that SMEs face, also in our project. You [as a lead partner] have to spare a lot of time for administrative organization. To run things as quickly as possible afterwards. To be occupied with the project itself, not with its administration.”



Major time expenditure and short-term conception of projects

In addition to the administrative burden, reference is also made to the large amount of time required for the implementation of cross-border projects, both within the framework of the INTERREG programme and in other forms of cooperation which pursue a specific objective. In particular the coordination effort between the partners takes up a lot of time. It is suspected that this can be a deterrent for some regions, but especially for local authority employees who fear that the cross-border projects will result in an additional time burden for them.

In addition, the conception of INTERREG projects and their time horizon is questioned at various points. The scientific evaluation of the INTERREG programme concludes that it is aimed at projects and “not primarily at cross-sectional, coherent and integrative spatial development in the border regions” (Pallagst et al. 2018b: 343). The interviewees particularly emphasise the additional time needed to initiate cross-border relations and to bring partners together. Regarding thematic fields like health and transport, the design of cooperation as a project is also viewed critically. These subject areas are considered too large to be dealt with within a time-limited project framework. With regard to the conception and content of INTERREG projects, some projects are restricted by requirements that do not correspond to the needs of the region. An example of this is the perceived pressure to innovate caused by the project specifications whereas a perpetuation of local cooperation would actually be needed.



“Transport projects in particular need a lot of time to prepare. This is already true if you only plan it within your own system.”

“We can only do projects. And the essence of a project is a start and an end point. It is therefore difficult to implement sustainable solutions. But I believe you can create meetings and encounters; go ahead in small steps.”



Lack of financial resources

While the additional funding through INTERREG funds is seen by many project managers as a great opportunity for cross-border cooperation, the lack of financial resources, conversely, represents a challenge for cross-border cooperation. This holds particularly true when no funds are earmarked in national budgets for cross-border concerns and projects. The amount of funding is also cited as an important criterion for the success of projects. Especially for

project partners such as associations, it is a great challenge if funding is not provided in time: They cannot make advance financial payments and are dependent on fast administrative processes. Other assessments of the interviewees show that the level of INTERREG funding is partially regarded as sufficient. In some cases, the opinion is expressed that an increase in funding alone would not necessarily lead to better projects or solve other challenges. Findings from other studies show that projects in certain thematic areas are particularly dependent on additional financial resources, as national funds are also only earmarked for application in national tasks, such as transport projects (Caesar et al. 2018: 211). It is also reported that INTERREG project applications that are well-prepared in terms of content may often lack the necessary own funds to actually implement the project (Damm 2018: 64).

Lack of personnel and frequent changes in staff

A lack of personnel or frequent changes in staff make cross-border cooperation more difficult. This can be observed for the project-based cooperation within the INTERREG programme and is reported by stakeholders from both the public and private sector. For instance, there may be delays in project implementation due to a lack of personnel that is familiar with government subsidies. Staff reductions in local government are causing problems for projects, too. In some cases it is thus no longer possible to guarantee support for local government projects in the field of demographic change. Many projects face regular staff changes, often at the end of the project term. This makes it more difficult to pass on the gathered knowledge. Changing contact persons can also mean that the exchange between countries becomes less continuous.

Disagreement and ambiguity regarding a project's objectives

Just like local or national projects with several project partners, cross-border cooperation projects face problems when there are different expectations and objectives on behalf of the project participants. Ambiguities and disagreements regarding the objectives and demands in the project can lead to dissatisfaction as well as declining commitment and an impairment of the cooperation. Specific to the cross-border context is the fact that a different significance of the topic in question in the different countries can also lead to different expectations. Furthermore, it is pointed out that in the case of long-term projects, such as in the area of infrastructure, the challenge is to maintain the same objectives and planned approach over the years of cooperation. This is reported both for cooperation within the framework of INTERREG and beyond. The scientific evaluation of other INTERREG projects also shows that, in addition to fundamentally different ideas about objectives (Caesar et al. 2018: 211), competitive thinking between project partners instead of pursuing common goals may also become a problem (Damm 2018: 60).

Different motives and motivation

In addition to divergent objectives of the cooperation partners, individual, divergent motives and motivations in the cooperation can also turn out to be challenges for the cooperation. Individual projects report considerable difficulties in winning over the relevant competent

authorities at various levels for cross-border cooperation in general and individual projects in particular. Political support is seen as indispensable, especially for the participation of the administrative side, and in particular local government. In addition, different motives that motivate the cooperation partners to participate in cross-border cooperation are also identified. These motives, such as the possibility of additional financial support or profiling in the thematic area, must be taken into account, too (Caesar/Pallagst 2018: 21).

Ambivalent stance towards the neighbouring country

While the first chapters described the potential positive effects, opportunities and the changing relevance of borders, the various border regions paint a somewhat different picture when it comes to their attitude towards the neighbouring country and cooperation – which may also determine the success of cross-border cooperation. In some places, it is said that although the national border is still being perceived, thinking in terms of regions is now taking place more often. In other cases, the impression is created that the border is still perceived as a border today. This is partly attributed to a lack of knowledge about each other as well as a lack of contacts. A negative attitude towards the European idea and cross-border cooperation is occasionally observed both at the level of the general population as well as at political level. Both can inhibit the will and the ability to act at the working level.



“I often get the impression that the border even today is perceived as a border. In many cases, this is a matter of transparency and of knowledge or also a matter of experience. [...] And in general, my experience is: If you take this step – and in my opinion, there is even today the need for people or projects to kickstart this – then everything works out fine. You get instant cooperation, and the border doesn't matter anymore either.”

Language barriers

Language differences between countries continue to be a major obstacle to cooperation, although their importance varies greatly from region to region. Especially at the (German) borders to Switzerland and Austria, there are no barrier effects of language. Language barriers can lead to insecurity and obstacles in establishing contact as well as to the intensity of cooperation. The border regions pursue different approaches to solving these problems. These are presented in the following chapter.

Cultural differences

As described in the previous chapter, different cultures and different models of society can lead to different approaches. But cultural differences can also become challenges in concrete cooperation. In particular, different communication and discussion cultures as well as differences in working culture and mentality are mentioned in this respect. This has been observed, for example, when working methods come together that are either more

pragmatic, creative or systematically oriented. Therefore, it is considered necessary to be aware of these differences and to avoid misunderstandings and discontent by means of close consultation.



“It may happen that one side maybe acts – let’s say – a bit quicker. However, it may then also happen that the other side proves to process more organised due to its structures and traditions there [...]. There are several differences in working methods. They are not necessarily so for cultural reasons. They may be cultural, but they may also be of an organisational nature.”

Summary

Many of the challenges described here are cross-cutting or apply across the board to most cross-border cooperation projects. In the single sectors, certain influencing factors and conditions have different effects; individual challenges have a specific influence on the success of cooperation in the analysed sectors.

Thus, the analysed sectors health and care, local supply as well as mobility are affected differently by these challenges and obstacles.

Cross-border cooperation in the field of mobility is made particularly difficult by the fact that transport systems are usually not conceived of in a cross-border context, national developments are often isolated from one another, and the long-term nature of transport projects contradicts the three-year duration of INTERREG projects. Moreover, infrastructure projects require years of synchronised planning on both sides of the border, which in turn requires continuous consultation. Transport projects addressing infrastructure are particularly impaired when partners pursue different motivations, as the cooperation of the responsible actors is essential in this case. Cooperation in the health and care sector is particularly affected by legal differences that cannot be addressed locally. In particular, different health care systems and uncertainties as to who bears the costs of cross-border health care or even in the area of emergency services need to be mentioned here. Clearer responsibilities and greater political commitment would help to bring about improvements in this regard.

For local supply projects, challenges arise in particular from the short-term conception of INTERREG projects. After the end of the project, they sometimes face difficulties in maintaining local supply if offers do not pay off economically. In this case, local supply services need approaches to safeguard and stabilise supply and to maintain visibility and demand.

With regard to the question of whether there are differences in the challenges between INTERREG projects and other forms of cooperation, only few differences can be identified. It is true that the administrative challenges caused by the funding regulations of the INTERREG programme are inherent to these projects. However, the administrative effort is

also seen as a challenge for financial support given by other donors. Moreover, project managers state that the implementation of cross-border cooperation would not have been possible without the framework and the financial support; in particular, the participation of the relevant actors would have been much lower. The time limitation of cooperation in INTERREG projects is described as being problematic and may also be problematic for other forms of cooperation, depending on their conception regarding time and deadlines.

5.2 Success factors for successful cross-border cooperation

After describing the obstacles and challenges that cooperations face, it is now to be shown which factors are cited for successful cross-border cooperation and which measures the surveyed projects adopt to achieve this.

Open communication and close consultations

Across all interviews, positive, open and unprejudiced communication at equal level is mentioned as fundamental for cross-border cooperation. Close coordination in cooperation and a constant exchange are considered to be central to this. According to the interviewees, it is important to speak the “same language” and to name and discuss goals, demands and problems early on. A certain degree of willingness for compromise is considered necessary for this.

Regular contacts, especially in the form of face-to-face meetings, are considered essential for good cross-border communication. Personal relationships with contacts on the other side of the border shorten coordination processes, level communicative hurdles by facilitating communication through the “short communication line”, and can be the starting point for new cooperation approaches. Keeping the same contact person facilitates contact. One means of initiating communication and exchange is the creation of occasions. These bring those involved together on location and put them in contact with each other. In addition, according to the project managers, a good understanding of which actors are involved and how they should be addressed is required. Communication tailored to the various functionaries is considered to be just as effective as early involvement of new partners, for example after changes of office or after elections.



“I believe it is also very important to simply create occasions and to make people get into contact as often as possible in order to make them really meet and talk to each other.”

Trustful cooperation

Just like good communication, a trusting and respectful interaction with each other is also mentioned as a crucial factor for successful cross-border cooperation. In this regard, confidence-building is described as a process that may take several years. Growing trust over time can thus be established, for example, through direct contact and exchange, which in turn facilitates further communication. This investment of time is considered to be profitable, as it makes obstacles such as language barriers less significant, if all parties involved can cooperate with the certainty of a trustful cooperation. These experiences have also been made beyond the analysed projects (Damm 2018: 63). In this instance, too, occasions are seen as helpful, providing the opportunity to meet and thus the opportunity to establish relationships of trust. These experiences are made by all participants in cross-border cooperation, including representatives of the municipalities involved. In some cases, the opinion is also expressed that personal competence plays a more important role in cross-border cooperation than technical competence.



“You have to enter such meetings or workshops – or the entire project, for that matter – without prejudice and with an open mind. And if this happens – it is mostly a very personal story – then things work out really well. Of course, you always have to be willing to find a compromise.”

Overcoming language barriers

Language barriers were identified as a key challenge for cross-border cooperation. Overcoming these barriers is thus also becoming a central success factor. Different approaches are presented on how challenges due to different languages can be tackled. Here, too, the people on different levels and with different responsibilities that communicate with each other shape the approach that is chosen to overcome language barriers. At the working level, there is often at least one person in the project who works bilingually. In addition, some projects offer language courses, e.g. for local government employees, to teach the use of the other language in everyday work. Bilingual glossaries are also being developed containing central terms for cooperation. Other cooperations in turn use communication in English at the working level. Interpreters are also used at official events and occasionally in everyday work.

Keeping motivation high

An examination of the obstacles to successful cross-border cooperation has shown that various factors can affect the motivation of the cooperation partners. The motivation of those involved at all levels of the project is seen as an important factor for success, since without

the personal commitment and assumption of responsibility by individual persons at the cooperation parties, successful cooperation could not be implemented. Also in other projects, great importance is attached to the personal commitment of individual participants (Damm 2018: 64; Mangels/Wohland 2018: 277). It is also repeatedly described that the will to cooperate is on the one hand a necessary prerequisite, on the other hand always a question of priority. In this way, the common will makes it easier to find ways and means to achieve the common goals. The interviewees said they have very different approaches to creating and maintaining motivation in the project. In addition to a very pronounced “service mentality”, which can be seen in most projects, clear requirements and expectations regarding the commitment of the project partners are sometimes formulated. There is agreement on the necessity to pick up on the different motivations and demands of the partners and to offer support if necessary. In addition, it is also considered helpful to create a spirit of optimism at the beginning and to address the personal passion and motivation of the participants in the course of the project, for example by keeping in touch and by expressing appreciation for the respective work.



“If there is a will for cross-border cooperation, then there is always a way and possibilities to work together for common goals.”

“What we witness again and again, is that if two sides actually want, a lot is possible. However, if there is less willingness and the entire thing is rather seen as an obligation or a task, the issue can become quite slow and dull.”



“It will never be the case – especially in larger groups and with many stakeholders – that all bring the same input and willpower. But if there is a feeling that in general, everyone wants to go ahead, then we have already reached a lot, I think. Then you can really come up with great things. From our perspective and experience, this is the foundation that is absolutely necessary.”

Introducing moderators and “bridge-builders”

A central role is ascribed to individual, committed persons at various levels. In the interviews, these are referred to as “caretakers”, “moderators”, “flag-bearers”, “drivers” or “bridge-builders”. They are associated with different expectations. In some cooperation projects, a coordinating person or office is perceived as conducive to success, taking responsibility for recurring processes and ensuring a long-term and regular exchange that does not break

down due to a lack of organisational initiative. In other projects, individuals have taken on the task of setting impulses, supporting development processes, leading the way, awakening the commitment of other partners and inspiring enthusiasm for the project. Sometimes, people have been hired for this task or assigned within the project. In other instances, project members have intuitively taken over this role without having been assigned to it. Overall, the credibility of these people through their own commitment is particularly important for them to be able to act as a source of inspiration, interviewees said. An important role is also ascribed to persons who achieve understanding between the involved countries and who are equally familiar with the conditions in both countries. They are said to have the ability to take a personal backseat, but to create a mutual dialogue between different partners. Some projects also make use of the methodological and technical knowledge of external experts who, for example, act as moderators in the project. The experiences of the interviewees have shown that the role of the “flag-bearer” or “bridge-builder” is usually identified during the cooperation process, while the role of the moderators is often already provided for in the initial project concept.



“Of course, you have to admit that this whole endeavour takes a lot of time and there is a lot of coordination work to do. And these are obviously the reasons why things maybe do not work out as well in other regions. I have said it before: This is the point in time when you actually need a trouble-shooter, a caretaker, who is willing to bring in such capacities and resources to make things possible.”

“What you have to do is to identify the drivers. You need drivers or flag bearers who take the lead and are willing to actually move things forward. And when you have identified such persons, chances are good that you can inspire others and reach another level of credibility. After all, it’s still a people’s business.”



Involving many actors

The involvement of many or preferably all relevant actors in the subject area of cross-border cooperation is mentioned as a further factor for successful cooperation. The involvement of representatives from various political levels, from local government, municipal institutions, business, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, from research institutions, associations and welfare organisations as well as other local experts is explicitly mentioned. For INTERREG projects, so-called network partners are also important. They do not receive any financial support themselves but can transfer knowledge into their networks. It is important to include the expertise of all relevant actors, to involve them at an early stage and to develop cross-border cooperation on the basis of their expertise instead of presenting

ready-made project concepts to the participants. In particular, an expertise for local requirements and needs is appreciated. In addition, it is important to distribute the tasks within the cooperation project according to the competences of the partners. Thus, in addition to the personal motivation and competence already mentioned, the required professional competence also needs to be covered. The professional diversity of the actors involved allows for a broad knowledge range within cooperation projects. Good knowledge of the local conditions and a good preparation for the cooperation are described as further helpful competences. The interviewees recommend addressing relevant actors actively, individually and in a targeted manner. The expertise of the actors in the surveyed projects is gathered through exchange in networks, discussions, events and surveys. Here, too, it proves to be purposeful to create occasions that offer opportunities to meet and get in touch with each other. Furthermore, a good balance of actors from both sides of the border is important, as is cooperation at various levels – from high-level political meetings to continuous exchange and cooperation at the working level.



“We are lucky enough to have very motivated partners. I made a choice there: Okay, if you want to join: fine. But if you are not sure: that’s alright, but then you are also not in.”

“The preparation and implementation are the entire time done with all partners. [...] And we also have a joint project team involving partners from both sides of the border. Well, within the project, there is one person hired, a coordinator. But if we have to decide on really strategic issues, we get together within the project team.”



Supporting citizen involvement and voluntary engagement

Particular emphasis is placed on the importance of involving citizens. First of all, reference is made to the everyday expertise and creativity of citizens in shaping their environment. Secondly, it is hoped that participation in the preparation and implementation will increase the acceptance of cross-border cooperation among the population. Last but not least, some of the municipalities surveyed and also other cross-border projects hope to be able to make greater use of voluntary engagement and local self-management to secure services of general interest, especially in rural areas, if previous structures cease to exist (Mangels/Wohland 2018: 250). Some projects are explicitly dependent on this voluntary engagement.

In order to implement the objectives, some cross-border projects are testing different forms of involvement of citizens, initiatives and associations in order to identify possible roles of the population in the implementation of cross-border cooperation. In part, civic involvement

represents a separate field of action for cooperation. Other projects have already found suitable formats for involvement. For example, exchange formats have been established that bring together citizens' knowledge with expert knowledge in the subject area covered. In addition, cooperative approaches to the establishment and maintenance of "village shops" have been chosen in projects, aiming to secure local supply. This approach has proved successful in the projects surveyed and benefits from the support of the population in the municipalities. Another possibility is to anchor voluntary engagement in the project structure and to conclude cooperation agreements, for example with local associations and initiatives instead of the respective municipalities. Overall, close monitoring and moderation of the participation processes is described as being promising. In addition to rapid implementation of announced processes, good information for committed citizens is particularly important in order to keep motivation and support high as well as to avoid frustration.



"It is important to involve the people already in that phase where the projects are being drafted. In a way, INTERREG came as a prefixed thing. A bit like a five-course meal which other cooks have already thought out and created for you."

"This is what I would like to see in future: That projects are not developed in some office, but rather with the people living there. Cause they know their village the best."



Overcoming administrative obstacles

For many of the above-mentioned administrative challenges in the project, the interviews do not yield any solutions, especially if the possible solutions are not within the sphere of influence of the specific projects. However, some projects report that the project partners are met with a strong "service mentality" and support is offered for administrative processes such as reports or accounting. This is especially emphasised with regard to small and medium-sized enterprises. These enterprises are often important project partners, but they shy away from the administrative burdens and efforts associated with funded projects. For this reason, close support of these project partners is sometimes ensured, or the administrative handling is taken over by other project partners on behalf of them. It is also reported that improvements and simplifications with regard to the INTERREG funding guidelines have already been achieved. With a view to the European level, however, there is a desire for further simplification and de-bureaucratisation of processes.

Institutionalisation of cooperation

As described in the chapter on opportunities of cross-border cooperation, the institutionalised format of INTERREG projects has a number of advantages, such as the availability of funding, the continuity of networking and exchange, and a generally greater scope of action for cross-border projects. Therefore, such an institutionalisation of cooperation is also named as a success factor for cross-border cooperation. In addition, the project partners and municipalities surveyed also pursue other strategies for institutionalising processes. For example, new structures are developed from experience, such as the appointment of administrative staff in each municipality of one of the surveyed border regions who are responsible for cross-border contacts. Other cooperation projects set up working groups which meet regularly, also outside of concrete projects, on a cross-border basis and which are given an institutionalised character at organisational level through the involvement of a previously described “caretaker”. Another approach is the establishment of a cross-border coordination office at one of the partners involved, which continuously deals with the cross-border topic and is the central contact point.



“All municipalities [in the region] now have a professional administrative officer or employee responsible for border contacts. This has not been there before. This means that they can work together. They meet and get to know each other and thus help in the administrations getting to know each other as well. And this was urgently needed.”

“I would like to add at this point that highly institutionalised structures of course help in making plans become reality. [...] And we try to prepare the decisions, which are then taken in the respective national committees, together in a cross-border working group. This is to make recommendations for decisions, which are then generally followed in the national committees. But from my point of view, there is definitely a need for a caretaker. Someone who invites to such a meeting, makes the room available, [...] puts together an agenda and provides a discussion group leader or working group chairman who guides through the topics and also ensures that a short note or minutes are sent around afterwards. This is necessary to reach this degree of institutionalisation which is just needed to reach binding decisions.”



Facilitating project funding

The additional funding made available by the INTERREG programme is cited by the projects surveyed and beyond that equally as an advantage and success factor (Damm 2018: 66) and even as a “motor for cross-border cooperation” (Pallagst et al. 2018: 344). As described

in the previous chapter, the financing requirements of the INTERREG programme with own contributions and complex accounting procedures for some projects, however, also entail challenges, especially for smaller or non-profit project partners. Some projects and municipalities are trying to counteract this, for example by obtaining financial support from other grant donors. In addition, regions are trying to support less financially strong project partners with advances from state funds, in order to avoid the problem of having to make advance payments themselves until the funds are paid out.



“This is why I am convinced that these things that are done in INTERREG, namely offering a formal project framework and financial stimulus for cross-border cooperation, that these things are exactly the right way. This field of cross-border is rarely included in national budgets in concrete terms. You can see that there is a regulation problem. There is a need for the drafting of cross-border solutions. And then you realise: Neither one nor the other side has taken this into account when drafting the budget. So, if you have funds facilitating this, things suddenly become more easy. I don’t want to say it is a sure-fire success. But nonetheless, you gain more room for action and agility to even start considering such issues.”

Identifying opportunities and making them visible

In order to increase public commitment to the project and the acceptance and support of cross-border cooperation, it is considered necessary to identify local needs as well as to highlight and make visible the advantages of cooperation (Bechtold et al. 2018: 13; Medeiros 2018b: 482). The interviewees stated that within the projects, it is important to demonstrate the project partners the added value of the cooperation through close coordination and clear communication and thus to create incentives to get involved. Even though cooperation is usually planned systematically, it is recommended to implement aspects that are visible and tangible for the participants. In addition, the planned measures should be clearly named and communicated in order not to raise false expectations and not to lose motivated partners who want to work pragmatically.

Regarding the publicity-effective presentation of cross-border cooperation, it is also assumed that it is easier to obtain support, also from the political level, if a clear added value can be observed. Interviewees reported that it is helpful to communicate clearly what needs there are for cooperation, what benefits can be expected, what costs are incurred and how these investments can act as development factors for the region. Against this background, the present study also collected and showed the opportunities and advantages of cross-border cooperation. It is also necessary to explain why it makes more sense to use funds for cross-border projects rather than just to use them in the respective country. The projects refer to all available media as channels of communication, but some of them see a further need for action in the area of public relations from their own side.



“This border region here has a clear interest in this field, and also in working on this field in a cross-border context. Because you are again and again confronted with these questions in everyday life.”

“I think cooperation gets much easier if you find areas where coordination and cooperation can really bring about added value. If you find this, you at least get an impulse that shows why it makes sense to get together.”



Finding tailor-made solutions and including experiences

Many of the projects surveyed stress the importance of tailor-made solutions for the respective cooperation approaches and municipalities, especially when it comes to securing services of general interest. It is seen as central to set one's own thematic and strategic priorities, to design suitable concepts and to select feasible measures. In this, it is important to consider the specific local conditions and to adapt concepts accordingly.

Examples of projects in the health sector are mentioned, which usually arise from very specific needs, such as a lack of a hospital on one side of the border.

Tried and tested concepts from other contexts and communities as well as positive and negative experiences from other projects can serve as orientation points. Many project managers in INTERREG projects as well as representatives of local authorities report that they can draw on experiences from other cross-border cooperation projects and in turn contribute own experiences. However, the importance of tailoring the project to the respective conditions is also emphasised in this context. Specifically, it is proposed to first examine local needs and conditions, to compare them with existing and proven approaches and to adapt the available possible measures to them in order to develop optimal solutions for the respective municipalities and regions. The interviewees recommend the involvement of all relevant actors, as well as the establishment of exchange formats that can provide a framework for the development processes.

Furthermore, a certain degree of creativity and flexibility is required in order to secure the supply of services of general interest. It is proposed, for example, to secure local supply offers by means of further sources of income and cost reduction if these cannot be sustained by themselves, for example by generating electricity with photovoltaic systems.

Looking back on experiences from the INTERREG programme, it is recommended that cross-border relations be allowed to grow before highly formalised projects are tackled. It is seen as helpful to initiate smaller projects first, for example meeting projects, in order to be

able to identify the interest of the project partners and the population. In addition, it has sometimes proved to be advantageous to start cooperation with topics that are easier to implement, such as in the field of tourism, where the added value can be more easily identified. On the basis of such cooperation, projects can then emerge in areas that pose greater challenges, such as transport or health. Own, specific forms of cooperation should also be pursued, irrespective of whether or not the funding requirements of the INTERREG programme permit tailor-made approaches to local needs.



“In the beginning, it is very important to build trust, for example by visiting each other. Moreover, you should be able to celebrate first successes quite early on. Simply going ahead with such a big project – only because you can get millions from the EU – is quite brave. You should rather go slow and start small, build mutual trust and then move on to bigger projects.”

Utilising existing potential and building on existing contacts

In addition to existing experience, the use of existing potentials and local points of contact can become a success factor for the projects. In concrete terms, it is a matter of precisely determining the conditions on location, such as the still existing structures of services of general interest as well as the current and future supply situation, existing initiatives, development potential and any preparatory work that has already been carried out. Here, too, great importance is attached to the inclusion of all existing local expertise.

In some cases, there is an approach aiming to use already existing, concrete approaches to a topic on one side of the border as a starting point for elaboration on the other side, such as an integrated urban development concept of a municipality as the basis for a joint cross-border development concept. Even less concrete approaches are attributed a potential for further cooperation, like existing interrelations between regions, for instance due to commuter flows. At the planning level, too, existing structures should be used and “better coordinated as well as contact with them facilitated for interested planning actors, for example by means of a contact list of contact persons” (Bechtold et al. 2018: 12).

The use of existing contacts is mentioned as a further success factor. Where contacts already exist, including informal and personal ones, it is helpful to build on them and develop them further. Municipalities with direct border contacts, for example, are almost inevitably in exchange with each other. These pre-existing contacts can be used to include municipalities or areas in the exchange and potential cooperation that are a little further away from the border but still belong to the border region. With regard to other cooperation partners, it is also considered beneficial to gradually gain more partners who in turn have other networks and can involve relevant actors. According to some interviewees, these networks should be maintained beyond concrete projects. This allows for short distances for cross-border contacts and offers starting points for future cooperation. It is reported that some cooperation

projects in fact build on previous projects with similar partners. Working groups that are independent of projects can also help to stay in contact and develop new projects on this basis. Long-standing contacts, especially between municipalities, have proven to be helpful for new projects in the same subject area, but also for initiating projects in subject areas that have not yet been dealt with.



“Preparations have taken many months. [...] But before there were already small projects and meetings like [...] a conference on cross-border cooperation in the health sector. These were small projects, but they have shown that there is a huge interest, be it within the municipalities’ administrations, the institutions or also among the citizens who are interested in finding out what is possible: How could you benefit from the promotion of the health sector on the other side of the border - or the other way round?”

Long-term conception of cooperation

Against the background of the above-mentioned obstacles that can arise from a time-limited conception of cooperation, the interviews revealed that long-term planning of cooperation is considered to be conducive to success. In particular, sufficient time should be allowed for initiating cooperation projects, establishing contacts and getting to know each other.

Long-term staff concepts and a high level of personnel continuity are also identified in the surveys and beyond (Damm 2018: 68; Mangels/Wohland 2018: 253) as necessary for successful cross-border cooperation. It has already been shown that cooperation projects often find this to be a major challenge. For this reason, it is not uncommon for projects to seek permanent job positions that can establish and maintain long-term contacts and also have time to develop new project ideas. Anyhow, only few approaches for solutions are specified. The already mentioned establishment of a cross-border coordination office with appropriate staffing and a clear mandate as well as the entrusting of administrative staff in each municipality with cross-border cooperation tasks could be potential starting points.



“If I could make a wish, I would wish for a permanent part-time job position at our project for someone who has language skills and can work on proposals or applications; who drives across the border every three weeks and comes back with new ideas.”

“How do I establish systematic village development? How can all villages along this border develop together? This would in fact be a systematic further development of the INTERREG programme. Not only working on a project for two or three years, but really coming up with a concept in which you develop a vision: How can our villages in the coming years become livelier? How can we develop them more systematically?”



Coordination with other measures

In order to increase the long-term benefits of individual cooperation, the projects and municipalities surveyed use various strategies for coordination together with other measures. On the one hand, sub-projects are set up in such a way that they can maintain an exchange with each other and that synergies can be utilised. With regard to the issue of demographic change, in various cases a holistic approach is being pursued instead of limiting the subject to individual sectors, incorporating the issue into regional development concepts and aiming to develop integrated action plans. With regard to the topic of local supply, the development of intermunicipal and regional local supply concepts is regarded as profitable. It may also be helpful to link the topic of local supply with other interests of the region, such as the marketing of regional foodstuffs and organic farming. Also, above the municipal or project level, a closer interlocking of approaches is called for, too. This might include coordination between municipalities and the planning level or between cross-border cooperation and regional development plans. Last but not least, there is also a call for a better combination and coordination of different funding opportunities, such as INTERREG and the LEADER programme aiming to support rural areas.



“How can I connect things? We have tackled things that have for a longer time been on the list of criticism, for instance from LEADER, namely that there is not enough cooperation across the border. There has also been criticism for some time that LEADER and INTERREG offer rather few points of contact. In fact, we have said: Here, at this place, we can make a concrete contribution for LEADER and INTERREG to work together and have joint effects in the region. And this has been understood by the decision-makers, too.”

Sustainable perpetuation of cooperation and knowledge management

The project-based design of cross-border cooperation, as provided for in the INTERREG programme, was in some instances judged as being too short-term and too selective with regards to the specific subjects. The projects surveyed have therefore developed various solutions as to how cross-border cooperation can be sustainably stabilised and how the knowledge already gained can be further used. It is recommended to maintain contacts and

networks that have been developed beyond concrete projects in the long term, for example in the form of exchange formats such as local supplier round tables or thematic working groups. Some projects have succeeded in maintaining the commitment of the partners, so that they continue to be available as contacts for cross-border questions in their respective thematic fields. In addition, efforts are also being made to continue projects independently beyond the end of the project, even without INTERREG funding.

One way to achieve this is to think beyond the project from the outset and ask more far-reaching questions, such as: How can our villages become livelier in the coming years? How can we develop them more systematically? How can we make the processes sustainable? The involvement of many partners, the development of networks and the integration of personal initiative in communities can ensure the transfer of knowledge, even beyond a concrete project. In some cases, cooperations are supported and monitored by scientific research. The aim of scientific support can be, for example, to identify framework conditions for cooperation and to investigate communication and participation in the project. In addition, the projects also use various media to record and pass on the knowledge acquired in the projects. There is a great interest in benefitting from the experiences of other cooperations and to pass on one's own knowledge. Thus, experiences and recommendations for action are written down in project brochures or manuals. In addition, toolboxes for cross-border cooperation are being developed locally, and digital knowledge platforms are also being created.



“It is very important to make communication as close as possible. Cause things can drift apart quite quickly. And if there is no trust, you’ll say at the end of the project: Okay, we did the project and that’s it. Never again. And of course, that’s not what we want. We want things to continue also after the project ends. Maintain contacts in order to develop new projects. Knowing each other and also being able to say: Okay, currently we don’t have a project. But maybe, in two years, we will say: Ah, I’ll call them and see how things are going. And then, maybe, you’ve got yourself a new project.”

“This personal contact through the network. This is the thing that, in my opinion, works sustainably besides the content issues.”



Promoting political support for cross-border cooperation

In the projects surveyed, and also in other cross-border contexts, political support is considered indispensable (Damm 2018: 69; Medeiros 2018b: 482). Moreover, it is deemed necessary that the issues dealt with are identified as important from the political side. Local support by mayors and municipal councils is considered important, and so is support at state

and federal level. The top-down approach is particularly successful when political decision-makers see themselves as providing impetus, which is important for motivation and continuity of the cooperation. In addition, there are accounts of successful projects when municipalities become involved in the cooperation, for example through collaboration or through grants or non-cash contributions.

To achieve this support, the projects surveyed use various strategies. First, cross-border cooperation and topics are actively brought to decision-making bodies such as local councils. Decision-makers are also approached with model solutions and decision papers for existing problems. Consulting these decision-makers is thus sometimes explicitly named as a task within the project. The active approach towards decision-makers is linked to the hope of making the concrete projects better known, highlighting them and, last but not least, conveying the relevance of the respective projects. With regard to communication with the political level, it is also pointed out that clear communication of the objectives and expectations of cross-border cooperation is necessary, also in order not to raise false expectations. The support of the political level and its commitment to cross-border cooperation are also considered important for the external presentation of the cooperation. In this way, additional attention and support can be generated, which in turn mean greater scope for action and often also faster tackling of the topics.

With regard to the partly unclear responsibilities in cross-border issues, the interviews do not provide any tangible solutions. Scientific evaluations of cross-border cooperation therefore demand that “[i]n the sense of a lively multi-level governance, the challenge of managing communication and coordination at different levels and creating the necessary interfaces should be taken up” (Pallagst et al. 2018b: 343).



“For the partnership to continue, we have to get those people [the mayors of towns on the other side of the border] on board. We tell them: This is what happened before, this is happening now, and this is what we plan for the future. Last fall, there were elections. Many things changed. And now we are looking to invite them as soon as possible.”

“This border region here has a clear interest in this field, and also in working on this field in a cross-border context. Because you are again and again confronted with these questions in everyday life.”



Acknowledging particularities of border regions

With regard to political support at state or federal level, the interviewees call for greater attention to be paid to border regions at higher political levels. For instance, the political side

demands that the European, cross-border orientation of border regions should be recognised as a necessity for these regions. As shown in the previous chapter, Eurosceptic political orientations pose a major challenge for cross-border cooperation. Rather, border regions need to “think in terms of regions” as opposed to thinking in terms of categories like this or that side of the border. This holds particularly true with regard to securing services of general interest. Therefore, it is partly seen as a necessity for cross-border cooperation to make one’s voice regarding the specific concerns of border regions heard also on a superordinate political level. On the one hand, political attention to border regions is called for with regard to greater support for cross-border cooperation. On the other hand, however, there is also a need to raise awareness of the fact that national decisions can in turn have an impact on cross-border cooperation with regards to securing the provision of services of general interest – for example, if national or regional regulations are changed in passenger transport and thus make cross-border passenger transport more difficult or even prevent it altogether. The view of the political level beyond the nation state thus also turns out to be a central demand. Similarly, the EU Commission formulates the demand towards the nation states to “further develop regular dialogues on border issues” (EU COM 2017a: 7).



“This location in the periphery requires you to make yourself heard regarding your own, special problem situations which may result due to the location near the border. This is certainly a challenge.”

Harmonisation of legislations

As has already become clear when considering the challenges, local opportunities to overcome legislative obstacles are very limited. The higher political levels are therefore called upon to advance the harmonisation of legislation. Nevertheless, the interviewees identify some approaches as to how the local and national level can contribute to addressing legislative challenges. In a first step, they call for local authorities and districts to become aware of the problems of different legal regulations, especially with regard to securing services of general interest, and to actively seek solutions. Furthermore, as already mentioned, it is considered important to acknowledge the effects of legislative changes at regional and national level on cross-border cooperation. In addition, local authorities at national borders should try to ensure that services on one side of the border can also be used by citizens of the other country. All in all, there are calls for the added value of cross-border cooperation to be made more visible to citizens. The EU Commission also encourages the member states to become active on these two levels, namely to firstly create awareness of obstacles and challenges as well as to communicate them, and secondly to actively seek solutions (EU COM 2017b: 307).



The Commission calls upon member states and regions to further develop regular dialogues on border issues. Essential European integration notions such as mutual recognition or alignment of rules and processes should receive more attention from member states and regions. They are invited to take full advantage of existing opportunities to conclude agreements or conventions. – EU COM (2017a: 7)

Summary

Even more so than for the challenges, it is evident that the factors described above apply to a similar extent to all sectors and many forms of cooperation when it comes to making cross-border cooperation successful. The involvement and participation of citizens plays a particularly important role in local supply projects, as the citizens have to support and actually make use of the chosen concepts for local supply. Meanwhile, volunteering is playing an increasingly important role in the health and care sector. For the areas of mobility as well as health and care, the aforementioned central obstacles can also be named as central success factors. These are stronger political support and the harmonisation of legislation. These factors can also be promising for more informal forms of cross-border cooperation. It is of course possible that there are fewer administrative hurdles, and possibly no institutionalisation of cooperation is sought or no topics are dealt with that urgently require harmonisation of legislation. However, in particular open communication and close coordination, trustworthy cooperation with a high level of motivation and the involvement of many actors seem promising far beyond project-based cooperation. It is explicitly recommended for emerging cross-border cooperation to adapt the activities and objectives to local conditions and possibilities. Moderate growth is also recommended, allowing time for the establishment of a solid basis for cross-border cooperation. Equally, visibility and above all political support, but also the support of the citizens are just as decisive for the success of cross-border cooperation of all kinds.

6 Transferable tools and processes of cross-border cooperation

Finally, the question of tools and processes for successful cross-border cooperation was examined. This question is based on existing efforts to provide municipalities and projects with concrete ideas and starting points which they can in turn use when it comes to meeting the challenges of demographic change in securing services of general interest. The BMFSFJ's "Municipality Workshop on Demography" programme, for example, offers a toolbox with suggestions for other municipalities. The tools have been developed in the various municipalities and include, for instance, a "village dialogue" or citizens' workshops in

the neighbourhood.⁶ For its part, the European Commission has compiled examples of good practice and approaches for border regions with regard to cross-border cooperation (EU COM 2017a). The EU programme Interact also develops toolkits and guidelines for cooperation programmes such as the INTERREG programme, for instance on communication and territorial development. Toolboxes are also being developed in some of the surveyed projects, aiming to support future cooperation.

Transferable tools and processes that can serve as a stimulus for other municipalities and projects can be derived from the success factors mentioned in the interviews and the associated explanations on their concrete implementation. They cover different levels and include a whole range of starting points, from rather abstract recommendations for project planning to concrete exchange formats. In the following, examples of the potential tools and processes – as identified in the analysed projects – that might be used to successfully implement the success factor “Involving citizens in cross-border cooperation” are presented.

Citizens as central actors in cross-border cooperation

Background and objectives

The expertise, creativity and assumption of responsibility by citizens is an important resource for shaping their living environment. In addition, the voluntary engagement of citizens and local self-management play an increasingly important role when previous structures of services of general interest are no longer in place, i.e. especially in rural areas. Successful cross-border cooperation is also dependent on the acceptance and support of the population. The participation of citizens in the preparation and implementation of cross-border cooperation can make a decisive contribution in this regard.

Implementation possibilities

- *Anchoring of voluntary engagement in cross-border cooperation:*
 - Including citizens in the project conception
 - Involving citizens in the implementation of concrete aspects of cross-border projects
 - Considering local support and initiatives when drafting projects and project structures
 - Participation of children and youths in the field of child-friendly municipalities
 - Involving citizens' engagement as own field of action/sub-project within cooperation projects
 - Involving citizens who are organised in associations and local initiatives as cooperation partners in (INTERREG) projects

- *Concrete potential forms of involvement:*
 - Establishing exchange formats that offer a space for the already existing knowledge of citizens on specific issues, for instance formats like workshops or congresses

⁶ More information can be found at the website of the Demography Workshop for Municipalities: <https://www.demografiewerkstatt-kommunen.de/Werkzeugkoffer>.

- Establishing communication processes in the form of citizens' groups that prepare decisions
 - Implementing concrete activities by the citizens, for instance neighbourly help in municipalities
 - Cooperative and collaborative approaches to establish and maintain village shops as a potential basis for the running of such shops, aiming to secure local supply, "citizens' shops"
 - Concluding cooperation agreements directly with local associations and initiatives
- *Framework conditions*
- Close support, organisation and moderation of participation processes
 - Quick implementation of announced processes
 - Good, suitable information for engaged citizens
 - Maintaining motivation as well as avoiding overloads and frustration
 - Coverage of voluntary engagement with regard to insurance protection

7 Conclusion and prospects

In order to meet the challenges of demographic change in terms of securing services of general interest, municipalities and regions are pursuing a wide range of strategies. In this working paper, cross-border cooperation was examined as one of these potential strategies. In doing so, forms of cross-border cooperation were presented and their existing problems identified. Furthermore, it was described what is important to the projects in terms of cross-border cooperation, which topics they deal with and which approaches they pursue in order to work successfully across borders. Seven cross-border projects in the fields of health and care, local supply and transport were examined as exemplary cases.

In order to be able to serve other communities and projects as a source of information and starting points, the information obtained in this way was summarised with regards to opportunities, disadvantages, forms, challenges, success factors and related approaches for action.

It has been shown that the project managers and municipal employees surveyed see a number of opportunities and advantages in cross-border cooperation. In particular, they mention the joint mastering of similar challenges, getting to know each other and pooling resources. But also the possibility of visibly placing relevant topics of the region as well as a better networking within the own country are mentioned as opportunities. In contrast, no disadvantages are seen in cross-border cooperation. The opportunities and advantages are usually named in a generalised way – independent of the sector or degree of formalisation of the cooperation – thus emphasising the importance of cross-border cooperation for the analysed border regions.

It has become evident that there are areas where projects have been very effective in finding their own solutions, such as involving many relevant actors or overcoming language barriers. On the other hand, there are also areas where demands are formulated, but where the projects' own possibilities for action to overcome the obstacles are hardly mentioned, as these are not within the sphere of influence of the individual projects and cooperation. This includes for example the harmonisation of legislation. It is to be noted that project managers and representatives of the municipalities in the interviews often mentioned the same topics being of greatest concern for cross-border cooperation in the region. In some cases, the priorities differ somewhat, but the underlying perspectives appear to be similar.

The results presented in this paper are mainly based on experience gained in the context of INTERREG projects. The challenges and success factors for incipient, possibly still informal contacts and cooperation may therefore differ from these. This circumstance was addressed in the analysis by examining projects at different stages of project implementation and by including the entire range of experience with cross-border cooperation of the interviewees. Therefore, the knowledge gained can still be useful for other municipalities and projects, regardless of their current degree of cross-border cooperation, and can serve as a reference point for shaping one's own (planned) cross-border cooperation.

It has become clear that many obstacles and challenges to cooperation cannot be solved by the parties themselves. In particular, administrative and legal obstacles require regulation at

a higher level. The European Commission has therefore taken and addressed various measures, including the issue of complexity with its so-called “80 simplification measures in cohesion policy 2021-2027” (EU COM 2018c). Furthermore, building on an initiative of Luxembourg’s Council Presidency in 2015, the European Commission has presented a proposal for a voluntary mechanism to overcome legal and administrative obstacles in a cross-border context. This mechanism is to make it possible - “on a voluntary basis and agreed by the competent authorities [...] for the rules of one Member State to apply in the neighbouring Member State. This would apply to a specific project or action limited in time, located within a border region and initiated by local and/or regional public authorities” (EU COM 2018b: 1). The main purpose of the mechanism is to reduce complexity and costs for border regions in their cooperation. However, it is not a “one-size-fits-all” solution and should rather give the member states “the option of devising solutions that best suit the regional context” (ibid. 5). This proposal is currently being discussed, within the framework of the ordinary legislative procedures, in the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union.

8 Annex

Annex 1 – INTERREG V A Funding regions with German participation

Grenzübergreifende Zusammenarbeit mit deutscher Beteiligung

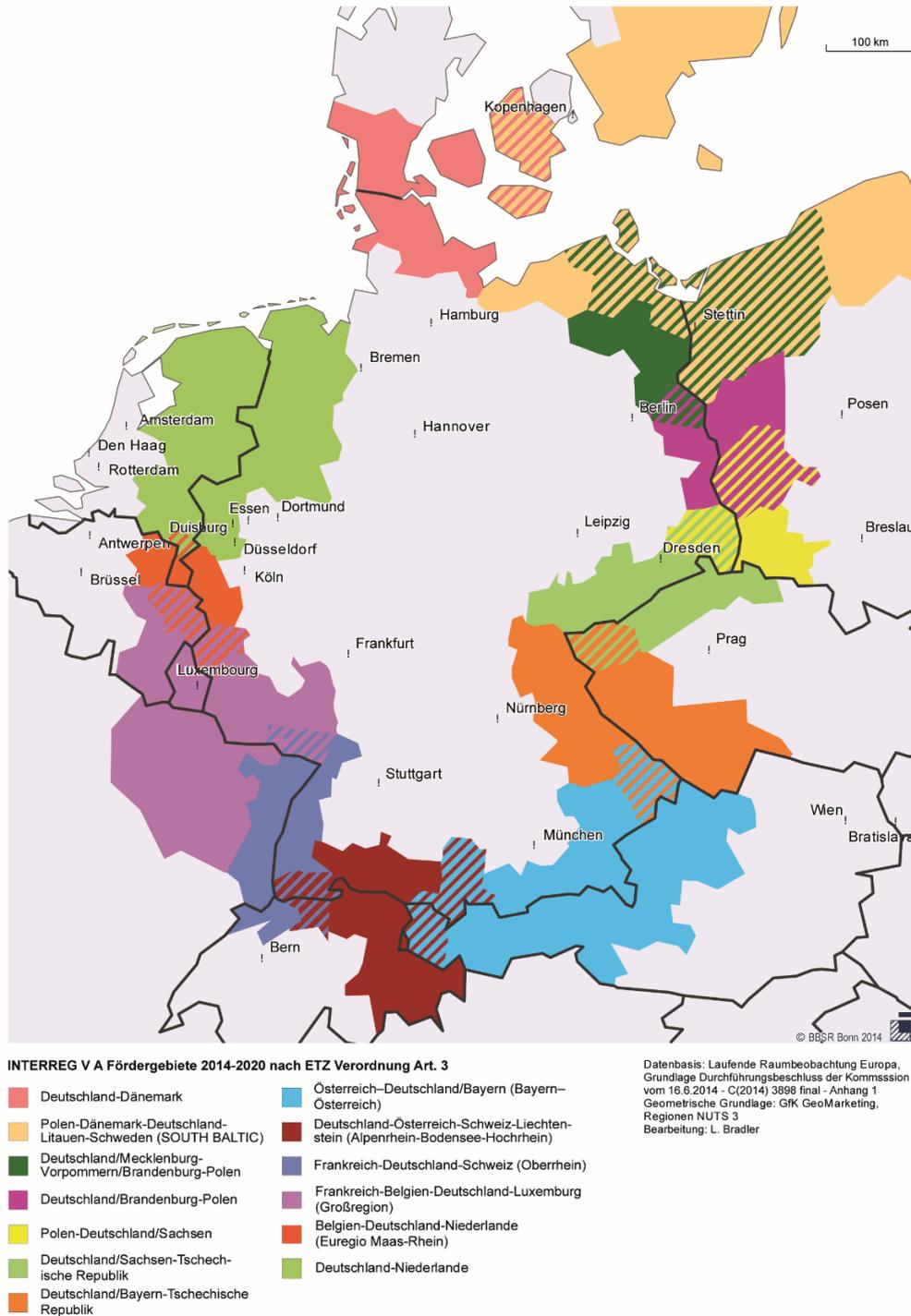


Figure 1 – Cross-border cooperation with German participation 2014-2020 (INTERREG V A) (BBSR 2018b)

Annex 2 – Overview: opportunities for regions from cross-border cooperation

- Mastering same challenges together
- Benefitting from differences
- Getting to know and learning from each other
- Pooling resources
- Creating added value for the region
- More activities due to additional funding, increasing visibility
- Setting the agenda
- Pushing national projects, reaching better national networks
- Avoiding deteriorations, maintaining the status quo

Annex 3 – Overview: obstacles and challenges for cross-border cooperation

- Differences in law and administration
- Opaque responsibilities
- Not all challenges can be solved on local level
- Competition to national tasks
- Lack of political support
- Physical access to the neighbouring country – Distance despite common borders
- Administrative obstacles within the project
- Major time expenditure and short-term conception of projects
- Lack of financial resources
- Lack of personnel and frequent changes in staff
- Disagreement and ambiguity regarding a project's objectives
- Different motives and motivation
- Ambivalent stance towards the neighbouring country
- Language barriers
- Cultural differences

Annex 4 – Overview: factors for successful cross-border cooperation

- Open communication and close consultation
- Trustful cooperation
- Overcoming language barriers
- Keeping motivation high
- Introducing moderators and “bridge-builders”
- Involving many actors
- Supporting citizen involvement and voluntary engagement
- Overcoming administrative obstacles
- Institutionalisation of cooperation
- Facilitating project funding
- Identifying opportunities and making them visible
- Finding tailor-made solutions and including experiences
- Utilising existing potential and building on existing contacts
- Long-term conception of cooperations
- Coordination with other measures
- Sustainable perpetuation of cooperation and knowledge management
- Promoting political support for cross-border cooperation
- Acknowledging particularities of border regions
- Harmonisation of legislation

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