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Institute for Transnational and Euregional
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBC	Cross-Border Cooperation
EGTC Euregio Meuse-Rhine	Project partner in the Crossquality project
EMR	Euregio Meuse-Rhine
EMR territory	Territory of cross-border cooperation
EU	European Union
Euregio	Collective term for institutionalised cross-border cooperation initiatives throughout the European Union
Interreg EMR	Official programme
TIA	Territorial Impact Assessment

1

INTRODUCTION

Do Euregional cross-border programmes and projects foster the development of effective transnational cooperation networks? Does Interreg funding produce valuable and sustainable networks of expedient collaboration within the Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine (EMR) territory? How can the quality of cross-border cooperation (CBC) networks be measured, and how can links between Interreg EMR projects and CBC quality be traced?

An ESPON study (with the involvement of ITEM/ Maastricht University) points to the importance of designing a qualitative methodology for CBC analysis (see Dallhammer et al. 2019). More recently, the European Court of Auditors also issued a special report on Interreg cooperation and concluded, among other things, that “the indicators used did not generally capture the cross-border effect, hampering the monitoring of programme implementation in comparison to its objectives” (European Court of Auditors 2021:5).

This research project, called ‘Crossquality’ and conducted by researchers at the Universities of Maastricht, Aachen, Hasselt and Liège in cooperation with the EGTC Euregio Meuse-Rhine (hereafter called ‘the Crossquality team’), seeks to address this gap by developing a new methodology for measuring the quality of CBC using indicators and data to measure this quality in a more qualitative way. Effectively, this means that the proposed methodology will

encompass both qualitative and quantitative elements and thus contribute to the body of CBC assessment literature.

Moreover, this Crossquality project was initiated under the assumption that existing Interreg programmes do not use a specific evaluation or assessment methodology to measure the quality of CBC as a result of the interventions. This is to some extent surprising, since the programmes work with a list of indicators used for internal evaluation of the programme. The indicators serve first and foremost to determine whether the objectives are met at both the project and programme level. Hence, the existing indicators of the Interreg EMR programme will be analysed to find out to what extent they already measure aspects of the quality of CBC processes and where any shortcomings are detected.

This research report is intended as a background document that explains the theoretical and conceptual background of the methodology, and goes deeper into the methods developed. The methodology provided will first be used to measure CBC quality within the framework of the Interreg EMR programme. The results of this assessment will be provided in the ‘The effects of the (2014-2020) Interreg (V) Euregio Meuse-Rhine Programme on the quality of CBC: Final Report’. However, the methodology stands on its own, and can also be applied to other future CBC programmes, including in the context of the Interreg Meuse-Rhine

programme 2021-2027.¹ This research report is composed of five main parts. Section 1 contains the introduction. Section 2 presents an overview of the different definitions and dimensions of CBC and the multiple attempts at measuring CBC, in the literature and by the Interreg EMR Programme. Section 3 describes the conceptual approach used here for the measurement of the quality of CBC. The concept is based on specific approaches related to the quality of cooperation. The methodological design of the approach is outlined in Section 4, the different measurement instruments are presented in detail. Lastly, Section 5 offers a summary and conclusions.

It is important to note that this document is closely related to the practical handbook that describes how to apply the methodology. Hence, the handbook flows from this research report that outlines the theoretical framework. This research report furthermore contains an overview of the research field, the conceptual steps followed and a detailed explanation of the methodology. The handbook, on the other hand, provides rather precise instructions on how to apply the different measurement instruments. It is intended to inform and guide the practitioner or researcher on how to apply the methodology.

2

HOW TO MEASURE THE QUALITY OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION?

In this section, cross-border cooperation (CBC) will be analysed both practically and theoretically and an overview of attempts to measure the quality of cooperation will be given. The Crossquality team first took a look at what is usually meant by CBC and how different authors defined this concept previously. The Crossquality team then proceeded to present an overview of different scientific approaches to measure the quality

of CBC within a certain region. Particular focus was placed on Territorial Impact Assessment (TIA) methods. The Crossquality team also took a look at how the Interreg EMR secretariat itself analyses the quality and impact of the Interreg EMR programme. This section ends with a description of the research field to which the methodology aims to contribute.

¹ Between 2021 and 2027, the programme is called Interreg Meuse-Rhine and was referred to under the name Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine (EMR) between 2014 and 2020. Since the report mainly concerns the first programme period, reference is most often made to Interreg EMR. When discussing forward-looking reflections, the report uses the name Interreg Meuse-Rhine.

2.1 WHAT DOES CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION MEAN IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INTERREG EUREGIO MEUSE-RHINE?

In the context of this project, Cross-border cooperation (CBC) as called by the Crossquality team means the cooperation of all different types of public or private organisations, such as companies, chambers of commerce or other employer associations, trade unions, universities or schools, municipalities and other administrations, police forces, individual citizens or citizen associations with partners across the border. One of the obvious effects of an Interreg programme is that different stakeholders within a certain sector form a network to apply for Interreg funding. If funding is granted, they then conduct a specific Interreg project. In this respect, CBC is very often initiated by Interreg, though this does not mean that the cooperation of partners across the border will be positively affected and lead to the establishment of sustainable cooperation in the future (even without Interreg funding). Moreover, CBC does also exist without Interreg funding. This means that CBC in a certain sector can also be prompted by different motives other than to conduct a joint Interreg project. The effects of an Interreg programme on cooperation across the border also depends on the existing cross-border networks and on sector-specific collaboration requirements, patterns and cultures more generally.

This means that CBC takes place in a place-specific context (Bathelt & Glückler 2018:46). It is embedded in, supported by and dependent on a specific legal framework (in the particular states or regions), a specific cultural and historic background that has an influence on mutual understanding or conflicts and

cross-border networks in various sectors and institutions (such as Euregions), and thus more broadly forms a cross-border governance system. Hence, the preconditions for CBC differ tremendously between border territories. The Euregio Meuse-Rhine territory comprises the Belgian provinces of Limburg and Liège with the German-speaking East Belgium, the Dutch region of South Limburg, the German districts of Aachen, Düren, Euskirchen and Heinsberg and the city of Aachen itself, with a total surface area of around 10,470 km², a population of 3.8 million and approximately 250,000 businesses (EMR n.d.). Approximately, about half of the population lives in Belgium, one third in Germany and one fifth in the Netherlands (ArbeitsmarktInZicht 2020). Compared to other cross-border regions within the EU, the cross-border relations and preconditions can be described as intensive and advanced. According to Beck (2022:63), it is noticeable that, in the EMR territory as well as in the Greater Region and Upper Rhine, formalisation and institutionalisation are significantly more advanced than in other cross-border territories.

Durà et al. (2018:30) detected 158 territorial CBC structures, with 61 entities being classified as especially “active, innovative and excellent” in terms of their governance structures and the relevance of the projects they carry out. The Euregio Meuse-Rhine, meaning the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), is one of the especially active entities. Therefore, the assessment of the impact of the Interreg EMR programme on the quality

of cooperation and collaboration among the different stakeholders must be viewed against the background of the general characteristics of cross-border governance in the EMR territory. For instance, partners across the border have been working together for more than 40 years; in some sectors, such as cross-border ambulances or police cooperation, the EMR territory is a sort of frontrunner.

The EGTC Euregio Meuse-Rhine (EGTC EMR) as an institution is clearly an important element of overall cross-border governance. Unlike in other Euregios, it is driven first and foremost by regional and not local stakeholders. The board is dominated by Provinces on the Dutch and Belgian side, a special regional setting on the German side and the participation of the

German-speaking Community in Belgium as the strongest political player in terms of its specific legislative competence. The coordination network of the five largest cities was thus also integrated recently under the umbrella of the EGTC EMR and many of the sectoral networks were interlinked with its secretariat. In this respect, the assumption is that many cross-border networks that deal with Interreg projects are also connected with thematic working groups established by the EGTC EMR as an organisation. Because the EGTC EMR as an organisation is comparatively well-established, the Crossquality team could hypothesise that this also has implications for the quality of networks as part of different Interreg EMR projects. This would be different in a cross-border region with rather weak cross-border entities.

2.2 CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION: OBJECTIVES & FORMS

After having discussed CBC from an empirical point of view, CBC will now be discussed more theoretically. What are the key definitions, goals and assessment methods for CBC?

A benchmark for defining 'good practice' in CBC are the objectives formulated by EU policies and funding schemes. It is interesting that the actual objectives of CBC have varied between the different Interreg programmes throughout the years (Medeiros 2018). Mitigating major border constraints has not been the main objective of EU CBC programmes from the start, but only came up during Interreg IV (Medeiros 2018). For Interreg V (2014-2020) that was studied in this project, the European Commission defines EU CBC as follows:



European cross-border cooperation, known as Interreg A, supports cooperation between NUTS III regions from at least two different Member States lying directly on the borders or adjacent to them. It aims to tackle common challenges identified jointly in the border regions and to exploit the untapped growth potential in border areas, while enhancing the cooperation process for the purposes of the overall harmonious development of the Union.

(European Commission n.d., italics added)

The key passage is “enhancing the cooperation process”. It is quite interesting to see that strengthening the cooperation processes between border regions is regarded as an important mediating objective here in order to create more internal cohesion.

The conditions for these cooperation processes are very different and the cross-border territories are important. “Cross-border or transborder regions, commonly known in the European context as Euregios, have been created across state borders in order to decrease their role as barriers in an attempt to redefine fixed, border-induced state territoriality.” (Popescu 2008:419). Therefore, an important question is how the interventions stimulated by Interreg are embedded into the wider cooperation structure of a certain Euregio. This is in particular true for the EMR territory, as the strong cross-border governance structure was demonstrated previously.

How should different CBC initiatives be understood with respect to the quality of cooperation? Do useful indicators exist and what are they? A theoretical overview of the differences between tangible CBC initiatives is offered by De Sousa (2013), who recommends a four-part typology of the nature of CBC. At the first and lowest level, De Sousa (2013:6) mentions ‘Awareness raising co-operation’, which in effect is more about relations and regional promotion than about real cooperation. The second level, called ‘Mutual aid co-operation’, in fact requires more cooperation and is about emergency services helping each other in neighbouring countries (De Sousa 2013:6). At this level, the development of deeper social ties between transnational actors can be seen. The third level of CBC is even

more interesting, as it concerns ‘Functional co-operation’ (De Sousa 2013:6). De Sousa (2013:6) writes: “These co-operation projects aim at solving problems, creating business opportunities, promoting cultural exchanges and reducing non-visible barriers to labour mobility through the implementation of joint co-operation projects, such as the INTERREG programmes.” These functional cooperation initiatives will be central to the research at hand, as the research focuses on developing an instrument to measure the quality of CBC in Interreg programmes. However, De Sousa (2013:7) names yet a fourth and final phase of CBC, namely ‘Common management of public resources/services’. In this phase, a link with the statement of Popescu (2008) on cross-border regions above can be seen. There is a shift in territorial logics: for De Sousa (2013:7), the main goal here is that both public services and resources are now primarily handed over to and organised by the cross-border regions themselves. These strategies matter as well, as they can be seen as ‘higher’ levels of integration. This is relevant, when the measurement instrument uses the so-called ‘Coordination Scale’ by Metcalfe (1996a; 1996b), where common budgets and policies constitute the highest tiers within a scale on cooperation processes. As the Crossquality team will explain, this logic will be applied towards measuring CBC quality.

After having introduced CBC and the Interreg EMR, the question now arises as to what extent these CBC efforts can be regarded as effective. Below is an overview of the relevant literature.

2.3 RELEVANT LITERATURE & APPROACHES WITH RESPECT TO TERRITORIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT METHODS

In recent decades, different Territorial Impact Assessment (TIA) methods have been developed (Medeiros 2020). As the name suggests, the aim here is to measure territorial impacts of for example supporting measures, such as fostered collaboration. The question arises as to what territorial impact exists exactly, and how it can be linked to cross-border territories. As Zonneveld and Waterhout (2009) report, territorial impacts cannot be easily defined. Using the typology of Böhme and Waterhout (2008:244, in Zonneveld and Waterhout 2009:5-6), Zonneveld and Waterhout (2009:5) write that effects do not necessarily have to be direct, and can also be more indirect, and the object affected by the policy can differ as well. Evers (2011:76) indicates that the lack of a clear definition of the TIA also conflicts with the methodology to follow. Camagni (2020:30) understands the TIA as aimed at understanding to what extent territorial cohesion is augmented by different policy interventions.

However, TIAs can also be described as in the words of Ocskay (2020:134): “What does the ‘quality of cross-border cooperation’/the ‘level of cross-border integration’ mean? And, finally, ‘What is the real mission of cross-border programmes?’”. This is a rather normative question that should be answered first.

As this conceptual problem cannot be resolved exhaustively, for each (new) impact analysis method, it must be stressed how it fits into the existing body of TIA methods. The Crossquality team therefore wants to underscore that instead of mainly looking at territorial outcomes and developments, a measurement approach should be developed that focuses on the quality and improvement of CBC processes as such. The following section briefly presents an overview of the state of the art of different approaches on indicators and assessment methodologies for CBC.

2.4 SEARCHING FOR MORE ADEQUATE ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGIES FOR CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

Existing cross-border indicators developed for instance by ESPON focus on differences in border regions in relation to geographical, economic, cultural and political factors to reinforce relations in neighboring regions, solve problems or manage resources (Durà et al. 2018:24, ESPON 2021b). It is interesting that ESPON (see above, 2.4) developed a list of 626 indicators (ESPON 2021a). However, the relation to real cross-border aspects

is weak. ESPON provides a great overview of specific national border regions in general, but not specifically of cross-border territories.

As CBC is emphasised as being important for territorial development in Europe, open markets, mobility, the harmonisation of institutions and integration are core targets (Trienes 2014:22). Removing legal and administrative barriers would

stimulate economic growth in border regions (Camagni et al. 2017:8). For the evaluation of this kind of socio-economic development in territories, the European Commission recommends case studies, Delphi surveys, workshops or SWOT analyses as instruments (European Commission 2013). These instruments were not developed for CBC evaluations in particular but with respect to different territories. The outcome of CBC has been investigated thoroughly, see e.g., the European Commission (2017), but cross-border indicators are very often related to obstacles in the areas of mobility, social relations, language and culture (European Commission 2020). Hence, the focus lies more on the mobility or non-mobility of individuals or companies, not on the cooperation of citizens, companies or institutions across the border.

Another interesting assessment methodology is the approach of Ricq (2006). He describes indicators with respect to the quality of information, consultation and cooperation across the border. In Ricq's hierarchy, harmonisation and integration across the borders are defined as the ultimate steps (Ricq 2006:130ff). However, he admits that for the last two dimensions, new structures are required (Ricq 2006:142ff). For the assessment of CBC programmes, the different aspects of information, consultation and cooperation are very promising (with specific indicators), but harmonisation and integration are outside the scope of cross-border networks in the framework of Interreg programmes. However, Ricq's discussion on cultural and linguistic distances (Ricq 2006:144ff) is relevant for the development of a sound methodology with soft indicators (see below, 3.4).

At the European level, there are many case studies on general aspects of cross-border mobility. For example, Delhey et al. (2020) see

Europe as a cross-border network and investigate mobility, mobile communication and migration in a quantitative manner, measured by the number of trips, exchange of students, tourism and telephone data. Another case study by Dörny and Decoville (2016:31) investigated border effects in the European transport sector network in Luxembourg. Herz and Olivier (2012) studied transnational relationships in a quantitative and qualitative manner via an (ego-centric) network analysis. These studies enrich the field of quantitative network analysis in a qualitative way. Metcalfe (1996b) investigated the EU Commission as a network organisation and invented the Policy Coordination Scale. Unfortunately, many case studies did not specify the exact questions asked and/or indicators used.

Other assessment methodologies for CBC have been published in Economic Geography. There are even many approaches to measure cross-border exchange, migration and foundation, such as Local Buzz/Global Pipelines (Trippel et al. 2007), regional innovation systems or learning regions (Butzin 2000). A few indicators are mentioned briefly at this point: direct subsidy for stimulating private R&D, geographical proximity (Brökel & Graf 2020:13f) or how the quality of cooperation is rated in different settings such as R&D cooperation or informal contacts (Trippel et al. 2007:14). Huber (2012:9) mentioned three degrees of personal proximity, which are very interesting: knowing each other, emotional closeness and feeling of personal obligation. For good cooperation, proximity is good, but should not be too close, because there must be a reason for exchange (Huber 2012:15).

Networks in general, but especially local networks (Fromhold-Eisebith 1995), are another source of qualitative (Serdült 2002; Hollstein

2006) indicators, partly related to CBC (Fletcher & Barrett 2001). An overview of network-related questions is presented by De Lange et al. (2004:373ff). They are related to daily work, which is not really suited to Interreg CBC. Further indicators used include advice, cooperation, friendships and networks in organisations (De Lange et al. 2004:373-376). Fletcher and Barrett (2001) investigated family companies in different countries, the origin of R&D employees, strategic alliances and power relations in supply chains. All of these indicators are not really appropriate for measuring the quality of institution-

alised CBC between different kinds of actors in the framework of Interreg programmes.

This raises the question as to what indicators do fit for measuring the quality of CBC in the context of Interreg. To do so, the next section will provide a summary of how the quality of the Interreg EMR programme is evaluated, before introducing different existing approaches and finally the custom approach used here to measure the quality of CBC with respect to the effects of a specific Interreg programme.

2.5 THE EXISTING SYSTEM OF INDICATORS FOR THE INTERREG EMR PROGRAMME

According to the description on its webpage, “Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine uses indicators to measure the impact of its programme.” (Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine n.d.:3).

Indicators are defined at the EU, programme and project level. A common system of indicators has been put in place for all projects funded under the European Regional Development Fund in order to compare and compile achievements across Europe. In this way, your project will contribute to forming a bigger picture of the effects of European funding. Some indicators are defined at the EU level (common output indicators = CO), and other indicators were developed specifically for the Interreg EMR programme (programme specific indicators = PS).

(Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine n.d.:3)

The assumption of the Crossquality project is that deficiencies with respect to a qualitative and process-oriented assessment can also be found in the framework of the Interreg EMR programme. The current programme output indicators (see Annex I) are first and foremost quantitative in nature and do not describe qualitative elements of CBC processes of public entities, companies or citizens. Nor do these indicators really capture the causal relation between the programme and the indicated developments. The Interreg indicators also seem to be biased towards informing about Euregional cooperation achievements. As this list of indicators primarily suggests that they quantify certain outcomes, and the quality of cooperation networks is barely assessed, the full validity of this measurement instrument is diminished.

Table 1: Example of output indicators for the 2020 Interreg EMR programme State of play

Priority axis 2 - Economy 2020

ID	Common & programme specific output indicators	Unit	Programme target value	Expected contribution by projects	Ratio 'Expected contribution' vs 'Target value'
CO 01	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	Enterprises	750	1077	144 %
CO 02	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants	Enterprises	250	50	20 %
CO 04	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	Enterprises	500	150	30 %
CO 05	Productive investment: Number of new enterprises supported	Enterprises	50	30	60 %

Source: Progress of programme output indicators, Interreg V-A Euregio Meuse-Rhine State of play on 16 April 2020, accessible via <https://www.interregemr.eu/downloads#1916509>

A look at the output indicators of the present Interreg programme (see Annex I) shows that the quality of CBC processes has not been systematically measured or evaluated thus far. For the following four priority axes, all indicators are quantitative and deal with counting the number of stakeholders involved in activities. With respect to priority axis 1 'Innovation', it means that indicators are for instance about the number of enterprises receiving support and the number of enterprises cooperating with research organisations. The same goes for the second axis 'Economy'. Here, typical indicators are the number

of enterprises (see table above) that receive support for productive investments, number of business cases developed, and the number of SMEs receiving support. Surprisingly, with respect to this priority axis, there is no indicator explicitly related to cross-border relations or activities. With regard to 'Social Inclusion', the third axis, the indicators are related to the number of participants in a specific training course, or related to services. Another aspect is the number of organisations that are involved in projects to strengthen the cross-border labour market. Also in this respect, there are no special indicators on

the quality of CBC processes with respect to the labour market. The most interesting indicators for this work are related to the fourth priority axis 'Territorial Cooperation'. The quantitative indicators describe the number of projects dealing with the improvement of cooperation in a certain sector like health, safety, public authorities or cultural organisations. Hence, they can be used to illustrate the increase of the number of projects per sector. It would be interesting to compare the numbers for these indicators over time during the Interreg programme periods, in order to find out in which sector this type of projects increased.

The Interreg EMR programme is representative of the situation of many other Interreg programmes. In relation to the systems of indicators for other Interreg programmes, the indicators for Interreg EMR are rather standard. One conclusion of the 2019 ESPON project (Dallhammer et al. 2019) is relevant for the situation of other programmes too, namely that for all the programmes investigated there was no comprehensive list of qualitative indicators for evaluation of the project

and programme. ESPON (2007:10) supports the scientific community in territorial development and periodically provides an overview of the different kinds of borders (i.e. ESPON 2007). ESPON provides all sorts of data, e.g., with respect to Territorial Impact Assessments (ESPON 2020). There are also no data available outside the Interreg programme with respect to the qualitative development of CBC networks. Nor have any general surveys been done with respect to the perceptions of citizens or companies towards the quality of CBC, the functioning of cross-border entities such as the EGTC Euregio Meuse-Rhine or attitudes towards the idea of Euregional cohesion.

Also outside the scope of these programmes, no qualitative data are available on matters like the cooperation of employment services or municipalities, or the view of employers or public bodies on the development of CBC in a particular sector. There is a striking difference between the regular measuring of attitudes towards the EU with the 'Eurobarometer' instrument and the situation in cross-border territories (see Box 1).

Box 1: **Examples of the lack of qualitative data**

Whereas for individual border regions it is still not possible to say what the repercussions of the COVID crisis have been with respect to the attitudes of citizens, this was documented by Eurobarometer for the EU as a whole (European Commission 2021). While the coronavirus pandemic has been impacting the daily lives of Europeans for more than two years, attitudes towards the EU remain surprisingly positive, according to the Standard Eurobarometer conducted in February-March 2021. The image of the EU has improved and trust in the EU has increased and reached their highest levels in more than a decade. It would be, of course, very helpful for policymakers in border regions to have a similar instrument for their cross-border territory, so that they might be able to learn more about the perception of CBC, institutions and overall cohesion across the border. The last Eurobarometer Flash 422 in this respect was published in 2015 on 'Cross-border cooperation in the EU' (European Commission 2015). DG Regio supports the idea to collect more data on public perception and the quality of CBC and recently commissioned a research study on those topics.

3

A NEW CONCEPTUAL APPROACH FOR MEASURING THE QUALITY OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

In this third section, the Crossquality team introduces a research approach that focuses on the quality of CBC processes by delving into the quality of cross-border networks (and not on measuring outcomes). After embedding this new approach in literature on networks and cooperation, a new measurement instrument to assess network quality will be presented. An overview of the sectors used as case studies for the development of the measurement instrument will also be given.

The mixed-methods design includes both qualitative and quantitative elements for adequately measuring the quality of CBC within Interreg programmes. As a first step, the approach aims at identifying relevant

CBC policy sectors in order to detect sectoral cross-border expert networks. As the unit of measurement, the quality of CBC will be measured by focusing on actor networks within a particular CBC programme. Asking the question about the quality of cooperation within the network means first examining the particular nature of the network and how it functions. The network for instance depends on external factors, such as the requirements and importance of Interreg funding in the sector, other national, regional or EU funds, or the general institutional setting of the cross-border territory. This means, for instance, whether the EGTC Euregio Meuse-Rhine as an organisation plays an important role within the sectoral network.

3.1 WHAT IS A NETWORK?

There is a long legacy of discussing a specific meaning of networks in economic sciences. Walther and Reitel (2012:5) use the following definition for networks: "A specific set of inter-relationships among a defined set of persons within a social system". The definition stresses the fact that relationships as such take center stage when analysing networks. Within the Crossquality team, the concept of the network strongly deviates from the conventional

understanding in academic circles: the quality, content and thickness of these relationships will be the focal point.

How have networks been analysed in the academic literature throughout the years? Klijn (2008:511-512, italics not added) presents a three-fold research categorisation of governance network research, in which he distinguishes the following approaches: 'policy

networks', 'inter-organisational service delivery and policy implementation', and 'governing networks'. In the first approach, the policy network participants are studied; for the second approach, the cooperation of different organisations to deliver goals is central; and, lastly, the third approach looks at networks in which different actors must cooperate to create policy, especially on how the actors interact with each other and how processes could make further progress (Klijn 2008:511-513; Klijn & Koppenjan 2012:588-589). The third research approach will be important for the present research project, as CBC mostly consists of networks of actors that must cooperate intensively to reach their project goals.

The question arises as to which dimensions of network quality really are important to gather indicators. Provan and Milward (2001) provide an elaborative framework for assessing interorganisational network quality within the public sector. Here, they defend that there should be three different dimensions at which network effectiveness should be evaluated: "community, network, and organization/ participant levels." (Provan & Milward 2001:415). Briefly, for Provan and Milward (2001:416-420), assessing network quality is about measuring whether the community receives advantages from the network's activities, the intrinsic quality level which the network achieves and the gains made for the individual network participants. An exhaustive methodology combining these three elements in order to measure the quality of cross-border networks would be best. However, the Crossquality team decided to predominantly focus on the network dimension by looking at the quality, intensity and thickness of the cooperation process, because the community and organisation/participant dimensions are

already covered by existing indicators, while the network dimension is not.

Provan and Milward (2001:418) use clear language when indicating which factors are crucial for assessing networks: "The effectiveness of a network and its NAO [Network Administrative Organisation] can be assessed in a number of different ways, many of which depend on the relative maturity and development of the network." They mention in this regard not only the number of network participants, but also elements such as the products a certain network has to offer, a certain diversity in participant backgrounds, relationship depth and efficacy, and the quality of network administration by an autonomous unit appointed with this task (Provan & Milward 2001:418-419). While it is not the core of their argument, Provan and Milward (2001:418) also stress that "[h]ighly effective, mature networks have a seamless quality that allows information, resources, and clients to flow smoothly across agencies and programs".

From a governance perspective, the basic assumption is that understanding public policy requires looking at so-called 'non-hierarchical networks' as they tend to make an important contribution to governance (Christiansen 2016:107). Peterson (2009:112) indicates that, in policy network analyses, it is often commonly understood that policies actually implemented can in fact be influenced by the peculiarities of a policy network. Therefore, the quality of cooperation within – in this case – cross-border networks is measured. From a governance standpoint, cooperation defines the quality of a network and good coordination is necessary to create a high level of cooperation. Therefore, the measurement instrument the Crossquality team developed needs to tell something not only about

the quality of cooperation as such, but also about the coordination. Hence, the assumption is that a higher quality of cooperation, obtained by a higher

level of coordination, will lead to a higher societal impact of the particular cross-border network.

3.2 COOPERATION, COORDINATION & COLLABORATION WITHIN NETWORKS

The coordination of a network could be regarded as being most important for its quality. But what is good network coordination? For the analytical evaluation of interactions within a certain network, it is helpful to further distinguish between three concepts: coordination, cooperation and collaboration.

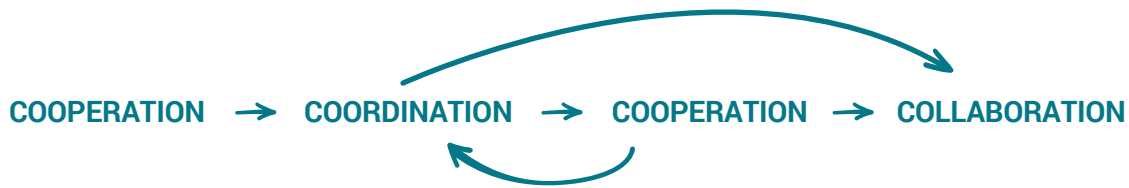
A definition for the term **cooperation**, which stems from the field of game theory, is: "An actor cooperates if and only if he or she chooses a course of action that will lead to a collectively rational outcome when other actors behave cooperatively as well." (Diekmann & Lindenberg 2001:2). If this is the case, it would be highly advantageous to coordinate the different actions of others in order to create this collective rationality. **Coordination** could then be defined as follows: "[A] set of decisions is coordinated if adjustments have been made in it such that the adverse consequences of any one decision for other decisions in the set are to a degree and in some frequency avoided, reduced, counterbalanced, or outweighed." (Lindblom 1965:154, in Peters 2018:2). This means that it is possible to say that if several decisions (of individuals, organisations, groups) are coordinated, the thus preferred collective rationality could be reached. Subsequently, **collaboration** can be defined not as pure coordination or not as limited as cooperation, but as a more advanced form of cooperation. Roschelle and Teasley (1995:70) define the

concept of collaboration in the following way: "Collaboration is a coordinated, synchronous activity that is the result of a continued attempt to construct and maintain a shared conception of a problem." This definition of collaboration seems to imply some kind of moving away from particular interests and coming to some profound integration with the other partners.

There seems to be a kind of hierarchical relationship between these concepts. Proper coordination, as for instance providing good information and fostering consultation between partners, seems to be the precondition for cooperation when joint priorities are set and agreements are made on the division of labour. Good coordination would mean, according to the definitions, that cooperation can be attained more easily. Extensive coordination – for instance by formulating joint strategic goals or agreeing on a joint budget – could be seen as the precondition for sophisticated collaboration. Collaboration could then be the most advanced manner of interaction in the conceptual framework here. It means, to some extent, handing over some control to the partners since it is not purely a division of labour but also a recurrent process where the partners rely on the work of others. There needs to be more trust than in the case of pure cooperation. The relationships between the concepts can be summarised as in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: The relation between cooperation, coordination and collaboration

(as depicted by the Crossquality team)



The figure starts with cooperation, before attempts towards coordination. Hence, cooperation as such must be regarded as the first variable: without cooperation, there can be neither coordination nor collaboration. The figure subsequently shows that coordination fosters the quality of further cooperation. Coordination can therefore lead to better cooperation. This better cooperation again

may also create further incentives for a higher level of coordination, creating a feedback loop between coordination and cooperation. On the top of that, coordination can also contribute to the development of real collaboration, as in the highest tiers of coordination partners really start finding each other, and collaboration develops. Finally, collaboration is the result of very profound cooperation between actors.

3.3 THE 'COORDINATION SCALE' OF METCALFE

In order to measure the quality of cooperation, coordination and collaboration in cross-border networks, the approach here combines various indicators derived from different bodies of academic literature on issues of European integration, public management and social network analysis. To analyse the concept of coordination in the area of CBC, the Crossquality team uses the so-called 'Policy Coordination Scale', a model in the field of European Integration developed by Les Metcalfe (1994:271 in Metcalfe 1996b:60; Metcalfe 1996a). Instead of offering a single definition of the concept of coordination, this scale provides a whole range of different elements (Jordan & Schout 2006:41), and describes steps from easier forms of coordination, such as the exchange of information up to the formulation of a unified strategy. The Coordination Scale actually captures network qualities (Metcalfe 1993:20): "These levels do not refer to different levels in an

organizational hierarchy of authority [...] Each step in the scale represents a set of linkages between organizations in a policy network."

The original Coordination Scale of Metcalfe has been proven to be able to measure the quality of network cooperation (see e.g. Ricq 2006:130ff, Jordan & Schout 2006). The present research adds a cross-border context to this scale. Networks in general and networks in a cross-border context have different characteristics (Herz & Olivier 2012), such as language- and culture-related problems, because border regions are different from other regions, e.g., border regions have difficulties in the economy and labour market. It is important to keep in mind that the scale must be seen as the methodology behind questions – the scale itself does not carry the questions. Hence, the scale is very useful as part of a new approach for measuring the quality of cross-

border networks. Within this coordination scale, Metcalfe (1993:21-22) stresses the importance of every lower level of the scale functioning well

in order to be able to reach a higher level. The coordination scale is described in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Metcalfe's 'Policy Coordination Scale' (Metcalfe 1994, in Metcalfe 1996:60)

1	Organisations Manage Independently within their Jurisdictions
2	Exchange of Information among Organisations (Communication)
3	Consultation among Organisations (Feedback)
4	Avoiding Policy Divergences (Speaking with One Voice)
5	Search for Policy Consensus (Conflict Management)
6	Arbitration of Organisational Conflicts
7	Establishing Common Parameters
8	Setting Common Priorities
9	Unified Strategy

Since the original scale was developed for policy coordination of EU Member States in the Council, it was adjusted to fit to the needs of the present research project for measuring CBC.

The following variant scale was developed.

Table 3: Coordination scale for cross-border cooperation as adapted by the Crossquality team

1	Exchange of cross-border information
2	Consultation amongst cross-border partners
3	Avoiding conflicts
4	Formulating joint priorities/objectives
5	Possibility for the partners to establish and fund a joint coordination body
6	Possibility for the partners to fund future cross-border services

Compared to Metcalfe's Scale, the Crossquality team removed the first and sixth steps, merged steps four, five and six, as well as steps seven and eight, and added two further steps. The first step of the adapted scale focuses on the exchange of information within the project network. As Interreg projects involve several actors from different nations, a closer look at cross-border information flows seems relevant. Metcalfe mentions in the second step of his coordination scale sharing updates of actions with others, as follows: "At this level of the scale reliable and accepted channels of regular communication exist." (Metcalfe 1993:24). Therefore, good cross-border exchange of information exists when enough information is transmitted through suitable channels to enable actors to conduct their work unobstructed by a lack of necessary information.

The second step of the adapted scale refers to consultation amongst partners across the border. According to Metcalfe, the term relates to organisations that engage with others to get relevant feedback: "Consultation provides feedback from a variety of sources to a ministry which can then build this into its own thinking and decision-making" (Metcalfe 1993:24). When talking about consultation, consideration should be given to recurring situations in which project partners discuss with other partners in order to exchange views on the project, or to get advice about their own ideas and opinions.

The third step of the adapted scale concerns avoiding conflicts, in some way merging the fourth and fifth steps of Metcalfe's Coordination Scale. Where for Metcalfe (1993:24f) the fourth step refers to making sure that different opinions do not get disclosed to the public, the fifth step emphasises seeking harmony between the different partners. He connects both aspects

in the following way: "Instead of negative coordination to avoid revealing differences, ministries can work together more positively to achieve consensus on common objectives and complementary policies" (Metcalfe 1993:5). The adapted scale combines both elements towards the category 'avoiding conflicts'. Drawing on Metcalfe's description, avoiding conflicts has been defined as the willingness and opportunity to avoid disagreement, to solve arising conflicts and to foster consensus-seeking activities between the partners. Hence, capturing more structural features of the partners' network is important, revealing whether the project network can prevent conflicts and the partners can come towards each other.

The fourth step of the adapted scale is 'Formulating joint priorities/objectives'. Venturing further from the previous one focused on conflict-avoiding and consensus-seeking, emphasis here must be on more tangible effects, namely priorities or objectives. Metcalfe (1993:25f) considers steps seven (establishing common parameters) and eight (setting common priorities) as creating central institutions that instruct the different parts (ministries of government) on which actions should be adopted or abandoned. In the adapted scale, these elements are combined into one category concerning joint priorities or objectives. Also the present Crossquality project itself gains real 'actor qualities' and becomes worth pursuing, so that individual actors develop shared priorities and objectives.

The fifth and sixth indicators refer to thoughts by De Sousa (2013:7) discussing 'Common management of public resources/services'. Against this backdrop, the fifth step of the adapted scale refers to attempts made at creating profound, more institutionalised and better

structured methods for CBC between project partners through joint creation and maintenance of coordination services that perform the requested administrative tasks. The willingness of cooperating partners to collectively fund a central service can count as better coordination: actors want to pool resources to establish a service that serves the interests of the entire

cross-border network. The same holds true for the sixth indicator, albeit moving one step further: beyond setting up a supportive institution, a whole set of cross-border public services is installed, which continue to be at the disposal of the cross-border region. This can be regarded as the highest possible form of CBC.

3.4 SOFT INDICATORS FOR MEASURING THE QUALITY OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

Besides these indicators, which mainly describe the 'hard' and tangible aspects of CBC in networks, there are several 'soft' aspects of CBC which also have an impact on the quality of cooperation². These soft indicators are not measured by the indicators used until the present. Soft aspects of CBC are qualitative and subjective. They include group dynamic processes and the Crossquality team is of the opinion that they need to be counted as measurable indicators, rather than objective indicators. Therefore, the Crossquality team also includes the following additional soft indicators in its measurement approach:

- Personal cross-border contacts
- Level of trust between actors
- Coping with different languages
- Coping with cultural attitudes

The first indicator on personal cross-border contacts refers to the development of valuable contacts amongst project partners, such as important professional contact-building. The relevance of the second aspect, the level of trust in networks, was underscored by Klijn and Koppenjan (2012:593-594). It is therefore important to analyse whether or not the variable of trust is present in cross-border networks. The indicator on coping with language differences matters because of the international nature of the project network. Do the different mother tongues of partners potentially hamper the quality of cooperation? The fourth aspect highlights that cultural differences may occur within a transnational network, which require coping abilities. In this case, does culture influence the quality of CBC?

² See in the context of soft aspects for example the following publication focused on the cross-border labour market: Edzes, A., Venhorst, V., & Van Dijk, J. (2015). *Grensoverschrijdende arbeidsmarkt: Voorbij de romantiek*. In H. Blom, C. Zantingh, L. Smit, & Editors, *Rijnland in de regio: Onderzoek en activiteiten van Stenden Hogeschool en het Alfa-college in de noordelijke Nederlands-Duitse grensregio* (pp. 153-166). n.n.: Rijnland in de regio.

3.5 THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: COMBINING 'HARD' & 'SOFT' INDICATORS

The abovementioned methodology rests on two pillars:

1. the cooperation scale, which predominantly measures 'hard' aspects of cross-border cooperation; and
2. an analysis of 'soft' aspects of CBC. The present research project intends to evaluate the quality of cooperation within sectors of Interreg EMR projects, and of the Interreg EMR programme as a whole, using both qualitative and quantitative indicators.

Since the Crossquality team wants to know more about the evolution of networks (also with respect to different phases), the common benchmark for all the indicators is the situation before the current Interreg programme, hence the situation before 2013/2014. If indicators refer to the current situation, the comparison is with the situation at the beginning of this programme period. As will be discerned in the following sections on operationalisation and data analysis, such a comparison is not always possible from a practical point of view. One final remark must be made regarding the indicators and assessing the overall impact of an intervention funded by the Interreg programme. Even if there is no other funding scheme supporting certain objectives in the field of CBC, it is rather difficult to determine the 'net impact' in comparison to the overall impact on cooperation in different sectors by all kinds of developments. In many cases, the funding of Interreg or other programmes is not relevant for certain changes with respect to the relation of sectoral stakeholders.

Instead, effects not related to funded projects at all are the drivers. This primarily means overall economic or political developments. The COVID pandemic has certainly shown how strong the influence of single events can be on the border region far beyond the scope of an Interreg programme. In this respect, the research instruments developed, which will be discussed in the next section, must reflect the distinction between the overall development of cooperation in a certain policy field and the explicit impact of the interventions of the Interreg programme on the described development. In this respect, a precise distinction must always be made.

4

METHODOLOGY IN DETAIL

4.1 MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENTS

After reviewing the existing literature and searching for adequate instruments and indicators for assessment methodology based on three different instruments and a specific list of indicators.

1. Individual expert interviews
2. Expert workshops
3. An expert survey.

Later on in this chapter, an outline of these methods will be presented. For this, the Crossquality team also refers to the Crossquality handbook, which is a practical guidance document for researchers who will apply the method. The first focus here will be on the methodological background, describing its strengths and weaknesses, before touching shortly on each of the methods.

This research makes use of a mixed methods design to measure the quality of CBC. This means that it uses a survey to exploit a large body of data and also applies qualitative interviews and expert workshops which provide smaller quantities of data. It also means that the indicators are based on both 'hard' and 'soft' aspects, as mentioned above.

It is difficult to label an individual indicator as 'quantitative' or 'qualitative'. While the literature shows a rather clear definition regarding quantitative indicators, a clear definition of qualitative indicators is not straightforward. In this research, the demarcation of the CIDA

(1997) will be used: "Quantitative indicators can be defined as measures of quantity, such as the number of people who own sewing machines in a village. Qualitative indicators can be defined as people's judgements and perceptions about a subject, such as the confidence those people have in sewing machines as instruments of financial independence." (CIDA 1997:9).

This research aims at combining both elements. All methods employed collect numerical data on the quality of cooperation within a certain network. These are the indicators that can be scored on a scale from 1 to 5. This kind of indicators dominates the survey, but is also present in the expert workshops and interviews. It is especially in the expert workshops that the link between quantitative and qualitative data is made, as the respondents are invited to elaborate further on their answers in a discussion between the participants. The idea is that these discussions during the expert workshops in particular yield the most important information for the researcher assessing CBC quality. They offer insights into how cooperation within sectoral networks develops, what strengths and weaknesses are, and what could be done to improve cooperation. The discussions - as well as the statements made by respondents during the individual interviews - can truly be seen as qualitative data. These statements require further interpretation by the researcher and provide an improved understanding of CBC quality.

At the start of the Crossquality project, the choice was clearly made to use qualitative data via a survey, individual interviews and expert workshops. This research report thus presents appropriate methods for analysing the quality of CBC, which provide a comprehensive description of actual cooperation processes. The advantage of applying these three methods together is, as described above, that they combine a large body of data providing an overview of the quality of cooperation within a cross-border region (survey), and qualitative insights on the peculiarities of the cooperation (expert workshops, interviews). The interviews and expert workshops offer extensive insights into the actual processes and the causal mechanisms underlying the cooperation processes. These insights are supplemented by the results of the survey. Through the larger number of respondents reached via the survey, this method offers broader results on how participants in cross-border projects perceive cooperation. By applying both 'hard' and 'soft' aspects of cooperation quality, multiple elements of cooperation processes are measured, which results in higher validity.

Samples of respondents can distort the validity of the research. Due to the relatively small numbers of projects within a certain sector, this method does not require that samples be drawn. Every practitioner, belonging to an organisation that is part of a project, should be able to participate in the research. In order to ensure the results remain valid, it is important that the researcher try to invite every project partner to participate in the assessment and check the usefulness in the expert interviews. Biases caused by inviting respondents selectively should be avoided, meaning that each project partner should be approached. With this in mind, it is recommended to assess

fewer sectors but with more participants per sector and project than, the other way around, i.e. more sectors with fewer participants. The lack of a response can, however, still bias the results, for example because experts with a very good or a very bad experience may want to contribute more out of self-interest – and thus can overrepresent the extreme opinions. The researcher always needs to analyse the distribution of participants in the expert workshops and interviews over the total number of project partners invited, in order to assess the validity of the results. Furthermore, in the analysis, the results of the expert workshops should be interpreted in this regard. This, again, is a qualitative assessment to be made by the researcher. In general, the participation of multiple project partners per project in a single expert workshop is absolutely required.

This method for CBC assessment has several strengths and weaknesses. In the individual interviews and expert workshops, the number of indicators assessed is always limited due to time constraints. There are more indicators that could be asked of the respondents and which could provide an even more comprehensive picture of CBC quality. The Crossquality team believes, however, that these indicators are the most important for measuring the dependent variable of the quality of cooperation processes. Moreover, the expert workshops can be extended with additional indicators, that become visible during the data analysis. This point will be further discussed in Section 4.7.

This assessment methodology clearly focuses on the quality of cooperation processes. As a result, it focuses relatively less on the institutional characteristics of cross-border networks. The role of these more tangible

characteristics within the methodology is rather restricted. One advantage of this situation is that the methodology does not require the researcher to collect much additional data, outside of the three methods presented, and is thus less complex. It can however be argued that the institutional focus is less present within this method. This is an intentional choice, because the methodology clearly aims to add something new by gathering much qualitative data. The Crossquality team does not perceive this as a large weakness of the method; nevertheless, any party interpreting the results must bear in mind that this method focuses more on the quality of the processes than on institutional network features. This also touches upon the fact that there is no one single definition of quality. Quality should be perceived as multidimensional. As such, the strength of this methodology is that it focuses on a rather underexplored element of quality, and requires to that qualitative data be collected; its weakness is that other, more common dimensions are less covered. Another point is that respondents are practitioners, working within the Interreg projects, either as lead partners or project partners. Potential respondents not included in the analysis are colleagues working in the financial or legal departments of these organisations, to name only a few. The Crossquality team made this choice because it believes the most important insight on cooperation quality can be obtained from the practitioners. However, a broader (but also more labour intensive) analysis would also encompass participants from other organisational departments as well.

Another aspect to point out is the structure of the interviews and the expert workshops. Both the interviews and the expert workshops

were structured, which means that they followed a fixed order of questions that must all be answered by the respondent. However, and this is especially the case during expert workshops, there should be room for discussion between experts about the questions covered, especially when considering the many items on the coordination scale. This means that different items may be covered in relatively greater detail in different instances, depending on the discussion. A fully structured approach to interviewing would require that each item be covered in the same manner; in this research, this could fluctuate and followed a rather semi-structured approach. The researchers can also decide to spend more time on certain elements compared to others, according to their interests. In general, however, it is important to make sure that each item is asked of the respondents during both the interviews and the workshops, that each item is asked in a similar way and that each item asked of the respondents is introduced sufficiently and that no item is left undiscussed.

Part of the project involved testing some elements of the method and then continually adapting the method according to the experiences. We thus learned from the first expert interviews and adapted the focus of the questions slightly. The Crossquality team also adapted the shape of the expert workshops based on the experience gained from the first two workshops. This means that the method was still under construction when it was first implemented. This diminishes the reliability of the results presented in the final report to a small extent, because the measurement instrument was not always exactly the same across the different sectors. Although this may have had an influence on the answers and their comparability, the Crossquality team

believes that this did not affect the outcome of the interviews or workshops too much. The adaptations were more a question of efficiency and practicability since it learned what to ask and what could be gleaned from experts. It also means that future applications of the method will be more consistent and deliver more reliable results, if exactly the same questions or workshop timing is applied throughout the entire assessment of an Interreg Programme. The expert interviews provided insight especially into regional perspectives since the experts were very often linked to an institution representing

the view within one particular partner region. So, in the case here, the Crossquality partners conducted interviews with partners from their own regions. This gave the Crossquality team a deeper understanding of regional related aspects and perceptions. The workshops on the other hand should provide greater insight into sectoral aspects of CBC, because the participants are experts from different partner regions but belong to the same sectoral network. The purpose of the survey is to build a broader dataset and validate the qualitative results in a quantitative manner.

4.2 GROUPING OF DIFFERENT SECTORS WITH RELEVANT NETWORKS

In the approach here, it is important to divide the different Interreg EMR projects into different mutually exclusive sectors, as the Crossquality team will analyse the quality of CBC both in sectors and across the Interreg EMR programme as a whole. With respect to the demarcation between different sectors, this refers to the structure of the Interreg EMR programme. A distinction can be made between the four priority areas: Innovation, Economy, Social Inclusion and Territorial Development.

Nevertheless, the different categories are too horizontal and abstract and do not refer to a clear policy sector with specific cross-border networks. In this sense, the categories are not really fit for purpose. A look at the thematic work structure of the EGTC Euregio Meuse-Rhine shows a different picture. Here special working groups are presented for five different topics, as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Thematic working groups based on the organigram of the EGTC Euregio Meuse-Rhine

Theme	Labour market	Neighbouring languages	Economy & Innovation	Security & tourism	Culture & health
Responsible coordinating region	Aachen Region	Dutch Limburg	Belgian Limburg	Province of Liège	East Belgium/DG

Source: Euregio Meuse-Rhine, EMR_EGTC_Organigram, on <https://euregio-mr.info/en/ueber-uns/vorstand-und-emr-buero>

The problem with these sectoral categories is that some group together sectors where the coordination networks are most probably highly separated from one another. The connections between sectors are not always clear, such as the grouping of security and tourism or culture and health. Other sectors are probably too narrow in nature, such as neighbouring languages. Here, the education sector as a whole would for example be a more appropriate category. One important sector that is missing

can be described as nature conservation and the environment. That topic is covered under the umbrella of the EGTC Euregio Meuse-Rhine with a special network called 3LP, the 3 Countries Park.

The Crossquality team thus tried to group different projects into different categories, and after gradually modifying the list of categories, came up with the following list of categories for all Interreg EMR projects:

Education: Focus on the cooperation of schools/with neighbouring languages

Labour market & business: Cooperation of employment services & cross-border business networks

Research & innovation: Cooperation of companies and universities

Police cooperation & crisis management

Health & wellbeing: part of EMRIC issues/EUprevent

Culture & media, tourism

Nature conservation, urban & rural planning, the environment

Energy transition & climate policy

Public transportation & cooperation between other public services

Social integration

Annex II shows which project belongs to which sector. Whether this grouping makes sense is also very much up to the initial stakeholder analysis of the Interreg programme. The task is

to screen the programme and assign different projects and stakeholders to these headings in order to see whether the breakdown is good.

Programme stakeholders are essential to the process given that they have the best knowledge of the programme and can provide an overview of the sectoral networks and stakeholders. There is a range of different types of regional experts with or without a direct link to the programme. These experts have knowledge of the regional context in specific fields relevant to the programme via their work in regional administrations, NGOs, SMEs or academic institutions. Their perception of the effects of programme interventions, given their knowledge of the programme area, can complement the inputs of programme stakeholders with additional impartial observations of what single projects or the programme meant for the quality of cooperation in a specific sector. Participants from umbrella organisations (such as governmental bodies, interest groups/associations) who can cover thematic aspects over time are particularly valuable here. It is of course important to strive for an equal distribution of participants from all sides of the border. Ideally, parties from very partner region of the Interreg EMR territory should be present. This can be challenging for the timing of a workshop, and participation of some experts is crucial. Therefore, alternative participation solutions should be considered for each sector. While in-person workshops should be preferred, online workshops can be a good alternative and are welcomed by experts who want to avoid lengthy travel times.

The sector grouping, availability of experts and time available also influences the number of expert workshops. In this application of the method, the Crossquality team decided to hold 5 expert workshops. For a future application, the first workshop will be always a sort of pilot in order to become familiarised with the set of questions, indicators and the methodology as a whole.

In this context, it is also important to determine who can be regarded as an expert. The Crossquality team distinguishes between two different kinds of experts:

1) A Lead Partner or Project Partner (anybody participating in at least one Interreg project). Experts with a great deal of experience have a broad understanding of the sectoral network as a whole and the Interreg structure, while experts with less experience have a good eye for details in cooperation and the Interreg structure. Additionally, experts in CBC can also be found outside Interreg projects and round out the results. They can be representatives of cross-border entities or local authorities:

2) Real 'experts' on CBC as an overarching topic and related methodology and/or with experience in CBC outside of the scope of an Interreg programme. They are included in important sectoral networks. If experts are not a Lead Partner or Project Partner in current projects, they can probably refer to Interreg projects in the past. In that case, the questions are adapted to experts with perhaps less recent experience with cross-border cooperation in a sector. However, it is also important to have both experts with much Interreg experience and experts with experience from just one or two Interreg projects, because their view of certain aspects will differ. While experts with a broader understanding can share experiences from the past and have broader insight, experts with less experience can focus on details from projects and can be less prejudiced. One lesson learned from practical application of the methodology here was that the cross-border experts found were mostly connected to Interreg projects. Therefore, even the expertise on specific networks was related to cooperation funded by Interreg.

4.3 INDIVIDUAL EXPERT INTERVIEWS

The Crossquality team conducted semi-structured **individual expert interviews** mainly remotely, in this case using Zoom, to get first-hand information on the perception of the quality of cooperation. The interviews also serve as preparation for the sectoral workshop by making sure that the questions for the workshops are fit for purpose; additional questions back up this methodological approach. Exchange with experts also clarified the understanding here of how Interreg projects should be evaluated and provided insight into the projects and sectoral cross-border network. It started with a small number of experts to test the questions, and to gain a better idea of which questions are suited to the expert workshops. Therefore, a short interview guideline is necessary. The open questions in Annex III were used by the Crossquality team. Questions used in the interviews were also included in the workshops again to obtain different perspectives.

Expert interviews are interviews with Project Partners or Lead Partners participating in Interreg EMR projects. Alternatively, interviews can be carried out with other experts with experience in a cross-border context in the EMR territory. The experts interviewed were also invited to the expert workshop.

Every interview starts with a short introduction, such as:



In the Crossquality project we work together with different partners in the EMR territory to learn how the success of CBC can be measured using qualitative indicators. This is necessary, because the actual evaluation of Interreg projects produces only quantitative results. Therefore, we will ask questions about the general influence of the Interreg project on CBC and the stability of the network in the sector.

The Crossquality team chose to conduct semi-structured interviews because some of the experts' answers will lead to questions different from those on the list. It is important to remain flexible in this regard, to allow for new questions to come up. The core questions of the interview concern the general influence of the Interreg EMR projects and the programme as a whole on the quality of CBC and the stability of the network in a sector, including soft aspects such as cultural understanding or trust, that are important for a network (Nuisl 2003). Below is a list and explanation of questions formulated and applied in the expert interviews.

List of questions - expert interviews

What is 'Quality of cooperation' in your opinion?

This is first question is general and aims to stimulate reflection on the focus of the assessment.

After being involved in an Interreg project, do you feel closer to partners from the border region? Would you start more cross-border projects because of your experience?

The first question gives an overall impression of the expert's ideas about the quality of cooperation and the network. This is just a first subjective impression. The second question seeks to obtain a broader perception of the impact of the expert's own participation in an Interreg project, related to their experiences with general quality. In the pilot application, these questions worked well as opening questions for both the interviews and workshops.

How did your cross-border awareness change? Are you more interested in cross-border projects in general after your Interreg experience?

The interest in future cross-border projects for the Crossquality team is an indicator of the success of former projects. The assumption is that positive experiences with respect to the cooperation will lead to a greater willingness to be involved in future cross-border activities.

Did your network become more diverse? Do you have more cross-border contacts or new contacts with other sectors or fields of work?

These questions are directly aimed at the effects of the project on the network and are also general starting questions. They also help to familiarise the expert with the focus of the assessment. The questions refer to extension of the network across the border and with respect to other sectors. They concern not only the intensity of contacts, but also the extension of a network which can be influenced by a specific project. These questions should produce more details on the network-related benefits of the project.

How often do you share information, such as newsletters, brochures or informal emails, with the former partners now?

This question is the first that refers directly to the cooperation scale (see above). It starts with the question of the exchange of information that can be regarded as a starting point for any higher form of cooperation. If experts have been dealing currently or recently with one particular Interreg project, the question refers to those experiences. The assumption is that the exchange of information is a prerequisite for good network cooperation. The following questions also refer to further aspects of the cooperation scale.

How would you assess the quality of consultation between the project partners?

This question refers to the capacities to be interested in the opinion of project partners on specific topics and the openness to learn from each other (which goes beyond the pure exchange of information).

How would you assess the ability to solve conflicts between the project partners (if there were conflicts)?

The assumption is that conflict-solving capacities are essential to successful cross-border cooperation.

Were the project partners able to agree on common priorities, including with respect to cooperation after the project period? Was it even possible to agree on joint coordination financed by own means?

This question refers to the core idea of Interreg cooperation, that project financing should lead to sustainable cooperation between cross-border partners who are ready to contribute to future cooperation with their own financial means.

The next set of questions refers to what are called 'soft' aspects of cooperation.

How did you handle different languages among the project partners? Did the project increase capabilities to communicate well?

How did you cope with different cultural attitudes of the project partners? Did the project help improve mutual understanding?

Did you develop good personal contacts with individual project partners as a result of the project or do you still share personal information with former project partners even after the end of a project?

This question refers to the quality of network contacts. One aspect of the quality of cooperation concerns the relationships between project partners in a business-related network. Research shows that good personal contacts can be regarded as an indicator of good network relations as an important element of good business-related benefits. Here, reference is made to the previous chapters discussing the relevant literature.

Do you feel personally obliged to help the contact if a former partner asks for help that would take a significant amount of time?

This question refers to the quality of network contacts. It is asked to learn more about the closeness of two network partners. The assumption is that good personal contacts lead to more cognitive closeness and have a positive effect on the quality of cooperation within a network.

The final question refers to programme-specific effects on cross-border cooperation in the framework of a specific project. Since the Crossquality team learned from many experts that the technical aspects of project management were also an important element of cooperation, it included a question on administrative aspects.

What experience do you have with project administration, such as payments, specific reporting regulations and administrative burden?

Or: What can be improved in the administrative aspects of the Interreg programme, such as payment on time, regulations, reporting obligations and other forms of bureaucracy?

How did they affect cooperation?

These questions focus on experience with Interreg projects in general. The Crossquality team learned from the expert interviews that administrative aspects of Interreg projects can also have an influence on partners' resources and their capacities to cooperate. In this respect, it is valuable to know whether administrative aspects have an effect on cooperation and how this changed over time.

Which important partners could tell more about the quality of cross border cooperation?

Lastly, as a more practical element, the Crossquality team asked the experts finally about colleagues who could also be interviewed which is an opportunity to learn more about the specific network of the expert in a given sector.

4.4 EXPERT WORKSHOPS

4.4.1 The selection of sectors

As already mentioned, the Crossquality team started with a sectoral expert workshop as a test workshop. For the Crossquality team, the public transportation sector was its first choice. It knew from the first expert interviews that there is a very stable sectoral cross-border network and that enough experts could be found from the entire Interreg EMR programme. The reason is that there was a very broad EMR Connect (ECON) project where many relevant partners of the sector worked together. Therefore the experts in the workshop here were more or less from one single Interreg project. The following workshops were grouped around sectors

and networks could also be identified around specific Interreg projects. In these cases, experts from several Interreg projects came together. There are also practical questions: is the sector really relevant in terms of the number or importance of the activities? In which sectors can you easily identify experts who are relevant for this type of expert workshop? Are there experts from different partner regions in a certain sector? Are they available at the moment? During its assessment, the Crossquality team faced one problem with the experts from the health sector who were too busy to join any extra activities during the COVID crisis.

As discussed earlier, there are different theories and approaches with respect to the quality of cooperation in a cross-border context. The Crossquality team referred to previous studies and instruments developed by ESPON or other work in the field of network analysis. The approach for the workshop is also related to this application of the coordination scale and the different dimensions considered as useful indicators. The coordination scale was also the most important guide for the formulation of the

questions. An example workshop programme is shown in Annex IV. The workshop consists of two parts that follow the research question here. First, it was discussed how the experts assessed the quality of cooperation within the framework of a certain Interreg project. The second part was about the general development of the quality of cooperation in a specific sector and the possible effects of the Interreg programme on it. It gives an indication of the development of cooperation within the programme period.

4.4.2 Questions for the expert workshop

The expert workshop initiates with a short summary of this project and an introduction of all the participants starts with icebreaker questions: What are the first things you think about when defining good cross-border cooperation? Resulting from the project: Did your contacts become more diverse, do you have more cross-border contacts, or even new contacts in other sectors or fields of work? The experts generally talk about CBC, also to sensitise them to this topic. For the Crossquality team, the last question offers insights into their Interreg network.

The following question targets CBC more specifically: How would you assess the quality of cooperation in your specific Interreg project? Subquestions involve scale ratings from one to five and serve to capture differing project-related opinions by respondents. This relates, for instance, to the experts' understanding of CBC, which can enrich the interpretation here, and the general relevance of the network. The Crossquality team tries to get information on the forecasted success and deviations, because actors have to deal with unexpected turns of

event in many projects. Good management and careful dealing with CBC-related problems is necessary. Terms, such as information, must be clarified because they may be understood differently. For each subitem the experts get around three minutes to explain their major points. The detailed sub-questions are:

- Cross-border information
- Cross-border consultation
- Avoiding conflicts
- Formulating joint priorities/objectives
- Possibility for the partners to establish and fund a joint coordination body
- Possibility for the partners to fund future cross-border services

After a short break the workshop continues with the second part, which contains soft aspects of CBC. If necessary, an explanation of what is meant by cultural attitudes or differences is provided.

- Cross-border personal contacts
- Coping with different languages
- Coping with cultural attitudes
- Development of trust within the project network

According to the cooperation scale, both hard and soft aspects should be captured for each CBC aspect in every Interreg project included. The focus lies on qualities of cooperation: The network around the Lead Partner is important, because management requires many cooperation skills. Yet, communication and exchange of information between partners is important as well, to determine the centralisation of the network. The Lead Partner is the focal network actor, but how central can be shown by the communication among all partners. The cross-border context is covered by capturing how experts cope with language and cultural problems. The cross-border context is included in all questions.

Questions on the exchange of information refer to the frequency and intensity of information sharing, which matters as each partner in projects has something to offer to the others. Reasons for not sharing information could be sensible economic or scientific data, or a lack of communication or miscommunication. Under consultation a higher level of communication in the project is understood (e.g., meetings, discussions, etc.). The Lead Partner is crucial for avoiding conflicts and for successful project-related communication. Interreg projects contain different types of meetings and also require meetings with externals, which offers indicators for the general quality of CBC. As five regions in three countries are part of the EMR, conflicts and problems can emerge because of different languages and cultures. These aspects and the coping with conflicts are indicative of effective communication and a high quality of CBC.

Jointly establishing and financing a coordination body and future services also indicate good CBC

qualities. It proves the partners' willingness to work together in future projects and continue cooperation even after the termination of the current project. It also shows that there is a need for intense CBC. This aspect also refers to sectoral network qualities: The deliberate supply of ideas, time and money and the willingness to continue participation are indicators for successful network integration based on trust and personal contacts.

In part II the Crossquality team intends to make comparisons between sectors as well. This helps it learn from best practices and reveal sector-specific problems, as shown in the Crossquality Final Report. The questions asked are: **What is your assessment with respect to cross-border cooperation in your sector over time?** and **How would you rate the influence of your Interreg project on the general quality of cross-border cooperation in your sector?** Scale ratings should be provided for both questions.

The first question looks at the entire sector. It is aimed at experts with long-term experience and a broad understanding of the sector, or a legacy of many Interreg projects, who provide valuable insight into the general influence of Interreg funding in the sector. Only a few experts have such broad knowledge, and a few fundamental answers, which require thorough reflection against the expert's background, are used.

The second question explores the influence of the funded project on the general quality of CBC in the sector, again using a scale from one to five. The answers offer important insight into whether the project has a significant impact on cooperation in the sector as a whole and the strength thereof. Sectors vary with respect to these influences. The question will also give

room for ideas on how to improve the influence of Interreg projects on the sector and to generally strengthen the sectoral network.

The last workshop questions are: **What are your experiences with the administrative aspects of the Interreg programme, such as payment on time, regulations, reporting obligations and**

other forms of bureaucracy? And: **How did it affect cooperation? If there is enough time, the question What could be improved in terms of cooperation?** is asked.

The workshop ends with a short summary, thanks and farewell.

4.4.3. Using a rating scale

Many questions that are discussed in the previous section refer to a scale from one to five. The Crossquality team uses a rating scale from one to five for most questions because this consolidates the validity of its results for the years to come. In addition, experts provide many details that bolster the qualitative analysis of CBC. This allows for easy combination of the qualitative analysis with a quantitative part for the sake of comparability. A scale is a quantitative tool applied to measure various qualities of CBC. Furthermore, a five-point scale is used as it allows for a mean. Sometimes an effect cannot be estimated distinctly, and

the experts should not be forced to take a position. A rating of no improvement – minor positive improvement – positive improvement – strong positive improvement – very strong positive improvement or very bad to very good is provided. Only the best and worst points are given explicitly to avoid misunderstandings: negative or no effect, strong positive effect.

The Crossquality team uses the good/bad-scale for the aspects of the cooperation scale and the no improvement/very strong positive improvement scale for the open questions with a scale.

4.5 SURVEY

“Surveys are a popular form of data collection, especially when gathering information from larger groups, where standardization is important.” (Leeuw & Schmeets 2016:138) An online survey is an adequate research method for gathering data from a larger number of actors, as it is thus mainly quantitative and standardised. Such a questionnaire-based approach is useful later in the project to systematically capture patterns of CBC including a greater amount of participants from Interreg projects studied, or experts outside the selected projects. Indeed, a questionnaire allows a theory to be tested and confirmation of the qualitative findings (Epstein & Martin 2014). For parts of the questionnaire, a scale rating is requested; other questions offer scope for rating as well. Open text answers may be less practicable for large numbers of respondents, but are included in the design of the questionnaire in order to get more qualitative insight behind the numbers. The final online survey rounds out the results from the individual expert interviews and the expert workshops. The Crossquality team can thus reach many more experts to validate the results. While interviews and workshops will be anonymised in the analysis, the online survey is anonymous by design and will reduce the subjective bias. Our partners may not provide totally objective answers to questions like those concerning the general success of Interreg projects or cooperation with the Lead Partner, if that partner is present. Both the number of participants and the possibility to reduce the bias through anonymity supports the validity of the results. The Crossquality team also uses an online survey to secure the findings and reach out to a more diverse group of experts. Qualtrics was used as the online survey tool. To reach the experts, Interreg helped by sharing the survey with the right target group via e-mail and social media.

The online survey rounded out the results in a quantitative way to make sure that the qualitative results have a quantitative foundation. Annex V shows the questions. The survey aims to provide additional insight and rankings from a greater audience of experts. It is not meant to analyse causal effects, correlations or other statistical findings. It has thus more a descriptive aim. The questions are therefore also formulated to gather descriptive data. In this regard, it is to a great extent a repetition of the questions formulated during the interviews and expert workshops. This allows for comparisons between the research methods applied. It also allows the researcher to expand the range of participants. Furthermore the smaller amount of qualitative insights from the interviews and expert workshops can be put in the context of the larger quantitative numbers. For this, it is important to have enough respondents, and thus data. In the application of the methodology, the Crossquality team aimed for a minimum of 100 respondents. The minimum amount will differ given the size of a programme area. In this regard, the area of Interreg EMR is smaller than Interreg Germany-Netherlands for instance.

To comply with data protection and privacy regulations, the first question asks for consent. Participants need to actively complete the informed consent. To make sure participants do so, it should be programmed that the question must be answered by the participant (forced response). In case consent is not given, the logic of the survey should be programmed to end the survey. A text box at the very beginning of the survey should explain the context of the survey, its aim and how the data will be processed and stored.

Other questions added to the survey ask about which region the participant comes from (Q1) and the experience with cross-border cooperation within and/or outside of Interreg EMR projects (Q3). The first question is added to be able to assess whether the survey participants represent the participating regions in sufficiently equal numbers. This insight is necessary to have a complete picture of the Interreg EMR programme area. If needed, it also allows to filter for respondents outside the programme area. It is not necessarily the case to do so, as the Interreg EMR programme also allows project partners to join from outside the programme area in case the activities will benefit the Interreg EMR area.

In this regard the second question added on experience within and/or outside Interreg EMR projects is relevant for filtering the results. Useful filtered results could be the results from respondents active in Interreg EMR projects alone, respondents active both in and outside Interreg EMR projects, and respondents not active in Interreg EMR projects and only active outside the Interreg EMR programme. Comparison of the three could produce interesting results. Furthermore, the survey logic should be programmed to allow for multiple options and if a respondent answers only having been active in cross-border cooperation outside of Interreg EMR projects, the questions with the cooperation scale concentrated on the Interreg EMR project will be skipped.

The descriptive aim of the survey also has important implications for the method for data analysis. In the data analysis, the emphasis should thus be placed on the mere passive presentation of the data, without necessarily running statistical tests. Again, the Crossquality team only wants to present the expert judgement of a larger pool

of experts, not test hypotheses or establish relations between dependent and independent variables. In addition to data gathering, survey tools such as Qualtrics also include data analysis options. In Qualtrics, as this is the tool used by the Crossquality team, the results section allows for automated viewing of the survey results. Qualtrics can pre-design the viewing, but also allows the researcher to adapt the viewing or to start from scratch. Several viewing options are possible, such as charts (bar, line, pie, breakdown), tables and word clouds. Regarding non-numerical, open text inputs, it might be useful to use text analysis such as word clouds or Text iQ.

In the analysis it might be interesting to filter results for certain categories. One could think of the differences between regions or participants with experience outside the Interreg EMR programme. While not necessary for the aim of the assessment, these differentiations can be made. To do so the data should be filtered on the relevant categories. Again, tools such as Qualtrics allow for these analyses easily.

The open fields in particular may lead to new insight for new indicators or criteria for good cross-border cooperation, for example. The open questions, especially questioning about what good cross-border cooperation is, might deliver new common themes, for example. Text analysis can be used to identify new indicators, as it can highlight certain commonly-used words or serve to categorise certain remarks. These words or comments can be coded/categorised, resulting in a possible new indicator, that could be used for further research.

4.6 DATA ANALYSIS

A central issue for deriving rigorous CBC assessment results is how to systematically analyse all the individual expert interviews (Mayring 2004). The approach briefly depicted below has been developed and used for the expert interviews conducted in the pilot study, but not for the workshops. As described above, the workshops could be analysed through more standardised approaches due to the use of Mentimeter slides and scoring tables for capturing results.

Analysing the expert interview transcripts requires other approaches. Due to requirements for adequate data protection management, the Crossquality team created a table with code acronyms for the different experts for internal analysis

of the findings (e.g., code AL1 for the expert from Aachen (A) working in the field of labour market and business (L) with the number 1; see the example below). Such a table should, however, only be used for internal analytical purposes. It should only be used by the researchers and not be disclosed to a broader audience. This is because the acronyms still provides information about a respondent and therefore contain personal data. It is not allowed to make the data public in this way. A table with such individual statements and acronyms may never be published: only completely randomised numbers to indicate a respondent and only aggregated data should be made public. Data should always be presented completely anonymised.

Table 5: Internal analysis of the findings

Acronym	Question	Category	Labels
AL1	What experience do you have with cross-border cooperation within and/or outside of INTERREG projects?	1 high experience	Current INTERREG project, 'guest' in a former INTERREG project and many cross-border projects, part of a huge network
HT3	What is 'Quality of Cooperation' in your opinion?	1 sharing of information	Names sharing of information, learning from other cities

A major advantage of such a table structure for sorting acquired answers and statements is that similar answers can be clustered according to categories for the final report. The experience with the pilot study described here showed that experts sometimes only provide viable answers to early questions later in the interview (mentioning, for instance, important statements referring to question 1 only towards the end of the conversation). In these cases, clustering logically related answers helps find the right spot for each statement. Sometimes answers provide insight

related to two different questions and should therefore be sorted to two categories.

When assessing the validity of captured expert statements, highly region-specific responses should be identified and evaluated separately. Some interview answers may specifically relate only to one region within the Interreg program territory, or a certain CBC aspect may only be mentioned by experts belonging to one region. It is particularly important to account for such region-specific findings during the analysis.

5

SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

Strengthening cooperation across borders was a major objective since the outset of various Euregios (or Euroregions) throughout the European Union. Interreg programmes in these regions aim to reduce border barriers through cooperation projects, such as Interreg EMR. Supporting CBC may positively affect mutual market access, mobility, harmonisation of institutions and integration. CBC quality, however, is always shaped by the region-specific legal framework, cultural and historical contexts, and socio-economic development conditions in all regions included (Metcalf, 1996b; Popescu, 2008; De Sousa, 2013; Trienes, 2014; European Court of Auditors, 2021).

Unfortunately, the indicators used hitherto to assess the impacts of Interreg-funded cross-border projects or programmes do not capture positive or negative CBC effects. Evaluation indicators currently used try to mainly quantify participation

(e.g., counting numbers of stakeholders involved), but do not address qualitative features of CBC linkages generated that potentially connect decision-makers, public entities, companies and citizens. Furthermore, no cause-and-effect relationships are captured between the Interreg programme and the resulting developments. No surveys are conducted to capture the perceptions of citizens or business representatives of the quality of CBC, the functioning of cross-border institutions or ideas of Euregional cohesion.

This report therefore puts forward that the evaluation of Interreg programme effects should also emphasise CBC quality, drawing on additional methodologies, indicators and kinds of data. So how can crucial qualities of CBC networks be measured? How can links between Interreg programmes and the induced interactions of public sector bodies, companies or citizens across borders be traced?

Do these programmes and projects really foster the development of transnational cooperation? And does Interreg funding produce effective and sustainable networks within the EMR territory? The regular assessment of CBC network qualities instigated by Interreg funding is crucial, albeit challenging due to the variety of products and services exchanged, the diversity of participants and the variable effectiveness of relationships and their management. CBC evaluations should also try to measure whether the community addressed derives benefits from joint activities (Provan & Milward, 2001; Klijn, 2008; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2012). The CBC assessment approach outlined in this report draws on a broad network conception including issues of coordination, collaboration and cooperation, which build upon each other. Based on insight that different degrees and variants of interaction should be captured, the application and adaptation of a coordination scale (Metcalf, 1993; Metcalf, 1996b; Roschelle & Teasley, 1995) has proven useful in the case of this CBC assessment study. Another important issue has been to adequately include all relevant actors, as CBC networks comprise various stakeholders, internal partners and external experts, each marked by a particular relationship to the region, the network and the project funded. A focus on project-related experts made it possible to take advantage of their vast experience with a broad range of practical collaboration issues and framework conditions.

In a nutshell, this research report presents an overview of the definitions and dimensions of CBC, and also draws on other assessment attempts found in the scientific literature referring to the Interreg EMR programme. It then shows which building blocks can be used to compile a new methodology for measuring crucial CBC qualities in projects funded during the 2014-2020 Interreg programme period.

To adequately assess CBC in an Euregional context, the Crossquality team proposes a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative elements. It focuses on certain CBC variants and qualitative attributes of these cooperations. For practicability reasons, the approach presented in this report has focused mainly on network dimensions concerning the quality, intensity and importance of cooperation. Other aspects, such as the community and organisation/participant dimensions are already covered by conventional indicators for project assessment (see Provan & Milward, 2001).

In order to measure the quality of different CBC variants, like cooperation, coordination and collaboration, this approach combines various 'hard' and 'soft' indicators derived from different scientific studies on, among others, European integration, public management and social network analysis, using Metcalf's (1996b) Coordination Scale as a central reference. Adapted to cross-border issues, this scale served to capture various network qualities, from simple forms of coordination to the formulation of a unified strategy. In addition to looking at these hard and tangible aspects of CBC, soft aspects that matter for CBC impact were also tackled, such as trust, language and culture. The suggested mixed-methods approach combined three distinct, yet related elements: individual expert interviews, sectoral expert workshops, and an online expert survey. While a standardised survey produces a larger body of data (larger N) on how participants in cross-border projects perceive cooperation, the smaller number of informants captured through qualitative interviews and expert workshops delivers richer and deeper insight into particularities. Another crucial issue is which themes or sectors of Interreg EMR projects should be selected for analysis. Based on a screening of prevalent funding topics, the following are

included: Public Transportation, Education, Climate Innovation & Technology, Labour Market & Business and Health. The expert workshops in these fields in particular served to logically connect the quantitative and qualitative findings, and obtain global results that qualify all Interreg projects to some extent as well as sector-specific CBC quality features.

Finally, it must be admitted that understanding, working with, and evaluating the qualities of CBC and associated issues of networking, coordination and collaboration are truly challenging. The methodology here surely has weaknesses, but it tries to show what can be achieved when combining some academic rigour with the necessary sense of pragmatism. Eventually, it should also be highlighted that this document is closely related to a handbook designed for practitioners. While

this research report should be seen as a scientific, conceptual and methodological background document, the handbook provides more specific instructions on how to actually apply the various CBC assessment methods. Furthermore, a final project report will also be produced that, as a complement to the other documents, presents the EMR-related results produced using the entire mixed-methods approach in the Crossquality project. Overall, it is the hope here that all the findings derived from the CBC assessment project and the methodology developed will offer a useful basis for all decision-makers, practitioners, experts, researchers and others who want to more adequately evaluate CBC qualities in the context of Interreg programmes. Hopefully, this work will open the door for others to use this easily reproducible methodology for the 2021-2027 period and other future programme periods.

The different steps of development of the methodology

A. Preparing the instruments

- Step 1:** Programme characterisation: Stakeholder analysis/sector analysis/funding analysis focused on 'quality of cooperation'/context map of sectoral networks/cross-border public services/institutions
- Step 2:** Indicator assessment: list of relevant quantitative and qualitative indicators/defining the sectoral boundaries
- Step 3:** Development of format for expert interviews
- Step 4:** Formulation of questionnaire/determining the target group/collecting contacts
- Step 5:** Formulation of shape of the expert judgement workshops/pilot workshop
- Step 6:** Formulation of questions of the survey – defining the target group
- Step 7:** Debate of the draft methodology with external experts

B. Applying the methodology

- Step 1:** Informal talks with sectoral experts – Formal expert interviews
- Step 2:** Sending out of questionnaire
- Step 3:** Expert judgement workshops – Focus groups

C. Discussion of results – drafting of report

- Step 1:** Debate of the results with experts (external advisors)
- Step 2:** Drafting of report
- Step 3:** Discussion of draft report with essential sectoral experts involved in the process

6

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ANNEX I:

Programme Output Indicators

Progress of programme output indicators

Interreg V-A Euregio Meuse-Rhine

State of play on 10 June 2021



Priority axis 1 - Innovation 2020

ID	Common and programme specific output indicators	Unit	Programme target value	Expected contribution by projects	Ratio 'Expected contribution' vs 'Target value'	Reported achievements by projects (17-03-2020)	Ratio 'Reported achievements' vs 'Target value'
CO01	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	Enterprises	250	582	233%	421	168%
CO02	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants	Enterprises	80	53	66%	24	30%
CO04	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	Enterprises	170	466	274%	475	279%
CO06	Productive investment: Private investment matching public support to enterprises (grants)	EUR	6.000.000	4746672,85	79%	2353247,56	39%
CO26	Research, Innovation: Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions	Enterprises	25	157	628%	129	516%
CO27	Research, Innovation: Private investment matching public support in innovation or R&D projects	EUR	5.625.000	4746672,85	84%	2353247,56	42%
CO28	Research, Innovation: Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the market products	Enterprises	30	35	117%	22	73%
CO29	Research, Innovation: Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products	Enterprises	30	22	73%	0	0%
CO41	Number of enterprises participating in cross-border, transnational or interregional research projects	Enterprises	25	23	92%	0	0%
CO42	Number of research organisations participating in cross-border, transnational or interregional research projects	Enterprises	20	70	350%	31	155%
PSI10	Number of supported innovation-oriented cooperation projects between enterprises and knowledge institutes	Number	40	43	108%	23	58%
PSI09	Number of supported innovation-oriented cooperation projects between enterprises	Number	20	0	0%	0	0%

Priority axis 2 - Economy 2020

ID	Common and programme specific output indicators	Unit	Programme target value	Expected contribution by projects	Ratio 'Expected contribution' vs 'Target value'	Reported achievements by projects (17-03-2020)	Ratio 'Reported achievements' vs 'Target value'
CO01	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	Enterprises	750	407	54%	565	75%
CO02	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants	Enterprises	250	17	7%	11	4%
CO04	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	Enterprises	500	150	30%	195	39%
CO05	Productive investment: Number of new enterprises supported	Enterprises	50	180	360%	0	0%
CO08	Productive investment: Increase in employment at enterprises which receive support	Full time equivalent (FTE)	100	5	5%	0	0%
PSI01	Number organised activities focussed on stimulating entrepreneurship	Number of activities	150	170	113%	55	37%
PSI02	Number of developed business cases	Number of business cases	10	254	2540%	0	0%
PSI03	Number of SMEs receiving support	Number	990	417	42%	536	54%
PSI04	Number of SMEs receiving grants	Number	245	50	20%	31	13%
PSI05	Increase in employment at SMEs which receive support	Full time equivalent (FTE)	99	0	0%	0	0%
PSI06	Number of supported projects focussed on efficient use of natural and material resources in (SME) enterprises	Number	3	1	33%	0	0%
PSI17	Number of projects supported in order to increase energetic autonomy at SMEs	Number	2	0	0%	0	0%

Priority axis 3 - Social Inclusion

ID	Common and programme specific output indicators	Unit	Programme target value	Expected contribution by projects	Ratio 'Expected contribution' vs 'Target value'	Reported achievements by projects (17-03-2020)	Ratio 'Reported achievements' vs 'Target value'
CO44	Labour Market and Training: Number of participants in joint local employment initiatives and joint training	Participants	300	932	311%	1.011	337%
CO45	Labour Market and Training: Number of participants in projects promoting gender equality, equal opportunities and social inclusion across borders	Participants	300	845	282%	1.234	411%
CO46	Labour Market and Training: Number of participants in joint education and training schemes to support youth employment, educational opportunities and higher and vocational education across borders	Participants	150	1.100	733%	843	562%
PSI19	Number of projects focussed on disadvantaged youth, elderly and vulnerable population	Projects	5	48	960%	3	60%
PSI20	Number of people that make use of cross-border social services	Persons	1.000	540	54%	2.093	209%
PSI21	Number of supported projects focussed on strengthening the connection between education and labour market	Projects	3	4	133%	4	133%
PSI22	Number of organisations that participate in supported cooperation focussed on cross-border functioning of the labour market	Organisations	10	118	1180%	138	1380%

Priority axis 4 - Territorial Development

ID	Common and programme specific output indicators	Unit	Programme target value	Expected contribution by projects	Ratio 'Expected contribution' vs 'Target value'	Reported achievements by projects (17-03-2020)	Ratio 'Reported achievements' vs 'Target value'
CO09	Sustainable tourism: Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	Visits per year	2500	150751	6030%	900	36%
CO36	Health: Population covered by improved health services	Persons	800000	517801	65%	759231	95%
CO43	Labour Market and Training: Number of participants in cross-border mobility initiatives	Persons	50	102	204%	210	420%
PSI11	Number of projects focussed on reducing the mismatch between knowledge institutes and enterprises and/or government.	Projects	2	0	0%	0	0%
PSI12	Number of projects focussed on improving the cross-border cooperation concerning health	Projects	2	1	50%	0	0%
PSI14	Number of project focussed on improving the cross-border cooperation concerning safety	Projects	2	5	250%	1	50%
PSI15	Number of cross-border cooperation between public authorities	Cooperations	10	44	440%	8	80%
PSI16	Number of meeting projects between residents of the EMR	Meeting projects	2	52	2600%	27	1350%
PSI17	Number of projects on sustainable and smart mobility and/or on alternative means of transport	Projects	2	1	50%	1	50%
PSI18	Number of projects focussed on strengthening the quality of cultural activities by cooperation between cultural organisations	Projects	2	3	150%	0	0%

ANNEX II:

Projects According to Sector

Projects grouped according to sectors (on the basis of the Interreg EMR website and, if available, the official websites of the particular project)

Education (focus on the cooperation of schools/with neighbouring languages): 9 projects

Technology in Healthcare Education	EMRLingua	EMRWINE
Garage 4.0	FUNFORLAB	COMPAS
EUR.Friends	skills4you	EUTech

Labour Market and businesses (cooperation of employment services and cross-border business networks): 6 projects

EMR Start-Up	DigitSME
youRegion	QRM 4.0
Innovation2Market	See-V-Lab

Research and Innovation (cooperation of companies and universities): 18 projects

Within Health and Biomedical Sciences: 4 projects

EURLIPIDS	Food Screening EMR
EURadiomics	Generate Your Muscle (GYM)

Within Natural Sciences and Technology: 4 projects

EMR Digital Twin Academy	E-TEST - Einstein Telescope
ET2SMEs	AACoMa

Other Projects: 5 projects

HypeRegio EarlyTech	Crossquality
IMPACT	Blockchain4Prosumers
HypeRegio BusyBee	

Police cooperation and crisis management: 3 projects

IKIC Public Safety
EMR EYES
PANDEMERIC

Health and wellbeing (part of EMRIC issues/euPrevent): 15 projects

Within Health and Health Technology: 9 projects

i2-CoRT	Oncocare	CoDaP
Poly-Valve	wearIT4Health	Healthy Aging
SafePAT	wearIT4Covid	euPrevent COVID

Within Wellbeing: 6 projects

EUPrevent Social Norms Approach	euPrevent PROFILE
EUPrevent Senior Friendly Communities	CORESIL
MOBI	EMRaDi

Culture and media, tourism: 3 projects

Terra Mosana
RANDO-M
Cycling Connects

Nature conservation, urban and rural planning, environment: 1 project

Wohnmonitor EMR

Energy transition and Climate policy: 6 projects

Light Vehicle 2025	LIVES
ROLLING SOLAR	IN FLOW
Wanderful Stream	From Waste 2 Profit

Public Transport and other public services cooperation: 1 project

EMR Connect

Social Integration: 4 projects

N-Power	In de zorg - Uit de zorgen
People To People	TREE

ANNEX III:

Short List of Questions for Expert Interview

Excerpt of questions for Crossquality: Quality of cross-border cooperation

What experience do you have with cross-border cooperation within and outside of Interreg projects?

What is 'Quality of Cooperation' in your opinion?

Did your contacts become more diverse, do you have more cross-border contacts or new contacts with other sectors or fields of work?

How often do you share information, such as newsletters, brochures or informal mails, with the former partners now?

Are you more interested in cross-border projects?

How would you assess the quality of cooperation in your Interreg project?
(on a scale from 1 to 5)

- Exchange of information
- Communication amongst partners
- Coping with language differences
- Coping with cultural differences

What is your assessment with respect to cross-border cooperation in general in your sector over time? (on a scale from 1 to 5)

What can be improved in the administrative aspects of the Interreg programme, such as payment on time, regulations, reporting obligations and other forms of bureaucracy? How did it affect the cooperation?

ANNEX IV:

Workshop schedule

10:00 - Introduction

Welcome of participants and solving of technical problems. Greeting, introductory words about Crossquality and short (!) introduction of the participants (and of the Crossquality team).

10:20 - Open questions

QUESTION 1:

Icebreaker question. What are the first things you think about when defining good cross-border cooperation?

QUESTION 2:

Resulting from the project: Did your contacts become more diverse, do you have more cross-border contacts, or even new contacts in other sectors or fields of work?

10:30 - Questions part I: Cooperation within your project (1)

First questions and presentation of the scale from 1 to 5 and the Mentimeter tool.

Scale from 1 to 5: very bad - very good

Mentimeter: Presentation.

QUESTION 3:

How would you assess the quality of cooperation in your Interreg project? (on a scale from 1 to 5)

- Cross-border information
- Cross-border consultation
- Avoiding conflicts
- Formulating joint priorities/objectives
- Possibility for the partners to establish and finance a joint coordination body
- Possibility for the partners to fund future cross-border services

Every expert chooses a number from 1 to 5 for each subitem via Mentimeter. It is started with the first subitem. Afterwards, the moderator asks a few experts for justification, before asking the next subitem. Around 3 minutes (on average) are allotted for each subitem.

11:00 - Short break

11:10 - Questions part I: Cooperation within your project (2)

Soft indicators on CBC

- Cross-border personal contacts
- Coping with different languages
- Coping with cultural attitudes
- Development of trust within the project network

Scale from 1 to 5: very bad - very good

Mentimeter: Presentation.

Questions part II: Cooperation within Interreg as a whole

QUESTION 4:

What is your assessment with respect to cross-border cooperation in your sector over time?

Scale from 1 to 5: Negative or no effect – Minor positive effect – Positive effect – Strong positive effect – Very strong positive effect

QUESTION 5:

How would you rate the influence of your Interreg project on the general quality of cross-border cooperation in your sector?

Scale from 1 to 5: Negative or no effect – Minor positive effect – Positive effect – Strong positive effect – Very strong positive effect

11:30 - Closing

QUESTION 6:

- A) What are your experiences with the administrative aspects of the Interreg programme, such as payment on time, regulations, reporting obligations and other forms of bureaucracy?
- B) How did it affect cooperation?
- C) (If enough time) What could be improved in terms of cooperation?

Short summary, possibility to get the results of Crossquality, thanks, farewell.

11:45 - End

Saving of video.

ANNEX V:

Questionnaire - Online Survey

Q1 / What is 'Quality of cooperation' in your opinion? What aspects should be characteristic for good cooperation? (Open question)

Q2 / Do you have experience with cross-border cooperation within and/or outside of Interreg projects? (Answers: Inside and/or outside of Interreg)

Q2 A/B / What experience do you have with cross-border cooperation within/outside Interreg projects? (Open question, within/outside depends on the former answer. If both: Both questions)

Q3 / As a result of the project(s), did your contacts become more diverse, do you have more cross-border contacts, or even new contacts with other sectors or fields of work? (Open question)

Q4 / How would you assess the quality with respect to practical aspects of cooperation in the course of your specific Interreg project? (Rating from 1 to 5 for nine subitems) Subitems: exchange of information, communication among partners, project internal infrastructure - cloud/newsletter/etc, communication with the Lead Partner, quality of joint internal meetings, quality of joint meetings with externals, coping with language differences, coping with cultural differences, coping with conflicts.

Q5 / What is your assessment with respect to general cooperation across the border in your sector today in comparison with 2013 (start of the recent Interreg programme)? (Rating from 1 to 5 for nine subitems) Subitem: cross-border information within your sector/project, cross-border consultation, avoiding divergences/cross-border conflict solving, formulation of joint priorities/objectives and lobbying activities, consistency of a joint strategy/work programme with subsequent joint activities, status of joint projects (Interreg or others) with one funding scheme and joint responsibilities, integration of the cross-border network in your sector into the broader governance structures of the EGTC Euregio Meuse-Rhine, stability of the organisational set-up of coordination in the sector (i.e. a common secretariat) without Interreg funding, possibility to establish joint public services (like Grensinfopunten) with a shared budget independent from Interreg project funding.

Q6 / How would you rate the influence of your Interreg project on the general quality of cross-border cooperation in your sector? (Rating from 1 to 5 for four subitems) Subitems: cross-border information within the sector, cross-border consultation, ability to formulate joint priorities/objectives/lobbying activities, stability of the organisational set-up of coordination in the sector (i.e. a common secretariat) without Interreg funding.

Q7 / What can be improved in the administrative aspects of the Interreg programme, such as payment on time, regulations, reporting obligations and other forms of bureaucracy? How did the administrative aspects of the Interreg programme affect cooperation? (Open question)

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CROSSQUALITY



EDITOR:

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ITEM

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