



Interreg
Euregio Meuse-Rhine



CROSSQUALITY

FINAL REPORT

The quality of cross-border cooperation
in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine and effects
of the INTERREG Programme

Application of the impact assessment methodology to the quality of cross-border cooperation

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Institute for Transnational and Euregional
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INTRODUCTION

How good is the cooperation of public sector bodies, companies or citizens in our cross-border region? How can we describe the quality of cross-border networks and entities? And finally: what are precisely the positive effects of an Interreg programme on the different aspects of the quality of cooperation and governance across borders? How could the impact be more positive in the future? This report is the third research output of the Crossquality Interreg project. Firstly, a comprehensive research report documented the scientific background of development of the methodology and its application. A second practical handbook for practitioners shows how to apply the assessment and illustrates the different steps with respect to programme analysis, expert interviews, expert workshops and surveys. In this third document, the results of the pilot application in the programme area of the Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine programme will be presented.

The project is aimed at developing and applying the methodology for a baseline measurement in the territory of the current Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine programme¹ at the end of the 2014-2020 programme period. The intention is to also apply the methodology in a structured way during the following 2021-2027 programme period as an option for other Interreg programmes. This pilot application is meant to be the benchmark for future projects.

In 2021 and 2022, the Crossquality team carried out the assessment by approaching many Interreg experts in the cross-border territory, conducting interviews, organising workshops and producing a survey. In this report, the results for the Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine programme will be presented.

The basic assumption was that there is a need for innovative qualitative assessment methods to better understand effects on the quality of cross-border cooperation in a given territory. With this innovative qualitative assessment methodology, it should be possible to better assess the effects of Interreg programmes by applying it accordingly in a specific programme area and producing additional qualitative data that are still lacking today. The current programme indicators are first and foremost of a quantitative nature and do not describe qualitative elements of cross-border cooperation of public entities, companies or citizens. Furthermore, outside the framework of Interreg, there is no structural assessment of the development of cooperation and the cross-border governance system. This is a general shortcoming of many Interreg programmes and cross-border territories.

Chapter 1 analyses the specific background of the programme territory, the programme and the existing indicator system of the Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine programme. The question

¹ The name of the programme for the 2021-27 period is now "Interreg Meuse-Rhine" instead of "Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine" that was applicable during the 2014-2020 period.

was to what extent aspects of cross-border cooperation quality are already measured and where possible shortcomings are. Then, based on that analysis, the sectors most relevant for the assessment are selected.

Chapter 2 presents the findings for the sectors selected. This comprises the findings from the analysis of the programme, individual expert interviews and the sectoral expert workshops. The selected sectors are public transport, education, energy transition and climate policy, the labour market and health. In chapter 3, the results of the Crossquality survey are presented and discussed. The survey was open in the summer and autumn of 2022.

In chapter 4, the findings will be summarised and conclusions will be drawn from the different results. Finally in chapter 5, recommendations are made with respect to the particular situation

of cross-border cooperation in the programme territory of the Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine programme. The question of whether specific measures could help to increase the impact of the programme on the quality of cross-border cooperation in different sectors will also be discussed.

The final results will hopefully be the baseline and benchmark for a structured assessment cycle during the Interreg period after 2021. This report is the result of a fruitful cooperation between all of the partners from Universiteit Hasselt, the Université de Liège, RWTH Aachen University, Universiteit Maastricht and the EGTC Euregio Meuse-Rhine. The project partners themselves hopefully improved the quality of cross-border cooperation between universities via this Interreg funded project, including with respect to future joint collaborations.

1

ANALYSIS OF THE PROGRAMME

1.1 THE SPECIFIC BACKGROUND OF THE PROGRAMME TERRITORY

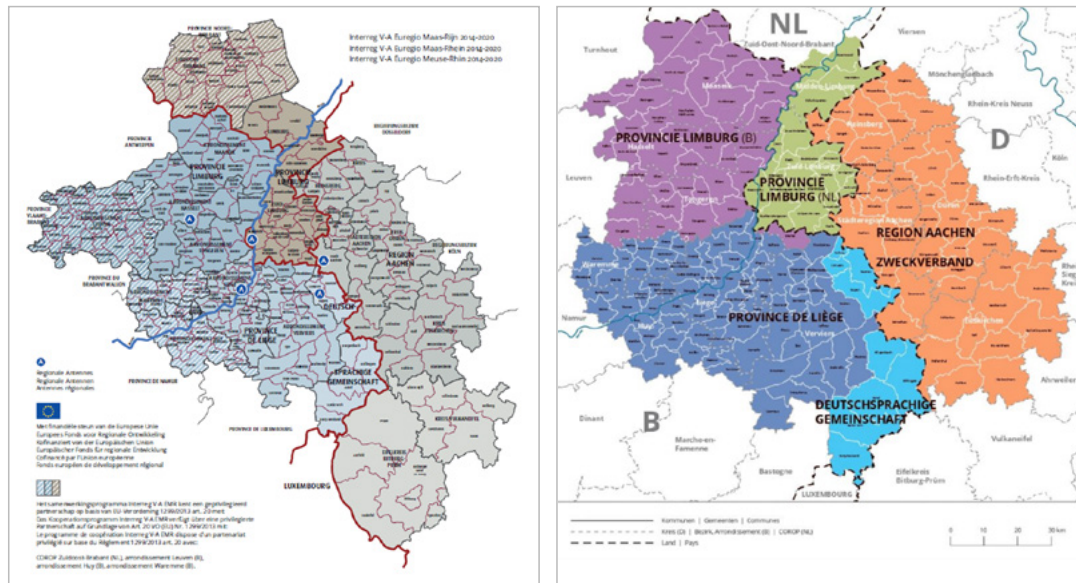
This Interreg project examined the specific impact of the Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine programme in the 2014-2020 programme period (hereinafter: Interreg EMR programme). The investment comprises a budget of EUR 96 million from the EU European Regional Development Fund in the areas of innovation, economy, social inclusion, education and territorial development with additional co-financing from the partner regions.

The intention of this first qualitative assessment is to find out whether and how the programme improved the quality of cross-border cooperation in the programme area with respect to different sectors. In the context of this project, cross-border cooperation (CBC) means the cooperation of all different types of public or private organisations, like 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. It is obvious that the quality of cooperation between these stakeholders depends very much on the particular conditions in a certain border region, in this respect at the German, Dutch and Belgian border. This means that CBC happens in a place-specific context (Bathelt & Glückler 2018:46). It is embedded, supported and dependent on a specific legal framework (dependent on the particular EU Member States or regions), a specific cultural

and historic background having an influence on mutual understanding or conflicts, cross-border networks in various sectors and institutions (such as Euregions) forming in a broader sense a cross-border governance system. Hence, the preconditions for CBC in the programme area of the Interreg EMR programme are different from other border territories. In this respect, the content of the programme and the administrative aspects have very particular effects that are dependent on the cross-border situation and the particular circumstances in this cross-border territory. This means that a similar programme could have very different impacts on the quality of cooperation in other parts of the EU. This is important with respect to the comparability of the results of this exercise. The results will show very particular impacts of the programme on the cooperation of project partners located in the Interreg EMR territory in different policy sectors, but this does not necessarily mean that similar effects can be expected in other cross-border territory. Hence, it is important to understand the specific background.

One of the most relevant aspects: the programme area of the Interreg EMR programme is almost identical with the territory of the EGTC Euregio Meuse-Rhine (in the following EGTC EMR). This is a "Euroregion" with a long-standing tradition of cross-border cooperation.

Map 1: The territory of the Interreg programme EMR and Euregio Meuse-Rhine EGTC



Source: <https://www.interregemr.eu/downloads-en> and <https://euregio-mr.info/de/ueber-uns/geschichte>

In addition to the geographical territory of the EGTC EMR, the programme territory also comprises for instance parts of the German Land of Rhineland-Palatinate, parts the Dutch Province of North Brabant and other parts of Flanders. Therefore, the programme defines territories outside the original programme area (and the EMR) where stakeholders can participate in a privileged partnership. Nevertheless, the territory of the EMR can be described as the core territory of the programme. The two different organisations (EGTC EMR and Interreg EMR) are from the outside world not always seen as two different entities. Due to the territorial similarities and the use of the name Euregio Meuse-Rhine in

the programme title, it is currently difficult for a broader public to understand the geographical and institutional differences. The similarity of the name has even led to some confusion among Interreg project partners who did not fully understand the differences between Interreg structures and the structures of the EMR². Also because of this, the name of the programme was changed for the following programme period³. It is also not easy for the public to get a grip on the different compositions of partners cooperating within the two organisations. In this respect, institutional complexity is one of the characteristics of the Interreg EMR programme, especially with respect to the relation to the Euregio Meuse-Rhine.

² Some of the experts interviewed during this project mentioned that the organisational differences between the EGTC Euregio Meuse-Rhine and the Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine programme were not always clear to them.

³ The name of the programme for the 2021-2027 period is now "Interreg Meuse-Rhine", see the official page of the programme: <https://www.interregemr.eu/news/invitation-public-launch-event-Interreg-meuse-rhine-nl-be-de-en>.

Table 1: Partners collaborating in the Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine programme

Source: <https://www.interregemr.eu/about-interreg>

Belgium	Germany	The Netherlands
German-speaking Community of Belgium	Region Aachen Zweckverband	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy
Flanders	North Rhine-Westphalia	Province of Limburg
Province of Flemish-Brabant	Rhineland-Palatinate	Province of Noord-Brabant
Province of Liège		
Province of Limburg		
Wallonia-Brussels		
Federation		
Walloon Region		

These partners decide about the shape of the programme, the selection of projects and their individual share of co-financing. Some of them are also stakeholders of the EGTC EMR (marked in blue in the table above). However, the overlapping of the stakeholders and their influence on the programme is smaller than the geographical overlapping. This has for instance to do with the presence of national (in the case of NL) and regional ministries (in the case of BE and DE) in the Interreg bodies and their own priorities when it comes to co-financing. Nevertheless, when it comes to cross-border governance the assumption is that the functioning of the

Interreg collaboration is based on structures and established cooperation networks that are also linked to the EGTC EMR.

The EGTC EMR is one of the oldest cross-border Euroregions in the EU and was founded back in 1976, long before the start of the first Interreg programme in 1990. The legal and organisational shape of the EMR has changed over the years. In 1991, it took on a legal status as a Dutch Foundation (Stichting). Later, in 2019, the EMR was transformed into a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). Since then, the official name is EGTC Euregio Meuse-Rhine.

Table 2: The partners of the EGTC EMR

Source: <https://euregio-mr.info/en/>

Belgium	Germany	The Netherlands
Province of Limburg	Region Aachen Zweckverband	Dutch Province of Limburg
Province of Liège		
German-speaking Community/ East Belgium		

The EMR comprises a total area of some 10,470 km², a population of 3.8 million and approximately 250.000 businesses⁴. Approximately one 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 in the EU, the cross-border relations and cooperation 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 the Upper Rhine, there is a significantly higher formalisation and institutionalisation as in other cross-border territories.

Durà et al. (2018:30) also detected 158 territorial CBC structures, of which 61 entities were classified as especially “active, innovative and excellent” in terms of their governance structures and the relevance of the projects they execute. In this category, the EGTC EMR is among the especially active entities, meaning that 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 seen as a sort of frontrunner⁵. The EGTC EMR is also characterised by its own strategy building processes. After having developed the strategy 2020 EMR years ago, the partner region recently agreed on a strategy for 2030 that describes the main priorities for the years up to 2030⁶.

⁴ See for instance the EMR EGTC infographic at https://euregio-mr.info/euregio-mr-wAssets/docs/DE_Infographic-EMR-Interreg.pdf.

⁵ This was for instance described in a “b-solution” case related to ambulance services.

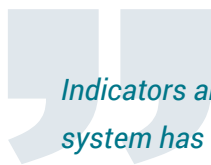
⁶ The strategy can be found on the EGTC EMR homepage: <https://euregio-mr.info/nl/ueber-uns/strategie/>

In conclusion, the Interreg EMR programme is characterised by different aspects:

- The geographical area of the Interreg programme is very similar to the geographical territory of the EGTC EMR,
- the governance structures of this cross-border territory are very much characterised by the structure of the EGTC EMR,
- hence, compared to other cross-border territories, formalisation and institutionalisation in this cross-border territory are comparable high,
- the EGTC EMR as an organisation is also involved as an advisor to the Interreg programme,
- the individual partners of the EGTC EMR (regions) are also partners in the framework of the Interreg programme and are part of its bodies,
- as a result of the existing EGTC EMR governance structures, cross-border networks that are dealing with Interreg projects do also have a connection to thematic working groups established by the EGTC EMR as an organisation,
- one particular difference with respect to other cross-border Euregions and Interreg programmes (for instance at the Dutch-German or Dutch-Belgian border) is the fact that partners from three Member States are involved, with three languages and five administrative cultures (with the differences in the three Belgian partner regions),
- the complexity of the Interreg EMR programme is increased by the prominent role of border regions (like the Dutch and Belgian provinces) in the EGTC EMR, whereas in the framework of the Interreg EMR programme bigger regions with legislative power (like the Belgian regions and the German Länder) and the Dutch national government are the dominant players in the decision-making.

1.2 THE INDICATORS OF THE 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 indicator system has been put in place for all projects financed under the European Regional Development Fund in order to compare and compile achievements across Europe. This way, your project will contribute to a bigger picture on the effects of European financing. Some indicators are defined at the EU level (common output indicators = CO), while other indicators have been developed specifically for the Interreg EMR programme (programme specific indicators = PSI).

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

As already described in the Crossquality Research Report (Crossquality 2022a), the assumption of the Crossquality project was that general 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 of a quantitative nature and

do not describe qualitative elements of CBC processes of public entities, companies or citizens. Furthermore, these indicators do not truly capture the causal relation between the programme and the developments indicated. As this list of indicators primarily suggests that only certain outcomes are quantified, the quality of network cooperation is hardly assessed at all.

Table 3: Progress of output indicators in the 2020 Interreg EMR programme

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 shows that the quality of CBC processes is not systematically measured or evaluated so far. For the following four priority axes, all indicators are of a quantitative nature and deal with counting the amount 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 axis 2 "Economy". Here, typical indicators are the number of enterprises (see table above) that receive support for productive investments, the 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 programme, or related to services. Another aspect is the number of organisations that are involved in projects to strengthen the cross-border labour market. In this respect as well, 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 the cooperation in a certain sector like health, safety, public authorities or cultural organisations. Hence, they can be used to illustrate the development of the number of projects per sector.

The Interreg EMR programme is in this sense representative of the situation of many other Interreg programmes. Compared with the indicator systems of other Interreg programmes,

those used for the Interreg EMR are rather standard. A conclusion from a 2019 ESPON project (Dallhammer et al. 2019) confirms that this is relevant for the situation of other programmes, namely that for all the programmes investigated there was no comprehensive list of qualitative indicators as part of the project and programme evaluation. In this sense, this project involved developing innovative qualitative indicators that deal with different aspects of the quality of cross-border cooperation and producing project-specific data since this type of data is still lacking. As described in detail in the Handbook and Research report, elements of a coordination scale were used to define different indicators with respect to information, consultation, conflict resolution, joint decision-making, etc. Data production was first done by the assessment of experts involved in Interreg projects. This means, that with this first application of the methodology, we provide data collected by asking Interreg practitioners ("insiders") about their view on the quality of cooperation and its development.

There are unfortunately also no available data with respect to the qualitative development of CBC networks in a specific cross-border territory outside the Interreg EMR programmes, nor are surveys done frequently on 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 the attitude towards the idea of Euregional cohesion. In the framework of this project, it was not possible to include specific data produced on the perception of the quality of cooperation by citizens, companies or a broader audience. In addition to the specific perception of the experts, this could be additional knowledge of the impact of Interreg programmes in the future, including with respect to new indicators related to public awareness

and perception. Moreover, it would be useful outside the scope of Interreg to know more about the cross-border cooperation of employment services or municipalities, or the view of employers or public bodies on the development of CBC in a particular sector in a specific border territory. This could also be an additional way to learn more about the general development of cross-border cooperation. 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. Eurobarometer deals in general with the perception of EU institutions or policies. There was only one special Eurobarometer (Flash 422) dedicated to cross-border questions. This was published in 2015 on “cross-border cooperation in the EU” (European Commission 2015). In this respect, the lack of data with respect to the

Interreg EMR programme is representative of the situation in many border regions. There is to date no frequent and stringent measurement of cross-border awareness and perception, meaning that when assessing the impact of a programme, one cannot make use of existing data but must produce specific own data for development in a specific programme area. The Crossquality project had to deal with these deficiencies and therefore focused as mentioned on the view of Interreg practitioners. Additional Euregional surveys could be very useful to get a broader picture of cross-border cooperation in the future. Recommendations will be made later as part of the final conclusions. It would for instance not be too difficult to include more specific questions in the partner and project reports related to the development of cooperation quality.

1.3 THE THEMATIC FOCUS OF THE INTERREG PROGRAMME AND SELECTION OF SECTORS THAT WERE INVESTIGATED – GROUPING OF THEMES AND CROSS-BORDER NETWORKS

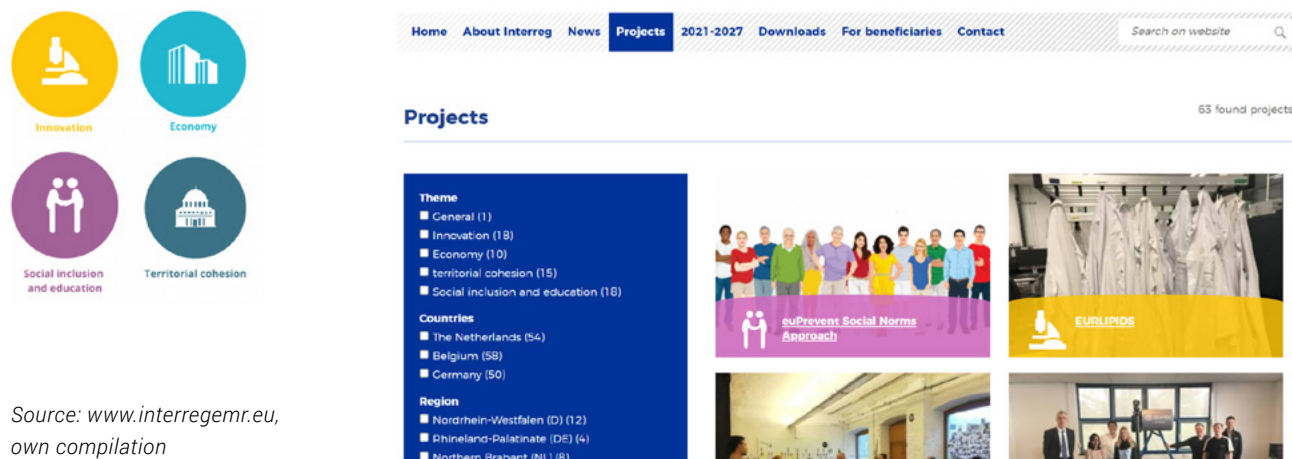
In order to compare different sectors and the respective networks related to the Interreg programme, the different Interreg EMR projects had to be grouped into topical themes. One practical requirement: it should be possible to detect experts with experience in a certain sector and who can reflect on that experience with cross-border cooperation in individual interviews. The idea is that experience in one sector could be compared to experience in another, which could also allow for conclusions to be drawn with respect to the influence of certain Interreg projects on the quality of networks and cross-border

cooperation. In addition, it should be possible to bring together experts from a predefined sector who could fruitfully share their experiences (also with respect to joint experiences) and who to some extent belong to a same cross-border network or have also some knowledge on the development of network structures in a particular sector. This means that the definition of sectors should enable the selection of experts that have a general view of the sector as a whole and experience with cross-border cooperation in one or more networks.

One obvious approach could be to use the structure of the Interreg EMR programme. The themes of the four-priority axis provide different categories: Innovation, Economy, Social Inclusion and Territorial Development. According to an overview on the programme's homepage,

the allocation of projects in accordance with these priorities was as follows: Innovation (18), Economy (10), Territorial cohesion (15) and Social inclusion and Education (18)⁷. In addition one project was listed under "general".

Graph 1: Investment priorities for the 2014-2020 period



Source: www.interregemr.eu, own compilation

Nevertheless, looking at the very obvious and prominent networks in the cross-border territory, e.g. in the field of public transport, health services or education these priority-axis categories are too horizontal and abstract and do not refer to a clear policy sector with specific cross-border networks that are practical for the identification of a coherent group of experts. As another practical approach, one can refer

to sectoral categories outside the Interreg programme that are defined by the different cross-border working groups established by the EGTC EMR. As part of the organizational diagram of the EGTC EMR, we find working groups for five different topics, as shown in the table below, that could be a useful structure of stable cross-border networks and fruitful cooperation inside and outside Interreg structures.

Table 4: Thematic working groups presented by the organizational diagram of the EGTC Euregio Meuse-Rhine

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

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

⁷ See the programme homepage www.interregemr.eu, viewed on 21 December 2022.

The Interreg projects of the 2014-2021 Interreg EMR programme could be grouped under one of the headings. The problem with these sectoral categories used by the EGTC EMR for their working group structure is that they combine sectors with different thematic network structures (e.g. security and tourism, 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. Nevertheless, this initial list was a good starting point for a more comprehensive grouping of sectors.

After an iterative process, by analysing the nature of the Interreg projects (as seen above with more than 60 projects) and gradually modifying the list of sectoral categories, the following list was drawn up in order to group individual Interreg EMR projects with the expectation that a consistent group of experts could be detected:

- A. Education (focus on the cooperation of schools/with neighbouring languages)**
- B. Labour market and businesses (cooperation of employment services and cross-border business networks)**
- C. Research and innovation (cooperation of companies and universities)**
- D. Police cooperation and crisis management**
- E. Health and well-being (part of EMRIC issues/EUprevent)**
- F. Culture and media, tourism**
- G. Nature conservation, urban and rural planning, environment**
- H. Energy transition and Climate policy**
- I. Public transport and other public services cooperation**
- J. Social integration**

As a test of whether this grouping made sense, an initial analysis of the stakeholders of the Interreg programme was done by contacting project practitioners to determine their understanding of sectoral networks and of their own sector or network. As outlined in detail in the Crossquality Handbook and Research report, expert workshops were an essential element of the methodology. They brought together experts from one particular sector to exchange views on different aspects of cross-border cooperation. The following table shows how the individual projects were grouped under these headings:

Table 5: Grouping of projects

<p>Education (focus on the cooperation of schools/with neighbouring languages) - 9 PROJECTS</p>	<p>Technology in Healthcare Education Garage 4.0 EUR.Friends EMRLingua FUNFORLAB</p>	<p>skills4you EMRWINE COMPAS EUTech</p>
<p>Labour market & businesses (cooperation of employment services and cross-border business networks) - 6 PROJECTS</p>	<p>EMR Start-Up youRegion Innovation2Market</p>	<p>DigitSME QRM 4.0 See-V-Lab</p>
<p>Research & innovation (cooperation of companies and universities) - 18 PROJECTS</p>	<p>EURLIPIDS EURadiomics Food Screening EMR Generate Your Muscle (GYM) EMR Digital Twin Academy ET2SMEs E-TEST - Einstein Telescope</p>	<p>AACoMa HypeRegio EarlyTech IMPACT HypeRegio BusyBee Crossquality Blockchain4Prosumers</p>
<p>Police cooperation & crisis management - 3 PROJECTS</p>	<p>IKIC Public Safety EMR EYES PANDEMERIC</p>	
<p>Health & well-being (part of EMRIC issues/ EUprevent) - 15 PROJECTS</p>	<p>i2-CoRT Poly-Valve SafePAT Oncocare wearIT4Health wearIT4Covid CoDaP Healthy Aging</p>	<p>euPrevent COVID EUPrevent Social Norms Approach EUPrevent Senior Friendly Communities MOBI euPrevent PROFILE CORESIL EMRaDi</p>
<p>Culture & media, tourism - 3 PROJECTS</p>	<p>Terra Mosana RANDO-M Cycling Connects</p>	

Nature conservation, urban & rural planning, environment - 1 PROJECT	Wohnmonitor EMR
Energy transition & Climate policy - 6 PROJECTS	Light Vehicle 2025 ROLLING SOLAR Wanderful Stream LIVES IN FLOW From Waste 2 Profit
Public transport & other public services cooperation - 1 PROJECT	EMR Connect
Social integration - 4 PROJECTS	N-Power People To People In de zorg - Uit de zorgen TREE

Source: www.interregemr.eu, own compilation

Hence, the final selection of specific sectors for the practical work was made on the basis of this grouping. There was a certain judgement as to whether the sector could be representative and relevant in relation to the overall cross-border cooperation. A practical reason for the choice of a certain sector was whether one could expect that enough experts could be detected, individual interviews could be conducted and workshops organised. On the basis of these criteria, the following sectors were chosen for the detailed analysis of the quality of cooperation. In these sectors, expert interviews were carried out and expert workshops organised.

1. **Public transport**
2. **Labour market and Business development**
3. **Education**
4. **Innovation in the Energy transition and Climate policy**
5. **Health/Emergency**

1.4 THE APPLICATION OF THE CROSSQUALITY METHODOLOGY

The first purpose of the Crossquality project was to develop a methodology that can be used more widely to assess CBC qualities in various Interreg programmes. The second objective was to apply the methodology and analyse the Interreg EMR programme (2014-2020) in order to find out how cross-border cooperation developed over time and what the specific influence the programme

had on the quality of cross-border cooperation. As shown, this started with a deeper analysis of the programme and the selection of suitable sectors that could also be compared against each other. As outlined in detail in the Crossquality Handbook, the approach consists of individual expert interviews, expert workshops, and a written survey and comprised the following steps:

Table 6: The phases of application of the Crossquality methodology

1	Preparation: analysis of the Interreg programme with respect to sectors, networks and experts
2	Application: conducting expert interviews, expert workshops and a survey (second half of 2021/2022)
3	Final report: analysis of the results and drafting of the report (second half of 2022)

In the preparatory phase (spring/summer 2021), the Interreg EMR programme was analysed and the previously described definition of sectors was done. Then, practitioners were identified (hereinafter referred to as “experts”) who engage in an Interreg project in a thematic sector (for instance public transport or the health sector) and have specific, often region related experience through having participated in one or more projects and existing networks in the sector. The underlying idea was that individual expert interviews offer a good initial analysis for specific sector settings. Due to the coronavirus crisis, all the interviews were done by video conferencing. In the course of the project, 56 semi-structured

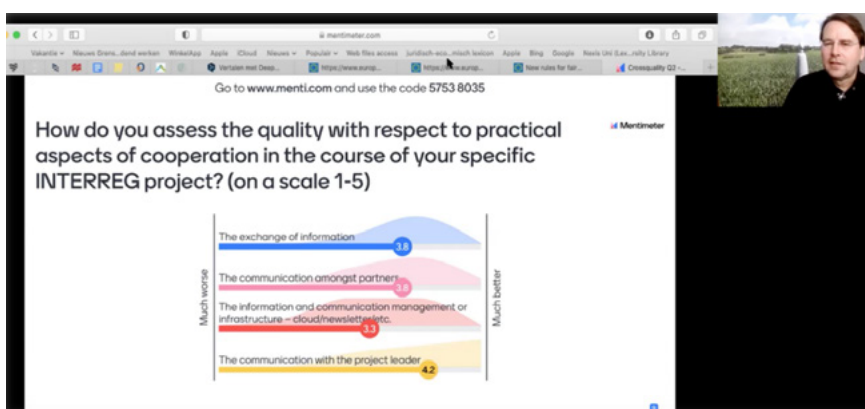
interviews were conducted with experts from the selected sectors and from the different regions of programme territory (most of the within the territory of the EGTC EMR). Some experts also had experience with other Interreg programmes (e.g. Germany-Netherlands, Netherlands-Flanders) and could compare different aspects. The duration of the interviews was between 30 and 60 minutes. A format of initial questions can also be found in the Crossquality research report. Due to the coronavirus restrictions, it was sometimes not easy for the experts to find time for the interviews. This was for instance true for experts dealing with health or emergency services related to crisis management duties. Nevertheless, in general experts were very

helpful and open to speaking with the Crossquality researchers. Many contacts were made with other experts on the recommendation of experts who knew other experts with long-standing experience with Interreg projects (snowball effect). There were also differences with respect to certain sectors. It was for instance easier to identify and contact experts in the field of public transport than in other sectors. The reason is that there is a particularly long-standing stable network of cross-border experts in the area of public transport (linked to a large Interreg project).

The expert interviews also offered the opportunity to ask whether experts were ready to join expert workshops and discuss questions related to the quality of cross-border cooperation with their colleagues. Whereas with the expert interviews, information was often collected about single projects, the workshops offered the opportunity to get a broader view of the sector and the quality related to different Interreg projects. With the recommendations and information provided on the individual project homepages, the participants in five sectoral expert workshops were finally

recruited. Due to the coronavirus restrictions, these workshops were also organised via video conferencing. In the workshops, experts from the same sector discussed the questions with each other and exchanged their experiences with the Crossquality team. Therefore, between 10 and 15 participants joined per workshop with a diverse background with respect to their home region and their level of experience with cross-border cooperation and Interreg projects. In the workshops, the “Mentimeter” interactive presentation programme was used⁸. During the initial part of the workshops, the experts discussed open questions with the Crossquality team and were asked to write down their comments. Then, during the main part, the experts were asked for their judgement by giving a score with respect to the different aspects of cross-border cooperation. In the following chapter, the results of the individual interviews and expert workshops will be presented for each sector. In a final step, these results will be discussed against the results from a broader survey across all the policy sectors where a larger number of cross-border experts gave their view.

Screenshot 1: Impression from an online expert workshop with the use of Mentimeter



Source: own Crossquality screenshot

⁸ <https://www.mentimeter.com/>

2

QUALITY OF COOPERATION IN DIFFERENT SECTORS

2.1 PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The production of data started with the public transport sector. In this sector the first experts were interviewed and the first pilot workshop was organised in December 2021. The sector also was used to test the format of the interviews and the workshop format. Some of the questions or the grouping of questions were later changed based on the experience from the first round of expert interviews and the pilot expert workshop. This means that the formulation of questions shown for the expert workshop was later changed. Hence, the format was not entirely the same for instance with respect to the scoring of different aspects of cooperation. However the broader topics and focus of the questions were the same. Therefore a comparison of different policy sectors is possible, even though the format of the workshop and the formulation of questions were slightly different at later stages of the research.

2.1.1 Network structure

The public transport sector in the EMR is characterised by two important aspects. The main stakeholders, public and private transport companies and related public authorities have developed stable relations for many years. Unlike in the other sectors described in this report, there is a permanent coordination body financed and established by the Aachener Verkehrsbetriebe (AVV). According to AVV, the origin of the coordination body dates back

to Interreg projects in the 1990s. The AVV is home to a Euregional coordination office (Euregionale Koordinierungsstelle), which takes on a coordinating function for public transport in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine. In this capacity, there is cross-border coordination beyond the scope of individual Interreg projects. During the last couple of years, for example, the AVV has been the lead partner of the “EMR Connect project” and was responsible for the cooperation of 14 partners in the EMR, who are working on improving cross-border public transport in five work packages. A further very important difference with respect to other sectors is that “EMR connect” was the only project in the field of public transport during the 2014-2020 programme period. The project started in October 2017 and lasted until March 2022 (due to an extension). With certain exceptions (Dutch NS and German Deutsche Bahn were not partners), all relevant stakeholders in the field of public transport were project partners, for instance also the Belgian SNCB. Most of the partners of the Interreg project regularly meet via the work of the coordination office of the AVV and join forces within the framework of the EMR connect. The following public transport companies are part of the Interreg project: Arriva Personenvervoer Nederland BV, TEC Liège-Verviers, Aachener Verkehrsbetriebe (AVV), Vlaamse Vervoersmaatschappij De Lijn, Société Nationale des Chemins de fer Belges (SNCB). In addition to these partners, universities

and regional authorities were also involved and some of the latter have a say in concessions and public procurement decisions. Many interview partners stressed the fact that, over the last decade, relations amongst the partners have been growing and the cross-border information and coordination has become more essential. Therefore, there is cross-border involvement in public procurement processes when the concession of a new line with cross-border relevance is at stake.

It is obvious that due to the structure of the sector (meaning that there are not so many potential stakeholders) the number of cross-border partners is limited. The sector shows strong cohesion due to the network described above that extends beyond the scope of Interreg projects with a stable coordination structure. The research showed that this feature in particular has been very important for the sustainability of this particular network structure. In this respect, the public transport sector can be described as a sector with comparatively high cross-border cohesion.

2.1.2 Findings from the public transport sector

Findings with respect to the understanding of the quality of cross-border cooperation

Expert interviews

The experts interviewed in the field of transport came from different regions of the EMR and worked mainly for public transport companies, for regional administrations and universities dealing with public transport questions. Many of them had extensive experience with former

Interreg projects and with respect to cooperation in the framework of the coordination body of the AVV. They were all actively involved in the Interreg “EMR connect” project. Only a few newcomers who had just started in the sector and were involved in an Interreg project for the first time were interviewed. As part of the methodology, newcomers without a lot of Interreg experience were also seen as very interesting, since they may have had a fresh view of certain routines and details and were less biased based on earlier experience.

With respect to the understanding of the quality of cross-border cooperation, many experts mentioned during the individual interviews “exchange of information”, “good communication” and “learning from each other”. One single expert mentioned “knowledge of administrative competences” in the border region and a few mentioned a “shared vision” with respect to the development of cross-border public transport. Since the Interreg project dealt with improvements in prices, services and digitalisation of tickets and passenger information, it is not surprising that the exchange of data was also mentioned as an important indicator of the quality of cooperation in the field. “Effective results” were also mentioned as an important feature of cross-border cooperation in the field. It was also emphasised that, with the Euregional coordination body of the AVV, the network in the field is very sustainable and financed without Interreg funding.

Expert workshop

The understanding of the quality of cross-border cooperation outlined above was very much reflected in the debate during the expert workshop. Unlike in the subsequent workshops, no special sheet was completed by the experts

with their own statements. This had to do with the fact that, after the first workshop, the question put to the experts and the use of Mentimeter was still adapted based on the comments from the experts.

Findings: Did participation in Interreg lead to a more diverse network and more contacts?

Expert interviews

Almost all experts in the field of public transport confirmed that their involvement in Interreg projects (or the later EMR connect project) had enlarged their cross-border network. For most, this was a matter of course and rather one of the main elements of Interreg projects. One expert mentioned that Interreg funding was necessary to establish and stabilise networks. Some emphasised that it had also brought them

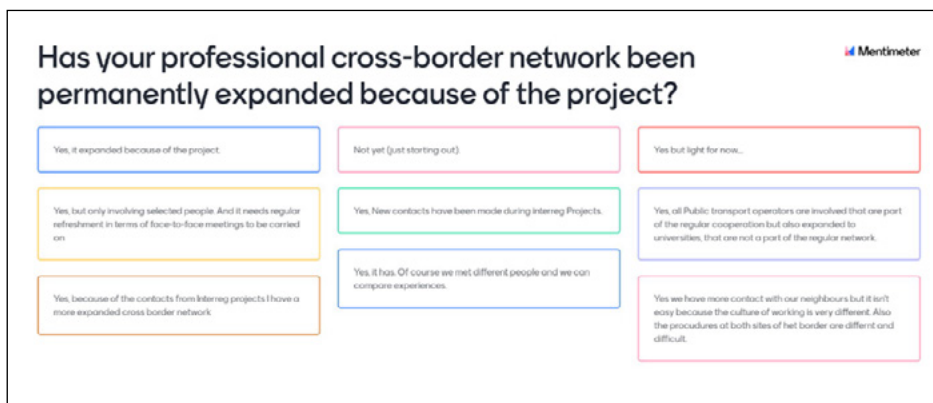
new contacts with colleagues from universities, where they had no contacts previously. One was of the opinion that it was only through the Interreg project that the contacts were transformed into a network.

Only one expert mentioned that contacts were rather limited and only on a case-by-case basis.

Expert workshop

The very positive picture with respect to having more contacts and access to a network was also confirmed by the debate during the expert workshop. It was also confirmed that unlike in the “normal” public transport network led by the AVV, where public transport companies meet regularly, the Interreg project enlarged the network with the participation of universities. The picture below shows the original statements from the participants during the workshop.

Screenshot 2: Transport workshop



Source: Crossquality

To conclude, interviews and the expert workshop gave a very positive picture with respect to the impact of Interreg on the network in the public transport sector. There is a widespread understanding that in the transport sector the general coordination point together with the collaboration in Interreg projects has benefits

for the partners involved who can enlarge and stabilise their contacts and network partners. However, the sustainable network outside Interreg is seen as one important precondition for the successful use of Interreg funds.

Findings related to the quality of information and communication

Many experts were rather positive with respect to the exchange of information in the framework of the current Interreg project. It was also mentioned that this has to do with good project management. The distinction was made between information within a work package (was seen as very good) and information on the general development of the project. There were two experts who mentioned that the lack of personal contacts because of Covid had a negative influence on the information flow. Some experts mention the fact that even if there is information via project management, individual personal contacts are very important to be well informed.

With respect to communication amongst the partners, the situation was described by most of the experts as positive. Some mentioned the good quality of communication of the lead partner with the other partners, the good quality of joint meetings. It was also said that the communication differs within a work package and relates to the contacts with a certain partner. A distinction was also made between core partners (where the communication was good) and other partners (more difficult). Many experts emphasised the positive role of the lead partner with respect to communication.

Coping with different languages

One of the indicators related to understanding and communication has been the question about the role of languages. In general, experts pointed out that the different languages could be a problem. In the framework of the Interreg project not all partners do speak English and many experts do not passively understand all other languages (French). Some mentioned

problems in following meetings entirely in English. It was mentioned by several experts that communication between the Dutch and German experts was easier. Experts also said that there were problems and that they needed some interpretation.

Coping with cultural differences

Many experts did not think about cultural differences in the sense of different mentalities of people or work culture. They mentioned different planning procedures, different political agendas or the differences in the structures of public transport in the different Member States/regions. One expert referred to the big differences between the public transport organisations in Belgium in comparison to Germany. Another expert mentioned that joint projects within the framework of Interreg did not change the fundamental differences. Experts who also understood cultural differences as differences in mentality and working style outlined that this was also an added-value of cross-border work. It was also mentioned that in the transport sector you need some patience in order to achieve results. More experts mentioned that cooperation between German and Dutch partners seems to be easier and that understanding of the other's system was more advanced.

Findings on the development of the quality of cross-border cooperation over time

Experts were asked how they assessed in general the development of the quality of cross-border cooperation over time in their sector. Did they see major improvements or a rather stable situation with respect to the network in the public transport sector were they were part

of? In the individual interviews, many experts expressed a rather positive view and referred to a growing “semi-structured” network. Some experts clearly expressed the view that without Interreg the cooperation would be much weaker. It was also emphasised that the coordination by the AVV was an important factor for stabilising the work of the network, including beyond single Interreg projects. One expert mentioned a general problem, that despite the positive cross-border network, cross-border aspects were still not embedded into broader national public transport governance structures in the regions/ Member States. In this sense, two experts made the distinction between a positive Euregional network and the problems of integrating cross-border transport needs into wider national structures.

Findings related to the impact of the administrative burden of Interreg project management

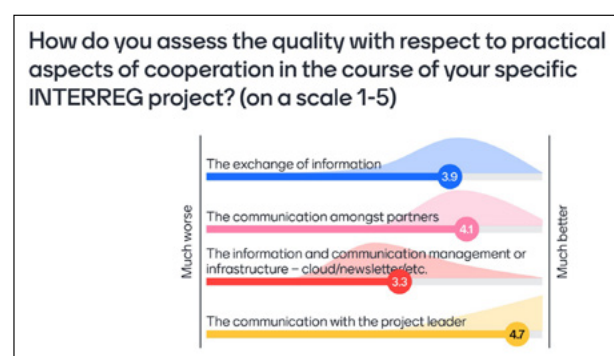
Expert interviews

Most of the experts agreed on the fact that the administrative burden for project partners and the project lead partner would be too high. Some experts mentioned problems with making entries in the eMS system. In general, it was said that one had to spend too much time on reporting. Also of concern were the difficulties when changes had to be made to the initial project plan, payment terms, details of requirements (logo, etc.) and the lack of user-friendliness of the eMS system. One expert raised the concern that the amount of the Interreg contribution did not always match the administrative costs.

Expert workshop

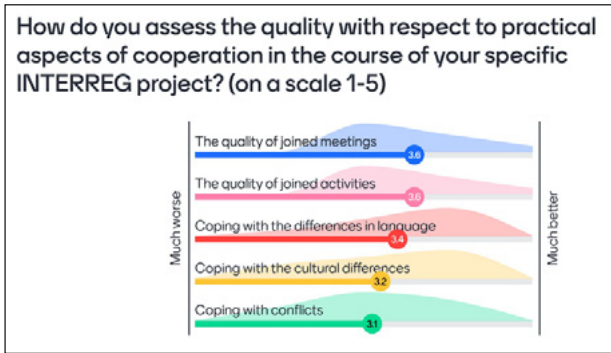
In the first pilot expert workshop, the questions discussed were not yet fully synchronised with the expert interviews. However, the following scoreboard shows the scoring of the participants in the expert workshop on the transport sector who responded to different aspects related to the questions of cross-border cooperation in the framework of Interreg.

Screenshot 3: Transport workshop



The debate during the expert workshop confirmed the rather positive picture painted by the expert interviews. In particular, the information and communication amongst partners was seen as very positively influenced by the Interreg project. One very important element was the high satisfaction with the communication with the project leader. As already shown, there is only one Interreg project going on in the sector led by a project partner who is also responsible for the coordination of the network of public transport companies beyond single Interreg projects. It was mentioned in expert interviews and confirmed by the expert workshop that the rather stable coordination structure outside Interreg is seen as very beneficial with respect to the positive impact of Interreg cooperation with respect to the quality of information and communication across the border.

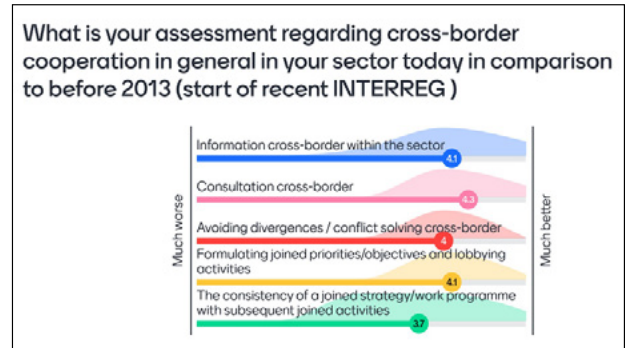
Screenshot 4: Transport workshop



For all the categories, there was a clear positive score, meaning that the Interreg project did contribute to the improvement of the different aspects of cross-border cooperation. The higher score for the quality of joint meetings again confirms answers in expert interviews that the efficiency of joint meetings and also refers to the positive view on the coordination by the lead partners. Since the Crossquality team also asked about the formulation of questions and whether the order and scoring would make sense, it was proposed to make further changes to the scale (much worse/much better), since the different aspects were not expected to get worse in the course of projects. The changes were made and implemented during the following expert workshops. In the workshop, questions were discussed to enrich the scope of the expert interviews. In order to know more about the general development of cross-border cooperation in a specific sector, the experts were also specifically asked about the development in the sector as such, beyond the work within a specific Interreg project. The underlying assumption is that positive cooperation under the umbrella of Interreg may be not representative of the sector as such, meaning that despite Interreg different aspects of cooperation could even worsen overall and the positive impact of Interreg is not that relevant for general development. This was

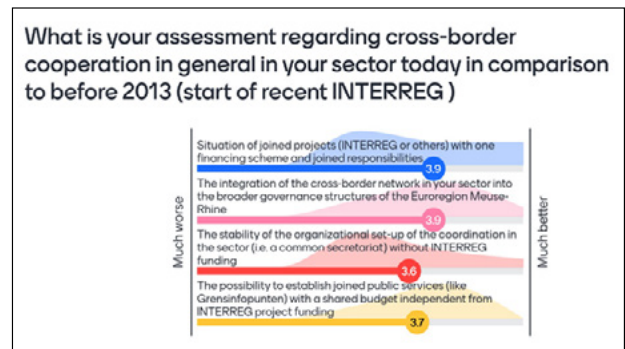
certainly not the case for the transport sector as the following scoreboard shows.

Screenshot 5: Transport workshop



Here again, different categories of the “coordination scale” were used to learn more about specific aspects of cross-border cooperation (see Crossquality Research report). The experts were even more positive with respect to the overall development in their sector than with respect to the single Interreg project, meaning that their view on the general development of information exchange, consultation across the border was extremely positive. Even with respect to more ambitious aspects like formulating joint priorities, experts saw a very positive development.

Screenshot 6: Transport workshop

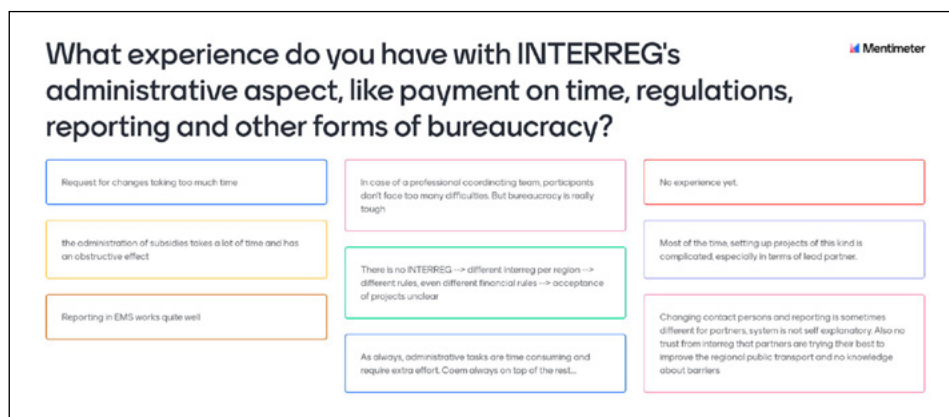


In this first pilot workshop, other aspects of the coordination scale were part of the scoring exercise. The development of joint projects

was also seen as very positive, as was the integration of their network into the overall structure of the EGTC EMR. With regard to the impact of Interreg in a sustainable sense, the experts had a positive view of the establishment of joint services without Interreg funding.

Finally, a last open question was discussed in the pilot transport workshop. This was related to the question of administrative burden that was already mentioned by many experts during the expert interviews.

Screenshot 7: Transport workshop



The statements from the participants in the expert workshop confirmed statements made during expert interviews: administrative tasks are time consuming and one expert even mentioned that it has a negative (“obstructive”) effect. Some arguments put forward in the framework of the expert interviews were mentioned again, for instance that it would be too time consuming to request necessary changes within the project. One new statement was made with respect to the differences of administrative burden related to the specific Interreg programme. This was also mentioned by experts of other sectors who have experience with more than one Interreg programme. The different rules of Interreg programmes increase the complexity for stakeholders who have the possibility to join not only Interreg EMR but also Germany-Netherlands or Netherlands-Flanders programmes.

Summary for the transport sector

The public transport sector is to some extent unique with respect to the setting of Interreg projects, since there was only one broader Interreg project under the 2014-2020 Interreg EMR programme. Therefore, all relevant stakeholders dealing with public transport in the wider area of the geographical area of the EGTC EMR were part of the Interreg project. And, the Interreg project brought together partners who already belong to a non-Interreg related network with a stable coordination structure financed by a specific partner. Many of the network partners were already cooperating together in the past in the framework of Interreg projects. The coordination body (AVV Aachen) can also be seen as a result of former Interreg projects. This means, that the Interreg project (EMR connect) was launched in addition to the normal coordination network and enlarged the existing network with extra

partners (in this case universities, for instance). This has apparently very positive implications for the quality of cross-border cooperation within the Interreg project: the experts in the sector describe the quality of cross-border cooperation as very positive (both in individual expert interviews and in the joint expert workshop). Experts emphasise the advantage of a stable coordination body that is not linked to one single Interreg project. This seems to have also a very positive effect on the project management which was also very positively assessed. There is also trust within the network that there will be further cooperation without Interreg funding. That is not surprising given the fact the partners can already rely on a joint coordination body (also being the lead partner) that operates outside the framework of the Interreg project. Also the expectations

with respect to future joint services are very positive. In this case, the objective of the EMR Connect project are in line with the idea of activities that will also be maintained after the programme period. In this respect, the partners already ensured via the project design that they will develop joint services (for instance e-ticketing) that at a later stage are not dependent on further financing with Interreg funds. In this sense, one can also speak about a network that had already the capacity to agree on joint objectives that were supposed to be transformed into joint services in the longer run. Given the satisfaction mentioned by experts under the umbrella of the Interreg project, it was possible to fully use Interreg as a tool to further strengthen (and enlarge) the network with joint priorities.

2.2 EDUCATION

Interviews were conducted in October, November and December 2021 with experts from the education sector. Most of the experts had a great deal of experience with Interreg projects. The workshop was organised on 28 January 2022 with in total 14 participants (experts and Crossquality team). Some of the questions or the grouping of questions were slightly changed based on the experience from the first round of expert interviews and the pilot expert workshop of the transport sector. But the general format was the same as in the first workshop.

2.2.1 Network structure

The education sector in the EGTC EMR and Interreg EMR territory is characterised by the following aspects. During the last decades, many Interreg projects (like EUR Friends

2017-2021, Linguacluster 2010-1013, today EMR Lingua, skillsforyou) were established that dealt with exchanges between schools, making traineeships possible across the border, stimulating the capacities to teach and learn the neighbouring languages, develop learning materials and joint resources. The latest EMR Lingua project (started in 2020) explicitly aims to create and strengthen a sustainable structure for the teaching of the neighbouring languages German, Dutch and French in the Euregio-Meuse-Rhine. This is already an indicator for one of the cross-border problems in the sector. Despite many Interreg projects, project partners from schools and higher education did not succeed in establishing a permanent cooperation with its own coordination body beyond the scope of single Interreg projects and specific themes. Resources

and network structures were often lost after the end of the project and had to be newly built at the start of the next project. Nevertheless, there are many experts in the Euregio who have a lot of experience with Interreg cooperation of schools and higher education and were involved in many initiatives in the past. To some extent, they formed temporary networks around individual Interreg projects bringing together experts from different types of schools or higher education. The sector analysis detected nine projects in the 2014-2020 Interreg EMR programme that could be grouped under the heading “education”. Some of them are rather narrow in focus, and experts are not likely to belong to a broader network in the education sector. This is true for the following very specialised projects: the exchange platform

for winemakers (EMRwine), the production of innovative learning materials for car-related education (garage 4.0), the quality of the training of medical laboratory technicians (FunForLab), the development of educational programmes at the intersection of health care, patient safety and innovation (COMPAS). It was decided to focus on experts dealing with the broader cooperation of schools across the border as in the EURfriends and ongoing EMRLingua projects. Therefore, the experts interviewed and participating in the education workshop were in particular familiar with the situation related to the cross-border cooperation of different school types and institutions of higher education.

Table 7: Interreg projects in the field of education

<p>Education - 9 PROJECTS</p>	<p>Technology in Healthcare Education Garage 4.0 EUR.Friends EMRLingua FUNFORLAB</p>	<p>skills4you EMRWINE COMPAS EUTech</p>
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2.2.2 Findings from the education sector

All the experts confirmed that they had more contacts as a result of Interreg projects and that they had contacts with new institutions or contacts related to different topics. Two experts also stressed the fact that contacts are more qualitative, if the contact persons have a similar task within their institution. One expert

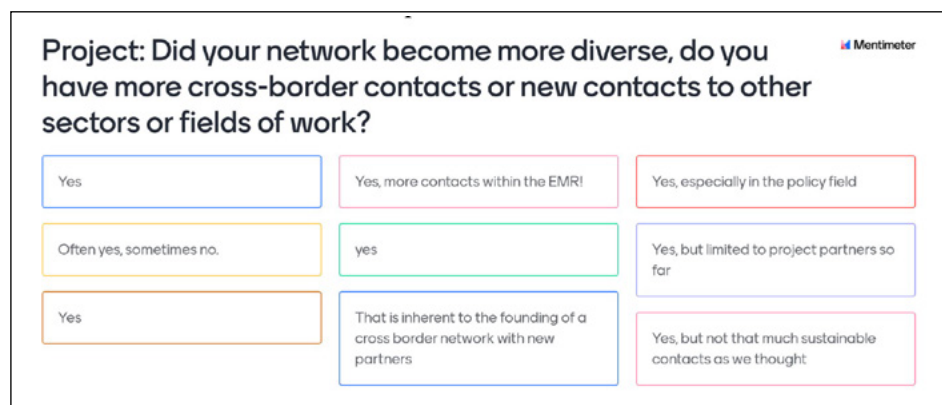
mentioned that at the start of an Interreg project the contacts were still modest but intensified over the course of the project. Two experts especially emphasised the problem of maintaining contacts after the end of a particular project. According to them, contacts were more often lost in the sector after the end of projects.

Expert workshop

The reactions expressed during the expert workshop were not entirely positive. The participants did point out that their network had been strengthened or that they had more cross-border contacts through the Interreg project. However, it was also stated that the network would not necessarily expand due to the lack of follow-up outside Interreg. The sustainability

of the networks would only be supported with subsequent projects. As a lesson learned from the sector, networks in the sector were only sustainable when the Interreg funding was secured. In this respect, one participant pointed out that a more stable network would be necessary to manage cross-border knowledge transfers in a sustainable way.

Screenshot 8: Education workshop



Findings with respect to the understanding of the quality of cross-border cooperation

Expert interviews

Individual experts stated that one of the crucial elements for the quality of cooperation was whether there is a "deeper relation" between partners. Some emphasised the importance of project management and administrative aspects that had an impact on cooperation. Clear common objectives would be very important, others called it a joint strategy and the support of all partners for these common objectives. One expert mentioned the experience that the quality of cooperation had been hampered by

the change of the lead partner in the course of a project. Another expert questioned the word "quality" because it could mean the necessity of a broader concept. More pragmatically, one could look at what was effectively done, what ideas were exchanged and how human relations developed. Several experts pointed out that good knowledge of the partners was necessary for good cooperation. Good communication skills and language skills were also mentioned.

Expert workshop

The question related to the understanding of the quality of cooperation was not answered by the participants due to time constraints.

Findings related to the quality of information and communication

Expert interviews on information exchange

The experiences with respect to information exchange were also diverse. One expert pointed out that the information flow was good. Others mentioned that the efforts made with respect to mutual information were too costly, for instance too many meetings. One other expert mentioned that the frequent change of colleagues on the other side of the border had complicated the information flow. In general, the picture was more negative as in the case of the transport sector.

Communication

As a result of the Interreg project, experts mentioned that communication in the network improved since the personal contacts were getting better. Other confirmed that the communication would be more stable as a result of the Interreg collaboration. One expert pointed out that communication with the project would depend very much on the project coordinator. Intensive communication would be easier in smaller sub-groups and not with all project partners.

Coping with different languages

Experts in the education sector also have a diverse understanding of whether the language question has an important impact on the quality of cooperation. Only one expert said that understanding despite the different languages was good. Another expert saw also no more significant problem with respect to the cooperation. Others were more sceptical. One expert said that the role of the language question was underestimated. Language problems would have an impact. Other experts said that the cooperation was not always efficient due to language problems. One expert reported that the usual Euregional approach - speaking the own language and understanding the other languages – was not always feasible because colleagues did not understand the neighbouring languages. Other emphasised that English was also not an option for all the colleagues in the network.

Coping with cultural differences

Experts mentioned that differences in the administration culture did play a role, meaning that the way meetings were organised or scheduled or the working culture was different. Another expert pointed out, that it would be very important to know the different work processes. One mentioned the particular differences in how emails were used with respect to the colleagues who were listed under Cc. Other referred to the different understanding of when and how an agreement was made and whether and when it was confirmed. Interestingly enough, particular experts from the Walloon region regarded all of the cultural differences above as “no problem” and “enriching”. Dutch experts pointed out that, in to their experience, the cultural differences are smaller between German and Dutch colleagues in the field of education.

Findings on the development of the quality of cross-border cooperation over time

A common statement from experts was that institutionalisation in the sector was in progress, referring to the stop-and-go situation for many years where individual Interreg project had built up networks that also stopped after the project came to an end. Some experts pointed out that funding was the crucial point for sustainable network structures in the sector, especially for schools. So far, it was not possible to finance a joint coordination body with respect to cross-border education outside of the Interreg framework. It was also mentioned that in the education sector, cooperation is primarily faced with very different institutional and legal backgrounds. That was in general a structural obstacle to sustainable and closer cooperation for instance for schools. Because of this difficult background, many experts confirmed that Interreg projects were one possibility to establish temporary networks around a specific theme.

Findings related to the impact of the administrative burden of Interreg project management

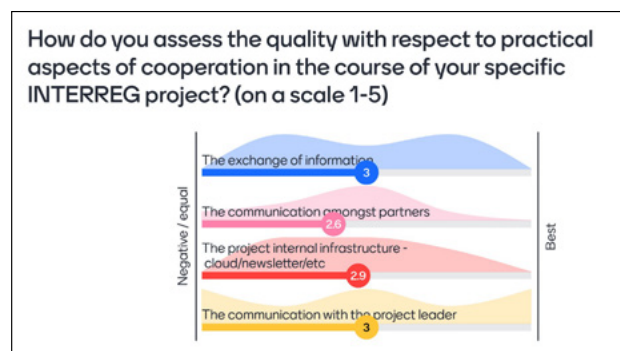
The comments made in the course of the education expert interviews were very critical about the administrative burden. Most experts complained about the complexity and the problems with the eMS system. Experts also mentioned that the procedure for getting changes of the project approved were too cumbersome. There was also uncertainty about the final amount of money that would be paid out, which was a real problem for partners. Another expert mentioned that it was

very difficult with an organisation without a dedicated person just for project management. The participation should be especially lighter for schools, was another concern mentioned by an expert. Another comment referred to a general problem of cross-border cooperation in the framework of an Interreg project: because of the demanding management tasks partners would have less time for the activities.

Expert workshop

Most of the experts participating in the expert workshop had experience with several Interreg projects, however mainly dealing with the cooperation of schools and higher education. A broader debate was stimulated on different aspects of cooperation in the education sector ranging from the exchange of information to communication aspects. The following screenshot from the Mentimeter slide shows the scoreboard after the experts ranked the quality of different aspects.

Screenshot 9: Education workshop



The exchange of information is ranked much better than communication amongst partners despite the fact that the internal information infrastructure (newsletters, etc.) scored a 2.9. In general, the more sceptical statements on information and communication from the expert

interviews are confirmed by the scores of the workshop.

The following categories were ranked higher, especially the question regarding experience with respect to language problems. The quality of joint meetings is ranked the highest which also refers to a positive perception of project management and the role of the project leader. Apparently, the experts do not see that the network structures in the framework of their Interreg project offer appropriate tools to solve conflicts. The participants did not give any examples during the workshop whether they faced conflicts in the course of a particular Interreg project.

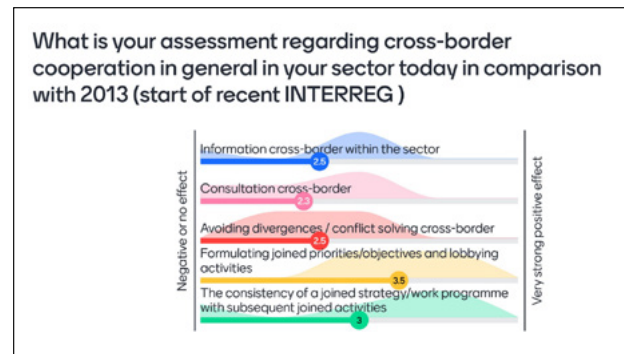
Screenshot 10: Education workshop



Findings with respect to the general development in the education sector

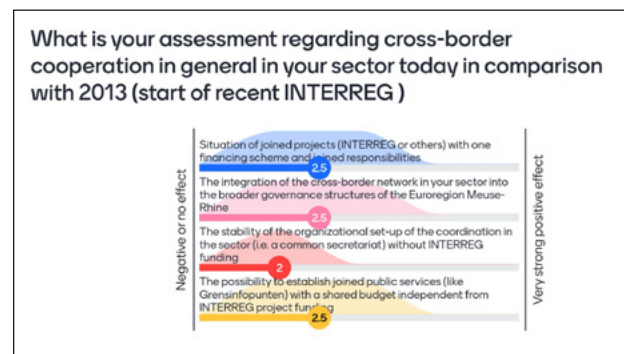
As in the case of the transport sector, the question was raised of how the expert saw the general development in the sector independent from the individual Interreg project. The benchmark in this respect was the time before the 2014-2022 Interreg period. In this case, the ranking done by the experts was surprising. The general development of cross-border cooperation in the sector was assessed as much worse than in the specific Interreg context.

Screenshot 11: Education workshop



Especially, the general conditions for consultation in the sector across the border are regarded as rather poor. Conflict solving also obtained a modest score. That corresponds to the assessment related to experience with Interreg cooperation. The formulation of joint priorities and objectives is ranked comparatively higher but lower than in the case of the transport sector. The same goes for joint strategies.

Screenshot 12: Education workshop



Here above all, the low score is striking with respect to the stability of the organisational set-up. This refers to the understanding of many experts that, despite Interreg projects, it was not possible to build up a stable coordination body outside Interreg funding. Related to the objectives of the EMR Lingua project, there is some hope to establish a joint service/coordination point in the future with a shared budget independent from Interreg. It is also interesting that the assessment is rather modest on the question of

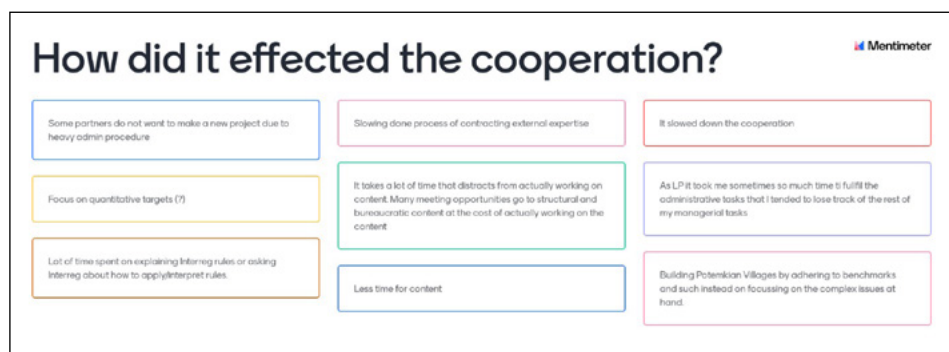
how well the network in the field of education is integrated into the general network structures

of the EGTC EMR. This could reflect the fact that the permanent working groups of the EGTC EMR on “neighbouring languages” is not seen as a decisive body representing a strong cross-border education network.

Administrative burden

Finally, as an open question as in the case of the transport sector, the question of how the experts see the influence of administrative burden was discussed.

Screenshot 13: Education workshop



The most alarming comment referred to the experience that some Interreg partners did not want to participate in a new project due to the administrative procedures. Two experts pointed out the administrative burden slowed down the cooperation and that it distracted from the content. It was also questioned whether the focus on quantitative targets would help. Much stronger than in the transport sector, there is an understanding that project partners (for instance schools or regional administrations) do not always have the capacities to cope with the requirements.

Summary for the education sector

The overall assessment of the quality of cooperation and the stability of network structures is more negative in the education sector compared to the transport sector. One essential reason was frequently mentioned: the lack of a permanent cross-border coordination

body outside the Interreg framework. This led to some frustration with respect to the quality of cooperation in general in the sector and an interesting distinction made by experts. The cooperation as part of Interreg projects is still perceived as very useful for the own network and different aspects of information and communication are regarded as rather positive. However, there is a widespread perception that in general the situation of cross-border cooperation in the education sector is not much better than before the programme period. Another rather concerning result is also that experts have some doubts that some partners will participate in the future in Interreg projects because of the administrative burden. More than in the transport sector, the partners in the education sector point out that the extra efforts on administrative tasks are to some extent jeopardising the focus on real work under the Interreg projects.

It is interesting that the project objectives of EMR Lingua already put some of the deficiencies in the sector on the agenda. It also aims to develop a more stable situation with respect to the cooperation of schools in the field of languages

without Interreg funding. Unlike the other projects in the field of education, the establishment of a sustainable structure is explicitly one of the main objectives of the project.

2.3 INNOVATION IN THE ENERGY TRANSITION AND CLIMATE POLICY SECTOR

Interviews were conducted in December 2021 and the beginning of 2022 with experts from the sector of the energy transition and climate policy-related innovation projects. Most of the experts had a great deal of experience with Interreg projects. The workshop was organised on 7 March 2022 with in total 10 participants (Crossquality team and seven experts). Some of the questions or the grouping of questions were changed slightly based on experience from the two first rounds of expert interviews and the pilot expert workshops (transport and education sector). Yet the general format was the same as in the first workshops.

2.3.1 Network structure

The innovation sector in the territory of the EGTC EMR and Interreg EMR is characterised by the following aspects. During the last decades, many Interreg projects were established that dealt with innovation in different sectors with the participation of universities, industry and SMEs. However, unlike in the transport sector one cannot detect a certain major cross-border network. Due to the very different topics, research fields and stakeholders, temporary networks have been established in the course of an Interreg project around a certain topic. The linkages between these networks can be described as weak.

There is a special standing cross-border working group called "Economy and Innovation" outside Interreg under the umbrella of the EGTC EMR. However, the experts did not mention this group as an overarching body bringing together experts dealing with innovation in a sustainable way. Hence, the network structure can be described as heterogenic, temporary and small scale. In the 2014-2020 Interreg EMR, 16 projects are grouped under the heading "Innovation". There are six projects related to the energy transition and climate policy innovation. In order to focus on a group of experts where a certain network structure could be expected, the decision was made to concentrate on innovation in the field of energy and climate. In this case, 6 projects could be detected under the Interreg EMR programme. For the expert interviews, contacts were made with experts linked to these projects and topics. Expert interviews were conducted mostly with experts who had been involved in several Interreg projects. Only one expert participated for the first time in an Interreg project. Experts also had experience with cross-border projects outside Interreg and with other Interreg programmes (Germany-Netherlands).

Table 8: Projects in the field of innovation

<p>Research & innovation (cooperation of companies and universities)</p>	<p>EURLIPIDS EURadiomics Food Screening EMR Generate Your Muscle (GYM) EMR Digital Twin Academy ET2SMEs E-TEST - Einstein Telescope</p>	<p>AACoMa HypeRegio EarlyTech IMPACT HypeRegio BusyBee Crossquality Blockchain4Prosumers</p>
<p>Innovation related to the Energy transition & Climate policy</p>	<p>Light Vehicle 2025 ROLLING SOLAR Wanderful Stream LIVES IN FLOW From Waste 2 Profit</p>	

2.3.2 Findings with respect to the Energy transition and Climate policy sector

Expert interviews

The general picture is very positive. Experts pointed out that with new Interreg project contacts can be intensified with new partners. According to experts, some of the project partner networks from previous projects were still active and useful outside Interreg. Other experts stated that Interreg gave them the opportunity to get to know new organisations. Representatives from universities/schools of applied science pointed out that the contacts with counterparts from other universities in particular were stable. It was said that this was not the case with the contacts with other institutions such as public sector bodies or SMEs across the border. Only one expert pointed out that contacts and the partner network had disappeared at the end of the project period.

Expert workshop

The general positive statements were confirmed by the written comments made during the expert workshop. There was only one expert who did not see an improvement with respect to contacts due to Covid. In the debate, it was again confirmed that network building would be rather limited to colleagues or experts in the same field and working for similar institutions. The contacts between experts from schools of applied sciences were mentioned. Interreg would in particular strengthen relations between similar institutions.

Screenshot 14: Energy transition and Climate policy

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

More cross-border contacts but only in the same field of work.

Yes it is the opportunity to get a lot of new contacts

No, but this might be because of COVID and the lack of conferences e.g.

The cooperation made me more aware of the possibilities beyond the border

Findings with respect to the understanding of the quality of cross-border cooperation

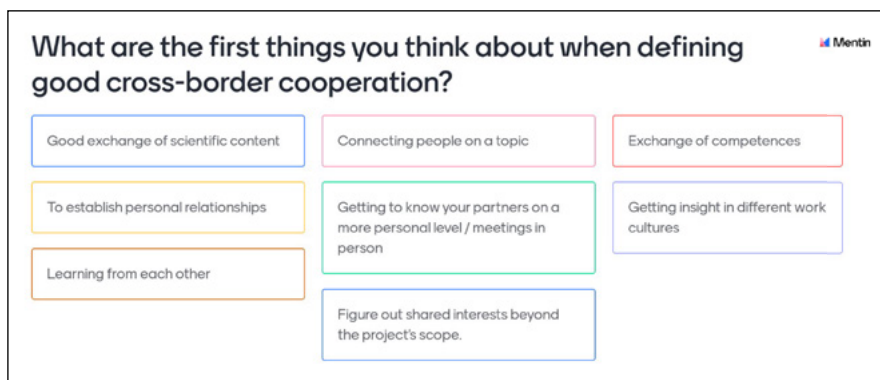
Expert interviews

Individual experts mentioned key words such as “having common targets”, “exchange information”, “learning from each other”, “create mutual benefits” and “achieving synergy effects”. Benefits should be there for every project partner and shared equally amongst the partners. Cooperation would only be possible when network partners have good and stable contacts. Experts also stressed personal relations and the need to do something for others. As a precondition experts mentioned the need for regular meetings to stimulate information exchange. One expert put it this way: you can speak about good quality of cooperation if something can be achieved that is not possible without the cross-border cooperation.

Expert workshop

The question related to the understanding of the quality of cooperation was also discussed by the participants in the expert workshop. The written statements are very similar to the statements made in individual expert interviews. Exchange of competences and mutual learning were again mentioned as important elements. A new aspect was “good exchange of scientific content” that thus far had not been mentioned during the expert interviews. This certainly also has to do with the fact that mainly experts from scientific institutions had time to join the workshop. There was for instance no participant from an SME. The expert interviews and expert workshop gave the impression that the projects and cross-border networks are driven by academics in particular.

Screenshot 15: Energy transition and Climate policy workshop



Findings related to the quality of information and communication

Expert interviews on Information exchange

Covid was mentioned by some of the experts as a hindrance to proper information exchange. It was said that academics were used to online tools but nevertheless personal exchange was missing. Experts referred to their own diverse experiences with projects with very different information flows. In general, the information exchange linked to the specific Interreg projects was described as good. Some projects use a certain platform for information exchanges. Other projects work with almost weekly meetings. One expert mentioned that especially in the first phase of a project a sound information flow was crucial to get to know each other and join forces. One expert referred to a very special problem due to company secrets where information could not be shared as expected. Another expert pointed out that a good information flow would depend on sound project management. Several experts stated that bilateral information exchange would be more effective and a crucial element in a cross-border situation. This related to the question of good relations between individuals.

Communication

Again, cross-border communication in the framework of Interreg projects was in general described as good. Some experts again mentioned the difficulties due to the Covid crisis. One expert had the impression that too many meetings were held and not all the communication was useful. Another expert pointed out that more meetings would have been helpful. Some experts also referred to the role of the lead partner with respect to the quality of communication between partners and the lead partner. Communication problems were described but these were not dependent on institutions but on individuals. Several experts pointed out that the communication was good with colleagues with the same institutional background. But as in the case of information exchange, bilateral communication was mentioned by experts a key factor.

Coping with different languages

Experts in the field of Energy transition and Climate policy stated that the question of different languages did not have a negative impact on their cooperation. Especially experts from universities/schools of applied sciences had no problem with communicating in English. Partners from the Netherlands are also often willing to speak German. Partners from both Limburg regions can of course speak Dutch if they work bilaterally on a certain project package. The network partners from the Walloon region would also speak English. In this sector, it would help that the technical and scientific language would be English. In the field of innovation related to the energy transition and climate policy, SMEs were partners or SMEs were the target group for certain activities. In this respect, the language question could be challenging. Activities with SMEs as a target group would be normally done in the respective language of the partner region which creates extra challenges with respect to the joint preparation.

Coping with cultural differences

In general, experts pointed out that cultural differences enriched the cooperation and did not hinder the quality of cooperation as such. Experts mentioned a different “working culture” in Germany and the Netherlands. Other experts just pointed out that these ideas were often only “clichés” that belonged more to history. Some experts concluded that because of still existing differences, the knowledge of these differences would still be important, therefore good relations and a sound information flow would be an asset. Other experts mentioned cultural differences in different institutions. It would be easier to work together with a partner with a similar institutional background (e.g. school of applied science) than

with an SME or public sector organisation. In this respect, the national or language background would be not as important as the institutional background.

Findings on the development of the quality of cross-border cooperation over time

More experts stated that without Interreg funding no joint cross-border projects would be implemented. Thus, neither the 2014-2020 Interreg programme nor previous Interreg programmes stimulated cooperation between partners in the energy transition and climate policy innovation sector, with stable structures and financial options beyond Interreg. Experts stated that there were almost no alternative funding resources for this type of cross-border projects. And the institutions involved were not in a position to finance joint projects with their own resources. They were also not in a position to finance a sort of Euregional coordination if there is no Interreg project. That’s why Interreg funding was still the dominant factor for cross-border projects. In this field of innovation, subsidies were necessary to stimulate cooperation. One expert argued that small-scale cooperation with one single partner could be possible but not multilaterally, as in the case of Interreg projects. The attractiveness of Interreg funding was to some extent the low threshold. One expert argued that national or European funds were today very difficult to get. The chances when applying for an Interreg project were much higher than in national or European calls (e.g. Horizon). Experts also mentioned an improvement with respect to potential project partners. Because of previous Interreg projects, some partners had found each other and discovered that there is a good match of interests and cooperation styles. This was

a very positive development and decisive for effective application in the future.

Findings related to the impact of the administrative burden of Interreg project management

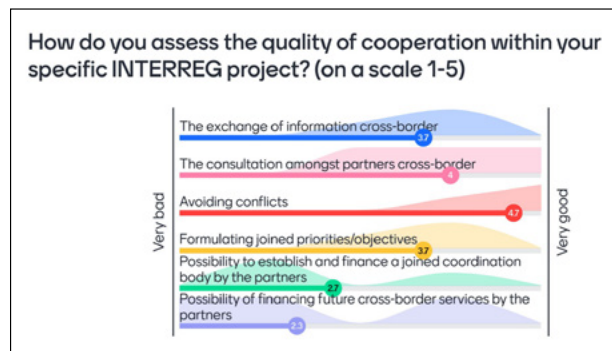
One expert referred to a partner organisation that will no longer participate in Interreg projects because of the administrative burden. This notion – as already seen in previous sectors – is concerning. It indicates that Interreg as such can also hinder cross-border cooperation for certain institutions. Most of the experts agreed that the administrative burden was out of proportion. Only one expert mentioned that they had found a routine dealing with the eMS system. Others mentioned that it takes too long to get used to it. Other experts complained about a lack of user-friendliness. Some experts mentioned the problem of late payment. It was said that this can be compensated by public sector bodies but would certainly be a problem for SMEs and other private sector partners. Some experts mentioned the problem of lower co-financing in some regions that would also be a problem. Individual experts also doubted the indicator system with respect to certain deliverables. The idea of one expert was to describe qualitative objectives that go beyond the idea of achieving a certain amount with respect to activities. One expert stated that it could be better to have an external project manager who only deals with the administrative side of a project. That would be better since a partner organisation in the project also has own interests.

Expert workshop

Most of the expert participating in the expert workshop had multiple experiences with Interreg projects. Some also had experiences other international projects outside Interreg. The participants in the workshop were asked to think about their assessment of different aspects of cross-border cooperation first in the framework of the Interreg project where they were involved. Learning from the experience with the previous two workshops, the following questions were formulated in a slightly different way. First to make it easier for the participants to understand the meaning of the question, and secondly, to better streamline it with the underlying idea of the “coordination scale” (see research report).

Findings on different aspects of cooperation

Screenshot 16: Energy transition and Climate policy workshop



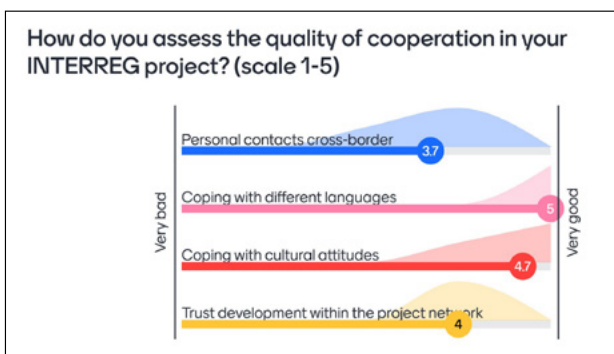
The most striking result is that the experts experienced a cross-border cooperation style where conflicts could be effectively avoided. It seems obvious that the very positive assessment of joint consultation is also ranked very high. It is interesting that the aspect of consultation is higher ranked than the exchange of information. The following assessments were not that positive. Whereas the formulation of joint

priorities is still regarded as positive, the experts see no positive development related to the changes to establish a joint coordination body outside Interreg funding. And even less positive: the experts do not really see an improvement with respect to the chances of common cross-border services that are funded by the partners and not by external Interreg funds.

Findings on soft aspects with respect to personal contacts, languages, culture and trust

In the third expert workshop, next to the questions on different aspects of cooperation, a list of dedicated question in relation to aspects like personal contacts, languages, culture and trust were included for the first time. That was done because these aspects were very often mentioned in the individual interviews. The Crossquality team made the decision to change slightly the format of the questions during the workshop in order to be more consistent to improve the understanding for the participants. With the ranking below, questions already raised in the individual interviews can be better assessed as part of the workshop by a group of experts.

Screenshot 17: Energy transition and Climate policy workshop



The assessments of the expert workshop are surprisingly positive. For experts present in the workshop, the different languages do not at all form an obstacle to cross-border cooperation in the framework of the specific Interreg project. They also describe the possibility to cope with cultural differences as very good. Even the aspect trust and personal contacts are weighted rather high. Following the judgements of the experts, the quality of cooperation within Interreg projects in the field of Energy transition and Climate policy is seen as very positive in relation to this four aspects.

Findings with respect to the general development in the sector energy transition and climate policy

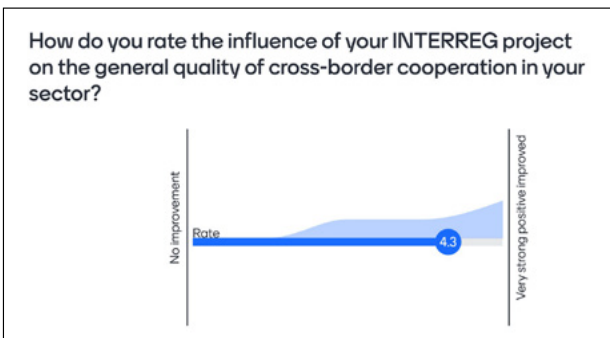
Due to the feed-back of previous workshops, the question related to the general development of cross-border cooperation in the sector was also reformulated to make it easier for the participants. The first question referred to the general development of cross-border cooperation in the sector (also outside Interreg) without going into the details of cooperation as in the previous workshops. The question is how positive experts assess the overall development of cross-border cooperation in their sector in the course of the last 2014-2020 programme period. The second question was about the assessment of the influence of Interreg on the overall quality of cross-border cooperation. The number below is the average of the voting of the workshop participants.

Screenshot 18: Energy transition and Climate policy workshop



The assessment of the development is rather positive. The participants in the workshop saw a strong improvement of the cooperation during the last programme period.

Screenshot 19: Energy transition and Climate policy workshop



It is not surprising that the role of the individual Interreg projects is seen as strong with respect to the quality of cooperation. According to the average score, Interreg has improved the situation in the sector. This is not surprising, since both the expert interviews and the debate during the workshop made clear that projects in the sector climate/energy projects would be not feasible without Interreg funding. One could say, there is not much cross-border cooperation outside Interreg funded projects. This can be seen as a clear indication, how important the Interreg programme is in this regard. However, the findings also show that the general idea

of Interreg to facilitate cooperation between cross-border partners that could be in a later stage financially sustainable is not realistic. As outlined, the broader understanding of the experts is that projects would be not financed without Interreg and the institutions involved are at the moment not in a position to finance sustainable cooperation structures or even joint services on their own.

Administrative burden

Finally, as in the previous workshop the question was discussed how the experts see influence of the administrative burden.

Screenshot 20: Energy transition and Climate policy workshop

What are your experiences with the administrative aspects of the INTERREG programme, like payment on time, regulations, reporting, other bureaucracy?

The screenshot shows a Mentimeter poll with the following responses:

- Very easy to compare from other Interreg
- ems-System is way too tricky and not well structured.
- Ems is a great tool
- Too complex, FLC was sometimes erratic, eMS hard to manage
- Bureaucracy was a burden on our ideas.
- Reporting was strange
- Hourly rates are not a valuable tool in bigger projects.
- Automatic calculations of hourly rates by just entering the salary.

The experts in this workshop were a little more controversial concerning the administrative burden. Whereas one expert was saying that the eMS was a good tool, others described it as not well structured. An expert with bad experience from a previous Interreg project described the current eMS system as better than in the past. Some experts confirmed many comments from the expert interviews with respect to difficulties related to reporting, understanding the FLC scheme or details as the calculation of hourly rates. As already mentioned, in the workshop mainly participants from higher education institutions were present. These institutions are normally used to work under formal conditions

of research funds with detailed monitoring and financial reporting obligations.

Proposals for improvements?

In the course of the expert interviews and expert workshops, very often experts formulated ideas to improve project management and to reduce the administrative burden. As a result, the Crossquality team decided to dedicate a special open question to the topic. It was regarded as one instrument that could also improve the quality of cooperation. And the idea was also to provide ideas for the programme secretariat with respect to the programme period 2021-2027.

Screenshot 21: Energy transition and Climate policy workshop

What could be improved with respect to cooperation?

The screenshot shows a Mentimeter poll with the following proposals:

- Lump sums
- Hand book and FAQ
- More consultancy from FLC
- Automatic calculation of hourly rates (etc.) by just entering the salary.
- Shorter cycles for payment
- reduction of redundant input boxes
- more "information" "help" boxes at every entry box

Summary for the sector Energy transition and Climate policy

The overall assessment of the quality of cooperation is positive, even if the very positive assessment in the course of the expert workshop goes far beyond the reflections stemming from the individual expert interviews. Other than in the case of transport and education, the experts were dealing with different Interreg projects and were referring to different experiences with respect to project management etc. Hence, the diverse experiences are certainly linked to the very different qualities of individual Interreg projects. One important notion from projects related to innovation was that the academic partners apparently have no problem to find each other and to also come to a common understanding of cross-border cooperation. Cultural or language problems were portrayed as not a big problem for cooperation. Another relevant factor are

administrative aspects. Since the share of academic institutions in this sector is bigger, more experience exists with project management and administrative aspects, for instance with Horizon 2020/Europe. Experts expressed the impression that the question of diverging institutional cultures was much more decisive for problems related to cooperation, meaning that institutions with the same background and institutional setting (like universities) could easier work together no matter whether this is cross-borders. International projects are very familiar to academics, whereas cooperation with other institutions (SMEs, public sector organisations) could be more difficult, even with the same region/Member State. This could mean that Interreg cooperation is phased with very different challenges in the field of innovation than in the field of education or transport. To improve cross-border cooperation in a sustainable way, the focus could be on certain measures improving the possibility to better integrate stakeholders as SMEs into the projects.

2.4 LABOUR MARKET, INFORMATION, BUSINESS NETWORKS

Interviews were conducted in the beginning of 2022 with experts from the sector labour market/information and business networks (in the following "labour market/Business). Most of the experts were very familiar with Interreg projects. Some participated in different projects including youRegion, DigitSME and Earlytech. The joint workshop was organised on 20 May 2022 with in total 14 participants (Crossquality team and nine experts).

The questions or the grouping of questions were not changed compared to the previous workshop in the field of Energy transition and climate policy innovation since the experiences with previous workshops were positive.

Table 5: projects in the field of Labour Market/business

Labour market & businesses - 6 PROJECTS	EMR Start-Up youRegion Innovation2Market	DigitSME QRM 4.0 See-V-Lab
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2.4.1 Network structure

There are rather stable networks of stakeholders that established in the framework of Interreg projects for many years with respect to the support of businesses. Part of the networks are for instance the chamber of commerce (like the IHK Aachen) or similar organisations in the partner region. In addition, provincial or regional development agencies were part of networks like the Belgian POM (Province of Limburg, BE) or the Dutch Liof (Province of Limburg, NL) or the German AGIT (City of Aachen StädteRegion Aachen) or the Basses Meuse développement (Walloon cities) and the Wirtschaftsförderungsgesellschaft Ostbelgiens. These institutions regularly joined forces with universities in the cross-border territory, or specialised agencies linked to a certain topic. In the field of the labour market, new players have appeared and form a rather new network (connected to the project youRegion) bringing together organisations that are dealing with cross-border information (Grenzinfopunkte, cross-border information points). These are hosted by municipalities (Aachen, Kerkrade, Maastricht) with organisations providing information for expats and newcomers (for instance Expat Center Maastricht Region). Relatively new is the involvement of stakeholders in the field of cross-border employment services (Arbeitsamt DG, Podium 24 Maastricht). The experts interviewed in individual

expert interviews and part of the expert workshop came from a rather diverse background. Some of the experts from the field of business development are dealing with cross-border Interreg projects for the last 20 years whereas some experts from the field of labour market and information just started with the Interreg project youRegion. This not surprising since in the field of cross-border information centres/points and cross-border employment services, cooperation of rather new organisations was only recently established.

2.4.2 Findings from the sector Labour market/business development

Findings related to the strengthening of cross-border contacts

Expert interviews

Some experts responded rather positive and confirmed that they found new contacts due to their participation in Interreg. However, one expert also noted that the contacts did often not last after the end of certain projects. Experts who have been involved in several projects in the course of the last programme period confirmed that Interreg projects contribute to the network capacity building. Many new projects were based on the contacts established in previous projects.

Expert workshop

The general positive statements were confirmed by the written comments made during the expert workshop. Only one expert expressed the view that he made hardly new contacts. A second expert stated that the increase of contacts was limited. The others confirmed that Interreg has

strengthened their contacts across the border. One mentioned that the options to contact partners across the border had increased, another stressed the fact the he made more contacts in a certain border region.

Screenshot 22: Labour market/ Business workshop

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

Absolutely	Yes	Yes, definitely
Yes, of course	Yes, especially in the Belgian part of the Euregio.	More options to chose partner
Yes, but just in a limited /small volume !	Hardly, just in a limited way, poor result	Value of contact depending often on experience Level

Findings with respect to the understanding of the quality of cross-border cooperation.

Expert interviews

Individual experts mentioned key aspects as information flow, regular exchange, regular meetings, the possibility to engage with each other and working together. One expert mentioned that it took a long time to get used to the way of cooperation. There was a certain misbalance between long preparation and little implementation of joint activities.

Expert workshop

The question related to the understanding of the quality of cooperation was also discussed by the participants in the Labour market expert workshop.

Screenshot 23: Labour market/Business Development



Different from the other sectors, many participants mentioned the aspect of common goals as a crucial element of good cross-border cooperation. Linked to common goals was also the aspect of “trust” that was mentioned by an expert. Long-standing and long-lasting networks

were seen by two experts as an important element of good cooperation.

The participants made more statements on the topic than in the previous workshops. This is shown in the following screenshot.

Screenshot 24: Labour market/Information/Business workshop



For the first time, the aspect of “responsibility” was mentioned and another expert emphasised the aspect of co-organisation as another win-win. One expert summarised the most important elements of good cooperation: trust, good atmosphere and delivering results.

Different from other sectors, the expert of the sector labour market/business development emphasised the question of common goals and joint responsibility as important element of good cross-border cooperation.

Findings related to the quality of information and communication

Expert interviews on Information exchange

In general, the experts responded positively with respect to the quality of information exchange. Experts mentioned that frequent personnel changes at a certain partner organisation made the information flow difficult. As in the case of the other sectors, Covid was mentioned as having a strong influence on the information flow. The assumption was that the information exchange would have been much better with more personal meetings. One expert made the distinction between the information flow at the project level in general, and the specific information exchange in a certain work package. It was much more difficult to cope with the development in the entire project.

Communication

In accordance with the assessment of the information flow, most of the experts assessed the quality of communication as good, but often mentioning Covid as a general obstacle. The underlying assumption was that communication would have been much better with more physical meetings. Two experts mentioned that the quality of communication was very different depending on a certain partner. One expert mentioned that positive impact of structured meetings for the general quality of communication. It was also outlined that communication could be limited to the partners in the same work package if the number of work packages were high.

Coping with different languages

The general picture on how to cope with different languages was more negatively assessed by the experts in the field of labour market/business development than in the previous sectors public transport, education and energy transition and climate policy innovation. A few experts pointed out that languages were sometimes a problem. This was for instance experienced in bigger meetings with many project stakeholders. Experts also referred to the use of the English language that was not always for all partners a good solution. Other experts stated that the language question was very much dependent on the composition of a specific work package. It would be difficult to assess the problem for an entire project. As in other policy sectors, it was mentioned that some language problems occurred with respect to colleagues from the Walloon region. Simultaneous translation was not seen as a good solution since it was too expensive.

Coping with cultural differences

In accordance to the statements in other policy sectors, the experts did not detect a major problem for the cooperation as a result of cultural differences. Experts mentioned that there were some differences in the working style (in BE more formal, NL more casual), but no major cultural clashes were reported. One expert referred to the so-called "welcome culture" (relevant in the field of expat information and coaching), that was more developed in the Netherlands than in Germany. One expert pointed out that in the beginning a specific Interreg project, there was not much knowledge about the working culture and processes at the other side of the border. This would also be an added-value of Interreg collaboration.

Findings on the development of the quality of cross-border cooperation over time?

Experts expressed in general a positive view on the development of the cooperation within the last couple of years. They referred to new contacts and obvious success stories as in the case of the establishment and structural stabilisation of cross-border information points. Especially in this field, where cooperation has been established only in recent years, the network is seen as a clear added-value. However, there were also experts pointing out that it was sometimes difficult to keep networks alive especially in-between Interreg projects. Experts also complained about a sometimes rather “passive” approach by some partners. A few experts regret that the cooperation is not more institutionalised but very dependent on single Interreg projects. Institutionalisation would be very important for the cooperation across the border in the future.

Findings related to the impact of the administrative burden of Interreg project management

As in previous sectors, one expert pointed out his institution would perhaps not participate in another Interreg project because of the administrative burden. The expert also mentioned that there was a lack of trust with regards to the Interreg organisation. Experts also repeated (what was said in other sectors) that especially for companies the participation in an Interreg project was very difficult due to the administration. One expert said that the project size (e.g. number of partners) was also relevant with respect to the workload. This had to do with the necessity of more meetings in bigger projects. One expert especially mentioned that the financing

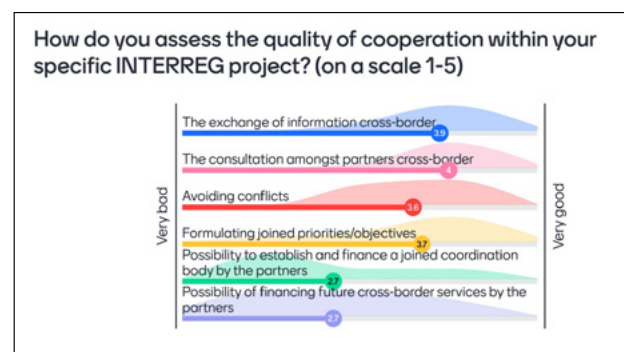
rules were not appropriate with respect to the internal procedures of municipalities. It was also mentioned that the whole application process would cost too much time. The investment in time was huge, long before the project started. Experts also pointed out that the eMS could be more user-friendly, and that the regulation with respect to communication requirements (posters, etc.) were too detailed.

Expert workshop

As already mentioned, the participants in the workshop had a mixed background and included both experts dealing for many years with different projects in the field of business development and experts in the labour market and information services with rather recent experiences (only one or two projects). As in the previous workshop, the experts were asked to think about their assessment of different aspects of cross-border cooperation first in the framework of the Interreg project where they were involved. The formulation of the question was kept as in the previous workshop since the feed-back from the participants was rather positive with respect to understanding and order.

Findings on different aspects of cooperation

Screenshot 25: Labour market/Information/ Business workshop

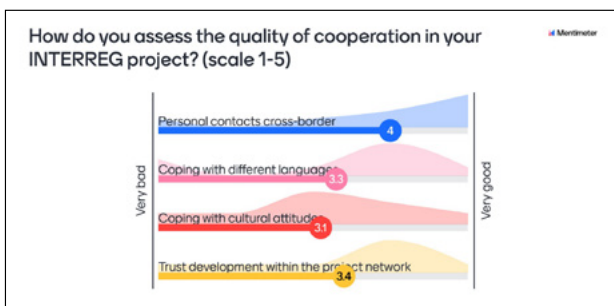


The results differ to some extent significantly from the previous workshop. Information and consultation is ranked high and regarded as positive. The assessment of the capability to avoid conflicts in the course of cross-border cooperation was less positive. It was also interesting to see the rather high ranking of the possibility to formulate joint priorities, but the much lower possibility to establish and finance a joint coordination body by the partners without Interreg funding. This means that, as in the case of the Energy transition and Climate policy innovation sector, the experts do not expect that their organisations would be ready to finance specific cross-border activities with their own money.

Findings on soft aspects with respect to personal contacts, languages, culture and trust

In this fourth expert workshop, next to the questions on different aspects of cooperation, again a list of dedicated question in relation to aspects like personal contacts, languages, culture and trust was included.

Screenshot 26: Labour market/Information/Business workshop



The assessment of the experts was a little less positive than in the previous workshops. Very different than in the Energy transition and Climate policy workshop, the possibility to cope with different languages and cultural differences is seen as less positive. These aspects score much lower than the question about personal contacts that are seen as more positive as an effect of Interreg.

Findings with respect to the general development in the sector labour market/business development

As in the previous workshops, on the general development of cross-border cooperation in the sector single questions were formulated to make it easier for the participants in the workshop. The first question referred to the general development of cross-border cooperation in the sector (also outside Interreg) without going into the details of cooperation as in the previous workshops. The question was how the experts assess the overall development of cross-border cooperation in their sector in the course of the last 2014-2020 programme period.

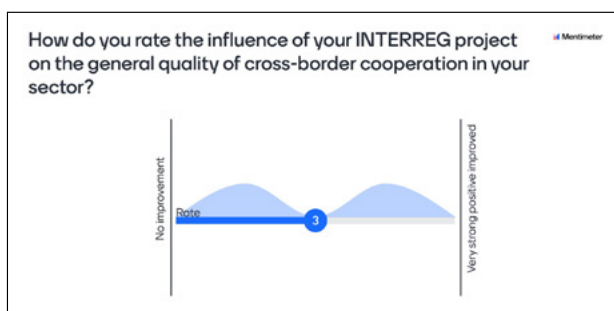
The second question refers to the influence of Interreg on the overall quality of cross-border cooperation. The number below is the average of the voting of the workshop participants.

Screenshot 27: Labour market/Business Development



The assessment of the development is more modest and less positive than in the sector Energy transition and Climate policy. The participants in the workshop doubt that there is a strong improvement of the cooperation during the last programme period. This corresponds to the mixed statements on the quality of cooperation with respect to different aspects. It could also be linked to the multiple experiences of some of the workshop participants who have seen many Interreg projects and apparently only modest improvements of the overall quality of cross-border cooperation.

Screenshot 28: Labour market/Information/ Business workshop



It is surprising that the role of the individual Interreg projects is seen as much weaker than in the previous workshop (4.3). According to this average score, Interreg has modestly improved the situation in the sector. Also here, the assumption is that experts with long-standing experience assess the influence of Interreg projects in a rather realistic way, since they have not seen major structural improvement of cross-border cooperation during the last couple of years or even decades. One expert with experience with many Interreg projects pointed out that there was structural problem behind the modest improvements. There was the idea of inventing new topics in the field of cross-border cooperation. However, the project period of around three years would be not long

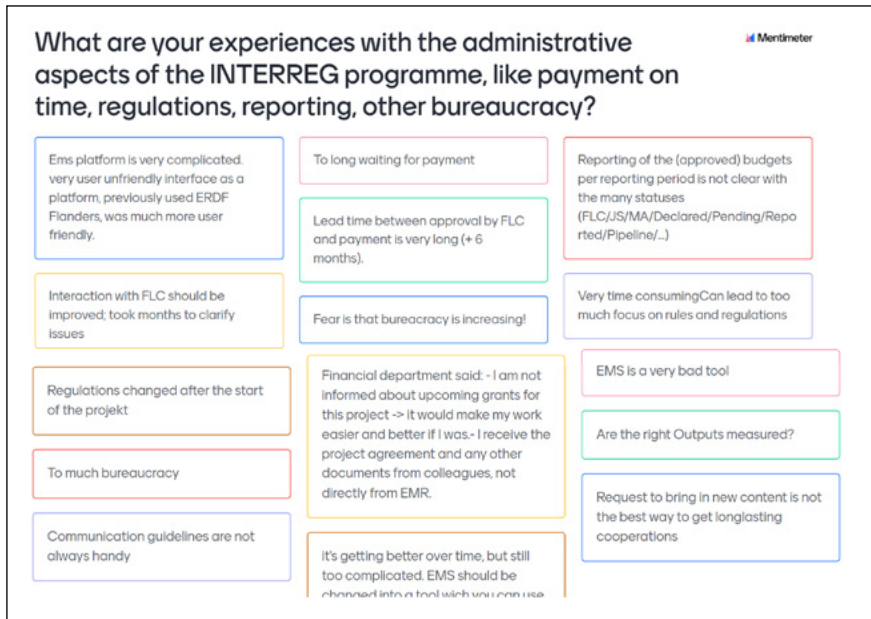
enough to develop sustainable structures. On the other hand, it was due to the current rules not possible to invest in the most needed forms of cooperation for a longer time period. Hence, this was a structural problem in the sector, that partners could not finance the basis joint services in a sustainable way and establish them for a longer period of time. Indeed, this also points on an important difference compared to the innovation sector. Here the emphasis is more focused on the production of a concrete result or product compared to more vague and long-term goals in the labour market sector.

It could also be assumed that experts who recently dealt only with one or two projects in the field of the labour market are to some extent disappointed with respect to the effectiveness of huge cross-border projects. A prolongation of the same project with the same focus could be more interesting than the option for the partners to switch to another focus because of need to be innovative.

Administrative burden

Finally, as in the previous workshop, the question was discussed how the experts see the influence of the administrative burden.

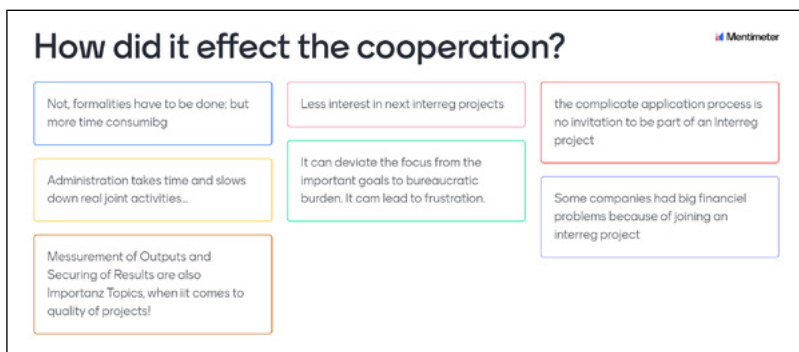
Screenshot 29: Labour market/Information/Business workshop



The collection of statements on the administrative burden from this workshop has been the most comprehensive. It also shows the comments of experts who had experience with

many years of Interreg projects. One expert again mentioned that his own financial administration has warned him to enter again into an Interreg project because of the administrative burden.

Screenshot 30: Labour market/Information/Business workshop



This last screenshot from the workshop exercise shows the statements of experts related to the impact of administrative burden on the future quality of cross-border cooperation. First of all, it confirms the concern that some stakeholders will no longer participate in Interreg projects. This is not so much the case for public sector bodies

but with respect to private sector stakeholders. Again the question of long-lasting applications was raised. This aspect was to some extent not such a big problem for public sector bodies, but for smaller players who have to make a precise plan with respect to their costs.

Summary for the sector Labour market/ Business Development

The general assessment of the quality of cross-border cooperation in the sector was less positive than in other sectors. Apparently, the experts in the sector struggle with structural problems of Interreg cooperation that set certain limits to a higher level of cooperation. The most striking result was the open debate during the workshop on a fundamental problem detected: the understanding that the funding of projects was on the one hand too short in order to set up stable cross-border structures. This leads to the described “Stop-and-go” situation where one project comes to an end without the possibility to further develop the achievements. It was discussed in the workshop why not having funding periods that last for the whole programme period in order to avoid “stop and

go”. It would also correspond to the efforts partners have to invest in the application and the long-lasting process. Next to the extension of timeframes, experts also discussed the aspect of “innovation”. There was the understanding that it could be more helpful to invest in solid structural cross-border cooperation in order to make sure that the basic requirements are there. This could be better than implementing smaller projects that would not have a sustainable effect after the programme period. As already mentioned, experts dealing with companies pointed out that a more structural and less temporary approach would be in particular interesting for companies. At the moment, they would have not much interest in short-term cross-border projects.

2.5 HEALTH (AND EMERGENCY SERVICES)

Interviews were conducted during spring and summer of 2022 with experts from the sector health. Most of the experts were very familiar with Interreg projects. Some participated in different projects including Pandemic, euPrevent projects, Poly-Valve, Oncocare.

The joint workshop was organised on 2 September 2022 with in total 11 participants (Crossquality team and eight experts). The questions or the grouping of questions were not changed since the experiences with previous workshop were positive.

Table 9: Projects in the field of health (and emergency services)

<p>Health & well-being (part of EMRIC issues/ EUprevent) - 15 PROJECTS</p>	<p>i2-CoRT Poly-Valve SafePAT Oncocare wearIT4Health wearIT4Covid CoDaP Healthy Aging</p>	<p>euPrevent COVID EUPrevent Social Norms Approach EUPrevent Senior Friendly Communities MOBI euPrevent PROFILE CORESIL EMRaDi Pandemic</p>
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2.5.1 Network structure

There is a rather diverse picture in the health sector with respect to existent networks. On the one hand, there are networks grouped around Pandemic and euPrevent. These are two Euregional coordination bodies that are coordinating cross-border cooperation for many years. They started as Interreg projects and succeeded in setting up permanent coordination structures independent from Interreg funding. Both organisations coordinate Interreg projects for many years as project leaders. The coordination bodies are financed by their own stakeholders. Pandemic for instance brings together stakeholders from the field of emergency services, fire brigades, ambulance services from the entire territory of the EGTC EMR. EuPrevent is dealing with projects in the field of preventive healthcare and is coordinating Interreg projects for many years as a lead partner. However, the basic financing of the coordination secretariat does not come from Interreg funds. Both stakeholders have played a crucial role as project leader in the 2014-2020 programme.

Networks grouped around single Interreg projects such as Healthy Aging, where partners joined forces with respect to a single topic and temporary character, were different from these examples. Most of the Interreg projects from the 2014-2020 programme had a focus on innovation with a scientific focus as in the case of Healthy Aging with the participation of university hospitals and medicine technology companies. Or as in the case of Poly-Vale: a project that temporarily brought together partners that were mainly concentrated on conducting medical research regarding artificial heart valves, aiming at providing long life with tailor-made heart valve prostheses. These networks have so far no stable coordination structure that was active before the start of the Interreg project. There is also a third phenomenon in the health

sector that has to do with close relations of specific hospitals across the border. Specialists in the field of children surgery have established for many years a stable network. Surgeons do operate across the border in the partner hospitals in a structured way. So far, this was not linked to any Interreg project, however there are ambitions to apply for Interreg funding under the new programme period.

2.5.2 Findings with respect to the health (emergency services) sector

Expert interviews

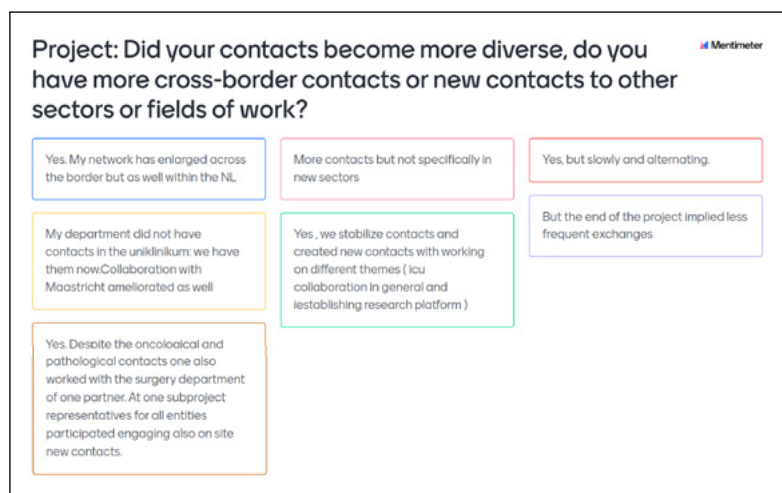
All experts confirmed that they have more and more stable contacts due to the Interreg project. One expert pointed out that the quality of contacts differ much. A general view is that via Interreg projects one is part of a broader cross-border network. One expert mentioned an interesting feature of project management: in the specific Interreg project, all the partners have to be present in all the work package meetings. This is seen as a very good instrument to increase contacts and stabilize the network since partners also meet who not share the same tasks within a work package. For the stakeholders with a stable network outside Interreg, the single projects do not have such an important influence with respect to their contacts as for stakeholders without a permanent network.

Expert workshop

The general positive statements were confirmed by the written comments made during the expert workshop and the debate. There were some additional remarks indicating network building

gets weaker at the end of the project period. And a remark indicating that Interreg projects also help to strengthen contacts in the own region or Member State.

Screenshot 31: Health/Emergency services



Findings with respect to the understanding of the quality of cross-border cooperation.

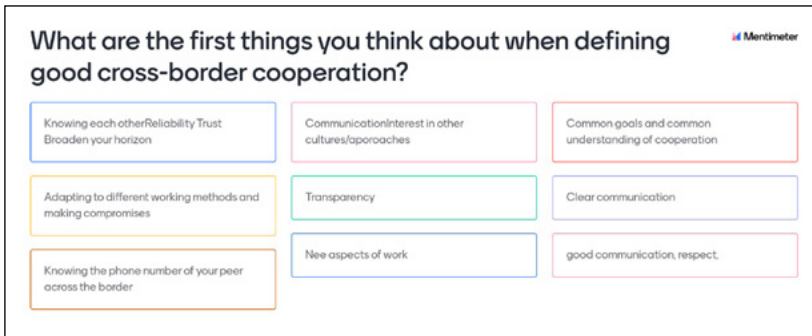
Expert interviews

Individual experts in the health sector confirmed earlier views on the quality of cooperation as mentioned in previous sectors. The main aspects mentioned were learning together, mutual benefits, trust, the right contacts and the formulation of common targets or a vision. One expert mentioned the importance of the debate on cultural differences and the interest for the neighbouring language. Another expert mentioned the need for sound financing of the cooperation.

Expert workshop

As shown in the Mentimeter slide above, the participants in the workshop in the health sector mentioned aspects as trust, understanding, respect, reliability. Secondly, they also saw the formulation of common goals as an important element and having good personal contacts across the border.

Screenshot 32: Health/Emergency services



Findings related to the quality of information and communication

Expert interviews on Information exchange

According to several experts, the Covid crisis had an important impact on the quality of information exchange in the course of Interreg projects. Some mentioned that in earlier days monthly personal meetings were much more productive in terms of information exchange than virtual meetings. Nevertheless, most of the experts pointed out that overall information exchange was good. In addition it was stated that information exchange depends very much on the quality of the project management by the lead partner. That was a statement made by several experts. One expert made the interesting comment that there was an improvement with respect to the knowledge about what other project partners do. However, this was not a real structural enhancement of the cross-border information flow in the sector.

Communication

Not surprisingly, experts also pointed out that Covid also had very negative repercussions on communication in the framework of Interreg projects. Nevertheless, most interviewees assessed communication across the border as

good. There was again the interesting aspect that one project implemented the approach that all partners were in one work package. This was described by an expert as a very good tool for supporting communication amongst all the project partners. In contrast, it would be difficult in projects with many single work packages to keep the communication effective between partners who do not share a work package. In the health sector, some experts pointed out that certain instruments of project management would also be crucial related to information and communication. Some projects work with a professional data platform that is already used for several Interreg projects, where documents, agendas and news can be shared. Other projects used ad-hoc information and communication tools that are not always ready from the beginning. It was also said that in this respect the Interreg secretariat did not provide special tools. The eMS system is not designed for project management. In this sense, every project has to find its own technical and procedural means.

Coping with different languages

The experts painted a mixed picture on how the project partners could cope with different languages as part of the cooperation. Some mentioned that due to language problems,

simultaneous translation was used but that this was not a sustainable solution because of the costs. A distinction was made between academics that participated and other experts. It was stated by several experts that communication between academics was no problem because of the use of English. One expert pointed out that it was anachronistic to translate the documents into all the three languages of the Euregion, since English would be the common denominator. An expert with many years of experience said that in former projects German would have been more important, however younger colleagues from the other regions do not speak German as well as the experts in the past. One expert repeated the problem mentioned by experts in other sectors, that especially experts from the Walloon regions would be at a language disadvantage if their English was not at a professional level. In some projects, the approach of speaking the native language is still used. Experts mentioned that this is not always easy especially if French-speaking partners are involved. Furthermore, the ability of the other partners to understand French has decreased during the last decades. Other than in the previous sector, language is seen as a potential problem for cross-border cooperation and improvement of the situation could help to increase efficiency and mutual understanding.

Coping with cultural differences

In accordance with the statements in other policy sectors, the experts did not detect a major problem with respect to cultural differences. One interesting remark from an expert was that cultural differences were sometimes used as an excuse to be more informed about the different structures and processes in the partner region. Some experts

again pointed out that the working culture was different. One expert had the impression that in his field cooperation between Flemish and Dutch institutions was closer. Another expert emphasised the match between the Dutch Limburg and Rhineland regions. As mentioned above, experts see language in particular as a major difference and potential obstacle with respect to partners in the Walloon region. One expert again stressed the fact that participation in cross-border projects would also require a certain openness and curiosity with respect to the specificities of the partner institutions.

Findings on the development of the quality of cross-border cooperation over time

Experts expressed a diverse view on the development of cooperation over the last couple of years. Experts from long-standing networks that operate also outside Interreg pointed out that they also developed more efficient project management skills that would be very positive for use of Interreg funds. The quality of project management would be better with experienced experts and organisations. In course of the last couple of years, it would also be easier to know which partners to choose for good cooperation in Interreg projects. These experts also described a clear additional role of Interreg funding for the activities of their own cross-border network. An advantage for them is that they can fall back on their stable network partners when building a consortium for Interreg projects. According to these experienced project managers, Interreg cooperation has improved, since the selection of cross-border partners is more efficient with long-standing experience with institutions across the border.

Experts dealing with temporary Interreg projects regretted that there was no clear coordinating role or structures that safeguard cross-border communication beyond Interreg projects. They also described a sort of stop-and-go approach where project cooperation cannot be used for next-level cooperation. Other experts described their network as semi-institutionalised. Network structures were in some cases less efficient because of many personal changes. For the scientist involved in Interreg projects, cross-border cooperation is only an additional activity in the framework of other international networks and projects.

Findings related to the impact of the administrative burden of Interreg project management

In this sector, experts were most critical vis-à-vis the administrative burden of Interreg projects. As in other cases, one expert stated that because of the administrative burden his organisation will no longer be an official partner of Interreg projects in the future. According to this expert, more time was probably spent on administrative tasks than on the content. Other experts in the sector also complained about the heavy bureaucracy and changing rules. The delay of the start of the project was also problematic. One expert expressed the view that especially for small- and medium-sized organisations the administrative efforts were too much. Especially for newcomers, the administrative side was a challenge. More experienced experts pointed out that it would be an advantage if project partners had already done Interreg projects in the past. They described the need for certain Interreg skills. One structural problem was mentioned by experts: the secretariat likes to see new partners

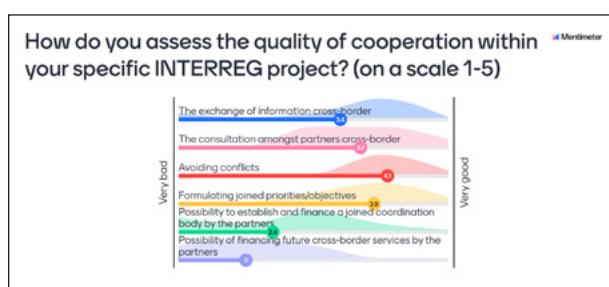
applying for Interreg projects and is therefore hesitant with respect to experienced networks that apply frequently. However, the complexity of project management is an obstacle to newcomers and would in practice mean that projects are more efficient with experienced partners. As in the case of the labour market/business sector, the general question was raised as to whether or not Interreg should allow for longer-term financial support in order to stimulate basic structures. This would mean that Interreg funding would deviate from the idea of always stimulating innovative projects.

Expert workshop

As already mentioned, the participants in the workshop were a mixed set of experts dealing for many years with different projects in the field of health and emergency services. Other experts from academic institutions had only experience with one or two projects. As in the previous workshop, the experts were asked to think about their assessment of different aspects of cross-border cooperation. First, they were asked to assess different aspects in the framework of the Interreg project in which they were involved. The formulation of the question was kept as in the previous workshops.

Findings on different aspects of cooperation

Screenshot 33: Health/Emergency services workshop



Interestingly, the experts have the impression that the Interreg cooperation established network structures where conflicts could be effectively avoided. This aspect scored the highest. It was also interesting and different from other sectors that the quality of consultation ranked higher than information. The score for formulating joint priorities was also higher than in other sectors. The two scores for the possibility of financing joint coordination structures and joint cross-border services in the future were lower than in the other sectors. The assumption here based on their comments is that the experts who dealt with temporary Interreg projects that were not embedded into an existing network structure saw that as very negative, whereas experts in a network that was already financed outside Interreg and provided cross-border services did not see options for additional non-Interreg funding.

cope with language and cultural differences is ranked much lower. It is not surprising that good personal contacts also lead to more trust within the project network.

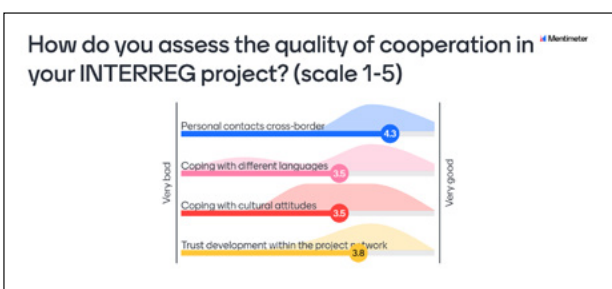
Findings with respect to the general development in the health/emergency services sector

As in the previous workshops, questions were raised about the experts' general assessment of the development of cross-border cooperation in the sector. This forced them to step back from their recent experiences under the umbrella of specific Interreg projects and think about the overall development in the sector. The question was how the experts assess the overall development of cross-border cooperation in their sector in the course of the last 2014-2020 programme period.

The second question referred to the influence of Interreg on the overall quality of cross-border cooperation. The assumption is that there were also other potential external factors that could have an influence on the quality of cooperation in the sector. The number below is the average of the voting of the workshop participants.

Findings on soft aspects with respect to personal contacts, languages, culture and trust

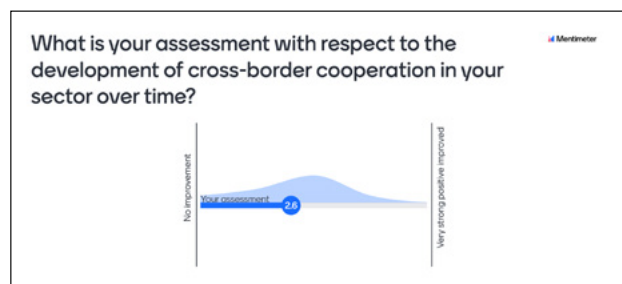
Screenshot 34: Health workshop



As in the previous workshops the experts were also asked to think about their assessment with respect to some other (soft) factors of cooperation linked to personal contacts, languages, culture and trust.

The results are very positive with respect to the development of personal contacts. The ability to

Screenshot 35: Health workshop



The assessment of the development is more modest and less positive than in the labour market/ business and energy transition and climate policy sectors. These experts also doubt that there was a strong improvement of cooperation during the last programme period. This corresponds to the mixed statements on the quality of cooperation with respect to different aspects. In this group of experts, more experts were very critical of the administrative burden and the overall efficiency of Interreg projects. However, according to the interviews there is a clear difference between experts with a functioning network outside Interreg and the rest. As already mentioned, there are two coordination bodies in the sector (EMRIC and Euprevent) where partners succeeded in establishing stable network structures with a coordination body. The more positive assessment of these experts is apparently not really reflected in this score during the workshop.

Screenshot 36: Health workshop



It is not surprising that the role of the individual Interreg projects is seen as much weaker than in the previous workshops. According to this average score, Interreg has modestly improved the situation of cross-border cooperation in the sector. Again here, the assumption is that experts with long-standing experience assess the influence of Interreg projects in a rather realistic way, since they have not seen decisive improvements in cross-border cooperation over the last couple of years triggered by Interreg.

Apparently, they are also not convinced that it was Interreg that improved their network structures in the sector but rather the financial contributions made by network partners to finance coordination structures.

Administrative burden

Finally, as in the previous workshop the question was discussed as to how the experts see the influence of the administrative burden. However, due to time restraints, the participants could not complete a Mentimeter sheet. Nevertheless the experts were eager to discuss the issue. As in previous workshops, there were many negative comments on the administrative burden related to Interreg participation. Pre-financing for instance was criticised, which could be a problem for many partners. There was the impression that the secretariat was only interested in checking boxes but not in the content. Experts referred to the experience of very long wait times for final payments. One expert described the situation where a project partner left the project because of administrative and financial problems. The administrative side means that partners internally had to earmark relevant resources for administration. It was proposed that Interreg focus on deliverables and not on administrative details. One expert also complained that the Interreg secretariat did not always stick to their own deadlines. Another expert admitted the administrative complexity but said that the Interreg secretariat was very helpful. The debate clearly showed that the experts do see a problem related to the administrative side of Interreg projects. Also in the health sector, there is the danger that potential partners in cross-border cooperation will no longer work together since they had negative experiences with the Interreg bureaucracy in the past.

Summary for the Health/Emergency Services sector

The general assessment of the quality of cross-border cooperation in the sector was even less positive than in the labour market/business development sector. Nevertheless, the sector offers interesting insight into the precondition for stable network cooperation across the border. As mentioned, Interreg projects in the past have led to the establishment of the Emric and Euprevent networks. Expert interviews showed that there is a big difference with respect to the use of Interreg funding in the sector. For organisations that are not members of long-standing networks, Interreg normally does not lead to stable network structures beyond the programme period of individual Interreg projects. Experts who are integrated as partners in the above mentioned networks see Interreg as a financial tool for their network activities. In this case, Interreg is not a means to establish or stabilise a cross-border network. Given the experiences across all of the sectors, this is only an exception to the rule that Interreg projects lead

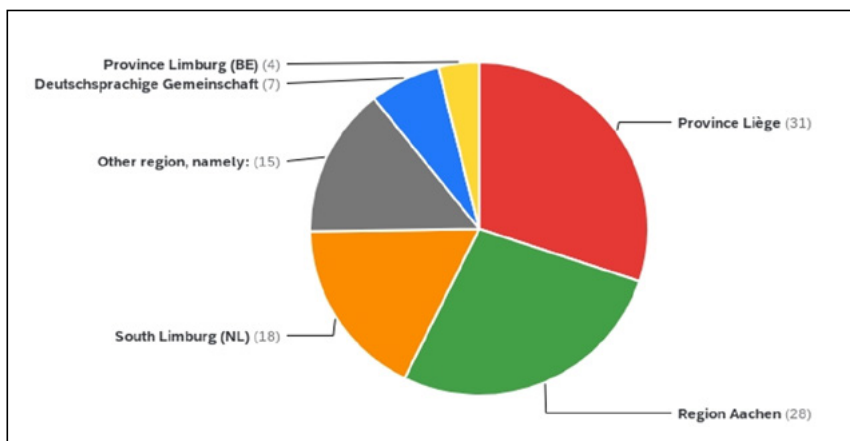
to sustainable network capacity building. However, it can be seen as a very positive precondition for efficient cross-border cooperation. Network partners with a long history of cooperation are very well equipped to apply for and execute successful Interreg projects. One reason according to the experts is that establishment of the network and improvement of relations amongst the partners are already done. This need not be an important part of the specific Interreg project. Hence, one of the main problems of newly-established consortia was also mentioned by experts in the health sector. First of all, Interreg projects do already require a certain degree of good cooperation between the partners. This is very much supported if partners have some experience with project management and coping with the administrative burden. One could argue that the partners of an existing network can concentrate more on the content than on network building and administration than a consortium without a joint network background.

3

FINDINGS FROM THE CROSS-SECTOR SURVEY

In addition to the interviews and expert interviews, an online survey was created. The survey was programmed in the online software Qualtrics, managed by the lead partner ITEM. An exported print-out of the Qualtrics-survey is included as an Annex. The survey was published in early October and was open from October to the end of November. Regarding communication, the partners in their networks, as well as the Interreg EMR secretariat via their social media channels shared the anonymous link to the survey. In addition, via the Interreg EMR regional antennas the survey link was shared among their respective networks of experts that were or are currently involved in Interreg EMR projects. This is the main target group of the survey, as it aims to cover as many as experts with the Interreg EMR programme as possible to expand the group of experts that were also addressed in the expert workshops and interviews.

Figure 1: Regional origin of respondents



In the survey, no distinction was made between sectors. It does ask the experts from which region they come, as well as their experience with Interreg EMR and/or outside Interreg EMR. In total, 107 respondents were recorded. Around 30% came from the Province of Liège, 27% from the Aachen Region, 17,5% from South Limburg (NL), 7% from the German-speaking Community and 4% from the Province of Limburg (BE). Around 14.5% was from another region, such as the Province of Namur, North Limburg (NL), Brussels, Trier, Eifel and Rhineland-Palatinate.

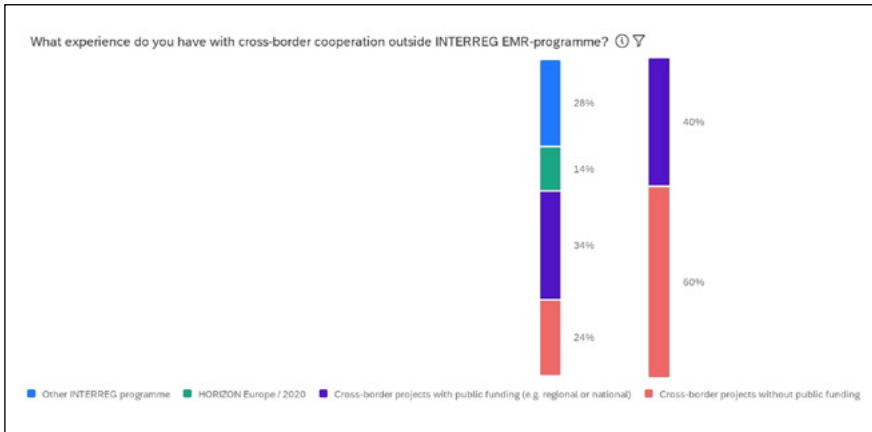
For the analysis of the open text, answers that were provided in a language other than English (e.g. German, Dutch) were translated into English. The translation allowed for (automatic) analyses of all text, without excluding answers.

Of all the experts, 70 had experience with cross-border projects within the framework of Interreg EMR. Of those experts, 19 also had experience with cross-border projects outside the framework of Interreg EMR. Ten experts had no experience with Interreg EMR, but did have experience with cross-border projects outside Interreg EMR. The ten experts without Interreg EMR experience came from the Brussels, Trier, Eifel and Aachen (2x) regions and the Province of Limburg (BE) (2x).

Regarding the experience with other cross-border projects, the following shares can be distinguished with regard to HORIZON, cross-

border projects with public (regional or national) funding, without public funding or other Interreg programmes.

Figure 2: Experience with CBC outside Interreg EMR



Here, the graph on the left is based on the experts with experience within and outside of Interreg EMR. The graph on the right shows those who only have experience outside Interreg EMR.

In the following we make a distinction between the results resulting from:

- all respondents in general;
- the respondents with only Interreg EMR experience;
- the respondents with both Interreg EMR and other cross-border experience;
- the respondents with only cross-border experience outside Interreg EMR.

For this, separate result reports were made in Qualtrics, each filtered – differently – for Question 3 (experience with cross-border projects).

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

A word cloud from all responses (N=107) shows the following highlighted words:

Figure 3: Word cloud defining CBC



When filtering on the respondents with only Interreg EMR experience (N=51), Exchange and Communication become more prominent, while filtering on experience within and outside Interreg EMR (N=19) shows the Partner as the most prominent keyword. Scrolling through all recorded responses, the Text iQ tool of Qualtrics is used to “label” and cluster answers. This is done in a comparable way as for the interviews, but then within Qualtrics instead of Excel. Based on all comments, the following labels were identified: agreement, benefit, commitment, common, communication,

contact, culture, exchange, mutual, openness, output, synergy, trust, and understanding. Here, the labels “common”, “communication” and “exchange” yielded the most hits. Regarding “exchange”, the respondents indicated that they value cultural exchange, exchange of expertise, ideas and good practices and to be in connection with project partners. The latter also connects with “communication”, where respondents indicate that the communication among partners is crucial and that this communication should be open and transparent, as well as frequent and on a personal level. Finally, “common” refers to having shared goals and aims, having common interests and principles, or, in one case, even performing the same activities for the same job, and having a common (working) language.

In conclusion, it can be argued that regarding the quality of cross-border cooperation the relations between partners is most important. To function well, characteristics of this relationship are that there be a common understanding of the objectives, that communication be open and frequent, and that cooperation yield valuable exchanges.

Resulting from the project(s), did your contacts become more diverse, do you have more cross-border contacts, or even new contacts to other sectors or fields of work?

There were 62 responses to this question. The responses were grouped and analysed using the Text iQ tool in Qualtrics. The first task was to group the responses into the simple answers “yes” or “no”. This resulted in 49 respondents indicating that their contacts did become more diverse, numerous, and/or broad. Ten indicated that this was not the case and three responses were invalid. In the “yes” category, respondents indicated strongly that their network became bigger.

Some (12) indicated that their contacts also became more diverse, to include other sectors. Only a few (2) indicated that this increased network was also stable, where information is exchanged regularly. Three indicated that the network is unfortunately unstable or is not very active. This is also an argument in the “no” category, indicating that all contacts ended at the end of the project. Most of the respondents in the “no” category, however, indicated that the project had no effect at all on their network.

Hard aspects: How do you assess the quality of cooperation in your specific Interreg project?

The following question questioned the respondents regarding the hard aspects of the quality of cross-border cooperation. The sub-items on cooperation quality are derived from the “Policy Coordination Scale” of Metcalfe (1994, in Metcalfe, 1996, p.60). The Policy Coordination Scale and its items are discussed in the Crossquality Research report and Handbook. The sub-items on cooperation quality can be scored from 1-5, where: 1 = very bad - 5 = very good. In the table, a further distinction has been made between the respondents who have been involved in Interreg EMR projects only, and the respondents who were also involved in other cross-border projects. The respondents who were never involved in an Interreg EMR project did not receive this question. This was because the question was aimed at the experience with and evaluation of the Interreg EMR programme. The table below shows the scoring for the sub-items, with the average, lowest and highest scores, the median (middle) and mode (the score that was given the most). The latter two were only calculated for the total results that still excludes the respondents who indicated to not have any experience with Interreg EMR at all.

Table 10: Hard aspects, CBC in Interreg projects

Hard aspects	Average	Min	Max	Median	Mode
Exchange of information cross-border	3.66	2.00	5.00	4.00	4.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.64	2.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	3.71	2.00	5.00		
Consultation amongst partners cross-border	3.51	2.00	5.00	4.00	4.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.48	2.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	3.59	3.00	5.00		
Avoiding and solving conflicts arising within your network	3.25	1.00	5.00	3.00	3.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.23	1.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	3.29	1.00	5.00		
Formulating joint priorities/objectives	3.48	1.00	5.00	4.00	4.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.45	2.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	3.53	1.00	5.00		
Possibility to establish and finance a joint coordination body by the partners	3.03	1.00	5.00	3.00	3.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.09	1.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.88	1.00	4.00		
Possibility of financing future cross-border services by the partners	2.90	1.00	5.00	3.00	3.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	2.95	1.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.76	1.00	5.00		

In the comparison between the numbers of “Interreg EMR only”, “Within and outside Interreg EMR” and the results in general, we should be cautious given the different number of respondents. Here, the first yields 44, the second 17 and 61 in total. Yet, a downward trend can be seen as the Policy Coordination Scale progresses. Indeed, where on average the exchange of information across borders is indicated as more or less good, and in most cases as good, the possibility of financing future cross-border services by the partners is neutral and thus not much affected during the Interreg project.

Soft aspects: How do you assess the quality of cooperation in your specific Interreg project?

Again, $N_{total} = 61$,

$N=44$ for Interreg EMR only and $N = 17$ for both within and outside Interreg EMR.

Again with a scale from 1-5, where:

1 = very bad - 5 = very good

This question addresses the soft aspects that can affect cross-border cooperation in projects. Again the average, minimum and maximum, as well as median and mode for the overall results are provided in the following table.

Table 11: Soft aspects, CBC in Interreg project

Soft aspects	Average	Min	Max	Median	Mode
Development of qualitative contacts within the project network	3.97	2.00	5.00	4.00	4.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.91	2.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	4.12	3.00	5.00		
Coping with different languages	3.62	1.00	5.00	4.00	4.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.61	1.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	3.65	2.00	5.00		
Coping with cultural attitudes	3.69	2.00	5.00	4.00	4.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.70	2.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	3.65	2.00	5.00		
Development of trust within the project network	3.69	1.00	5.00	4.00	4.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.77	2.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	3.47	1.00	5.00		

All aspects are ranked as more or less good to good. In general, the cooperation between partners appeared not to be hindered by soft aspects, but rather improved for several aspects.

2 = minor improvement - 3 = positive improvement - 4 = strong positive improvement - 5 = very strong positive improvement

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)?

Score from 1-5, where: 1 = no improvement -

This question was open for all respondents, as it is aimed at obtaining a general overview of the development of the quality of sectoral cooperation over time. Here, N Interreg EMR only = 39, N outside Interreg EMR = 4, N within and outside = 17 (total N=60).

Table 12: Hard & soft aspects, development of CBC

Hard & Soft aspects	Average	Min	Max	Median	Mode
Exchange of information cross-border	3.30	1.00	5.00	3.00	3.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.26	1.00	5.00		
<i>Outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.25	2.00	3.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	3.65	2.00	5.00		
Consultation amongst partners cross-border	3.30	1.00	5.00	3.00	4.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.31	1.00	4.00		
<i>Outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.75	2.00	4.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	3.41	2.00	5.00		
Avoiding and solving conflicts arising within your network	2.88	1.00	5.00	3.00	3.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	2.92	1.00	4.00		
<i>Outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.25	2.00	3.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.94	1.00	5.00		
Formulating joint priorities/objectives	3.25	1.00	5.00	3.00	4.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.31	1.00	4.00		
<i>Outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.25	2.00	3.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	3.35	1.00	5.00		

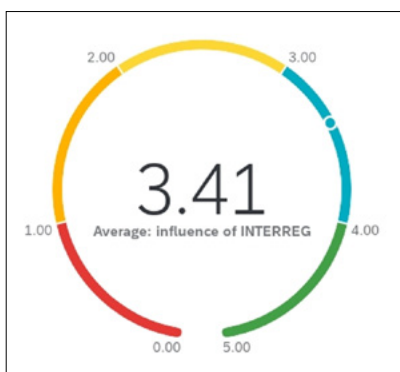
Hard & Soft aspects	Average	Min	Max	Median	Mode
Possibility to establish and finance a joint coordination body by the partners	2.77	1.00	5.00	3.00	3.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	2.79	1.00	4.00		
<i>Outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.25	2.00	3.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.82	1.00	5.00		
Possibility of financing future cross-border services by the partners	2.65	1.00	5.00	3.00	3.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	2.82	1.00	5.00		
<i>Outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.00	1.00	3.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.41	1.00	5.00		
Development of trust within the project network	3.30	1.00	5.00	3.00	4.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.41	1.00	5.00		
<i>Outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.00	1.00	3.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	3.35	1.00	5.00		
Development of qualitative contacts within the project network	3.42	1.00	5.00	3.00	4.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.41	1.00	5.00		
<i>Outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.75	2.00	3.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	3.59	2.00	5.00		
Coping with different languages	3.18	1.00	5.00	3.00	4.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.21	1.00	5.00		
<i>Outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.75	2.00	4.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	3.24	1.00	5.00		
Coping with cultural attitudes	3.28	1.00	5.00	3.00	4.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.36	1.00	5.00		
<i>Outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.50	1.00	4.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	3.29	2.00	5.00		

The table shows generally positive development. Regarding the soft aspects, the exchange of information and consultation, the respondents assessed the strongest positive improvement. The developments regarding the hard aspects of the possibility to finance by the partners both services as a coordination body are somewhat more cautious.

A next question is what the influence of Interreg has been on the development described above over the past years. Here again, the scale from 1 to 5 is applied with negative or no effect to very strong positive effect. The Gauge Chart on the rights presents the average assessment overall. Focusing on Interreg EMR only, the average is 3.49. Filtered on respondents with experience within and outside Interreg EMR, it is 3.24.

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

Figure 4: Influence of Interreg on CBC



How is your experience with the administrative parts of the Interreg EMR programme?

With: 1 = very bad and 5 = very good,

N total = 53,

N Interreg EMR only = 37,

N within and outside = 16

Table 13: Administrative aspects, Interreg EMR

Administrative aspects	Average	Min	Max	Median	Mode
Number of project partners	3.43	1.00	5.00	4.00	4.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.49	2.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	3.31	1.00	5.00		
Communication requirements (like posters, web page, logos)	2.69	1.00	5.00	3.00	3.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	2.76	1.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.53	1.00	4.00		

Hard aspects	Average	Min	Max	Median	Mode
Timesheet obligations	2.75	1.00	5.00	4.00	4.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	2.73	1.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.80	1.00	4.00		
Transparency and clear communication	2.96	1.00	5.00	3.00	3.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.00	1.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.88	1.00	5.00		
Payment amount	3.42	1.00	5.00	3.00	3.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.38	1.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	3.50	3.00	5.00		
Timing of payments	2.92	1.00	5.00	3.00	3.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	2.97	1.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.81	1.00	4.00		
Rejections of payments	2.62	1.00	5.00	3.00	3.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	2.78	1.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.25	1.00	4.00		
Billing of travel expenses	3.04	1.00	5.00	3.00	3.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.19	1.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.69	1.00	4.00		
Number of change requests	2.98	1.00	5.00	2.00	2.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.05	1.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.80	1.00	5.00		

Administrative aspects	Average	Min	Max	Median	Mode
Changing contacts at Interreg	3.12	1.00	5.00	3.00	2.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	3.16	1.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	3.00	1.00	5.00		
eMS reporting system	2.58	1.00	5.00	3.00	3.00
<i>Interreg EMR only</i>	2.68	1.00	5.00		
<i>Within and outside Interreg EMR</i>	2.38	1.00	4.00		

Other aspects that were mentioned are public procurement, flexibility in case of external negative impacts on the project, and too many meetings.

The table shows that the number of project partners and the contacts at Interreg were more or less positively assessed, while all other factors were neutral to slightly negative.

How did these administrative aspects of the Interreg programme effect the cooperation in general?

With: 1 = very negative effect
to 5 = very positive effect

The respondents (N=53) in total indicated on average that the administrative aspects of the Interreg programme affected the cooperation slightly negatively. The average assessment was 2.68, that is between a negative to neutral effect. The average for the results filtered on respondents with only Interreg EMR experience was 2.73 (N=37). For the group with experience outside and within Interreg EMR the average was 2.56 (N=16). Although, again, one should be cautious with drawing conclusions based on the differences given the small N. The assessment seems to be more or less identical. Yet, the respondents with experience outside Interreg EMR might have other relevant experience also related to administrative aspects of funding programmes that have affected their assessment regarding Interreg EMR. This matches the findings from the interviews and expert workshops, where comparisons were made with other programmes that were found to be less burdensome.

Figure 5: Effect of administrative aspects on CBC



What could be improved in terms of cooperation regarding the administrative aspects?

This was an open-field question, and yielded a total of 40 responses. For the analysis, Text iQ was again used. Four respondents indicated that no improvements were necessary. Two of them made comparisons to the Interreg Grande Region programme, which was found to be more burdensome. Another indicated that administration is just part of a subsidy and one had to be prepared for that.

However, 29 reactions can be grouped under the umbrella *simplification*. The administrative aspects should be simplified, as they were found to be disproportionate and inefficient. Multiple responses hinted that the administration distracts from the purpose of the project. In this regard, another indicator can be mentioned which is *output-driven management*. Overlapping with simplification to some extent, at least four respondents made clear in their wording that the reporting and management in their view focused too much on administrative obligations and discussions and the justification of costs. A recommendation is to adopt more output-driven management, where the output plays a more central role.

Other recommendations and concerns that were mentioned under simplification:

- Less reporting (not every 3 months) (2x)
- The reporting system and process are very often mentioned as being complex, requiring a specialist
- Simplified lumpsum financing
- One level of control of expenses
- Simplification of joint procurement
- Do not make it obligatory to divide timesheets per work package, since work packages overlap and splitting time is rather artificial

The latter point also refers to flexibility. In addition to flexibility with timesheets per work package, the fixed frameworks of eMS were mentioned. The complexity is that experience also relates to another indicator: help. At least nine respondents stated directly that more help would be desirable. Help could come in the form of clear information and assistance, communication, oriented training and instruction videos.

Other remarks & Overall conclusions from the survey

Few other remarks were made in the survey. One respondent indicated that a poor understanding of the missions of partners in a project led to insufficient involvement of all partners in the project. There was also misunderstanding about the Interreg rules, that appeared to have changed between the projects. Another respondent hopes for an innovative idea to set up another Interreg project under the new programme period, while another respondent raised the possibility that a functionality could be added that enables data transfer from partner reports to project reports in order not to forget any activities or files from partners. A last comment was that partners are working hard on the quality of collaboration, but Interreg as such is not seen as supportive in this respect.

The survey shows overall a positive development over time regarding the quality of cross-border cooperation. The influence of Interreg EMR is also positive and assessed as an important factor in the overall development of cross-border cooperation. It was often stated that the help of Interreg and the resulting projects resulted in a broader network of partners and contacts, both within as well as outside the sectors. This is an aspect that is greatly appreciated. Yet, the administrative aspects of the project could

have the potential to decrease the quality of the cooperation, as they are perceived as (too) time-consuming by multiple respondents. In some cases, partners are therefore not willing to cooperate in Interreg projects any more, or the

focus of Interreg does not support long-lasting cooperation networks. One observation that can therefore be made is that the potential of Interreg EMR as a facilitator of high quality cross-border cooperation is still not fully deployed.

4

CONCLUSIONS: IMPACT OF THE INTERREG PROGRAMME ON THE QUALITY OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

4.1 INFORMATION AND CONSULTATION IMPROVES, BUT PROJECT MANAGEMENT PLAYS A KEY ROLE

As we have seen from the expert interviews, workshops and survey, the general understanding of experts across sectors and regions is that Interreg projects have a positive influence on the personal cross-border network of the experts involved. The network is extended both within a sector as well as outside the sector. The information flow is stimulated and in some cases substantially improved through the regular meetings. The same goes for different forms of communication and consultation. Here, project management is key. The more professional the lead partner is at managing the project the better these aspects become. Many experts referred first and foremost to excellent project management when they assessed the quality of information/communication and consultation as very positive. If there were deficiencies, this was also very often related to the information and communication skills of the lead partner. Best practice was also very often linked to good information and communication tools, such as a

very good joint file sharing system on a platform where files, agendas and all forms of information can be shared. Since the present eMS system is not really a project management tool, the quality of the information and communication flow is very much up to the individual skills and tools of certain lead partners. It is not surprising that when certain lead partners were praised because of their information and communication skills they had a great deal of experience with Interreg projects. This is for instance the case in the public transport sector or in the field of health/emergency. Very often, lead partners who have had experience with many previous Interreg projects do have the skills to inform and communicate better than newcomers. In this sense, this is related to a general observation about the very important role of project management skills. Experts regard the management of Interreg projects as a rather challenging task and this also refers to the question of good information exchange and stimulation of communication

amongst the project partners. Whenever experts positively described the information and communication they also referred to sound project management. Experienced project managers in the field of public transport, health and emergency services were mentioned in particular as good facilitators with respect to the information flow and mutual communication and consultation. Another important aspect that influences the quality of communication between partners was mentioned in particular in the field of climate/innovation. According to several experts, there were not necessarily language or cultural aspects that influence the quality of information and communication, but the nature and mind-set of a certain institutional background. This was very often mentioned by academics who cited that aspect of information, communication and consultation as being much easier with other academic organisation, since their institutions work and think in the same way. This is a very interesting finding, since it illustrates that cultural or language aspects can apparently be less important for this basic element of cooperation than the institutional background. Indeed, academics know how to talk to academics and are used to working across borders, be they Euregional or international, while it is not so easy for universities to communicate with a chamber of commerce or a municipality.

Whether mutual information, communication and consultation also survives the end of a joint project is a different question and depends on specific conditions. Where a joint coordination body (a secretariat or single coordinator) is still there after the project period, the information flow will also be maintained more easily. Among the sectors under review, this was for instance the case in the public transport sector, where a stable coordination office has been in place independently from

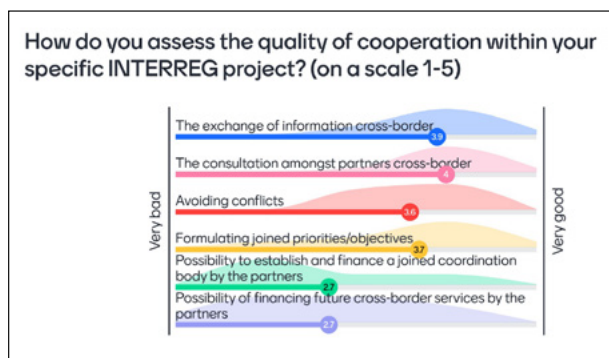
Interreg projects. The same applies to networks in the field of health and emergency services that also have stable coordination bodies beyond single Interreg programmes. These types of stable coordination bodies are also more likely to be professional project managers. A lack of information and communication is very often related to less experienced project management, a bigger diversity of partners with a different institutional culture (not so much regional cultures) and complexity of projects. It was also very often pointed out that projects with many work packages make it difficult to inform and communicate across the work packages. One "good practice" case from the health sector was a project where all the project partners were committed to attend all work package meetings, even if they did not play a role there. The idea was to support a good information and communication flow across the work packages and the idea of building up a stable and sustainable cross-border network. This seems to be an effective measure since it is also confirmed by other findings. Within projects with many work packages (for instance in the field of the labour market) information and communication were very often limited to the work package partners. This prevented to some extent the creation of a broader stable sectoral network across the work package boundaries.

4.2 THE STRUGGLE TO CONTINUE JOINT ACTIVITIES AFTER THE INTERREG PERIOD

Further up in the coordination scale of different aspects of cross-border cooperation, the picture is less positive than with respect to information. This refers primarily to the expectations of experts concerning future cooperation. Most of the experts did not expect that the project partner will continue their work without Interreg funding in the future. One of the main reasons pointed out in the interviews and expert workshops was that the partners could not formulate a common view on a cross-border task or service that could be financed together with own resources after the project period. The assessment from the expert

workshop in the labour market/business sector is a case in point.

Screenshot from the labour market/business development sector



4.3 THE STOP-AND-GO PHENOMENON: COOPERATION AFTER INTERREG FUNDING

Whereas information exchange and communication/consultation are assessed very positively, the other aspects on the coordination scale score lower. Though the ability of partners to jointly formulate priorities or objectives in the framework of the project is still seen as positive, future joint activities are seen much less positively. This pattern can be detected across all the sectors. It is very difficult for many Interreg-based networks to have a clear idea for the future with respect to joint activities or services that could be financed by the partners without Interreg funding after the end of the project funding. The same goes for an important element of a stable network like a joint coordination body. As seen in all the sectors, only in very rare cases does an Interreg project lead to the establishment of permanent coordination capacities and a sustainable joint service or activity. Best practice cases in the past under the Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine programme were

the establishment of the EMRIC and EUPrevent networks or the AVV coordination body. For organisations that are not a member of stable networks beyond Interreg, the projects normally do not lead to stable structures. It was stated that Interreg based networks very often improve the capacities to find partners again for a next Interreg project, but do not necessarily lead to joint activities or services outside the scope of Interreg. This is an important finding given the fact that Interreg programmes stress the nature of the support: Interreg is meant to finance the difficult start of cross-border activities with the clear intention that project partners maintain their cooperation in the future without funding.

As already mentioned only stable networks that are funded outside Interreg do follow this condition to some extent. As a result, experts who are integrated as partners in the above mentioned

stable networks see Interreg as a financial tool for their already established network activities. In this case, Interreg is not a means to establish or stabilise a cross-border network but offers additional finances for innovative cooperation on top of activities that are already financed by the network partners themselves. The results of the expert interviews, workshops and surveys show that in most of the sectors, especially without stable existing networks, "stop-and-go" is part of the expectation of project partners. Many experts agreed that the aim of the cooperation is normally not so much a future stable cross-border network with permanent activities financed with own money, but Interreg funding is an option to make cooperation possible with a very clear project-based character. This is for instance evident in the field of innovation. Partner universities are familiar with third-party project financing. In this case, the project focus lies from the beginning on a certain interest that very often does not go beyond the programme period. Surprisingly, Interreg rules stimulate this type of thinking. First of all, projects have to be innovative, meaning that the stable continuation of cross-border activities for a longer time period (beyond 3 years) is not meant to be supported. Thus, new networks that were established for a first Interreg project cannot simply apply for another project and stabilise their cooperation with respect to a specific activity. With deliverables and concrete results, the indicators of Interreg also support the development of specific outputs/products instead of long-term cooperation. As already mentioned, in the case of innovation for instance many partners are used to this sort of stop-and-go scheme. They very often regard Interreg funding as another means of funding alongside other national or European funds and can deal with the administrative burden related to application, project monitoring and financial

accountability. This is different for partners like SMEs or municipalities that are normally not involved in these types of short-term project-based activities that involve a certain amount of administrative burden. This means that the most suited applicants for Interreg projects (like universities or other partners with a certain project-based financing routine) are not primarily interested in building the capacity of stable cross-border networks.

The short project duration is also critical in sectors where more partners aim to build up stable cooperation (as in the case of the labour market or education). It was very often pointed out by experts that one Interreg project period is too short to build up stable network structures and come for instance to a sound coordination body without external finances. Even if the aim of establishing sustainable cross-border activities can be formulated by the partners, it is very often not possible after just one project to get enough internal support within the organisations to allocate own structural resources to a cooperation body or even joint services. Both aspects, the requirement to always formulate new and innovative project ideas and the rather short project period, prevent to some extent Interreg networks from stabilising network structures and avoiding the phenomenon of stop-and-go. And stop-and-go is seen by many experts as a problem related to networks. Stop-and-go in Interreg projects means that partners invest a lot of resources in the application and execution of a specific Interreg project, but at the end of the project period not only the activities but also the coordination capacities that were established end. Therefore, the flow of information and communication comes to an end. A typical case are joint homepages that are no longer updated when the project ends. This was for instance

mentioned with respect to the education sector that many projects had developed very ambitious and valuable homepages in the past, but that it was very often not possible to use them in future cooperation efforts. As a result, even if similar partners join forces under a new project, they would rather start a new homepage than integrate former information and communication tools. This was for instance mentioned by experts dealing with neighbouring languages. It is not surprising that one of the main goals of a new project related to neighbouring languages is to establish a stable coordination body to avoid the stop-and-go phenomenon in the future.

There is also a sort of contradiction related to the idea of Interreg programmes stimulating very new and innovative ideas and partner consortia. Experts with a long history of Interreg experience stated that they had the impression that it was not appreciated if the same partners applied another time in the same field. On the other hand, the expert interviews and expert workshops revealed that there is such a thing as special "Interreg know-how", meaning that for every sector we could identify a group of experts who have long-standing experience with many Interreg projects. Beyond certain project ideas, these experts form a sort of "backbone" when it comes to the formulation of new project ideas and the formation of cross-border consortia. The long-standing debates about the administrative challenges of Interreg projects revealed that there is a certain need for this type of Interreg know-how in order to successfully apply for and manage a project. This means that network partners with a long-standing cooperation history are very well equipped to apply for and execute successful Interreg projects. These are for example project partners who do not cooperate outside the Interreg context but know how to

find each other when there is an opportunity for an Interreg-funded project in their field. The field of innovation and the ad-hoc networks of universities and schools of applied sciences are a case in point.

On the other hand, it is even easier for experts with a stable network that exists outside Interreg. These partners do not spend much time searching for potential cross-border partners but just activate their cross-border network. In the experience of many experts, these projects are likely to be comparatively well managed and the partners can also formulate joint cross-border objectives. The major reason: experienced experts have the specific Interreg know-how needed with respect to network building, stimulating good cooperation (as an important feature mentioned by many experts) and coping with the administrative challenges. On the other hand, some experts mentioned regular problems of newly established consortia related to a lack of knowledge of their partner organisations. Interreg projects do require a certain degree of good cooperation between the partners. This is very well supported when partners have known each other for a longer period of time. One could argue that the partners of an existing network can concentrate more on the content than on network building and administration than a consortium without a joint network background. One essential reason was also mentioned by experts. When new consortia are formed, there is not always enough time spent on the question as to which partners are truly a good fit. It was stated that it is also difficult at the beginning to know exactly whether a certain partner from the neighbouring region can really deliver an added value to a certain project. In addition, partners are sometimes also chosen with respect to a certain regional distribution, meaning that there

is the need to also include partners from a certain region. Experts also stated that in some cases, political implications are involved, meaning the chances of a project application are better if more partners are involved and there is a broader regional diversity. Many experts pointed out that this can be problematic, since the compatibility of the partners is a key factor for a successful project. This also refers to a more fundamental question: a long list of diverse partners from all

the regions of the Interreg EMR programme territory has been described by experts as being very positive with respect to a successful project application, whereas the quality of the cooperation amongst the partners is much more difficult and riskier. Expert experience indicates that the better the partners know and trust each other at the beginning of the project, the better the chances for high-quality cooperation.

4.4 A STRUCTURAL PROBLEM: SHORT PROJECT DURATION AND THE PROBLEM OF CONSOLIDATION

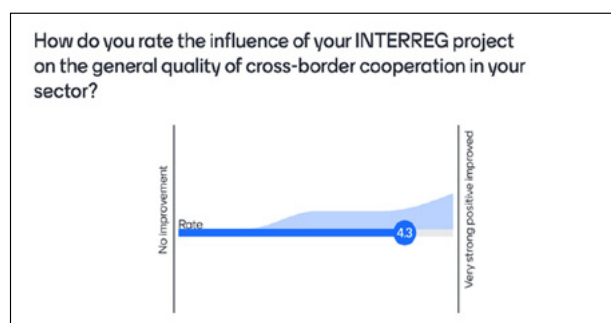
To conclude, the 2014-2020 Interreg EMR Meuse-Rhine programme was characterised by two contradicting aspects: the need for a certain amount of Interreg experience and Interreg skills was in favour of applications by experts and consortia with a long-standing Interreg project history, whereas the intention of the programme was to support new ideas and innovative consortia. However, experts without Interreg experience and without already existing network structures struggle with the rather sophisticated application procedure and later with the challenging project management. The experts who have already built up networks for previous Interreg projects struggle with the need to always come up with new ideas and objectives. Especially in the labour market/business sector workshop, the question was intensively discussed as to why Interreg does not allow the financing of permanent structures for long-lasting cooperation. Many experts

agreed that the reality in their field was that there is a need for more sustainable financial support for structural things like a stable coordination point. This idea was also mentioned for other sectors. Hence, it can be concluded that two aspects of the current financing philosophy are not in favour of the establishment of long-lasting coordination structures in a sector: the short-term project duration and the requirement that a second or third project cannot build on a previous one and aim at consolidating recently established cross-border structures. Especially experts with many years of Interreg experience do regret that even in a comparatively integrated cross-border region like the Euregio Meuse-Rhine cross-border cooperation has struggled for many years with basic capacity problems. As many statements showed, the consolidation of a network with stable networking structures outside Interreg is an exception to the rule.

4.5 INTERREG HAS STRONGER EFFECTS ON THE QUALITY OF COOPERATION IN SECTORS WITHOUT STABLE NETWORKS

After smaller changes to the questions asked in the sectoral workshops, for the last two workshops in the health sector and the innovation/climate sector a question was included on how the experts rated the influence of their Interreg project (projects) on the general quality of cross-border cooperation in their sector. This question was also asked in the survey. The background of this question was the growing understanding that there were other important developments and effects over the last two years in the cross-border territory that improved or made cross-border cooperation more difficult. It is evident for instance that the coronavirus crisis had a major impact on cross-border relations and activities and that these effects will also have long-lasting repercussions. Therefore, a final additional question was asked in the workshops for the health and innovation/climate sectors. The idea was to ask experts how they assess the overall influence of their Interreg project on the development of cooperation across the border in their sector.

Screenshots from the Health/emergency (top) and Innovation/Climate (bottom) workshops



The very interesting result for the health sector shows that the influence of Interreg was assessed as rather modest. The experts saw some influence of the Interreg projects. In comparison, experts in the climate/innovation workshop rated the influence much higher. To some extent, this is not surprising since it reflects the importance of Interreg for the sector. Whereas in the health/emergency sector stable networks do exist outside Interreg with joint cross-border activities not only linked to Interreg funding, the networks in the climate/innovation sector in the border region are very much linked and dependent on Interreg funding. This means that partners share few joint Euregional activities outside the Interreg framework. This also leads to another interesting observation: the meaning of an Interreg programme with respect to the quality of cooperation in a sector is very much

related to the role Interreg plays in a certain sector and the existence or non-existence of stable networks outside the Interreg framework. This can be supported by the survey results, where most respondents indicated that Interreg, with a score of 3.49, has a rather positive influence on positive development over time. However, again the development of the network and contacts

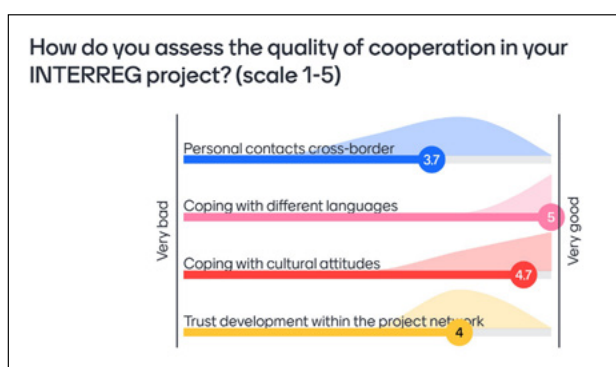
was mentioned as the most important. One could argue that it is a positive development in a certain sector if the influence of the Interreg programme on the quality of cross-border cooperation is less important. It can be seen as a success of previous programmes, namely the establishment of financially-independent cooperation structures.

4.6 PERSONAL CONTACTS, LANGUAGES, CULTURE AND TRUST: POSITIVE FINDINGS

The findings on what is called “soft indicators” were rather positive. The quality of personal contacts is assessed as positive in all the different sectors. Across all sectors, experts do not see language or cultural differences as a major obstacle for good cross-border cooperation. That is to some extent a surprising result, since one could expect that in a cross-border territory with three different languages and certain cultural differences, these factors could play an important role. One example from the Climate/Innovation workshops even shows a very positive picture. Here, even the practice of coping with different languages got the highest score. And the way the partners cope with cultural differences also ranked very high. A similar picture was seen for the other sectors.

This result can be described as extraordinarily positive related to language and cultural differences. The score in the other sectors are lower especially for coping with different languages and cultural attitudes. Nevertheless, the language question was only incidentally mentioned by project partners as a concern. Some projects struggle with the fact that neither purely English-based communications nor the Euregional approach (where all of the partners speak their own language and passive understanding is possible) are possible. Nevertheless, this was not widely regarded as a major factor that determines the quality of cooperation. This also refers to the rather positive assessment of the conflict-solving capacities. The results show that on average there are no major conflicts that are a threat to sound cooperation, hence meaning that cultural differences also do not regularly lead to conflicts or that there are good mechanisms for conflict solving. One explanation for the positive score in the field of innovation could be the fact that in the sector the project partners are used to speaking English as in the case of other international projects in the field of innovation. Experts mentioned very often that even if the partner organisations can easily work in English,

Screenshot: Climate/Innovation workshop



specific workshops or services for third parties like SMEs or public sector organisations have to be in the native language of the region. But this is also not seen as a negative aspect for cooperation. Not surprisingly, Dutch and German partners can communicate better in one of their own languages than if they communicate with French-speaking partners from Wallonia. Only in exceptional cases did experts mention the need

for interpretation when project partners met. In some of the expert workshops and in individual expert interviews, the question was raised as to whether certain language skills should be a requirement for experts when joining Interreg projects. This referred especially to the English language. It was more frequently mentioned that an English-based approach could also simplify monitoring and reporting.

4.7 ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN: SERIOUS CONCERN FOR THE QUALITY OF COOPERATION

Expert interviews, sectoral workshops and the results of the survey indicate that most of the Interreg practitioners struggle with the administrative burden. There are single voices (mainly with an academic background) who point out that monitoring and reporting is in line with the obligations of under other funds or programmes. However, the majority of experts from other sectors (i.e. public sector bodies) stated that it takes a lot of time to become familiar with the administration. Many experts stated that there is a certain misbalance between the time devoted to the actual joint activities and the time spent on administrative obligations, and this has repercussions on the actual quality of cooperation. Many concerns to this effect were raised (see the results from the survey). The most concerning were as follows: experts observed that project partners indicated that they would not participate in a future project because of their negative experiences with the administrative obligations. This refers to not only SMEs but also to other institutions, when for instance the financial department no longer supports participation in Interreg projects due to the administrative costs. The statements

from the interviews and expert workshops were to some extent anecdotal, nevertheless quite a few project experts mentioned that within their own organisation Interreg funding is not always seen as positive. Practitioners mentioned for instance their struggle with the eMS system, which was also often mentioned in the survey. This is related to the earlier finding that Interreg participation requires a certain know-how. Newcomers in particular need some time to acquire the necessary skills. Two examples among the more structural problems: public sector bodies raised the question of cost calculations with respect to personnel costs that would not fit into their system. This example indicates that some of the rules related to the financial administration of Interreg projects are not fit for all. While research institutes are to some extent used to the approach, other partners like SMEs or municipalities could lack the necessary experience with this kind of financial management. This is also true for payments. While in the case of a municipality or a university a delayed payment is not such a concern, this could be especially problematic for private partners who have to make prepayments.

Lastly, the experiences of the practitioners also show that the lead partners again play a decisive role. The administrative burden and time spent on monitoring and reporting can be reduced if new project partners are actively assisted by a lead project partner. The findings of the

Crossquality project indicate that thus far neither the assistance from a lead partner nor from the antenna or programme secretariat appears to have been effective enough to alleviate the concerns related to the administrative burden.

5

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Make capacity building related to stable cross-border networks an essential element under the new programme

According to the description of the new Interreg Meuse-Rhine programme one of the objectives is the promotion of legal and administrative cooperation and cooperation between citizens and civil society actors⁹. The programme itself does not in detail refer to the quality of cross-border cooperation nor to the question of cross-border networks. However, under programme objective six “Better cooperation governance” the ambition is described as follows: “The challenge is to achieve a degree and depth of cooperation that goes beyond the level of information exchange, with as a point on the horizon genuine cross-border policy coordination and investments based on joint policy agendas”¹⁰. The findings of this project are showing some evidence that even at the project level it is difficult to achieve a depth of cooperation that goes beyond good information and consultation.

The results from the different sectors show that it is difficult for project partners to formulate a joint agenda for sustainable cooperation beyond the framework of Interreg. It would be very important to integrate some lessons learned from this project into the broader understanding of objective six. Therefore, project proposals in a broader sense and under all objectives could also be assessed with respect to the question of how they can contribute to a stable and sustainable cross-border network. Indeed, every project has the potential to be a cornerstone of a better cross-border governance system. This also refers first and foremost to the question of whether project partners are stimulated to formulate a vision or a joint agenda for future cooperation and whether they can make an important contribution to strengthening the cross-border network in a certain sector. This also requires proactive communication on the part of the Interreg programme and a new understanding of the needs of project partners to improve the quality of cross-border cooperation in the longer run.

⁹ See: <https://www.interregemr.eu/2021-2027>. Viewed on 15/12./2023.

¹⁰ See: *Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE), ETC/Interreg Regulation – Model for Interreg programmes, Annex to Regulation (EU) No. 2021/1059 (ETC Regulation), Commission decision number C(2022) 8275 final, page 13.*

2

Better cross-border cooperation can be actively supported: more partners is not always better

The findings have also shown that there are some essential reasons why cross-border cooperation at the project level is better in some sectors than in others. One very decisive element starts with the choice of project partners. Especially in sectors where stable networks already exist, the likelihood of a successful project with good cross-border cooperation increases. This is related to a crucial but difficult aspect of Interreg projects: finding the right project partners. In the preparatory phase, some consortia do not spend enough time on the question of which partners really provide added value. Very often, the list of partners is also influenced by a quest for regional equality or even political interventions with respect to the representation of certain partners. This can have two effects: consortia are becoming quite large with rather diverse partners, and the partners do not always have the time or capacities to really assess the match and added value of the project partners. Experiences of practitioners indicate that a longer list of partners and a more diverse group does not lead to better cooperation and can be problematic. This should mean that a certain project proposal can also opt to deliberately limit the number of partners with limited regional diversity. The findings show that this could have a positive impact on the future quality of cooperation if the smaller number of partners complement each other well. Moreover, it is more likely that a smaller number of partners can agree on a sort of vision and agenda on how to cooperate in the longer run without Interreg funding. According to many practitioners, it is much easier to go beyond the pure project-based cooperation if the partners

trust each other and have real common cross-border interests. Indeed, also in the survey the word “partners” and label “common” (principles, targets and goals) were found to be the most important factors for successful cross-border cooperation. The question of whether there is a good match of partners could be more decisive for project applications. Again, the assessment of proposals should take into account whether or not a certain consortium can make a sustainable contribution to promoting sustainable cross-border network capacities in their sector.

3

Active measures to overcome the stop-and-go phenomenon

Another important finding of this project is that, even in a comparatively advanced cross-border territory such as the Euregio Meuse-Rhine, the Interreg programmes of the past did not necessarily lead to stable cross-border network structures in all sectors. As shown, there are sectors where network capacities exist beyond the funding of single projects. However, these are exceptions to the rule. Many practitioners regret the fact that there is still a sort of stop-and-go phenomenon where a lot of resources and cooperation network capacities are lost after the end of a single project. Project partners are not able to continue cooperating with follow-up activities financed with their own resources. This also means that only in very exceptional cases are project partners ready to maintain a sort of coordination body to facilitate the flow of information and communication beyond Interreg. The first reason for this stop-and-go can be found in the very formulation of a common objective. Very often, sustainable cooperation after the project is not explicitly intended by the project partners. This is certainly

true for very detailed objectives for instance with respect to innovation. Furthermore, the Crossquality project itself is a case in point, with the objective of the application being a newly-developed methodology. Nevertheless, the more sustainable vision of the project is to establish a stable cooperation network of universities that in the future can provide a valuable cross-border service with respect to the assessment of cross-border cooperation. This could be an essential contribution to objective six of the new programme. However, there are some requirements to support the idea of network stability. First of all, the notion of innovation should be reconsidered. Innovation can also mean that rather newly-established sector networks (after an Interreg project) want to reach another level of cooperation via another project. This new project is not necessarily innovative with respect to the joint activities or services that the cross-border network is developing. The consolidation of a cross-border activity could be seen as innovative with respect to the higher level and better quality of cross-border cooperation. In this sense, this refers to the understanding of innovation and whether innovative elements related to the quality of cooperation do count. This could also mean that a smaller consortium related to a certain activity is joined by other partners to extend the cross-border network structure. Or that an existing consortium established a more stable coordination body that goes beyond a lead partner's role. This refers to the perception of many practitioners that one rather short project period is not long enough to form a stable sustainable cross-border network. If innovation in the field of cross-border cooperation were to also count as innovation, project partners could be given the time to establish joint activities with a longer term perspective and deliberately

work on network structures and the quality of cooperation beyond Interreg. This implies as well that long-term objectives with respect to the improvement of cross-border cooperation have to be explicitly described by a consortium. Whether this could lead to a new understanding with respect to the financing of basic cross-border cooperation capacities is another question. The results of this project show that in the present system resources are lost since a lot of the capacity building does not lead to sustainable structures. As shown, the education sector is a case in point, where for instance projects related to school exchanges did not necessarily lead to sustainable coordination capacities beyond Interreg. Future projects in the field could take that into account. On the programme side, there could be the understanding that even if joint activities are the same, ambitious objectives with respect to the consolidation of cooperation capacities could be the innovative element.

4

Extended assistance: Interreg participation requires specific Interreg know-how

Finally, the many interviews with sector experts have highlighted the fact that participating in Interreg projects require a certain type of "Interreg know-how". Good cross-border cooperation is therefore also dependent on the expertise of the individual partner organisations and staff involved. In addition, it has been shown that the quality of cooperation is linked to the role of the lead partner. Lead partners with many years of Interreg experience can better stimulate cooperation between the project partners. And, project partners with longer experience can more easily cope with the administrative burden. Understanding the eMS system is just one

example: it takes some time for project partners to become familiar with the system. This reason is mentioned repeatedly in the survey. It also takes some time to master the different rules and obligations on communication, ranging from logos to posters. With the antennas, Interreg offers assistance that, according to the experiences of this project, is not systematically taken advantage of. The interviews and survey results showed that not all project partners are fully aware of the assistance available to them. There is also a problem with the perception of the secretariat. First of all, project partners see Interreg as an organisation that controls rather than assists, even though the secretariat offers certain information sessions. Also see in this regard the results of the survey on experiences with Interreg EMR and what could be improved. The desire for more information and assistance was clearly mentioned under the "help" label.

What could help: the programme could actively support projects with respect to the quality of project management and how to improve

the different aspects of cooperation (from information to joint agenda setting). This could mean for instance providing a good project platform. Today, every lead partner has to provide a certain project management tool and platform for basic information, the exchange of files, agenda setting, video conferencing and other project management tools. In particular, lead partners who are in the position for the first time could benefit from additional assistance. They could benefit from a sort of "coaching" that explicitly offers the possibility to get assistance with respect to basic project management skills, as well as assistance with respect to more specific cross-border challenges such as how to stimulate different dimensions of good cooperation amongst project partners. Lastly, this could lead to a situation where the programme secretariat is perceived as a body that is interested not only in monitoring and controlling, but above all in supporting excellent cross-border cooperation during the project period and beyond.

6

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ANNEX I: INTERREG EUREGIO MEUSE-RHINE (2014-2020) PROJECTS BY SECTOR

<p>Education (focus on the cooperation of schools/with neighbouring languages)</p>	<p>Technology in Healthcare Education Garage 4.0 EUR.Friends EMRLingua FUNFORLAB</p>	<p>skills4you EMRWINE COMPAS EUTech</p>
<p>Labour market & businesses (cooperation of employment services and cross-border business networks)</p>	<p>EMR Start-Up youRegion Innovation2Market</p>	<p>DigitSME QRM 4.0 See-V-Lab</p>
<p>Research & innovation (cooperation of companies and universities)</p>	<p>EURLIPIDS EURadiomics Food Screening EMR Generate Your Muscle (GYM) EMR Digital Twin Academy ET2SMEs E-TEST - Einstein Telescope</p>	<p>AACoMa HypeRegio EarlyTech IMPACT HypeRegio BusyBee Crossquality Blockchain4Prosumers</p>
<p>Innovation related to Energy transition and Climate Policy</p>	<p>Light Vehicle 2025 ROLLING SOLAR Wanderful Stream LIVES IN FLOW From Waste 2 Profit</p>	
<p>Police cooperation & crisis management</p>	<p>IKIC Public Safety EMR EYES PANDEMERIC</p>	

Health & well-being (part of EMRIC issues/ EUprevent)	i2-CoRT Poly-Valve SafePAT Oncocare wearIT4Health wearIT4Covid CoDaP Healthy Aging PANDEMERIC	euPrevent COVID EUPrevent Social Norms Approach EUPrevent Senior Friendly Communities MOBI euPrevent PROFILE CORESIL EMRaDi
Culture & media, tourism	Terra Mosana RANDO-M Cycling Connects	
Nature conservation, urban and rural planning, environment	Wohnmonitor EMR	
Public Transport and other public services cooperation	EMR Connect	
Social Integration	N-Power People To People In de zorg - Uit de zorgen TREE	

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

Interreg
Euregio Meuse-Rhine



EUROPEAN UNION
European Regional
Development Fund

CROSSQUALITY



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