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CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN RESEARCH AND HIGHER EDUCATION

**The chance of regional development
for European neighbours**

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1. Background

An important objective of the EU is to create a European research area (ERA) perfectly developed, functioning and working in networks. Borders would then hardly play a role in research and higher education, in particular as regards the employment of staff and resources and the mutual acknowledgment of curricula.

In order to develop in the areas of research, development, innovation and education a European Research Area in parallel to the Single European Market, the European Commission has to take advantage of supportive measures up to the new funding period from 01.01.2007 on. Based on the Bologna Process with an optional commitment of all 46 signatory states, the EU has created a frame of qualifications supported by important individual programmes like Comenius (pupil and research institutions), Erasmus (higher education), Grundtvig (adult education), Jean Monnet (European integration in university sector) and a cross cutting programme (sectoral programmes exceeding themes). It is also important to mention the 7th EU Research Framework Programme, which is supported by the Eurydice, the Education information network and the supporting programme for competitive capacity and innovation. Within the territorial cooperation, especially the INTERREG A programmes with main focus on cross border cooperation in research and development can be used.

Global, European interregional and transnational cooperation of universities and research centres is something natural today. Between neighbouring regions along a border, however, a closer cooperation in research and development depends still on some coincidences, even if it's not a single phenomenon any longer:

- In particular areas of specialisation with vast capacities the cooperation across the border become a natural consequence and even a necessity for universities and research centres on both sides.
- In other cross-border areas without the necessary potential or with facilities only at one side of the border, the administration at regional level or the respective Euroregion has to provide a strong support and very often even to start up the cooperation process.

Such cooperation areas are often called European, and on smaller neighbouring territories cross-border knowledge and research areas:

If this is really true, the main task would remain now to combine the efforts at the European and cross-border level!

Unfortunately, up to now the potentials for cross-border research and development in the EU are far from being fully used.



2. Still existing difficulties and barriers

- Cross-border cooperation between universities and research centres is more popular in the Northern and Western and less in the Southern and Eastern part of the EU.
- Many universities in Europe work together without joint organisational structures or joint publicity.
- Up to now only a few border and cross-border regions are actively involved in cross-border cooperation of universities and research centres.
- Different structures, competences and procedures, legislation, funding conditions, education policies, etc. are a hindrance to cross-border cooperation.
- A joint qualification framework as regards the workload, education standards, study results, skills and profiles is often lacking.
- In consequence the transparency and comparability of offered courses are not ensured, and the mutual recognition of study degrees and study periods as well as further training is highly limited.
- Mobility is also limited as full information is not available across the border.
- Lacking language skills (lacking knowledge of the language of the neighbouring country; it's not only English) make the integration for students very difficult.
- Psychological sensibility has an impact on cross-border cooperation.

3. Difficulties and barriers can be eliminated by:

- Investigating conditions (barriers and opportunities) and key elements necessary for successful cross-border cooperation in research and development.
- Elaborating a joint strategy in research, development and innovation with proposals ensuring the sustainability and further development of cross-border cooperation.
- Mobilising and combining knowledge available on both sides of the border through cross-border networks with key stakeholders (universities, research and innovation centres, business sector, administration) and policy makers responsible for research, development and innovation.
- Coordinating cross-border research activities in order to create synergies and for the benefit of the regional business sector.
- Making full use of all European and national funding programmes at cross-border level.
- Initialising joint courses and degree programmes as well as promoting the cross-border recognition of diplomas.
- Organising exchanges of students and teachers, providing necessary support and assistance.
- Improving language skills (language of the neighbouring country, not solely English).



- Creating the legal conditions for sustainable cross border cooperation (e.g. EGTC) in this field.

4. Added value of cross-border cooperation in research and development:

- Creation of European, institutional and economic added value not solely for border regions but for the European research activities in general (e.g. by closing the information gap in the ERA-Watch database).
- Mobilisation of European, national and other public and private resources through cross-border action programmes in research, development and innovation (based on a cross border strategy).
- Improvement of cross-border cooperation and facilitation of cooperation in innovation, research and development between public facilities and private enterprises (result: „public-private partnership“).
- Creation of the necessary „critical mass“ for particular innovation and research facilities that otherwise wouldn't be located in a border region as their realisation solely on one side of the border would not be possible:
 - Creation of “European Poles of Excellence”, “regional research landscapes” or “innovation clusters” (top performance can be rendered only through cooperation between facilities on both sides of the border).
 - High investment costs for medium-size complex research infrastructures can be rather justified in a cross-border environment.
 - Creation of infrastructures in border regions that are of interest for the European level, e.g. selected large equipment or broadband cable (Debate: European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructures).
- Specialisation at regional level with a huge dynamic of innovation through combination of competences and joint priorities.
- Achievement of important progress in cooperation at previous and current external borders of the EU while using the experiences of the “old” EU.

5. Expected results of cross-border cooperation are:

- Valuable knowledge for policy makers responsible for the creation of necessary conditions for innovation, research and development in national border areas and in a cross-border context.
- Exchange of best practices, recommendations and elaboration of key elements necessary for successful cross-border cooperation, also with benefit to the European research activities in general.
- Creation of joint and adequate framework conditions enhancing cross-border private and public investments in innovation, research and development (based on a cross border strategy).
- Exploitation of the transfer between basic and applied research and development (e.g. university on one side of the border, technical institute / university of applied studies on the other side of the border).
- Research and innovation networks in a Euroregion or a similar structure:



- Animation of a cross-border technology network including entrepreneurs, universities, research and innovation centres, investors and administration representatives with the aim to ensure a sustainable cooperation and realisation of innovative ideas.
- Continuous cooperation between universities, research centres and innovation facilities for the benefit of the regional economy on both sides of the border (support is provided by the regional level).
- Cross-border cooperation of SMEs involved in innovation and research processes (e.g. venture capital funds).
- Market-oriented, regional research and technology development concentrated on the needs of the local / regional economy.
- High-quality junior staff development in science and promotion of regular and permanent training.

All these factors together can improve the position of the Euroregion and the cooperating partners in the global, European and national competition.

6. The Role of Euroregions and similar structures is to:

- Act as service centre and service provider, engine and partner in cross-border cooperation between universities / research and innovation centres (under inclusion of private economy and public administration).
- Bring universities, research and innovation centres, private economy and regional administrations on both sides of the border together (creation of permanent working groups and networks).
- Develop cross-border strategies / programmes for research and innovation in partnership with network stakeholders.
- Ensure the provision of funding for programmes and projects.
- Provide support in terms of project development and funding.
- Initiate cross-border research and innovation clusters at regional level.
- Provide important information on European and national legislation that could have an impact on cross-border cooperation in this field.
- Publish research results, etc., in periodical reports on cross-border potentials in research, development and innovation, not solely at European and national level but first of all for the regional economy on both sides of the border.
- Ensure the sustainability of cross-border cooperation in this field.
- Solve occurring problems for the benefit of partners / stakeholders working in universities, involved in research and innovation.