

AEBR – AGEG – ARFE

50

years of cross-border
cooperation

2021

1971

AEBR STRATEGY 2030

Gronau 2021

FOREWORD

We are delighted to present to you the AEBR Strategy 2030, which outlines the strategic visions and goals we have defined to help AEBR realize its full potential and better fulfil its mission to enhance cross-border cooperation.

The process of formulating the AEBR Strategy has allowed us to take stock on past successes and failures, to determine our visions and future goals in the light of challenges ahead, and to put forward strategies for our development not only in response to changing needs but also as an active and participating agent to drive cross-border cooperation related changes.

The AEBR Strategy represents the concerted efforts of the AEBR staff and members, whose valuable input has been incorporated in this document. Let us take this opportunity to thank all of them for giving so much fruit for thought during the process of consultation and drafting of the AEBR Strategy document.

We are sure that with the collaboration of all the AEBR structures and supporters, the goals we aspire to accomplish will in time translate into milestones of which we can be proud. By investing in AEBR, we are investing to build a better future in European border and cross-border regions.

Ann-Sofi Backgren
First Vice-president

Karl-Heinz Lambertz
President

Martin Guillermo-Ramirez
Secretary General

TABLE OF CONTENT

INTRODUCTION	4
1. GOALS 2030.....	5
2. ACTION PLAN.....	7
2.1. Achieving CBC Objectives	7
2.1.1. Coordination with the Debates on Cross-Border Issues	7
2.1.2. Thematic work.....	9
2.1.3. Lobbying for the interest of border and cross-border regions	9
2.1.4. Instruments for achieving the goal.....	9
2.2. AEBR members	10
2.2.1. Recruiting new members	10
2.2.2. Activating members.....	11
2.2.3. Strengthening the connection between AEBR members and AEBR Team	12
2.3. AEBR Services and Communication.....	13
2.3.1. Efficient and focussed communication within the AEBR	14
2.3.2. Efficient and focussed AEBR outward communication	14
2.3.3. Quality services for AEBR members	15
2.4. AEBR Structural Budget.....	17
2.5. AEBR is a quality organization with professional staff	18
3. ROLES OF DIFFERENT PLAYERS.....	19
4. BACKGROUND	20
4.1. AEBR Members.....	20
4.2. AEBR Services and Communication.....	23
4.3. AEBR Structural Budget	24
5. THREE-YEAR GOALS.....	25
5.1. Thematic area 1: Achieving CBC objectives.....	25
5.2. Thematic area 2: AEBR members	25
5.3. Thematic area 3: Services and Communication	25
5.4. Thematic area 4: Structural budget.....	25
5.5. Thematic area 5: AEBR is a quality organization	25

INTRODUCTION

The Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) was founded in 1971 by the first border regions which had started cross-border cooperation in Europe after the Second World War, strengthening the integration of citizens across national boundaries. Over the last 50 years, the AEBR has been working for the common interests of border and cross-border regions inside and outside the European Union on their behalf, the identification of obstacles to cooperation and possible solutions, the promotion of exchanges between stakeholders in order to enhance cross-border cooperation and territorial development in general, with full respect to regional diversity.

Expectations from stakeholders that operate within and outside AEBR change over time. Therefore, in 2019 AEBR started developing a strategy for the next decade and beyond.

The AEBR Strategy 2030 consists of three parts: (1) **Goals 2030**, which introduces both the long-term and short-term goals of this strategy; (2) **Action Plan**, which discusses ways to reach these goals; and (3) **Background**, to give the reader background information of AEBR and to enlighten the reasoning behind the development of the goals.

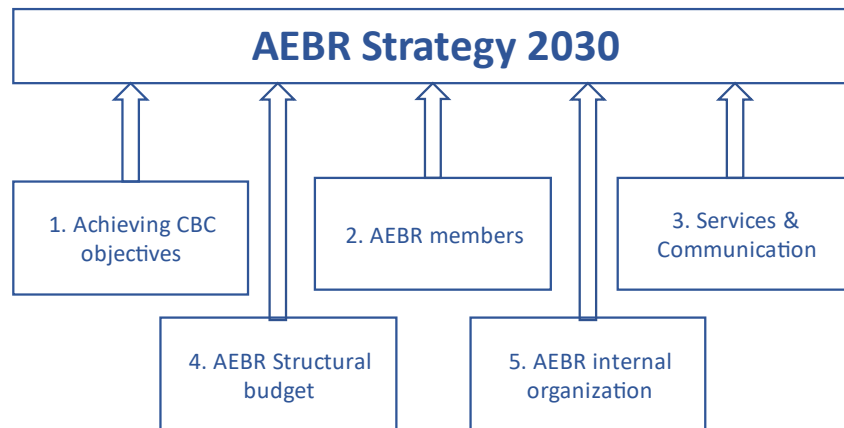
To develop the Strategy 2030 a Strategy Group was organized with the aim (1) to generate from-outside-in-view for the AEBR Strategy and (2) to act as an advisory body providing reasoning, guidance and advice. The Strategy Group is formed from the AEBR Members' side by Peter Hansen, Manuel Friesecke, Eszter Csokasi, Doede Sijtsma, Katharina Kampmann, Jurjen van Dijk, Timo Leinonen, Tiina Moisala, Carsten Jacob and Rüdiger Kubsch. From the AEBR Team Annika Jaansoo, Caitriona Mullan and Martin Guillermo-Ramirez have taken part in the discussions. And, AEBR President Karl-Heinz Lambert has also attended various meetings of the Strategy Group.

A preliminary set of results was presented to AEBR Executive Committee during the memorial events organized on 18 June 2021 at the Anholt Castle in Westphalia, where AEBR was founded. Finally, the AEBR General Assembly has approved the present text during the 50th Anniversary events in Arnhem (Province of Gelderland, the Netherlands).

1. GOALS 2030

The core business of AEBR is lobbying on cross-border issues at the EU and national levels while keeping an exchange of information with border and cross-border regions on cross-border cooperation in general and on related thematic issues, and providing services, mainly based on information, assistance and contacts.

The goals of AEBR for 2030 are set based on five thematic areas:



Thematic area 1: Achieving CBC objectives

Border regions' main objective is to reach a balanced development in their areas and remove border-related obstacles. This is why the AEBR was established, i.e. to overcome barriers to cross-border cooperation.

GOAL for 2030: AEBR has made significant contributions in terms of solutions and the required understanding at all levels of governance – EU, Member States, and subnational (regional/local) – for cross-border obstacles to be overcome at least in the Schengen area

Overcoming border-related barriers for cross-border cooperation is not only about the reduction of border hindrances on the ground, but also in people's minds: barriers, border control and prejudices towards the neighbouring country should be reduced. Furthermore, as there is currently no complete harmonization of legislation in Europe to tackle the so-called second generation of border-related obstacles, AEBR also aims to create compatibilities.

Our vision for the year 2030 in this thematic area is the following:

- There is a framework in place to overcome legal barriers
- Cross-border labour happens freely and effortlessly, i.e. cross-border labour is similar to inland labour
- CBC is fully recognized in a multi-level governance framework and cross-border cooperation is a normality
- AEBR has a strong influence on the EU and national cross-border policies via a strong presence in the European space
- AEBR is part of a wider network and has the greatest degree of prominence among all institutions and associations promoting border regions at the European level
- There is a stronger emphasis on learning the languages of the neighbouring countries
- Borders still exist but are more permeable and interfere less with residents' lives

Thematic area 2: AEBR members

To achieve the CBC objectives, AEBR needs members – motivated, active and loyal members. Therefore, this is the Goal for the year 2030:

GOAL for 2030: AEBR membership covers cross-border areas in both EU internal and external borders and has motivated, active, satisfied and loyal members

Thematic area 3: Services and communication

To achieve the CBC objectives and to have a wider representation with loyal and satisfied members, AEBR provides services and communicates its actions.

GOAL for 2030: AEBR is well-known among the border areas, the EU institutions and other players while providing services that attract new members.

Thematic area 4: AEBR Structural budget

To operate, an organization needs to be financially stable and sound. Financial flexibility is one of the key factors for the success of AEBR.

GOAL for 2030: AEBR is a financially strong organization that is not dependent on EU institutional support.

Thematic area 5: AEBR is a quality organization with professional staff

Having professional staff helps AEBR to create systems that guide AEBR towards being more impactful in achieving its goals.

GOAL for 2030: AEBR as an organization and its team are competent and qualified to achieve the goals set in the AEBR Strategy.

2. ACTION PLAN

This section of the AEBR Strategy 2030 provides a road map, an action plan, for achieving the goals set in the first section.

2.1. Achieving CBC Objectives

AEBR main goal in this thematic area is: *AEBR has made significant contributions in terms of solutions and the required understanding at all levels of governance – EU, Member States, and subnational (regional/local) – for cross-border obstacles to be overcome at least in the Schengen area*

There are three main steps in achieving the goal set for this thematic area:

- Coordination with the debates on cross-border issues
- Thematic work
- Lobbying for the interest of border and cross-border regions

These three steps are further discussed below.

2.1.1. Coordination with the Debates on Cross-Border Issues

There are growing debates about cross-border issues at the EU level as well as at the national and regional/local levels. Whereas the ongoing discussions on cross-border obstacles and public services might be crucial for the future of CBC, they are extraordinarily demanding for border regions and thus for AEBR. AEBR, as an organization with a wide representation, has the best overview of the topic. This, however, means that coordination of debates on cross-border issues, orientation and strong contributions are highly expected from AEBR, demanding AEBR take frequently the lead.

There is strong coordination on the topic of CBC with other networks such as the MOT¹ and CESCO², strengthened during the COVID-19 pandemic, and with many universities and research centres, mainly through the AEBR's experts' network built during decades and particularly during the implementation of *b-solutions*. AEBR also takes part in TEIN³ and various research projects (or demanding research). Since 2017, AEBR organizes a CB School for CBC researchers and practitioners.

There is also strong coordination on the topic with the EU institutions focusing on CBC: the European Commission's Border Focal Point, and the EGTCs' Platform at European Committee of the Regions, as well as its CBC Intergroup. There is a similar initiative at the European Parliament, led by the Alsatian MEP Anne Zander, working currently as an informal working group. However, there is a growing number of MEPs happy to react to support CBC, particularly but not exclusively at the REGI Committee, who should be capitalized.

A smart approach to the coordination of this network would make possible the systematic management of a very complex issue, with manifold and sometimes controversial aspects.

¹ *Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière*, Paris: <http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/>

² Central European Services for Cross-Border Initiatives, Budapest: <https://budapest.cesci-net.eu/en/>

³ Transfrontier Euro-Institut Network, Kehl: <https://transfrontier.eu/>

There are two major levels where AEBR has to coordinate the debates: the European context and AEBR members. At the European level, AEBR's role is to interact, exchange and coordinate CBC related issues with the EU initiatives (e.g. through lobbying, think tank). Targets and stakeholders:

- DG Regio
- Other Commission's departments (e.g. SANTE, GROW, NEAR, MOVE, EMPL, ENVE/CLIMA)
- Parliament: REGI committee, Informal Working Group on CBC, individual MEPs
- European Committee of the Regions: Intergroup on CBC, EGTC Platform, COTER Commission, Subsidiarity Platform, Covenant of Mayors, ARLEM, CORLEAP, etc.
- Council: through the Member States and their REPERs (*représentations permanentes*) in Brussels
- European Social and Economic Committee
- Other relevant players

The core business at the level of AEBR members:

- lobbying national and regional authorities, as well as MEPs, when necessary, to defend and protect our members' interests; and
- providing services, mainly based on information sharing, networking, assistance and provision of contacts.

Other stakeholders who take an active part in cross-border debates:

❖ Institutional:

- Europe: Council of Europe, in particular, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Centre of Expertise for Good Governance and COVID-19; Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)
- Transnational: BENELUX, Nordic Council of Ministers, Union for the Mediterranean, Carpathian Convention; current (and future) macroregional strategies: Baltic, Danube, Adriatic-Ionian, Alpine
- National: national ministries in charge (regional policy, territorial development, spatial planning, health, transport, finances, foreign affairs, etc.); national parliaments
- Interregional/ euroregional: in complex CB areas with various institutions at various levels; euroregions non-members of AEBR
- Regional: regional ministries and agencies in charge of CB issues (esp. regions with legislative powers); regional parliaments; border regions non-members of AEBR
- Local: municipal departments/agencies in charge of CB issues
- Other continents: African Union (AU), Andean Community (CAN), MERCOSUR, Central American Integration System (SICA), CEPAL, CAF, BID, national, regional/ departmental/ provincial authorities and agencies, several bi- or tri-national organisations to promote CBC
- Global: UN Agencies (e.g. UN Habitat, UNDP ART Initiative, UN Climate Action, ...)

❖ Non-institutional:

- Other specific networks: CESCO (AEBR member), MOT (partner)
- Universities and research institutes (Euro-Institute, ITEM,)
- Professional organisations: social-health care, transport, tourism and hospitality sector, creation, culture, etc.
- Civil society organisations, foundations and charities, youth associations, sports, NGOs (environment, migrants, etc.)
- Private sector: enterprises (esp. SMEs) with CB interests, CB chambers and associations of entrepreneurs, business incubators, PPPs, consultants, etc.

2.1.2. Thematic work

To deal with content-related work, AEBR has an Advisory Committee (Beirat), dealing with general and specific cross-border issues, as well as Task Forces dealing with thematic issues:

- TF External Borders (TFEB) (since 2007)
- TF CB Health (since 2007)
- TF Strategy and Finances (since 2009)
- TF CB Culture (T4CBC) (since 2012)
- TF Water Management (since 2012)
- TF Labour Market (since 2013)
- TF Interreg (since 2014)
- Working group on Small Project Funds & P2P projects (since 2015)
- TF Data and Innovation (since 2016)

In addition to the *Beirat* and Task Forces, a German Grouping also operates within AEBR.

2.1.3. Lobbying for the interest of border and cross-border regions

AEBR focuses on the cross-border aspects of EU policies. To provide discussion on border-related issues, AEBR provides the EU institutions with sound statements, Policy Briefs, analyses and other documents turning the attention of these organizations in the direction of most pressing issues as well as providing solutions to ongoing problems.

Also, AEBR must constantly respond to key policy consultations.

2.1.4. Instruments for achieving the goal

There are several instruments that AEBR can utilize to achieve the goal of this thematic area. These instruments are:

- AEBR members
- AEBR Task Forces
- AEBR network and events
- AEBR staff
- EU and other projects
- *b-solutions* project as a permanent instrument of AEBR
- Cooperation with other similar organizations
- Advisory Committee (*Beirat*)
- Cooperation with scientific organizations to make a connection between active politicians and scientists (e.g. via AEBR Cross-Border School)

In addition, AEBR can establish **AEBR Policy Support Group** whose members are civil servants of AEBR active members who are willing to invest in the timely preparation of lobby documents and reports for AEBR activities towards EU institutions (e.g. Position Papers, Policy Recommendations etc.), and also for the Executive Committee meetings and General Assemblies. The establishment of such an AEBR Policy Support Group aims for:

- More active use of the resources of AEBR members
- Creation of policy documents with a strong base and a follow-up
- Enhancing political discussions on local, regional and other international platforms
- Good presentation of AEBR members' interests in Brussels

The AEBR Policy Support Group could work with virtual tools, meeting occasionally alongside the statutory meetings of the Executive Committee and General Assembly.

Re-vitalizing the Beirat: the *Beirat* is an advisory body of the AEBR and as such, it should develop its role together with the development of the AEBR.

2.2. AEBR members

Under this thematic area, the AEBR goal is: *AEBR membership covers most cross-border areas in both EU internal and external borders and has motivated, active, satisfied and loyal members.*

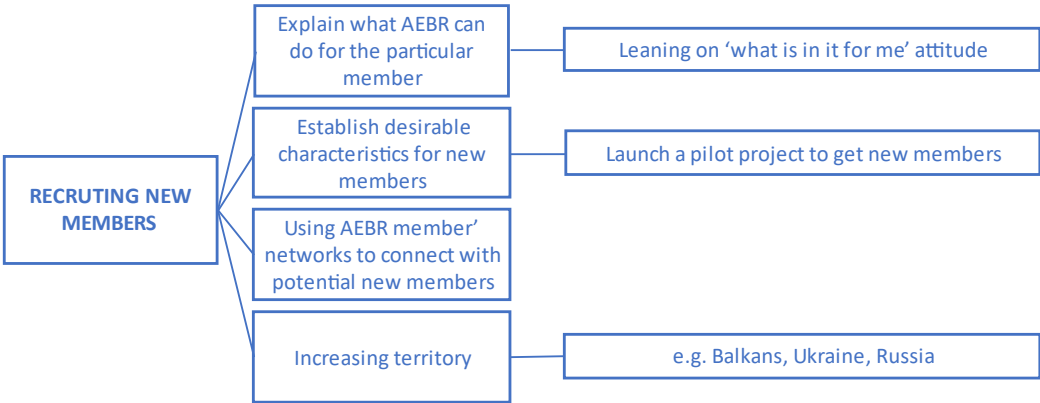
To achieve this goal, the following steps have been devised:

- Recruiting new members
- Activating current members
- Strengthening the connection between AEBR and its members, i.e. satisfied and loyal members

These steps are further discussed below.

2.2.1. Recruiting new members

For the development of AEBR, new members are essential. There are several ways to recruit new members (see the following Figure).



To achieve its goals, AEBR is looking for new members with the following characteristics:

- Active in cross-border issues
- Ability and willingness to pay the AEBR membership fee (e.g. NUTS II and III organizations, as well as active and operational CB structures)
- Influence/role in their country about cross-border issues
- Will to work together and to contribute to this partnership

To recruit new members, we can initially offer them an observer status.

EXPLAIN WHAT AEBR CAN DO FOR ITS MEMBERS

Finally, AEBR has achieved a lot during its 50 years of existence, especially in relationship with the major CBC-milestones: (Euroregions, CoE's Outline Convention, Interreg, EGTCs). Using these achievements as arguments when talking to potential new members to show them why a border or a cross-border region should become a member of AEBR.

ESTABLISH DESIRABLE CHARACTERISTICS FOR NEW MEMBERS

New members can also be gained by creating interesting opportunities and contents for members and non-members and by lobbying activities, i.e. AEBR can show its value to (prospective) new members by providing for the what's-in-it-for-me attitude. A positive environment of opportunities and discussions can ensure that current members will recommend AEBR to prospective members.

To recruit new members, AEBR can also launch a pilot action for those who are thinking to become members of AEBR. This pilot consists of:

- A reduced fee for a year (€ 600-800)
- Training of the new member via systematic/thematic monthly workshops. Through these workshops, other members of AEBR are providing their knowledge/expertise / good practices to the new members. This helps to connect successful CBC organizations with those less experienced and to link current AEBR members with potential ones
- Match each new member with a volunteer member ambassador, or "buddy" through an AEBR online community

A crucial aspect of this pilot is to get the new members active in AEBR from the first day.

USING AEBR NETWORKS TO GET NEW MEMBERS

Recruiting new members can best be done through current AEBR members, as the latter have an updated overview of the benefits that AEBR membership offers. So, connecting with their neighbouring regions or regions in their network, AEBR members have a huge potential for bringing in new members. This could be particularly useful for South, Western and Central European regions.

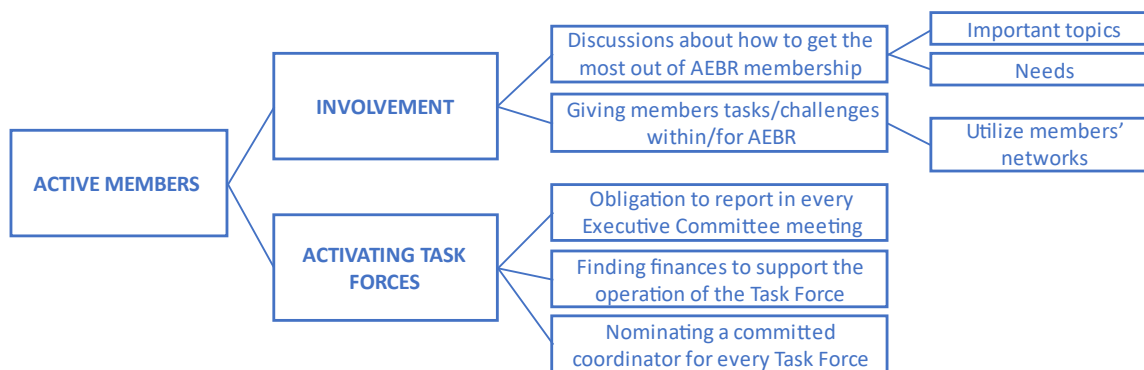
INCREASING TERRITORY

Currently, AEBR does not have many members in Eastern Europe, especially in the Balkans. Therefore, in the coming years, AEBR will especially focus on that area (without losing the approach to animate membership in the EU). Also, to strengthen CBC at the EU external borders, active members from Ukraine and Russia are essential. There are a few euroregions at the external borders of the EU which, due to language and capacity issues, deserve a specific approach. Other areas deserving a special focus are the Nordic countries, the borders of Switzerland and various European microstates (e.g. Andorra, Liechtenstein)

It is very important that AEBR does not poach members from our cooperation partners.

2.2.2. Activating members

Based on our research, less than 50% of AEBR members actively participate in AEBR arrangements, projects or Task Forces. There are several ways to enhance the activeness of our members, strengthen their loyalty and increase their satisfaction (see the figure below).



INVOLVEMENT

There are several ways to increase the engagement of AEBR members:

- AEBR can develop projects around relevant topics involving its members. There were various good examples of this kind of project in the last years, like the ESPON one on ‘Cross-border Public Services’, DG Sante’s on ‘Cross-border flow of patients’, *b-solutions*, etc.
- AEBR can involve AEBR members more in AEBR lobby tasks (e.g. there are various AEBR members represented at the CoR, MEPs from border regions can also be activated, etc.)
- to make the most of the AEBR members’ knowledge and experiences in meetings and events, it is necessary to make participation in these meetings and events as easy as possible (e.g. extending them into hybrid versions as much as possible)

In involving the AEBR members more, the emphasis is on participating/involving/networking, i.e. creating a circle of volunteers around AEBR to support the organization and bridging the gap between AEBR members and the everyday life of AEBR.

ACTIVATING TASK FORCES

Task Forces are an asset to AEBR as they work from case to case. There are several ways for all AEBR members to benefit from the work of the Task Forces:

- In General Assemblies, AEBR Task Forces give an overview of the discussions they have kept during the year and submit a working plan for the next year
- AEBR Task Forces should have at least one meeting per year to be active

However, to make the most out of the AEBR Task Forces’ discussions, the members of every Task Force need to have qualifications/expertise regarding the particular area of interest.

2.2.3. Strengthening the connection between AEBR members and AEBR Team

For AEBR to be successful, it needs active, satisfied and loyal members. To achieve this goal, the connection between the AEBR and its members has to be strengthened. This can be done in several ways.

COMMUNICATION

AEBR can improve the quality of engagement and communication with its members by initiating monthly calls/ meetings/ webinars to enhance the feeling of belonging. Also other communication channels should be explored to increase communication.

PERSONAL CONTACTS

A personal touch is very important - keeping in (personal) contact with members, potential problems can be spotted early and any wrinkle in the relationship can be ironed out quickly. There are several ways for a personal touch:

- During the AEBR meetings, contacts on a personal level should be made with each member
- If an AEBR member has not participated in the meetings for some time, AEBR Secretary General makes a personal call to see if everything is OK
- Personal meetings or phone calls about how the member is doing and what the particular problems in the border area are
- Facilitation of networking in the General Assembly, i.e. mixing new and old members to turn more attention to new members. Also, new members should make a presentation in their first appearance to help other AEBR members put a face to the name

DISCUSSIONS ABOUT BEING A MEMBER OF AEBR

To keep the AEBR members interested, discussions about being an AEBR member should be initiated. These discussions involve:

- Important topics to the member, i.e. what the particular member's needs are. This allows AEBR to bring members with similar needs together and, if possible, add an expert on this subject
- Why remain an AEBR member, if that membership is for the long run? For example, what they have achieved by being members of AEBR?
- How to get the most out of AEBR membership?

USE SAIL OF PAPENBURG TO STRENGTHEN THE CONNECTION

Re-thinking the role of the *Sale of Papenburg* as an instrument to enhance cross-border cooperation and benchmarking between AEBR members and to strengthen their connection with AEBR.

PROVIDING TRANSLATION TO EVENTS

AEBR is an international organization, meaning that members are speaking different languages.

Over the years we have noticed that language problems have inhibited some members' participation in AEBR meetings. There are more than twenty languages involved — AEBR uses mostly English, but German and, less frequently, French and other European languages are also used. To overcome this, AEBR organizes hybrid events with online interpretation OR requests host organisations to provide interpretation on site.

However, this is a handicap for some regions, where English or German are not comfortable languages to work with. A multi-lingual approach is a must for organisations like ours, and this is probably one of the easiest obstacles to overcome using currently available technology at an affordable cost.

2.3. AEBR Services and Communication

There have been different speeds, scopes and relevance in the diversity of border regions, and AEBR is the network established to support them in various essential services: exchange good practices, provide the latest and best information, produce feedback to lobby relevant institutions, and boost cooperation. Thus, communication plays a central role in AEBR's work.

To achieve the two previous goals related to CBC objectives and AEBR members, the quality of the services AEBR provides as well as efficient communication within AEBR, with its members and outwards are vital. The goal for 2030 in this thematic area is: *AEBR is well-known among the border areas, the EU institutions and other players while providing services that attract new members.*

To achieve this goal, the following steps have to be followed:

- Efficient and focused communication within AEBR (between AEBR members, among them and with AEBR Team)
- Efficient and focused AEBR outward communication
- Quality services for AEBR members

All these steps are discussed further below.

2.3.1. Efficient and focussed communication within the AEBR

In times that organisations receive plenty of newsletters, reports and information, the information that AEBR has should have an advantage over other communications. If AEBR's communication stands out from other communications, AEBR newsletters' reading rates will be higher. An increase in people reading AEBR communications is essential to get members to be more active and interact with AEBR on a more regular basis.

Digital meetings with members, such as webinars and online exchanges, could prove to be a valuable moment for communication. Therefore, this field does need attention.

Furthermore, the draft *Roadmap for the strategic implementation of Artificial Intelligence in AEBR*, presented to the AEBR Executive Committee (online) meeting on 4 September 2020, highlights:

A great variety of situations in our organization means dealing with a constantly increasing amount of data and information which can hardly be appropriately processed with traditional tools. There are technologies available in the market which can be adapted to our needs and help implement our tasks more efficiently. However, this needs a radical change in the strategy, operation and management of the Association, great doses of flexibility and adaptability, and a strong will to learn and invest in the future.

Appropriate communication and availability of relevant information are crucial for AEBR and its members, and AI might also improve organizational processes. A smart implementation of AI according to our organization needs and possibilities would support a stronger differentiation, and a better value-for-money of our services, resulting in better delivery and higher satisfaction of our direct customers: our members, and our indirect ones: border citizens."

2.3.2. Efficient and focussed AEBR outward communication

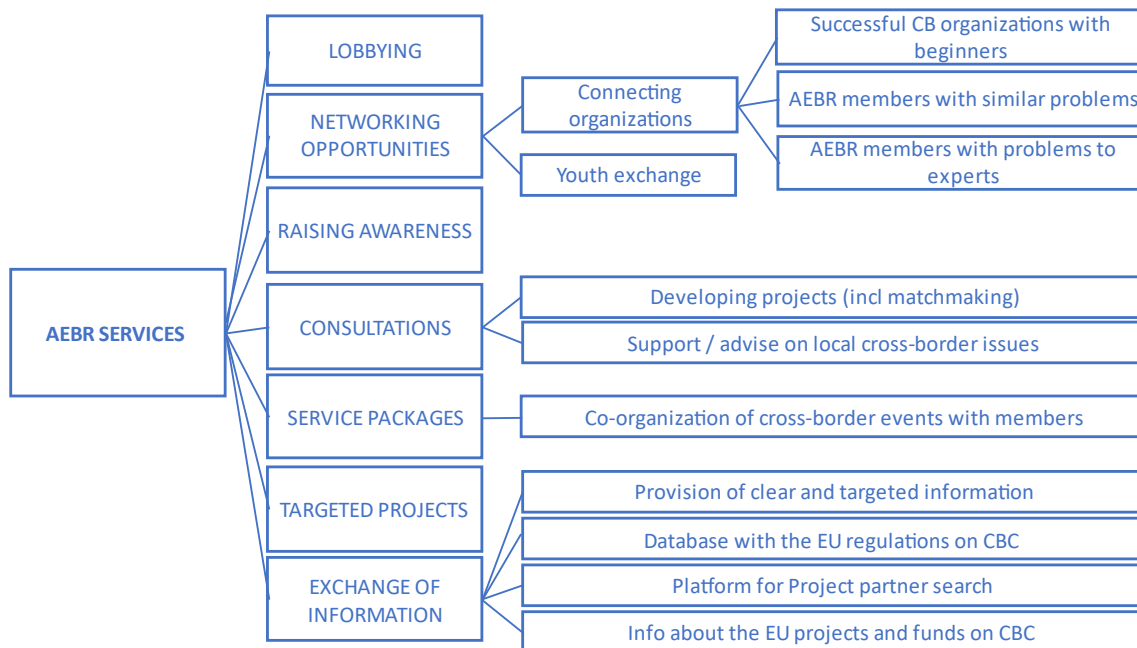
There are different levels of AEBR work (for a more detailed list of stakeholders, see section 2.1.1):

- Global (network, exchange of experiences, advise)
- European:
 - o European Union: Commission, Parliament, Council, Committee of the Regions, Economic and Social Committee
 - o Council of Europe, esp. the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Centre of Expertise for Good Governance and COVID-19
- National and regional level (support and advice for members regarding projects and programmes, participation in events, organization of working groups and conferences related to specific fields)

For AEBR to be noticed and accepted, it needs to have efficient communication also to the above institutions.

2.3.3. Quality services for AEBR members

To achieve the loyalty of AEBR members and to gain new members, AEBR has to offer services that are necessary and of high quality.



Over the years there have been several surveys conducted among AEBR members asking about the most demanded services provided by AEBR. Based on these surveys, the services that AEBR should provide and fine-tune are:

- Lobbying for border regions towards national and European institutions and bodies, e.g. through personal contacts, sound statements and analyses
- Networking: initiation, promotion and coordination of cooperation between regions in Europe to find ideas, inspiration and partners, e.g. by promoting/organizing/enhancing joint network activities, projects and thematic Task Forces. Also, connecting AEBR members with European institutions
- Raising awareness of problems, tasks, chances and challenges of border regions by organising subject-related events, providing analyses and targeted information on cross-border topics as AEBR is a contact point and central base of knowledge about CBC
- Consulting / assisting AEBR members on their cross-border issues and cross-border project management by making members who are experts in certain topics (e.g., CB Health, Green Deal etc.) more visible and connecting them with the ones in need i.e., members help members. In here, also connecting members from the West and East is of high importance
- Service packages. AEBR can provide services (e.g. developing projects, consulting projects) for a fee for members and a certain fee for non-members.
- Exchange of information and experiences among the members, e.g. through thematic meetings and implementation of joint projects

VERY IMPORTANT: the services AEBR already provides should be highlighted very clearly - this will also help to gain new members.

The need to provide better services is strongly connected with the need to communicate better. AEBR is aware of the availability or development of instruments to provide better services and communicate more efficiently: those developed around Artificial Intelligence (AI) and has started to explore them.

The abovementioned *Roadmap for the strategic implementation of AI in AEBR* stresses the need for AEBR to attract new members and increase the satisfaction of current ones by providing them with the **best available information, anticipating their needs, and designing specific services**. To this end, it also analyses the possibilities opened by AI to better accomplish its tasks by exploring the use of *Machine Learning* (ML) e.g. for information mining, *Natural Language Processing* (NLP) e.g. for machine translation, and *Robotic Process Automation* (RPA) in different processes and tasks within the organization, such as e-mail processing, marketing, data mining, financial management, members' relationship and virtual participation in meetings. RPA might be very expensive, ML needs high specialization by the operational human team, but NLP tools are already available, even for free, with high quality and excellent results.

The most relevant public contribution so far is [Connecting Europe eTranslation](#), an online tool to translate text from and into a growing number of languages⁴. The private sector also provides a number of tools. It is important to choose very carefully which are the more appropriate or convenient, but [Google Translate](#) has notoriously improved, and there are other products such as [Grammarly](#), for instance, which does not only check grammar but also detects the tone of writing. [Meaningcloud](#) helps with summarizing the contents when you need to read many papers.

AEBR's draft AI Roadmap includes various recommendations to improve organisational processes:

- Understand very well the possibilities of the proposed systems, and their financial impact on the organization.
- Evaluate the relative maturity of the key technologies to consider, in order to fill the strategy and support long-term investments.
- Instead of buying products, we should buy services, already developed by the providers (but adapted to our needs), in order to avoid additional staff and costs for support, maintenance and upgrade of the system.
- Try to find the appropriate combination of human and machine resources.
- Achieve the highest degree of integration into any other systems operating in our organization, and with our MEMBERS.
- Plan a 5-10-year strategic transformation of the organization's workforce around automation.

The action plan *Jumping into AI* means adopting a step-by-step approach, with a lot of caution and patience to manage change appropriately:

- First three years: the association gains a deeper knowledge of available applications, considering costs and expected return on investment, and consolidating a support group of relevant members while communicating any relevant aspect to the whole organization.
- 4th year: Once the appropriate decisions are taken, the transformation will start, with clear long-, mid- and short-term objectives, where any improvement will produce more changes.

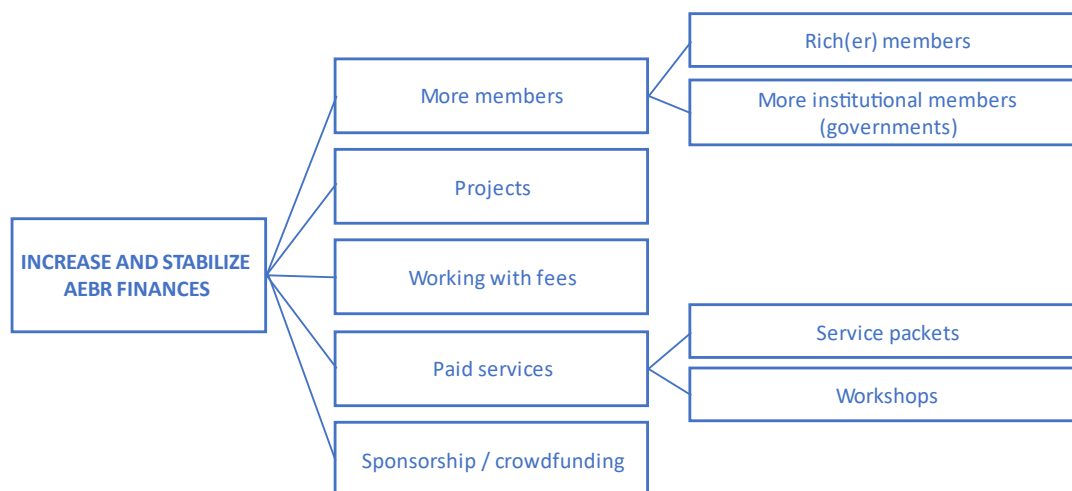
⁴ You need to have your own [EU Login](#) user and password (easy to get and very useful, as it gives you access to a growing variety of instruments, such as [eTranslation](#), [EU Survey](#), ...). On 31 October 2021 all EU official languages (including Icelandic and Norwegian) are available in eTranslation, plus Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Russian and Turkish

- 7th year: After three years of implementation: a completely new and smart organization will be able to process more efficiently internal and external information and will deliver much better and customized services.

This draft roadmap also includes various success criteria as well as ethical considerations, monitoring and evaluation provisions, and a proposal for its successful implementation and financing.

2.4. AEBR Structural Budget

AEBR's goal for 2030 is: *AEBR is a financially strong organization that is not dependent on EU institutional support.* There are several possibilities to achieve this goal (see the figure below).



Possibilities to make AEBR's budget more sustainable are:

- More members: Attracting more members and especially those who are able to pay the membership fee. There is even a proposal on table to strengthen the participation of "supporting members": those public authorities already participating through their CB structures, but willing to make an additional financial contribution and get involved more actively. Furthermore, other regional authorities with strong legislative powers and budgets (such as border German *Länder* or Swiss Cantons), could also be asked to contribute to the structural financing of the AEBR).
- Projects: Targeting a big European borders' project (coaching and escorting border regions); other projects to make us more visible
- Working with the fee:
 - o Indexing contributions, i.e. we lose about 1-2% of the membership fee every year due to inflation. That indexing should be done based on the German inflation rate
 - o Multi-annual membership (balancing of fees after three years)
 - o Raising fees - the last time the fee was raised was in 2017 and, previously, in 2011
 - o Creating types of memberships based on the services AEBR provides to members, i.e. I, II and III class members
 - o Rebalancing membership fees, i.e. how much is paid by different types of organizations (regions versus cross-border structures)
- Paid services: providing services for a fee, e.g. assisting in lobbying matters, accessing funds, the MOT's *bon á tirer* system; paying for conferences/seminars, e.g. minor contributions

compensating for at least the travel and accommodation costs; creation of AEBR products for sale

- Sponsorship / Crowdfunding:

- To gain sponsors announcing their events or products on our website and other communication tools
- Projects with organizations such as foundations (Konrad Adenauer, Friedrich Ebert, Bosch, Coca Cola, etc.)
- Crowdfunding for specific projects, e.g. the old AEBR dream of a cross-border TV series

2.5. AEBR is a quality organization with professional staff

Having professional staff helps AEBR to create systems that guide AEBR towards being more impactful in achieving its goals. The goal for 2030 is: *AEBR as an organization and its team are competent and qualified to achieve the goals set in the AEBR Strategy.*

3. ROLES OF DIFFERENT PLAYERS

There are several players in the implementation and monitoring process of the AEBR Strategy:

- General Assembly
- Executive Committee
- Task Forces
- Beirat
- Secretary General
- AEBR Members

To make the AEBR Strategy a success, the roles of these players have to be defined.

The role of the **General Assembly** in the implementation and monitoring process of the AEBR Strategy is mainly *an annual discussion about achieving the goals* of the strategy.

- The General Assembly is presented with 2-3 versions of goals among which the General Assembly will choose the goals for the coming year(s). This can be done via using interactive tools to enhance the activeness of the General Assembly
- AEBR members should also support and promote AEBR strategy

The **Executive Committee** in the implementation and monitoring process of the AEBR Strategy is mainly about *advising on achieving the goals* of the strategy.

- The Executive Committee not only sets the timeline of how and by what time AEBR has to achieve the milestones of the strategy, but also analyses and advises how to achieve these milestones
- 3-4 members of the Executive Committee have presented an opportunity to monitor and advise on achieving a certain milestone. However, it would be on a volunteer basis

The **AEBR Advisory Body Beirat** is involved via content advising of the AEBR Strategy. However, the activeness of the Beirat should be increased. Also, as there is an increase in cooperation between AEBR, CESC and MOT, it should be considered to involve the representatives of these organizations in the Beirat. So, potential members of Beirat can be:

- Senior contributors
- AEBR member organizations
- Friends of AEBR

The **AEBR Task Forces** play an important role in achieving the AEBR Strategy goals. The most important roles of the Task Forces are the following:

- holding quarterly meetings about achieving the goals of the Strategy
- presenting achievements on implementing AEBR Strategy to the Executive Committee
- working together with the Executive Committee members who are working on a certain goal
- monitoring the implementation of the Strategy
- advising the implementation of the Strategy
- ensuring the quality of the implementation process

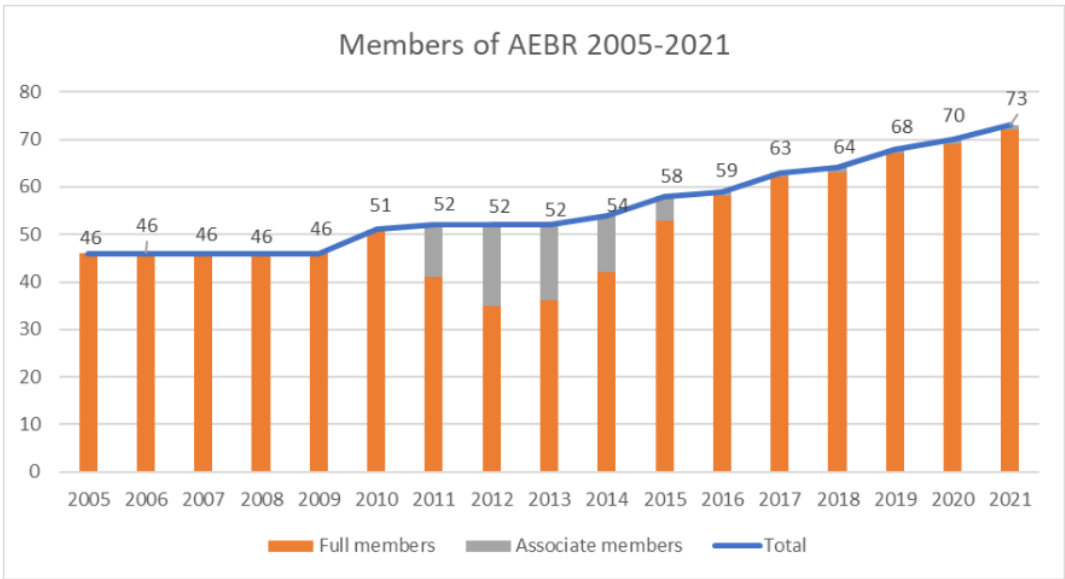
Other Task Forces of AEBR are also involved in monitoring and implementing the AEBR Strategy as they can be looked at as a toolbox for achieving the Strategy goals.

The **AEBR Secretary General** role is to connect the administrative part to the political part in achieving the AEBR Strategy goals.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1. AEBR Members

The members of AEBR are a heterogeneous group of organisations, both governmental and non-governmental. Over the last 15 years, membership has slowly risen to the roughly 73 organisations that are now (spring 2021) members of AEBR. A dip in full membership could be observed in the wake of the financial crisis that had quite a few members cancel their membership for financial reasons. After this, the amount of full members has risen almost every year, to the current amount of 73.



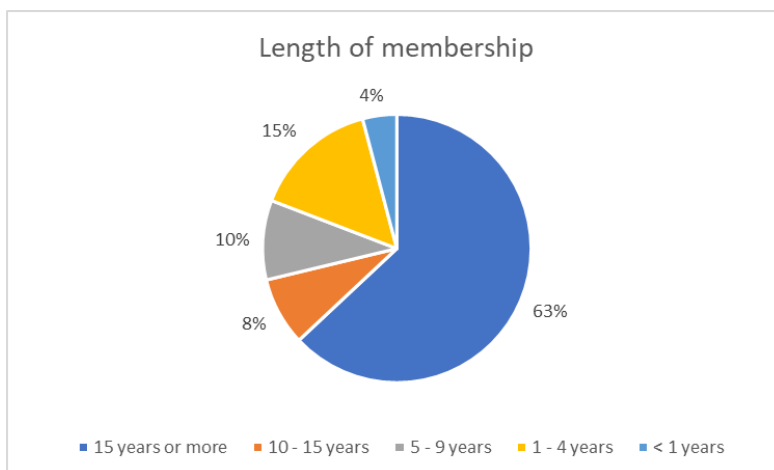
The members are located throughout Europe, with the focal point on the borders with Germany. Geographical gaps in members can be observed along French borders (most probably due to the influence of the MOT), in the Balkans and the Baltic States.

In total, there are 44 countries in Europe today and AEBR is represented in 27 of them. There are 17 countries with no AEBR representation. These countries are Albania, Andorra, Belarus, Bosnia, Croatia, Estonia, Iceland, Kosovo, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, North-Macedonia, San Marino and Holy See.



Type of border	Number of members
Borders between the New EU Member States	0
Borders between the Old EU Member States	25
<i>Bilateral borders</i>	24
<i>Multilateral borders</i>	1
Borders between the New and the Old Member States	23
<i>Bilateral borders</i>	15
<i>Multilateral borders</i>	8
EU Eastern External borders	13
<i>Bilateral</i>	8
<i>Multilateral</i>	5
Other EU External borders	8
<i>Bilateral</i>	6
<i>Multilateral</i>	2
Border between the non-EU countries	2
Other members	2
TOTAL	73

Type of organization	# of members	Total #
Cross-border organization (e.g. Euroregion, EGTC etc)	47	237
Region	20	1883 (Regions + LGs)
Chamber of Commerce	4	
Research organization	1	
Other	1	
TOTAL	73	

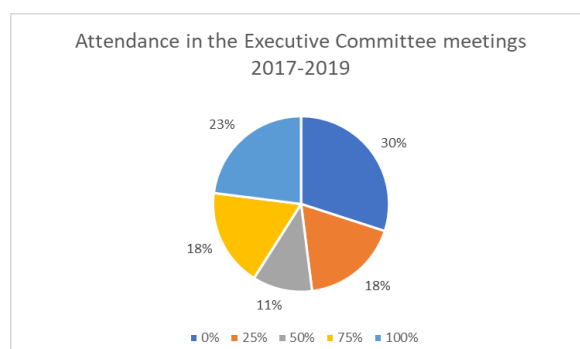
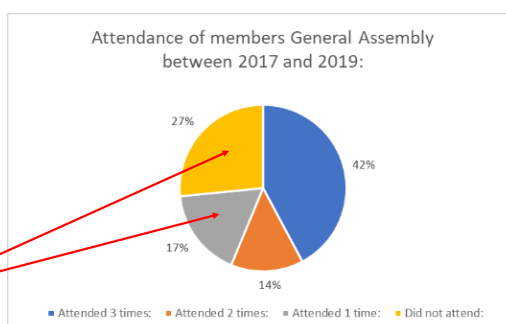


AEBR has to compete with various other organisations for its members. MOT (Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière), AER (Association of European Regions), CPMR (Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions) are the most noteworthy ‘competitors’. What can be noted is that these three, among other competitors of AEBR, all have their specific focus and their own pond in which they fish for new members. The height of membership fees is also different between AEBR and its competitors, with most of them having much higher membership fees. MOT has roughly the same membership fees as the AEBR.

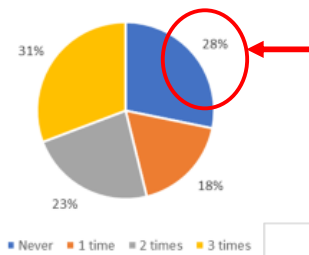
AEBR has 73 members (72 full members and 1 associate member) and 39 Executive Committee members. The activeness of AEBR members in AEBR events – General Assemblies and Executive Committee meetings – is rather low as can be seen from the following graphs.

ACTIVENESS

- AEBR has 72 full members and 1 associate member
- 27% + 17% = 44% of AEBR members do not attend in the General Assembly

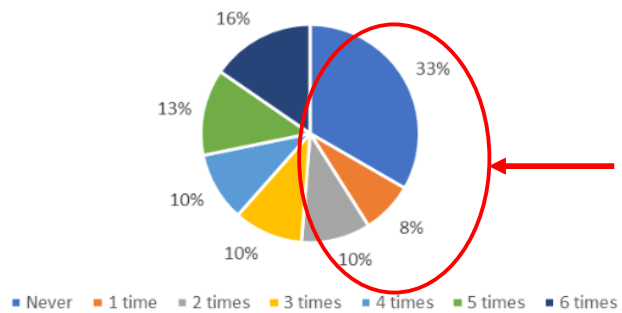


Attendance in 2019 ExCom meetings



- AEBR has 72 full members and 39 Executive Committee members

Attendance in 2017-2018 ExCom meetings



4.2. AEBR Services and Communication

Services and communication are primarily tied to the previous chapter on AEBR Members, as the services and communication from AEBR are largely geared towards its members. AEBR Communication follows a few channels (see the figure below). In 2020 AEBR also organized five forums, one on-site in Flensburg in February on CB Labour Markets, and four online: two on the (impact of) COVID-19 Crisis, one on Small and Medium Enterprises (with EURADA, intertwined with the Inter Ventures project) and one with CESCO, on Functional CB Regions in Western Balkans, to commemorate five years of CESCO-Balkans and AEBR Balkans.

AEBR COMMUNICATION

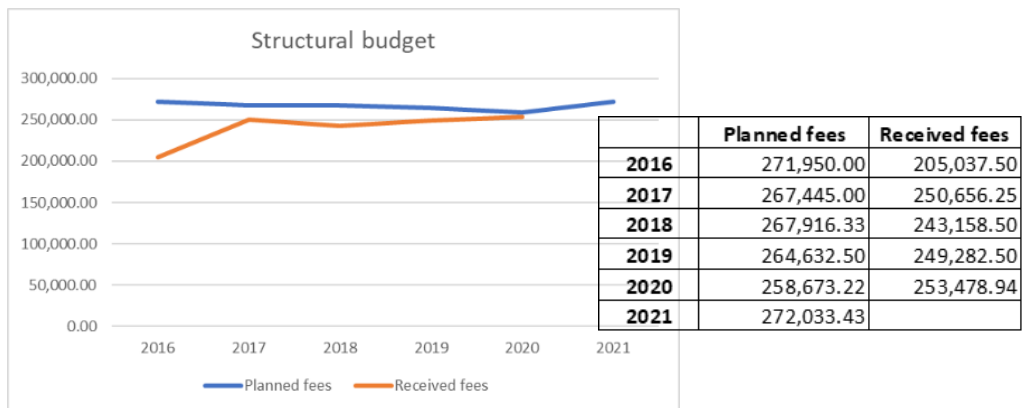
- AEBR communication channels:
 - AEBR Newsletter => to all followers: members, friends etc = 3243 contacts / 4 times a year => ca 19% of receivers open it
 - AEBR Insight => to AEBR members = 380/ once a month => ca 23% of receivers open it
 - AEBR Twitter => to all followers / when we have a communication
 - AEBR website => to all followers / when we have a communication => people are coming through the search engines => ca 1200 visits per month / best day is Tuesday
 - AEBR Facebook => to all followers / when we have a communication
 - AEBR Annual Conference
 - AEBR General Assembly
 - AEBR Executive Committee
 - AEBR Forums
-

4.3. AEBR Structural Budget

The structural budget of AEBR is mainly formed by the membership fees that each of the members pays annually to AEBR. Other sources of income for AEBR are based on the (European) projects that AEBR manages, such as *b-Solutions*, *IVY* and *Inter Ventures*, but these budgets are earmarked to specific tasks, and there is no “benefit” for AEBR, besides the deliverables and the capacity hire staff and finance a variety of actions. Additional liquidity is mainly gained through the implementation of consultancy actions, particularly in Latin America, through the *AEBR Global Initiative* coordinated from Brussels.

In the last few years, AEBR’s structural budget fluctuates between €258.000 and €272.000, depending on the number of joining/leaving members and the amount of non-paying members. Each year, membership fees between € 5,000 and € 25,000 are not received. Usually, the members that have not paid stop their membership after two years. These non-paying members rarely attend events such as the General Assembly either.

AEBR STRUCTURAL BUDGET



MEMBERSHIP FEE COMPARED TO OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

- AEBR (potential) members are also involved in:
 - International
 - MOT => (support from sponsors to membership fee) => 1,500EUR (municipalities) – 13,000EUR (regions)
 - CESC =>
 - CPMR => 60,000EUR / yearly (after reductions) => CEMR
 - AER => 20,000EUR/ yearly (Euroregions are not typical members)
 - AEBR => 6,000EUR/ yearly
 - National
 - Regional associations
 - National associations

5. THREE-YEAR GOALS

5.1. Thematic area 1: Achieving CBC objectives

- AEBR has established a permanent monitoring list of upcoming CBC-relevant EU legal regulations and has analysed their consequences for CBC
- AEBR is a number one partner to the EU on the CBC issues / AEBR is recognized by the European Parliament as the expert on CBC issues

5.2. Thematic area 2: AEBR members

AEBR has a clear and compelling roadmap for getting new members and activating existing ones

5.3. Thematic area 3: Services and Communication

- A communication officer (or CCO) (with experience in political communication) works full time for AEBR
- A communication officer has developed a communication strategy

5.4. Thematic area 4: Structural budget

Identify and contact core target (potential) members

5.5. Thematic area 5: AEBR is a quality organization

Skills of the entire team are mapped, gaps defined and targeted