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Master's Thesis

The Influence of Cross-Border Cooperation on the Competitiveness of Euroregions

A Comparative Case Study of
the Greater Region and the Euregio Egrensis

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Theses guidelines

Objective:

The aim of the master thesis is to assess the influence of French-German or German-Czech cross-border cooperation on the competitiveness of euroregions.

Methodological approach:

The thesis could be based on a contrastive case study of two selected Euroregions, taking into account different aspects that may have an impact of their competitiveness. The central question of the study will be whether the fact that regions cooperate with a partner on the other side of the border improves or enhances the economic, social, cultural, etc. situation of a region. In this context, important aspects such as the aims and the functions of the Euroregions, economic matters, specific activities, etc. should be described, in order to evaluate their level of competitiveness. On the methodological level, this could be done by means of document analysis, qualitative interviews and other method of qualitative research.

Framework structure:

1. Introduction. Objectives.
2. Review of literature.
3. Methods.
4. Results, potentially discussion.
5. Conclusion.
- X. References
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Beck, J. (Ed.) (2014). Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit mit deutscher Beteiligung, Berlin.

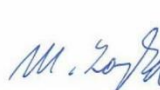
Bellini, N., & Hilpert, U. (Eds.). (2016). Europe's Changing Geography: The Impact of Inter-regional Networks. Routledge.
Ganster, P., Sweedler, A., Scott, J. & Dieter-Eberwein, W. (Eds.) (1997). Borders and Border Regions in Europe and North America. 376 p.
Perkmann Markus (2002): "Euroregions: Institutional Entrepreneurship in the European Union." In: Perkmann Markus, Sum Ngai-Ling (eds.): Globalization, Regionalization and Cross-Border Regions. International Political Economy Series. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 103-124.

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Jerome Friedrichs

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List of Abbreviations

AEBR	Association of European Border Regions
CBC	Cross-Border Cooperation
CoR	European Committee of the Regions
EGTC	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
NUTS	Nomenclature des Unités Territoriales Statistiques
RCI	European Regional Competitiveness Index
SME	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise
UniGR	University of the Greater Region
WEF	World Economic Forum

1. Introduction

For a long while, it seemed as if the world at the end of the 20th century was inevitably on its way to becoming ever more interconnected, possibly even integrated – in sum: ever more globalised – and characterised by an ever-increasing permeability of borders. This impression was reinforced by the events that led to the dissolution of the Soviet Empire (irrespective of the fact that they were accompanied by the drawing of new borders), the end of the cold war and the ‘Iron Curtain’, for which the fall of the Berlin Wall became arguably the most powerful and influential symbol. Capitalism and the free movement of goods, services and money had prevailed over socialism, and Western scholars held a debate about the future of the nation-state and its borders as the main anchors of the upcoming world order, with some even prophesising “the ‘end of the state-centric world of territoriality and borders’, and the ‘end of the nation-state’” (Anderson & O’Dowd, 1999: 599). A quarter of a century, a non-ending ‘war on terror’, a financial crisis, a so-called ‘refugee crisis’, Brexit, the rise of ‘Trumpism’ and a global pandemic later, debates on the demise of states and their borders have become either a thing of the past or of the very distant future.

Another symbol for the decreasing significance of (nation-state) borders were the emerging and growing supra-state regions and entities – potentially more so than any other, the European Union. The EU and the European integration process are built on the promise of mutual (economic) benefits for its members, largely resulting from the removal of internal border controls and of other border obstacles through the creation of the single market, which guarantees the free movement of goods, services, capital and people, as well as through the promotion of a single currency. Along with the progressive enlargement of the European Union, however, also came the realisation of an ever-increasing gap between the various regions of the member states, in other words: the perception of economic, social and territorial disparities. These disparities tend to be strongest at the peripheries of the (central) member states – their border regions –, so the removal of prevailing border obstacles was identified as one of the main avenues of action to tackle the issue of disparities and towards economic, social and territorial cohesion on the continent.

Cross-border cooperation became the keyword for these efforts, a process majorly set in motion at about the same time as the ‘kick-off’ of modern globalisation at the beginning of the 1990s and heavily financially incentivised by the European Union ever since. With the increasing importance of cross-border cooperation also came the rise of ‘Euroregions’, structures that assemble regional stakeholders from both sides of the border and are understood to be major facilitators in the cross-border cooperation process and that thus became one of the main targets for EU funding. At the

same time, this development reflects the growing importance that regions, as connectors between the (supra-)national and local level, were beginning to be attributed with on many levels. Ever since, however, regions have also seen themselves haunted by another debate that has seen its popularity rising steeply since its ‘invention’ in the 1990s: the debate of their – regional – competitiveness and their ability to prevail in the ‘competition of the regions’. Regional competitiveness quickly became one the favourite buzzwords of policy makers from the local up to the European level. So much so that “the concept of regional competitiveness has become a ‘hegemonic discourse’” (Bristow, 2005: 287).

1.1 Definition of Objectives

This master’s thesis attempts to analyse the influence of cross-border cooperation on the competitiveness of Euroregions by means of a comparative case study of two selected Euroregions: the Greater Region at the intersection of the borders between the states of Belgium, France, Luxembourg and Germany, and the Euregio Egrensis, covering territories of the Czech Republic and the three German Länder Bavaria, Saxony and Thuringia. The methodological choice is not least grounded on the fact that “rather than concentrating only on internal characteristics, it is generally more fruitful to study a border region in terms of its comparisons and relations with other regions and institutions” (Anderson & O’Dowd, 1999: 596). Not only is the choice of a *comparative* case study fruitful in general, but border regions have received immense attention from scholarly research over the years because their particular characteristics have made them preferable spaces for study, even earning them the title of ‘living laboratories’ for European integration.

However, the research objective raises first and foremost two questions: How to measure the influence of cross-border cooperation and how to measure the competitiveness of (Euro)regions? This thesis is therefore divided into two parts. First, the key concepts of Euroregions, cross-border cooperation and regional competitiveness will be discussed at length as all of them are demanding notions in their own right and their understanding is critical for the success of the subsequent comparative case study, which will then form this thesis’s second part.

A few other preliminary remarks need to be made at this point. The research subject of cross-border cooperation, and to a degree also that of Euroregions, is characterised by a certain ephemerality. Not least the present COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how quickly and drastically the conditions for cooperation across borders can change. Even before COVID-19, however, European cross-border cooperation had been subject to many and frequent policy

reforms, quickly rendering much of the research on the two subjects of cross-border cooperation and Euroregions outdated. This is especially true at the end of single European programming periods when much reworking is done and the future particularly unknown.

Another necessary remark concerns the issue of ‘normative inflections’ (Perkmann, 2003: n.p.). Much of the research on the issue has a strong interest in proving the positive effects of cross-border cooperation. While I might not have a personal interest in proving its worth, I generally believe in the value of European cooperation, a standpoint that must not obscure the view on the subjects and consequentially must be reflected with caution. It is even possible to argue that the thesis’s topic itself is close at risk of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy, as neither a negative nor a non-existing effect of cross-border cooperation on the competitiveness of Euroregions seems very likely. However, these reflections only require a certain change of angle on the research topic. Rather than primarily studying whether European cross-border cooperation has positive impacts on the competitiveness of border regions, this thesis is mainly concerned with understanding the reasons behind the existence of Euroregions, the support of cross-border cooperation and the ‘hegemonic’ call for regional competitiveness, as well as with studying the positive and negative effects that might result from these explications – via the comparative study of two Euroregions.

1.2 Literature Review

Each of the topics raised above and to be discussed has been subject of extensive scholarly research. What is more, especially the issues of Euroregions and cross-border cooperation have aroused the interest of different disciplines that have all turned to the respective subjects for various reasons and with different research agendas in mind. Therefore, the following literature review cannot provide a holistic overview of academic research on the subjects but only shine spotlights on the most relevant research questions and trends for the pursued objectives of this thesis.

Research on Euroregions has, generally speaking, either studied the structure, function and objectives of individual Euroregions and thereby attempted to provide explanatory behaviours and regional policy recommendations. Or, studies have aimed at developing models, classifications and typologies of the various entities named Euroregions on the continent, on the basis of which oftentimes attempts have been made to identify generalisable factors of success and failure, as well as issues specific to certain types or constructions of Euroregions. Issues of particular interest have been differences in Euroregional structures in different parts of Europe and whether Euroregions located in Central and Northern Europe are generally more successful than those in Southern and

Eastern Europe. In this regard, Euroregions have also received particular attention under the perspective of governance – especially multilevel governance – and their role in European cross-border cooperation. Remarkably influential and often seen as having had a pioneering character have been the studies of Markus Perkmann, who studied the emergence of Euroregions and other cross-border entities in Europe and their rise in prominence and importance under the perspectives of institutional and policy entrepreneurship. Other research has, amongst others, focussed on their contemporary role in regional development or their significance in institution-, network- and community-building processes. Furthermore, some studies have specifically examined maritime Euroregional structures and the contexts of cross-border cooperation across seas.

Since Euroregions have predominantly been studied as specific mechanisms in the cross-border cooperation process, both subjects are closely connected in scientific research. As is the case for Euroregions, cross-border cooperation has been studied as an individual practice and has been the subject of typology and framework analysis attempts that study drivers and barriers alike. European cross-border cooperation has been the research issue of diverse disciplinary perspectives, each for their own respective reasons. Spatial development as an example, has, in recourse to political science approaches, studied cross-border cooperation as a theoretical foundation of specifically European spatial development and its practical implications for various areas, such as European integration and the ‘new regionalism’, but also governance (Pallagst et al., 2018: 29). Especially economics and the fields of local and regional (socio-economic) development have studied the issue at length in order to identify its influence on the development of local, regional, national and supra-national economies and as an “intrinsic tool for subnational authorities pursuing European integration while reducing the separating effects caused by national borders” (Camonita et al., 2020: 515). Many studies have thus analysed the contemporary European framework for cross-border cooperation, especially the legal preconditions, and the influence of EU programmes, mainly Interreg. Other studies have examined the impact of cross-border cooperation on subjects such as innovation and knowledge, tourism, culture, health, the provision of public services, and the aforementioned regional development and spatial planning (Ibid.: 520).

The economic concept of competitiveness was transferred from its original micro-economic business context to spatial entities – first the nation then the region – at the beginning of the 1990s. It quickly became one of the favourite terms of European policy makers because it simultaneously promised an explanation and a solution to the apparent economic unevenness between the different regions of the EU member states. However, the idea of a regional competitiveness is by no means uncontested and has been a much-debated issue since its rise to prominence. This also regards its general usefulness and correct measurement, and its theoretical conceptualisation and

empirical application. However, the subject has been discussed most under the perspective of endogenous development and growth theories and in regard to knowledge, innovation and entrepreneurship as explanatory factors. Its relation to network-building capacity, clusters and institutions has also found particular interest among research on the issue (Huggins & Thompson, 2017). In addition, different and very influential indices that promise a measurement and overview of the regional competitiveness of individual regions have emerged over the years.

Lastly, the two Euroregional cases of the Greater Region and the Euregio Egrensis have each attracted the interest of scholars to very different degrees. The Greater Region has been subject of extensive research covering a wide variety of thematic fields such as territoriality and governance, education, social capital and related discussions on competitiveness, or the ongoing structural and demographic changes. By far the highest appeal, however, has lain in the in many regards unique cross-border labour market and the related issues of commuting, transportation, housing, as well as the economic, social and environmental issues resulting from the heavy commuting in the region. Regarding the Euregio Egrensis, the opposite is the case. Apart from single studies concerned with the Euregio, such as a dissertation on the issue of the German-Czech Euroregions from the year 2013, notable and recent research dealing with the Euregio Egrensis seems to be largely missing.

One final preliminary note needs to be made. Because this thesis was written during the COVID-19 pandemic, and largely also during a time of extensive lockdown, physical access to literature was severely restricted and thus limited to online resources only. While overall this has proven sufficient, not everything that was potentially of interest for this thesis was accessible, which has forced me to cite important sections from the literature after other sources more often than would otherwise have been desirable. Although every attempt has been made to ensure that the circumstances influence the work as little as possible, it must also be said that this thesis would, without a doubt, have turned out to be a different study, were it not for a global pandemic.

2. Euroregions

Any first approach to the concept of the Euroregion(s), searching for answers to the questions of what an Euroregion is and what exactly constitutes and differentiates this specific type of region from other types of regions, will most likely initially be subject to confusion and disappointment. When looking at the existing literature on Euroregions, it quickly becomes apparent that the term is nowadays used with such abundance and for such diverse entities that there does not seem to exist a consensus on a definition or even a widely shared common understanding of Euroregions. The issue is further amplified by the multidisciplinary character of the research subject (see for good overviews: Camonita, 2020: 520; and Perkmann, 2003: n.p.). Consequentially, many studies' motivation is reducing said confusion by developing – again quite diverse – typologies and (re)definitions of the concept, not least in order to better understand the functioning and functions of the many evolved forms of cooperation across borders within and due to Euroregions, and to identify their factors of success and failure. This is, of course, also one of the aims of this thesis. Indeed, most studies on Euroregions, even when dealing with the more theoretical issues of typology and definition, are mainly driven by inherently practical motives, such as, for example, “a need for orientations towards increased Euroregional efficiency” (Camonita et al., 2020: 516). This is a characteristic that also holds true for the closely related discussions on cross-border cooperation (Perkmann, 2013: 154). The main reason for the widespread usage of the term Euroregion is primarily found in the appeal of the notion – an appeal that can be explained by investigating the term's history and the promises that were and remain connected to its usage.

Due to “the great variety of features and institutional backgrounds in Euroregional structures” (Camonita et al., 2020: 516) and the consequential difficulties in simply providing a definition of the concept of Euroregion, this chapter aims first and foremost at arriving at an understanding of the subject as well as of the importance attached and of the issues connected to it. The goal is to end up with a working concept of Euroregions for this thesis and to enable its linkage to the concept of regional competitiveness. One last preliminary remark concerning this subject: there are limits to what this thesis may feasibly cover. Quite quickly, studies on Euroregions become detailed discussions about the different legal status and governance structures (and their implications) on which the various territorial entities named Euroregions are built. I will not be offering a holistic overview of these topics and only cover the differences and discussions revolving around the issues of legality and governance when it seems necessary for the overall understanding of Euroregions or the case study, or when they have ramifications for the concept of regional competitiveness.

2.1 A Short History of Euroregions

What then are Euroregions? As has just been presented, there is no simple answer to this question. Historically, the first indication of the term Euroregion can be found in 1958, when the ‘Euregio’ – one of today’s many cross-border cooperation structures –, located on the Dutch-German border near the cities of Enschede and Gronau, was first established. The Euregio is often considered to be the very first Euroregion. According to many, this is also where the term originated from and then “gradually became a general term defining a form of CBC [cross-border cooperation] throughout Europe” (Lepik, 2009: 266). At this point, this might also serve as a first common denominator of the various Euroregions: they are structures in which some sort of formalised cooperation across (national) borders is taking place. What this first approach to the concept of Euroregion also already indicates is how closely interconnected the ideas and histories of Euroregions and cross-border cooperation are. However, the establishment of the Euregio is not the reason for the existence of Euroregions today but is itself an expression and a logical consequence of the larger developments of the time.

The development and rising popularity of the concept is deeply connected to the European integration process of post-World War II Europe. From the very origins of what today is the European Union – the European Coal and Steel Community and its many subsequent entities –, the cooperation between countries and regions that formerly were enemies has been considered one of the key elements for a potential European unification and thus the promise of lasting peace on the continent (Sanguin, 2013: 156). Cross-border cooperation was one of the main driving forces for ‘Europe’, and Euroregions were seen as structures facilitating this cooperation. The importance that the European Union still attributes to Euroregions in this regard can be witnessed in expressions such as that “[t]he European Commission considers Euroregions as the keystone of its regional policy and as the best method for *unionization* regarding the candidate countries to the membership” (Ibid.). This latter characteristic of Euroregions of helping in the preparation of candidate countries for joining the union mainly since the 1990s (De Sousa, 2013: 678).

One of the reasons for the Euroregions’ high appeal and the consequential widespread usage of the term is therefore the importance that was attached to cross-border cooperation, which in turn is rooted in the European idea itself, and the function that was attributed to Euroregions in the European integration process. At this point, it should be noted that the increasing permeability, or rather: the changing significance of borders in the Europe of the second half of the 20th century, also served as an accelerating factor for the development and increasing popularity of Euroregions (Lepik, 2009: 268) – especially after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Medeiros, 2011: n.p.).

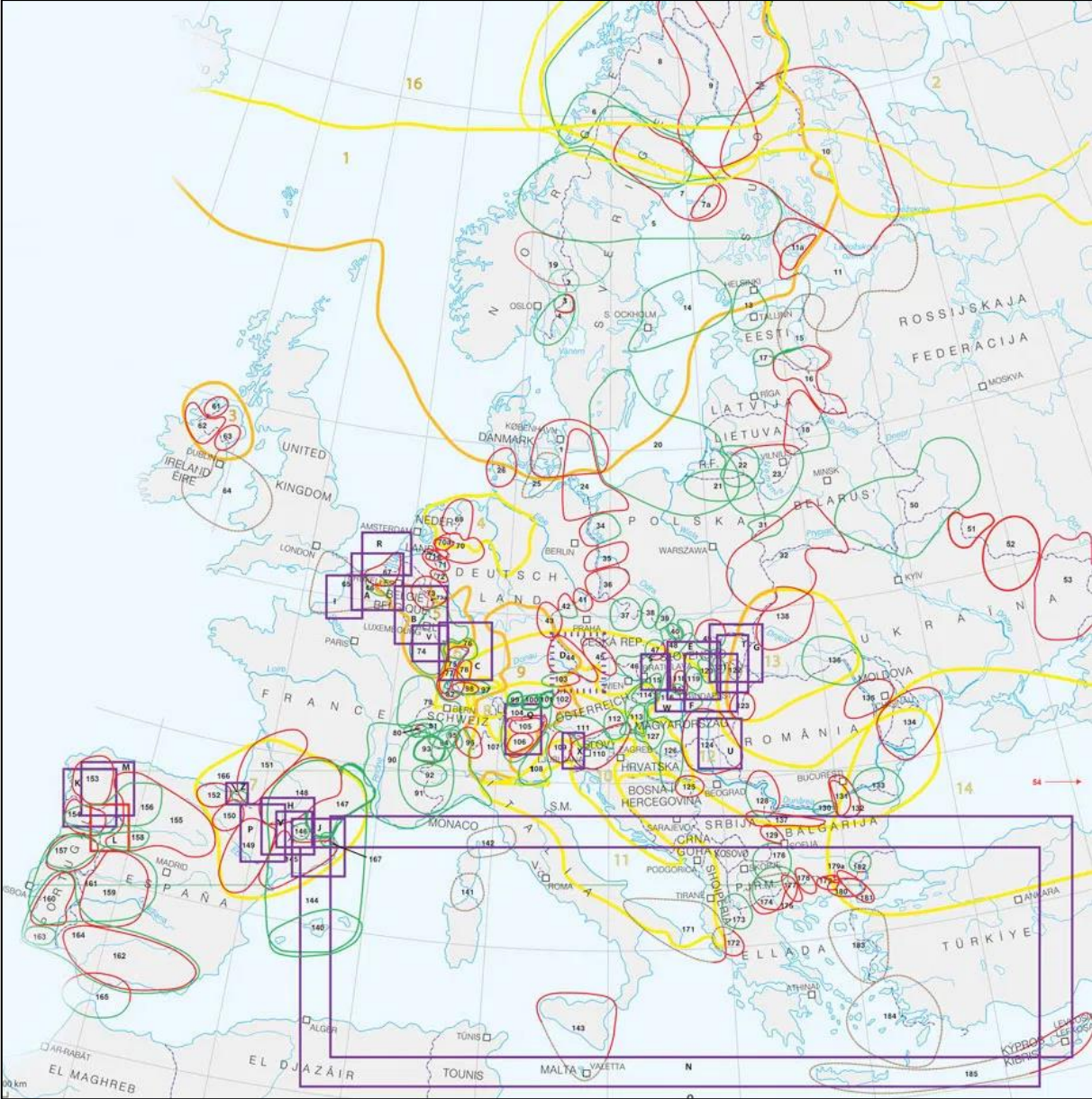
However, the fact that Euroregions were and still are being attached with such an idealistic importance still neither sufficiently explains what exactly constitutes these specific types of regions, nor does it explain their heterogeneity, nor does it provide a sufficient basis for a working concept of Euroregions for this thesis.

Although the mentioning of the term Euroregion nowadays predominantly evokes the idea of territorial structures within the framework of the European Union, the – legal – conception of cross-border cooperation does not originate from an initiative of the EU but of the Council of Europe. It was the so called ‘Madrid Convention’ in 1980 that defined the first legal foundations and instruments for cross-border cooperation in Europe (Council of Europe, 1980). With the introduction of the Madrid Convention, two main types of cross-border cooperation emerged: Working Communities and Euroregions – distinct mainly by their scope, and with Euroregions conceptualised as the much smaller of the two (Sanguin, 2013: 157). The main reason for discussing the Madrid Convention at this point is that it illustrates the differences in the way that the Council of Europe and the European Union each dealt with Euroregions and cross-border cooperation in general. Historically, while the Council of Europe established and *founded* structures, the European Union implemented programmes that *funded* the various structures of cross-border cooperation that were being established in Europe over the years (Ibid.: 158). Important instruments for this were mainly the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), introduced in 1975, and the Interreg programme, first implemented in 1990. It is, however, equally important to mention that the EU funds and programmes themselves have gradually become key engines in the institutionalisation of cross-border cooperation in Europe (Ibid.). This is especially true for the Interreg initiative, to whom the biggest surge in the establishment of new Euroregions and other cross-border cooperation structures in the 1990s is largely attributed (Medeiros, 2011: n.p.).¹ It is almost needless to add that the role and influence of the European Union and its instruments for the establishment of Euroregions and the development of cross-border cooperation in general have also been subject to discussion and have been challenged by various scholars. The main argument for an overestimation of the European Union’s impact is “that cross-border cooperation is driven from the bottom up” (Lepik, 2009: 268). However, the Interreg initiative undeniably became the most important source of funding for most Euroregions and other cross-border structures after its introduction. This in turn lead to the foundation of many cross-border cooperation structures with the clear purpose to “function as implementation agencies for this specific type of transnational regional policy” (Perkmann, 2002: 116). Since one of the requirements for Interreg funding is

¹ Exact numbers are, due to the imprecise nature of Euroregions, somewhat problematic. Still, for illustration purposes: Sanguin, for example, states that in 1990 35 Euroregions existed, and in 2013 already up to 100 (Sanguin, 2013: 161). See for a visualisation of Euroregions also the map of the AEBR on this subject (Figure 1).

compliance with EU regulations, the European Union became both a promoter and shaper of European cross-border cooperation via Interreg and its other programmes (Perkmann, 2003: n.p.).

Figure 1: AEBR Map of Euroregions



Source: AEBR (n.d.)

Another reason for the high appeal of the concept of Euroregion therefore is its monetary promise, which in turn is a direct result of the importance that the European Union has attached to Euroregions as structures facilitating cross-border cooperation (Medeiros, 2011: n.p.). Two important consequences of the EU’s way of dealing with Euroregions and cross-border cooperation were that, on the one hand, many structures engaged in cross-border cooperation self-proclaimed themselves Euroregions in the hope of accessing the financial instruments of the European Union – hence the great variety in Euroregions. Moreover, most of these structures did

so without making use of the legal framework offered by the Madrid Convention and thus were Euroregions ‘just by name’. A good example of this are the many and diverse Euroregions that appeared in Eastern Europe in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Sanguin, 2013: 160f.). On the other hand, and as a consequence of this development, many Euroregions often found themselves powerless, their legitimacy questioned, and unable to effect meaningful changes due to the lack of a clear legal basis to operate on and which would have integrated them in the larger European or in their respective national governance frameworks (Ibid.: 161). In an attempt to empower cross-border cooperation structures and combat the issues resulting from the lack of a clear legal basis, the European Union created the ‘European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation’ (EGTC) (European Commission, 2006) as a legal instrument² of their own in 2006, in order to offer the various cross-border structures the much-needed status of legal personality and thus “to bring both uniformity and legal stability to co-operation with sub-national units” (De Sousa, 2013: 670). Nonetheless, the administrative and institutional barriers are still considered to be the biggest constraint to cross-border cooperation (Medeiros, 2011: n.p.). Furthermore, being an ‘external’ barrier, this issue cannot be effectively eliminated by the Euroregions themselves – hence the need for instruments such as the EGTC (Kurowska-Pysz et al., 2018: 136). There are, of course, many other barriers affecting Euroregions and cross-border cooperation, such as a lack of visibility and general perception problems resulting in low involvements of the respective local populations (Howaniec & Lis, 2020: n.p.).

There is one last interesting aspect related to the issue of the importance attached to Euroregions that I want to mention. The creation of the EGTC instrument touches on the overarching question of what role regions should generally play in Europe – and thus on the debate around the idea of the ‘Europe of the Regions’. “The notion of the ‘Europe of the Regions’ [...] is a political concept that mostly has been brought along whenever the European integration process promoted the regional layer with further steps in regional integration and empowerment (especially in the 1980s and the 1990s)” (Ulrich, 2016: 158). In short, it is a vision of “Europe as a multilayered system with empowered regions under a supranational roof” (Ibid.: 159) – a vision that stands in sharp contrast to today’s Europe that is primarily built on the nation states – the ‘Europe of the Nations’. The guiding hope of the ‘Europe of the Regions’ is that such a ‘bottom-up’ Europe will be a less disparate and overall more just union. In this idea, Euroregions are consequentially envisioned to become “the new building blocks of a more balanced and harmonious European territory” (Medeiros, 2011: n.p.). The general increase in importance of regions at the European level over time is also reflected in the creation of new institutions specifically serving the purpose of

² Only recently, in 2018, the European Commission furthermore proposed the introduction of another new instrument, the ‘European Cross-Border Mechanism’ (ECBM), which is currently being examined by the European institutions.

representing the specific interests of regions, such as the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) in 1994. Since the establishment of the European Communities in the 1950s, regions have always been understood as key elements for the European integration process and cohesion on the continent (Greta & Lewandowski, 2010: 14f.). In this narrative, the EGTC can therefore be interpreted as another step towards the empowerment of regions and the promotion of multilevel governance (in contrast to nation state governance) or even ‘cross-border governance’ (Pallagst et al., 2018: 34; Ulrich, 2016: 169). In short, the EGTC can be regarded as another logical step in the European integration process and towards the ‘Europe of the Regions’.

2.2 On the Notion of Region

At this point, it seems advisable to take a step back and have a brief look at the notion of ‘region’ – not least in preparation for a better understanding of the subsequent discussion of *Euroregion* typologies and the intention to carve out a working concept of Euroregions for this thesis.

The notion of region is a notoriously imprecise one, and one that usually means something different depending on the context. Regions are a key reference parameter in many scholarly disciplines, be those geography, cultural studies, ecology, sociology or politics. Each discipline defines its own regions, either according to a specific function of the respective region – such as administrative regions in politics – or according to some criteria that distinguish a specific region from another. It is needless to say that those criteria are not always clear and precise, further adding to the somewhat vague and multifarious nature of regions. The English language even knows an expression that uses this term synonymously to ‘approximately’: ‘in the region of’ (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Having said that, the lowest common denominator of regions could be described as ‘an area that is distinct from another area’. Distinct either by ‘inherent’ or ‘acquired’ characteristics, or both. (Greta & Lewandowski, 2010: 14; Medeiros, 2011: n.p.).

Of particular importance for this thesis and the context of European cross-border cooperation is the classification of regions by the ‘Nomenclature des Unités Territoriales Statistiques’ (NUTS), developed by the statistical office of the European Union (Eurostat). NUTS was originally developed in order to provide a breakdown of the economic territory of the European Union which was detached from the borders of its member states in order to enable political interventions at the regional level, and generally to create a system that provided harmonised data for the whole of the Communities. Yet, each individual territorial unit is drawn within the limits of the borders of the EU’s member states. The NUTS classification is divided into three hierarchical levels, and

their subdivisions are largely based on population thresholds (European Commission, n.d.: NUTS). Funding eligibility within the framework of European cross-border cooperation, such as Interreg, is based on NUTS – in the case of the ERDF, it is based on the NUTS level 3 classification. This makes NUTS the most important regional classification for European cross-border cooperation.

Interestingly, NUTS became the basis for the European Structural Funds, such as the ERDF, at the same time as the Interreg initiative was launched. Both point to the larger contemporary development of – very simplified – a shifting focus from the national level to the regions as key factors and spatial units in economic development, due to them being understood as links between the higher national and international levels and the lower local level (Pallagst et al., 2018: 32). This also made regions the prime target for economic policy intervention (Huggins & Thompson, 2017: 4) – a development that – consistent to postmodern logic – has been baptised as ‘geographical turn’ (Despiney Zochowska, 2013: 73). Of key importance for this thesis is that regions in general, but especially Euroregions due to the context of cross-border cooperation, became a focal point in the process of ‘territorial Europeanisation’ (Pallagst et al., 2018: 31). Them becoming a focal point of economic intervention also had important consequences for the assessment and thinking of a *regional* competitiveness. Furthermore, “identifying and programming its economic development” (Greta & Lewandowski, 2010: 15) is nowadays understood as one of their primary functions.

How Euroregions might differ from other regions, also from closely related concepts such as the cross-border region, will be one of the subjects of the next section.

2.3 Towards a Working Concept of Euroregions

So far, in aiming for an understanding of the concept of Euroregion, this thesis has primarily looked at the history of the subject in an attempt to explain the appeal of the notion and its consequential widespread usage today. This led to a discussion of the relevance of both cross-border cooperation in general and of Euroregions for it, the role of the European Union and the issue of legality, as well as the central importance that regions are being attributed with today. Although these aspects are important for an understanding of the idea of Euroregion, they are, of course, not the only issues to take into consideration when trying to understand what exactly Euroregions are and what constitutes and differentiates them from other regions. In order to derive a working concept of the subject, I will now give a brief overview of typologies, definitions and conceptualisations of Euroregions – without claiming completeness.

The typology or definition attempt most frequently referred to in the literature on Euroregions stems from the ‘Association of European Border Regions’ (AEBR). In their “Practical Guide to Cross-border Cooperation”, the AEBR distinguishes Euroregions according to their participating authorities and/or organisational structures. According to the AEBR, a Euroregion can be:

- (i) an amalgamation of regional and local authorities from both sides of the national border, sometimes with a parliamentary assembly;
- (ii) a cross-border organisation with a permanent secretariat and experts and administrative staff;
- (iii) according to private law based on national associations or foundations from both sides of the border according to the respective public law;
- (iv) according to public law based on international treaties which also regulate the membership of regional authorities.

(cited after: Medeiros, 2011: n.p.)

Here, Euroregions are thus exclusively associated with cross-border cooperation entities.

Most typologies naturally discuss the relationship between Euroregions and cross-border cooperation in one way or another, and many conceptualise Euroregions as one specific form or expression of cross-border cooperation. Moreover, they are often understood as the ‘best’ form of cross-border cooperation in developed hierarchies. Greta and Lewandowski, for example, refer to Euroregions as “a formal expression of cross-border cooperation” (Greta & Lewandowski, 2010: 16) in a thought hierarchy of: border region – cross-border region – Euroregion. Here, border regions become Euroregions through increased cooperation and institutionalisation (Ibid.: 15f.). Medeiros titles Euroregions “multi-level relational networks across EU border areas” (Medeiros, 2011: n.p.) and equally conceptualises Euroregions in his own developed cross-border cooperation typology as one of a total of four types of cross-border regions in Europe – namely the one showing the best results. Here, the denomination ‘Euroregion’ appears as a quality feature and should only apply “where the CBC is strong enough to act as a main driving factor of the regional structural changes and the socio-economic development of these areas” (Ibid.). On the contrary, for Lepik “the term ‘Euroregion’ and ‘cross-border cooperation [...] structure/organisation’ is used synonymously to denote an area of cooperation of local and regional authorities situated at the border or close to it and collaborating in different sectors” (Lepik, 2009: 266).

Telle conceptualised Euroregions as ‘soft spaces’, giving them “considerable freedom to determine their organizational form as well as their agenda independently” (Telle, 2017: 97), and the influential studies of Perkmann (2002; 2007) continuously elaborated on Euroregions under the perspective of ‘institutional’ or ‘policy entrepreneurship’. The main idea of Perkmann was that, by virtue of providing a platform for the implementation of European policy (i.e., funding), Euroregions gradually became institutionalised and themselves the medium of policy action (by acquiring tasks

and building up organisational resources). This process was in turn enabled by European policy being based upon the principle of multi-level governance and of Euroregions most often being bottom-up structures. Greta and Lewandowski also link Euroregions to the idea of entrepreneurship. In contrast to Perkmann's studies, however, Euroregions appear as enablers of SME development and *local* entrepreneurship, and because local actors are inherently striving for competitiveness, “[a]s “special” regions, Euroregions are the embodiment of entrepreneurship and [...] strive to be competitive [themselves]” (Greta & Lewandowski, 2010: 14). This is an important aspect for this thesis to which I will come back in more detail later.

Since the intention behind the creation of the EGTC was, amongst others, to “ensure an adequate implementation of structural, cohesion and regional funds” (De Sousa, 2013: 679) and to institutionalise European cross-border cooperation, it does not come as a surprise that EGTCs have either been described as an evolution of the Euroregions, i.e., being Euroregions themselves (Ulrich, 2016: 169-172), or understood as the entity ‘behind’ the Euroregion (Medeiros, 2011: n.p.).

Camonita et al. more recently developed a classification of Euroregions based on the two explanatory variables “*i*) the territorial scale of the CBC activities performed and *ii*) the institutional density and level of self-government of the public actors involved” (Camonita et al., 2020: 515). While the AEBR conceptualises Euroregions exclusively through their cross-border cooperation entities, Medeiros, for example, contrarily states that “Euroregions should be understood in a geographical perspective” (Medeiros, 2011: n.p.), i.e., as ‘cross-border regions’ (and the entities behind the Euroregion should be called Working Communities). The question of whether Euroregions are being understood “through [their] geographical (territorial) [or] political (organisational) dimensions” (Camonita et al., 2020: 518) is indeed a key differentiator in the understanding of Euroregions and their typologies.

The dichotomy between territorial and organisational understandings of Euroregions merits some more extensive attention at this point as it has some important implications for the overall research question of this thesis. The two takes on Euroregions not only often appear to be polar opposites, the question of whether Euroregions should primarily be understood as territories or entities is – unsurprisingly – far from being resolved. Even when drawing on the etymology of the term, otherwise a much-loved and sure-fire way to give more credibility to the scholar's argument, a clear answer seems to elude itself. While etymologically the term ‘regio’ undisputedly stems from the Latin term *rege* or *regere*, Lepik states that although its meaning is “to draw a line or border” (Lepik, 2009: 266), the term was originally exclusively used to demarcate an area, but not to govern it (Ibid.). At the same time, Medeiros is able to argue that “the Euroregion word calls to mind the word ‘region’ which, in turn, comes from the Latin ‘regio’, whose etymology also relates to ‘regere’

which means ‘to direct, rule’ (on a given territory)” (Medeiros, 2011: n.p.). This contradiction is important to mention here because if I were to define Euroregions one-sidedly either through their territorial or through their organisational dimension, the overarching research question regarding the influence of cross-border cooperation on their competitiveness would be at severe risk of becoming redundant or pointless. This is because Euroregions would then either appear solely territorial expressions of areas where cross-border cooperation is taking place and thus would not possibly exist without it. Or, the research question would attempt to assess the regional competitiveness of organisational structures in the territories, which certainly is not the goal.

In fact, this thesis neither makes a strict division between territorial and organisational understandings of Euroregions nor does it attempt to clearly separate Euroregions from other structures engaged in cross-border cooperation, such as the ‘cross-border region’. Rather, Euroregion is understood as an umbrella term for regions as actors engaged in cross-border cooperation, and, importantly, as a self-designation. In fact, for the case study, neither is a final definition of Euroregions needed nor is the question of whether it is primarily the territorial or organisational dimension that constitutes the Euroregion of crucial importance. The remarks on the subject of Euroregions in this chapter mainly served as an introduction to the complex reality of European cross-border cooperation and intended to highlight key aspects that have to be taken into consideration when trying to understand and evaluate both the *process* (cross-border cooperation) and the *actors* (Euroregions), namely: the idealistic importance attached to both cross-border cooperation and Euroregions, the weight of EU funding, the many limitations (such as the legal issues) both concepts are facing, the significance of the principle of multi-level governance and the frequent relevance of Euroregions being bottom-up structures. At the heart of any Euroregion and cross-border cooperation is the willingness to engage in common activities – for which the term ‘Euroregionalisation’ was even coined. That is “the realization of common interests across the borders by local communities as well as understanding the need to solve problems” (Kurowska-Pysz et al., 2018: 135). What ultimately defines and differentiates them from other (Euro)regions are the individual, context dependent motivations for cooperation – which in turn lead to different goals, strategies and functions –, and the terms and conditions limiting or facilitating the possibilities of these cooperation engagements. Importantly, Euroregions can successfully function at all levels of development (Petrunenko et al., 2020: 153). The next chapter therefore aims to further clarify the motivations and goals of Euroregions and cross-border cooperation. One goal that most Euroregions will probably agree on as being shared by all of them is that of (regional) competitiveness. The implications and consequences thereof will also be the subject of a later chapter.

3. Cross-Border Cooperation

Now that a sufficient understanding and working concept of Euroregions – as actors in cross-border cooperation – has been established, the next central term of this thesis's topic to discuss is that of cross-border cooperation itself. It is a concept that already was a constant companion in the previous chapter because Euroregions are inherently linked to the idea of cooperation across (national) borders. The aim of this chapter is, similarly to the preceding one, to first and foremost establish an understanding of the notion in order to enable the linking of the concept of cross-border cooperation to that of regional competitiveness and to enable an understanding of how the influence of cross-border cooperation on the competitiveness of Euroregions can be measured.

How should cross-border cooperation best be conceptualised for the purpose of this thesis? One of the historically most important definitions stems from the above mentioned Madrid Convention, which defined 'transfrontier cooperation' (the variation in denomination only adds further proof to the manifoldness of the issue) as "any concerted action designed to reinforce and foster neighbourly relations between territorial communities or authorities within the jurisdiction of two or more Contracting Parties and the conclusion of any agreement and arrangement necessary for this purpose" (Council of Europe, 1980: Article 2). This is, of course, a rather wide definition that furthermore places a particular focus on the legal aspect and the foundation of cross-border cooperation (it was, after all, the aim of the Madrid Convention to provide European cross-border cooperation with an international legal framework). Another – and rather loose – definition often cited in the literature is the one provided by Perkmann, who defined cross-border cooperation as "a more or less institutionalized collaboration between contiguous subnational authorities across national borders" (Perkmann, 2003: n.p.). The importance of this definition lies in the emphasis of subnational, i.e., local and regional actors in the cooperation process, "a field long reserved for central state actors" (Ibid.). A last definition that should be included stems from De Sousa, because it specifically mentions the drivers for cross-border cooperation:

"In operational terms, cross-border co-operation can be defined as any type of concerted action between public and/or private institutions of the border regions of two (or more) states, driven by geographical, economic, cultural/identity, political/leadership factors, with the objective of reinforcing the (good) neighbourhood relations, solving common problems or managing jointly resources between communities through any co-operation mechanisms available."

(De Sousa, 2013: 673)

It is not this chapter's aim to simply provide a definition of cross-border cooperation, but to explain its aims, functions and functioning today, which requires one to first understand the reasons and motivations that underlie it as well as the barriers that hinder it. Only then will a sufficient understanding of the concept be established in preparation of the case study. In order to better understand these motivations and goals as well as the barriers and the functioning of cross-border cooperation, I will begin by giving an overview of the European framework for cross-border cooperation today and explain the main reasons behind its existence. Again, a look at the history of the concept will be the starting point of investigation.

3.1 Of Integration and Institutionalisation

The history of cross-border cooperation in Europe is a history of institutionalisation, although not one of particular coordination (De Sousa, 2013: 7). As has been shown, one of the main incentives of the European integration process that began in the wake of World War II was to transcend the many inter-European borders (Sanguin, 2013: 156), or rather: to diminish the dividing barrier effects of these borders (Medeiros, 2011: n.p.). While the focus of the previous chapter was on explaining the appeal and consequential popularity of Euroregions – the *actors* –, in this chapter I will try to explain the development of the *process* of cross-border cooperation. On a conceptual level, European integration and cross-border cooperation are two distinct processes. While “European integration is a system of interregional co-operation and interdependence in which states parties to a founding treaty abdicate part of their sovereignty to a supranational body [...] Co-operation [...] is a voluntary process in which states or sub-national territorial units act together for a common purpose or benefit without pooling sovereignty to a supranational body” (De Sousa, 2013: 672f.). A multitude of (sub-national) actors have been engaged in the cooperation process, partly due to its voluntariness and of it largely taking place outside the ‘official’ European sovereignty and integration process. It thus has varied significantly over time and between one border and another.³ This comes as no surprise, since Europe's most distinctive characteristic is arguably its diversity (which was even raised as high as to become its official motto – ‘united in diversity’). Notwithstanding their conceptual differences, both processes for the longest time proceeded in parallel to one another (Ibid.: 677), not least because the advancing European integration increased the need for cross-border cooperation (Ibid.: 672).

³ On a side note: cross-border cooperation is, of course, not a uniquely European invention. However, European cross-border cooperation notably distinguishes itself from cross-border cooperation taking place in other parts of the world in that “it is supported by public action and not by market dynamics” (Sanguin, 2013: 156).

One of the milestones in the history of cross-border cooperation in Europe is the establishment of the 'Euregio' in 1958. The main reason is that this first cross-border region became an important example and role model for other cross-border cooperation structures that followed thereafter (Caesar & Pallagst, 2018: 14). Another important milestone was the foundation of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) in 1971 because it was the first organisation specifically tasked with acting for and representing the particular interests of cross-border regions (De Sousa, 2013: 677). Also at the beginning of the 1970s, the Council of Europe started to support European cross-border cooperation on the regional and local level. Its efforts in overcoming the issues that resulted from different national legislations culminated in the (by now well-known) Madrid Convention of 1980. However, the instruments that developed from this convention (Euroregions and Working Communities) were still subject to bilateral agreements between the neighbouring states where cross-border structures were to be established (Caesar & Pallagst, 2018: 14). It is an issue that was only resolved in 2007, with the introduction of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation and the incorporation of cross-border structures into the legal framework of the European Union, which also provided the cross-border entities with the much-needed status of legal personality (De Sousa, 2013: 679). Here, the European integration and cross-border cooperation processes' strings came together, so to speak.

Supporting the establishment of cross-border organisations has originally also been the intention behind the Interreg initiative, first launched in 1990. Instead, it became the main means of financial support for European cross-border cooperation activities. Notwithstanding its initial intention, from the very beginnings of Interreg the goal has always been to support European cohesion and regional economic development (Caesar & Pallagst, 2018: 14f.). And the idea of cohesion is indeed key to the understanding of European cross-border cooperation today.

In order to understand the issue of cohesion, one must first realise that "regions within Europe vary greatly in their economic capacity, institutional structures and the political, economic and social demands they create" (Dvořáková Líšková et al., 2019: 10f.). Inter-regional differences and the consequences they cause have been one of the main issues of Europe since the very beginnings of the European integration process, starting in the 1950s (Greta & Lewandowski, 2010: 15). However, it primarily was the successive enlargement of the European Communities that caused a rising experience and impression of national and regional disparities (Ibid.: 14) – the 2004 enlargement of the European Union more so than any other. Originally, the European Communities were mainly focussed on their *economic* cohesion, i.e., a 'harmonious development of their economic activities', which has been an official objective since the Treaty of Rome, which came into force in 1958. The main instrument to reduce economic regional disparities and to

achieve the objective of economic cohesion became the common European regional policy (Ruidisch, 2013: 95). However, this only began in the 1970s, prior to which regional policy “was strictly in the hands of the member states” (Dvořáková Líšková et al., 2019: 13). Then, in 1975, the European Regional Development Fund was established, “which symbolized the birth of the real regional policy at the Community level” (Ibid.). The objective of a harmonious development of economic activities was extended to the *social* sphere with the signing of the ‘Single European Act’ in 1986, which officially introduced an ‘Economic and Social Cohesion Policy’. This new policy specifically targeted economically ‘lagging regions’ and aimed at reducing the widening gap between Europe’s manifold regions.

The Single European Act marks the beginning of a more holistic understanding of ‘harmonious development’. To this end, in 1993, the Maastricht Treaty created the ‘cohesion fund’ as a new and primary instrument for the common cohesion policy, which further aimed at financially assisting Europe’s least prosperous regions. Then, in 2009, with the Treaty of Lisbon, a third objective was added to the existing objectives of economic and social cohesion – ‘*territorial* cohesion’. However, the introduction of territorial cohesion did not come along with a clear understanding of what this objective meant, and there have been many divergent interpretations of it – albeit or due to its frequent usage in political debates since the 2000s (Ruidisch, 2013: 95f.). The meaning of the concept primarily depends on the objectives of regional policy at a given moment. According to Ruidisch, at the time when territorial cohesion became an official objective, three narratives dominated the discourse around it: balanced development, sustainability and *competitiveness* (Ibid.: 97). Via the objective of territorial cohesion, (territorial/regional) competitiveness thus became an official objective of the EU’s regional and cohesion policies. And one of the main instruments for achieving competitiveness became, in turn, cross-border cooperation – via Interreg.

The Interreg initiative became a formal objective of the EU’s cohesion policy in 2000 (European Commission, n.d.: Interreg A). Since 2007 (the beginning of Interreg IV), this objective has officially run under the title of ‘European Territorial Cooperation’ (ETC) (Caesar & Pallagst, 2018: 15). As a programme, Interreg is today built around three strands of cooperation: *cross-border* (Interreg A), transnational (Interreg B) – which supports cooperation in larger territorial areas, e.g., the Baltic –, and interregional (Interreg C) – supporting cooperation between geographically non-adjacent regions. However, the bulk of the funds is reserved for cross-border cooperation. At the time of the writing of this thesis, an agreement on the 6th Interreg generation (2021-2027 funding period) was reached, with an allocated budget of €8,050 million. €5,800 million of which are earmarked for cross-border cooperation (European Commission, 2020: Interreg Regulation).

It has already been shown that funding via Interreg is one of the main incentives to engage in cross-border cooperation, which is not least proven by the fact that there has been a steep rise in the establishment of cross-border structures since the introduction of the Interreg initiative in 1990 (Caesar & Pallagst, 2018: 15). Again, this increasing focus on regions as central actors has been the result of the rising importance that regions were globally being attributed with. The other side of the coin, however, is that funding via Interreg also empowered the regions and enabled them to make ever more claims upon the state (De Sousa, 2013: 676). It is also worth noting that via Interreg and its regional and cohesion policies, the European Union not only tackles its objective of economic, social and territorial cohesion. Due to the high dependence of most cross-border cooperation structures on the EU's financial instruments (Ibid.), Interreg is also a major tool to enforce the current goals of the respective larger European strategies (e.g., Lisbon Strategy, Europe 2020), as well as the respective goals of each Commission and funding period. The now ended funding period of 2014-2020 might serve as an illustration. During this time, the EU objective ETC knew eleven investment priorities (e.g., 'Competitiveness of SMEs'), which were based on the overarching EU targets of 'smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' set out in the Europe 2020 strategy, which in turn shaped the design of European policies such as cohesion policy. Every cross-border cooperation structure financed by this programme (such as the Euregio) had to concentrate on a maximum of four of these eleven priorities (European Commission, n.d.: Interreg A) – simultaneously further adding to the manifoldness of European cross-border cooperation.

A quick summary and illustration for the derivation of the above presented definitions: "Due to the institutionalisation of these practices [CBC processes] under the EU framework, European CBC can be easily resumed as 'an institutionalised collaboration between contiguous subnational authorities across national borders'" (Camonita et al., 2020: 517; citing: Oliveras et al., 2010). It was the parallel historical development of both processes, the institutionalisation of cross-border cooperation and the increase in competencies of the European Communities in the field of regional policy – in turn part of the European integration process – that shaped the framework for European cross-border cooperation today. The reason why the European Union specifically identified cross-border cooperation as a main avenue of (cohesion policy) action and chose to target (cross-)border regions and structures, such as Euroregions, so intensively can therefore not only be explained by the idealistic importance of cross-border cooperation, as presented in the previous chapter. It is equally the result of the increasing importance attributed to regions in politics and economics, the specific characteristics of border areas and of the overarching issues of cohesion and disparity. At this point, it is once more time to take a step back and have a (lamentably only) brief look at the vast and diverse issue of borders and border regions.

3.2 On Borders and Border Regions

The first – relatively obvious – reason for discussing borders at this point is that they appear a necessary precondition to *cross*-border cooperation, and border regions are the areas where cooperation across borders is taking place. However, borders (here primarily in the understanding of the external boundaries of nation-states) do not just exist as quasi natural and neutral beings. Even borders defined by natural boundaries such as mountain ridges or rivers are first and foremost constantly created by human actions (Kleinschmidt, 2014: 4). What borders in general and in particular mean and signify, what functions they exert and what effects they cause has changed greatly over the course of time and from border to border. While “[u]ltimately the significance of borders derives from the importance of territoriality as an organizing principle of political and social life”, they are characterised by “a great variety of material uses and symbolic meanings” and “[their] functions and meanings [...] have always been inherently ambiguous and contradictory” (Anderson & O’Dowd, 1999: 594). Thus, to be able to appropriately understand both European cross-border cooperation today and the border contexts of the comparative case study that follows, it is necessary to discuss the issues of borders and border regions first.

Social life is defined by numerous borders and boundaries, some direct, some more indirect, some visible, some less visible, that separate social groups from one another and thereby simultaneously exclude and create affiliation and a sense of belonging (Kleinschmidt, 2014: 8). Amongst the most direct and most present borders are the external boundaries of nation-states. This is because it is here, at their peripheries, that they are the most vulnerable and therefore feel the need to be the most visible. Borders define and legitimise the central nation-state because they symbolise its sovereignty. Therefore, they are of key importance to the state and consequentially imbued with symbolic meaning, in the attempt to give them a ‘natural’ and ‘right’ character (Anderson & O’Dowd, 1999: 595f.). They thereby furthermore contribute to the depiction of a world demarcated into distinct territorial units – the nation-states – that are divided by rigid boundary lines (Paasi, 1999: 670). However, borders do not only come into physical existence through the exertion of central state power. They are continuously being produced, reproduced and institutionalised, because “boundaries manifest themselves in numerous social (economic, cultural, administrative and political) practices and discourses” (Ibid.).

Consequentially, border areas are simultaneously defined by their border and contribute to the definition of that border. In addition, “[t]erritorial borders both shape and are shaped by what they contain, and what crosses or is prevented from crossing them” (Anderson & O’Dowd, 1999: 594). Not only are borders ambiguous and contradictory in that they exert their influence to the outside

and inside and are simultaneously subject to these outside and inside forces, they by no means only divide. It is possible to resolve separating border contradictions, something that generally requires the opening of gateways and a reduction of the barrier functions of borders (Ibid.: 596). This way, for border societies, differences and disparities that exist due to the dividing effects of borders open up a space for opportunity. When crossing the border, they might (economically, but also socially and culturally) take advantage from existing differences and benefit from creating a ‘contact zone’ for cooperation, thus reducing the border’s barrier effects (Caesar & Pallagst, 2018: 19).

The European Union is built on this promise of opportunities and mutual benefits that arise from overcoming border obstacles and their barrier effects. Without a doubt, the European integration process has drastically changed the function and meaning of its (internal) borders. With the creation of the European Single Market in 1993, which guarantees the ‘four freedoms’ of goods, services, capital and people, and the Schengen Agreement, which since 1995 has largely abolished internal border controls, Europe’s borders have become increasingly permeable over time. However, European integration has also had a ‘dual impact’ on border regions (De Sousa, 2012: 669). While overall positive, an easily overlooked effect of borders on border regions is that “[a]u fil du temps, la frontière, barrière ou filtre, a suscité l’implantation d’activités directement liées aux discontinuités qu’elle créait dans l’espace économique, juridique ou institutionnel” (Casteigts, 2003: n.p.). Before benefitting from the positive effects of the new permeability of borders, border regions first have to suffer the loss of specific border activities, such as those directly connected to the assertion of control over the border. Because the effects of the changing significance of borders are the most visible in border regions, which thus at the same time acquire local and global characteristics (Greta & Lewandowski, 2010: 18), they have, since the 1980s, become privileged spaces for study and policy implementation and have been entitled the ‘living laboratories’ of European integration (Casteigts, 2003: n.p.; De Sousa, 2012: 671).

Although reducing the barrier effects of borders is considered to be the border regions greatest opportunity to limit their disadvantages resulting from their peripheral location and to transform disparities into advantages, significant border obstacles still remain until today. “These border obstacles are especially strong in three domains: (i) legal and administrative; (ii) language; and (iii) physical accessibilities” (Medeiros, 2018: 486). With the European integration process, its internal borders did not disappear but changed their character and function from strict barriers to indirect filters (Caesar & Pallagst, 2018: 13). One of the reasons for this is the fact that the European Union itself is an ambiguous being when it comes to the issue of borders. With the subsequent pooling of sovereignty of the member states to the supra-state entity of the EU, the nation-states gave up parts of their control over one of the very things that legitimise them. Consequentially, even though

the states have an interest in reducing disparities and in a better economic performance of their peripheral regions, they ‘naturally’ object any further loss of their sovereignty that accompanies the institutionalisation of European cross-border cooperation. A last contradiction inherent to borders is thus that overcoming them simultaneously is the greatest motivation and one of the most problematic obstacles to cross-border cooperation in the Europe of the nation-states.

3.3 The Drivers and Barriers of Cross-Border Cooperation

The forms that cross-border cooperation took in Europe since the 1950s have varied and changed significantly over time and from border to border, making it a very complex phenomenon to cover. However, there have been attempts to summarise the incentives, motivations, types, activities and other elements of European cross-border cooperation. So far, this chapter has focused on the macro-level of the concepts’ goals, functions, functioning, motivations and barriers. In order to finalise the understanding of cross-border cooperation, that is to be developed in this thesis, and to derive how this complex concept might influence the competitiveness of regions, the next section will give an overview of ways to classify and compare cross-border cooperation as well as examine its barriers and motivations in more detail.

According to De Sousa, “[b]order regions seek co-operation efforts or agreements whenever [...] [t]here is an overlap of interests [...] a shared historical memory [...] a strong interdependence between two regions due to geographical or economic factors [...] a political objective for future joint action” (De Sousa, 2013: 673f.; citing: Committee of the Regions, 2009: 3f.). The most common denominator of these cooperation efforts is to overcome the disadvantages resulting from the peripheral character of the regions due to their border location. Building upon these incentives, De Sousa develops a typology, or taxonomy, of cross-border cooperation. In ascending order of necessary commitment: *awareness raising cooperation* (seeking good neighbourhood relations), *mutual aid cooperation* (agreements among emergency responders – e.g., firefighters), *functional cooperation* (implementation of joint cooperation projects, such as the Interreg programmes), *common management of public resources/services* (developed joint strategies of provided services, benefits and other public provisions in function of the border regions, contrary to being based on state interests and jurisdictions). The latter, while being the cross-border cooperation with the highest commitment, is also faced with the highest obstacles regarding financial autonomy and political interests (De Sousa, 2013: 675). The last two types of cross-border cooperation furthermore

depend on some form of institutionalised cross-border cooperation structures, such as the EGTC or Euroregions (as a structure built on the legal instrument provided by the Madrid Convention).

Since cross-border cooperation is such a complex phenomenon, it comes as no surprise that the individual motivations for cooperation are as diverse as the border regions themselves and the respective forms that individual cooperation takes. This thesis therefore cannot provide a holistic overview of this issue, and it will be of crucial importance to analyse the individual motivations of the two chosen Euroregions in the comparative case study. However, there are some motivations that stand out and merit mentioning.

Undeniably, one of the most basic motivations behind cross-border cooperation – and thus also the formation of Euroregions – is the attempt to find solutions to common problems (Sanguin, 2013: 156) or to promote common interests (Lepik, 2009: 267). Often, a pooling of resources is advantageous for all partaking parties because individual actors can benefit from each other's experiences and proven best practices, and a coordination of offered services can result in complementary benefits for residents on both sides of the border (Caesar & Pallagst, 2018: 20). This at least partially compensates for the barrier effects of the border in question, and reduces the impacts of the loss of border specific activities due to the ongoing European integration process (Casteigts, 2003: n.p.). Some issues, such as environmental problems, simply ignore borders drawn by human hand, thereby necessitating cross-border cooperation. Also, investments that affect the border area need to be coordinated to avoid conflicting projects, e.g., transport infrastructure (Caesar & Pallagst, 2018: 20). The empowerment of border regions that comes through cross-border cooperation has been mentioned before. Another incentive is the increased (multilevel) governance that cooperation across border enables (Ibid.: 21; see also: Pallagst et al., 2018: 33-36).

It is the objective of improving the overall quality of life (Greta & Lewandowski, 2010: 16) and the fact that “euroregionalisation removes their peripheral characteristics” (Ibid.: 18) which motivates border regions to engage in cross-border cooperation. Common strategies and images for border regions result in a higher visibility and in a stronger sense of belonging. Motivations for cross-border cooperation are therefore not exclusively of an economic but also of a socio-cultural nature (Caesar & Pallagst, 2018: 20). However, it often is the monetary motivation provided by the European Union that is the overriding incentive. De Sousa names the following drivers for cross-border cooperation: economic drivers, political leadership drivers, cultural/identity and state formation drivers, and lastly geographical drivers (De Sousa, 2013: 680-684).

Another common element that aids in the understanding of the phenomenon and in the comparison of cross-border structures, e.g., of Euroregions, are typical tasks and activities:

These include *i)* the provision of information regarding the regulation of cross-border activities, the promotion of joint activities (i.e. CBC projects) and the organisation of knowledge exchanges; *ii)* a strong lobbying interest for persuading national institutions towards cross-border issues; *iii)* incentives for collective sense making through the attraction and distribution of EU and local funding; *iv)* the promotion of the cross-border area per se (i.e. common identity-building and marketing image).

(Miörner et al., 2018: 6f.; cited after: Camonita et al., 2020: 518)

In sum and no less: “Les domaines concernés sont multiples et touchent à tous les aspects de l’action des pouvoirs publics et de la vie des populations concernées” (Casteigts, 2003: n.p.).

Notwithstanding the many advantages and drivers for it, European cross-border cooperation today is faced with many issues and barriers. As has been the case with motivations for cross-border cooperation, barriers – internal as well as external – to cross-border cooperation are legion, and this thesis cannot possibly cover each and every one (see for a good overview: Kurowska-Pysz et al., 2018), not least because these barriers often result from the specific conditions of cooperation structures or programmes. It will therefore be equally important to identify the individual elements that hinder successful cooperation activities in the comparative case study.

In general, a first and very basic but easily forgotten issue is that opening up borders, or removing barrier effects, by itself is not a sufficient basis for cooperation. Borders divide people, and it takes time and effort to overcome the differences resulting from the consequential differing development paths on both sides of the border (Caesar & Pallagst, 2018: 19f.). Language and intercultural difficulties are only two, although very expressive, aspects to name here. Even though cross-border cooperation is generally understood to be of benefit to all partaking parties, the respective interests of those parties might be conflicting and need to be clarified and agreed upon first. This is an issue that is elevated even more with a higher number of actors (Ibid.: 21).

The issues most often named, however, are the already mentioned lack of financial autonomy and dependence on European financial support, especially Interreg (De Sousa, 2013: 676), the consequential lack of power and authority of the regional actors as well as conflicting national interests or a general unwillingness of national authorities to meaningfully support cross-border cooperation of its border regions, in anxiety for separatist tendencies or a fear of loss of power. Generally speaking, “cross-border cooperation is damaged by the *omnipresence of the states*” (Sanguin, 2013: 160). On the macro-level, the already mentioned institutional diversity and lack of legal structures both limit the power of actors and hinder successful cooperation action and its support (De Sousa, 2013: 685; also: Caesar & Pallagst, 2018: 21).

A last barrier to mention, and which might even be applied to the whole of the European Union, is the severe issue of visibility: “For the time being, most of the cross-border cooperation arrangements and the institutions that embody them are political and administrative bodies of a technocratic nature, unknown to the local populations, regardless of the degree of success in fulfilling their designated objectives.” (De Sousa, 2013: 684) This leads to a lack of meaningful (multilevel) governance, i.e., a low involvement of local communities (Howaniec & Lis, 2020: n.p.), in turn threatening the very foundation on which the European idea is built because the local populations are one of the key stakeholders in the process, who together play the most important role in overcoming the barriers of cross-border cooperation (Kurowska-Pysz et al., 2018: 135).

While the issues identified here have been specifically discussed as barriers to successful cross-border cooperation, they are only some of the many issues that (border)regions are facing in the larger context of regional development. Many of these are also linked to the concept of regional competitiveness, which will be the subject of the next chapter of this thesis. As will the influence that cross-border cooperation can have on the competitiveness of regions and how this influence might be measured. Border regions are in many aspects a privileged space for analysis (De Sousa, 2013: 672). A characteristic that also holds true regarding the assessment of the impact of European policy on regions and their competitiveness.

4. Regional Competitiveness

In order to finalise the theoretical discussion, the last concept that needs explanation is that of regional competitiveness. Another necessary disclaimer upfront: this thesis can neither cover the in-depth underpinnings and intricacies of economic theories and concepts such as development, growth or productivity, nor can it discuss complementary concepts, such as that of resilience or well-being, and will therefore necessarily only scratch the surface of the issues raised. What it wants to achieve is to develop a sufficient understanding of the idea of a *regional* competitiveness to enable the assessment of the influence of cross-border cooperation on the competitiveness of the two chosen Euroregions in the following case study, as well as of the issues that are connected to the concept itself and to any such assessment. Once more, there does not exist a single definition of competitiveness, so what is meant by it very much depends on the context in which it is used:

Auch wenn international Wettbewerbsfähigkeit im Mittelpunkt und im Schnittpunkt des Interesses von Politik, Wissenschaft und Wirtschaft steht, so fehlt doch weithin eine einheitliche konsentrierte Perspektive [...] was konzeptionell gemeint ist: Für die Politik ist [Wettbewerbsfähigkeit] die Grundlage für den Wohlstand und den Erfolg einer Nation oder Region; für die Wirtschaft geht es um eine Standortbestimmung von Firmen in ihren Märkten und den Wettbewerbsdruck durch Konkurrenten, das sog. *business environment*; und in der Wissenschaft geht es um die „Treiber“, die bestimmenden Faktoren sowie Theorien und Definitionen, welche Zusammenhänge politisches Handeln erst möglich machen.

(Gretschmann, 2018: 372)

In business contexts, competitiveness generally refers to the ability of firms or persons to successfully compete against other firms or persons in a given market, for example, by having a higher productivity, leading to a higher profitability than their competitors'. Competitiveness is, thus, an inherently relational concept. While this micro-economics conceptualisation is relatively uncontested, in macro-economics, competitiveness is a disputed and much-debated issue (Dijkstra et al., 2011: 3). The probably best-known definition of (macro-economic) competitiveness stems from the World Economic Forum (WEF), who defines it as “the set of institutions, policies and factors that determine the level of productivity of a country” (World Economic Forum, 2017b). The WEF has been measuring the competitiveness of national economies since 1979 by focusing mainly at (and comparing) the productivity of countries, because it considers productivity to be “the main determinant of long-term growth and an essential factor in economic growth and prosperity” (World Economic Forum, 2017a). In other words, a rise in productivity, and therefore also competitiveness, will, by increasing economic growth, ultimately lead to an increase in well-

being – an assumption in which the WEF is anything but alone. However, the application of the two concepts of productivity and growth to spatial entities is not without its own issues and has some important pitfalls.

The field of regional development has progressively taken up the debate around (macro-economic) competitiveness since the 1990s and transferred the concept from its then national context to the idea of a *regional* competitiveness – mainly in order to use this theoretical tool in an attempt to find an explanation for the uneven development across and between regions and to identify its sources and determinants (Huggins & Thompson, 2017: 1). This was not least because it had by then become clear that the then dominant theory of a regional economic convergence over time had failed to come true (Howaniec & Lis, 2020: n.p.). Because regional competitiveness has been, equally since the beginning of the 1990s, one of the defined objectives of the European Union’s cohesion policy when the goal of territorial cohesion was first introduced, the fact that explaining inter-regional economic unevenness⁴ has been the main incentive for the application of the concept of competitiveness to the regional context is very interesting here.

Prior to these developments, regional policy had focused mainly on individual growth centres (i.e., cities) and tried to cushion the most severe negative impacts on rural areas and lagging regions exogenously. With the shift towards regional competitiveness, the new objective became to activate the endogenous territorial capital of each of the various European regions (Ruidisch, 2013: 98f.). Cross-border cooperation (and thus Interreg) therefore appears as an instrument to incite such endogenous regional development and to increase regional competitiveness. With this in mind, regional disparities then also lose their exclusively negative trait, since *positive* disparities potentially add to the territorial capital of a region (e.g., large areas with comparatively untouched nature).

While the uneven development of regions is observable and undisputed, the attempts to explain why regions develop unevenly are – unsurprisingly – plentiful (Huggins & Thompson, 2017: 7f.). This is not least because many different streams of economic thought, such as economic geography and spatial economics, have long been looking at the issue of regional competitiveness and sought to find explanations for the present unequal state of regions, leading to a “somewhat disparate and fragmented nature of work on regional competitiveness” (Ibid.: 1).

⁴ Another side note: although outside of this thesis’s feasibility and scope, it would also have been very interesting to further investigate into the issue of *intra*-regional economic unevenness.

4.1 The Pitfalls of the Regional Competitiveness Concept

If we consider the idea of a *regional* competitiveness, then the first question that should be addressed is what the different regions are actually competing for. It is not self-evident to simply translate the same assumptions about what firms (and to a degree nations) compete for to regions. And indeed, “the ‘competitiveness of regions’ [is] remaining an area of contested theoretical debate, especially arguments concerning the extent to which places actually compete for resources and markets” (Huggins & Thompson, 2017: 1). I will come back to this shortly.

The next question that logically follows is how regional competitiveness should be measured. To this end, a distinction between development and growth has to be made first, because the concept of regional competitiveness is related to both the ideas of regional development and regional economic growth. In short and heavily simplifying matters, regional economic growth refers to a rise in the productivity of economic activities in a region over a given period of time. In contrast to that, regional development refers to a rise in the standard of living. While in the dominant neoclassical economic theory, it is the defined goal of a firm to maximise profit, for which a rise in productivity is often a necessary first precondition, for regions, the goal of competitive activity is not necessarily a rise in productivity but should always be to raise the standard of living for the regional population when the productivity of economic activities is being raised (Ibid.: 3). In other words, “competitiveness should be defined as the ‘ability to create welfare’” (Aiginger, 2006: 162). Due to the above, regional competitiveness is often considered to consist of “the capability of a particular region to attract and maintain firms with stable or rising market shares in an activity, while maintaining stable or increasing standards of living for those who participate in it” (Storper 1997; cited after Huggins & Thompson, 2017: 2). Because regional capabilities and preconditions for attracting and maintaining firms vary significantly from one another – “depending on the drivers of growth” (Huggins & Thompson, 2017: 2) –, this is at the same time one of the explanations for why development and thus competitiveness varies across geographic space.

Due to this presumed role of regions as enablers of firm activities, economic theory also often assumes that regional competitiveness “is best measured in terms of the assets of the regional business environment” (Ibid.). These assets are, amongst others, human capital, innovative capacity and local infrastructure. All of these are understood to be prerequisites for a competitive advantage in a given economic sector since these factors influence the regions’ possibilities for economic potential, for example, the ability to attract people to the region, i.e., human capital. Therefore, “competitiveness is concerned with creativity, knowledge, and environmental concerns, rather than being purely based on accumulated wealth” (Ibid.). Furthermore, these assets can be the results of

bottom-up endogenous efforts (Ibid.), an important precondition for the understanding of the ascribed role of policy interventions on regional competitiveness. Another aspect to consider in this matter is that regions are composed of hard factors (e.g., infrastructure) and soft factors (e.g., culture) that both shape a region's competitiveness, but with very different possibilities to modify them – i.e., soft factors are much more difficult to influence (Greta & Lewandowski, 2010: 15).

At this point, it is time to come back to the initial question of what regions are actually competing for. To this end, when discussing regional competitiveness specifically, yet another distinction needs to be made: that between competitiveness and competition. So far it has been stated that in economic theory the role of regions is understood to be that of an enabler for competitive and productive firm activities. However, the regions only 'compete' in providing the framework for business competitiveness, and this form of competing is very different from that of firms. To illustrate this: regions do not compete for resources that would allow them to raise their productivity as they do not produce anything themselves. Quite the contrary, resources in a region are one of the components of their regional, or territorial capital, which in turn is seen as one of the framework conditions for competitive firm activities – as one of the just mentioned assets of the regional business environment. Regional competitiveness should therefore not be conceptualised as a zero-sum game where one region necessarily loses when another one succeeds (Huggins & Thompson, 2017: 3). In fact, this is one of the reasons why the question of whether the idea of a regional competitiveness that assumes the same logic as business competitiveness is in itself contradictory and ultimately only serves the justification of political action can be and has been raised (Bristow, 2005). In any case, one take-away so far is that regional competitiveness should not be understood and measured solely by the total or rise in productivity of a region, in turn conceptualised as the sum of all firms in a region, but as a set of various factors that together determine the competitiveness of regions. Importantly, this is a set of factors that goes beyond the assets of the regional business environment.

Before debating ways to measure regional competitiveness and deriving a conclusion for how to deal with this issue in the framework of this thesis, another issue that needs to be discussed in more detail is that of economic growth. This is because most economic theories on regional competitiveness inherently link the concept of competitiveness to the capability of future economic growth in a region. The subsequent logical way to explain and measure competitiveness that then follows is to look at the typical explanatory factors of growth, such as investments in knowledge, innovation and human capital, and the current productivity (measured as a ratio of a volume measure of output to a volume measure of input use, e.g., labour) in a given region. The most common indicator for economic growth is, of course, gross domestic product (GDP), or more

specifically: GDP growth rate. There exists, however, an enormous issue in applying GDP and the connected economic concept of growth to the idea of regional competitiveness. What GDP measures is the total market value of all finished goods and services produced within a defined market in a specific time period. What GDP does not provide is information about a rise in salaries or even the general well-being of a population – which is, after all, the ultimate objective of measures seeking to increase regional competitiveness (Huggins & Thompson, 2017: 8). It is simply an assumed link that a rise in productivity will lead to higher incomes and thereby to a higher standard of living. Some economists therefore define regional competitiveness as “the rate of economic development across regions and the capacity and capability of regions to achieve future economic growth relative to other regions at a similar stage of economic development” (Ibid.: 5). Not only are the concept of economic growth and the assumption that regions are directly competing with each other problematic here – let alone the general misconception that ever-increasing economic growth is possible in a world with finite resources (Daly, 2005). The idea of comparing regions and their economic developments by itself is not without problems, since no two regions are exactly the same. Each possesses their own respective territorial capital, many assets of which furthermore elude monetary or numeric assessments. GDP and the typical explanatory factors of growth are therefore not to be considered the main indicators for measuring regional competitiveness in the following case study. If at all, they must only be *a* factor in the ‘competitiveness factor set’. Ironically, however, a prevalence of economic growth over socioeconomic cohesion can be observed in many Euroregions’ strategic guidelines, “since ultimately they strive to be competitive with other territories” (Medeiros, 2011: n.p.).

It is also critical in the context of this thesis to stress the role ascribed to policy, when trying to understand regional competitiveness. A ‘region’ is nowadays understood as the central spatial unit for economic development. Not only is it the regions that compete to attract investments (Huggins & Thompson, 2017: 4), it is at the regional level that knowledge is transferred, innovation arises and entrepreneurship is incited. Moreover, the focus of economic policy on regions results from the recognition that “[t]he region and its competitiveness determine the development of its territorial sub-units and then the regional development of the state is a function of development of its regions” (Greta & Lewandowski, 2010: 14). As indicated, these regional assets of knowledge, innovation and entrepreneurship are generally seen as the basis for competitiveness, and their respective capacities (especially innovation capacity, for the creation of which the different helix models are a famous point of reference; see also: Carayannis et al., 2012) are therefore considered to be the key factors for regional competitiveness, development and growth (Huggins & Thompson, 2017: 4). This is why policy interventions today so heavily focus on the regional level and try to incite capacity building – a development that has also been reflected in the overarching

strategic goals set out by the EU, already since the Lisbon Strategy in 2000 (Greta & Lewandowski, 2010). The European Union's regional development policy of 'Smart Specialisation Strategies', may serve as an example here, who as endogenous place-based and decidedly not 'one-size-fits-all' strategies also attempt to take into account the particularities of each individual region (Thissen et al., 2013). At the same time, this policy is yet another brick in the understanding of the EU's heavy commitment to cohesion and regional policy. Cross-border regions in general and Euroregions in particular "have their permanent place in EU's regional policy as units stimulating endogenous growth and thereby local entrepreneurship" (Greta & Lewandowski, 2010: 16). This is not least because border regions are assumed to have a particularly high growth potential due to their inherent soft factors (territorial capital) majorly determining their regional competitiveness (Ibid.) – while their hard factors usually disadvantage them (Ibid.: 18).

One of the central avenues for policy interventions that seek to incite capacity building is the creation of clusters and networks, which are believed to be principal tools to enhance knowledge, creativity and innovation in a region (Huggins & Thompson, 2017: 2f.). In economics, the concept of clusters is closely connected to the name of Michael Porter. Porter's (indirect) contribution to the understanding of regional competitiveness was that he looked at the understanding of firm competitiveness – for which the capacity to innovate was and is still seen as crucially important – and transferred it to a spatial perspective, namely, that the capacity to innovate and other factors of competitiveness are not evenly distributed amongst nations but 'clustered' within only a few regions. Porter also linked (national) competitiveness to productivity and thereby connected it to the nation's, or region's ability to innovate (Ibid.: 4). Porter was, however, not the first to emphasise the importance of a region's capacity to innovate, as endogenous development theory had long theorised on this before him (Ibid.: 5).

An interim conclusion from the remarks made so far: the cross-border cooperation process, here understood as policy intervention, nowadays aims at inciting endogenous regional development, regional capacity building and thereby regional competitiveness. The latter, however, must not be understood as solely measurable in terms of a region's total firm productivity or in terms of regional growth and GDP but as a set of various factors influencing the potential of an increased standard of living of the region's population. From the European (policy) perspective, the goal of cross-border cooperation is to increase the territorial cohesion of its many and diverse regions by increasing their individual competitiveness. Hence, any action that reduces border obstacles and helps resolve separating border contradictions, thereby possibly positively affecting the well-being of the border population and thus adding to the overarching goal of territorial cohesion, can be understood as potentially influencing the competitiveness of border regions. From the regional

perspective, the goal of cross-border cooperation is both to increase the population's standard of living and to reduce the specific barriers resulting from the borders in question, but also to fulfil the individual goals and motivations that are the reasons for the regions to engage in cross-border cooperation in the first place. The key question then is in which fields of action cross-border cooperation affects regional competitiveness and which indicators are to be used to measure this. Concerning the latter, the aspects and dimensions to be studied must be defined first.

4.2 Measuring Regional Competitiveness

So far, this chapter has mainly sought to develop an understanding of the concept of regional competitiveness by demonstrating how today's mainstream economic theory primarily links the idea of regional competitiveness to productivity and economic growth, as well as by highlighting the most important connected issues. Due to this linking, economic scholars consider the main factors to measure regional competitiveness to be the assets of the regional business environment, which are understood to enable regional growth capacity (such as human capital, innovative capacity and local infrastructure), as well as the typical explanatory factors of growth (such as investments in knowledge, innovation and human capital, and the productivity in a given region).

However, it has also been shown that “competitiveness relates to the ability of an economy to provide its population with sustainable high and rising standards of living and high rates of employment” (Huggins & Thompson, 2017: 9). This is a crucially important aspect of regional competitiveness, not least because it is, in principle, possible for an economy to improve its productivity by lowering labour inputs (e.g., lower salaries), which leads to lower prices and thus a higher (micro-economic) competitiveness – but one that comes at the cost of lower well-being. A focus on the wrong, short-term price- instead of innovation-driven competitiveness is also one of the diagnosed reasons for the ongoing decline of Europe's competitiveness on the global level (Gretschmann, 2018: 370). Therefore, all models assessing regional competitiveness need to think about some way to measure the population's standard of living. Due to being comparatively easy to measure, the most popular indicators are employment and income (Huggins & Thompson, 2017: 9). The fundamental issue in measuring income via GDP per capita has already been elaborated on. Therefore, in attempts to measure well-being that go beyond GDP, “rather than considering GDP or GDP per capita and employment, outcome competitiveness is captured by income, social and ecological pillars; [that] also [take] into account measures such as expected life, subjective well-being or happiness, and work-life balance considerations” (Ibid.).

This raises yet another important question when it comes to measuring regional competitiveness: whether competitiveness should be expressed via the *inputs* that will lead to the fulfilment of the declared competitiveness goals, such as investments in human capital but also relevant competencies, or the *outcomes* that said goals reveal, such as employment rates but also other social and ecological indicators. Ideally, of course, any measurement would include both factors – inputs and outputs – in the hope of capturing how a region is performing at present and in the future (Ibid.). Next to methodological issues, the biggest barrier here is the availability of data. Ultimately, all attempts to measure the competitiveness of a region depend on the data available, which is often only provided at the national level. This is an issue that is even amplified for cross-border regions, where multiple authorities can potentially be in charge of gathering and providing said data, each after their own varying methods and according to the interests and needs of their nation states.

Naturally, there have been many attempts to create indicators and indices that measure and present the competitiveness of spatial entities in easy-to-grasp numerical assessments, one of which, due to being the most relevant, I want to discuss: the European ‘Regional Competitiveness Index’ (RCI). The RCI is a framework that since 2011 has calculated the competitiveness of all European NUTS 2 regions via a total of eleven categories (in turn largely based on the ‘Global Competitiveness Index’ of the WEF) that affect competitiveness and which are classified into three groups – ‘Basic’, ‘Efficiency’ and ‘Innovation’ (Dijkstra et al., 2011: 5). It furthermore excludes all assets outside the influence of public policy intervention, such as the natural capital of a region (Ibid.: 4). The individual indicators that the eleven dimensions are composed of are updated every two years, the rhythm in which a new RCI report is published by the European Commission (with a notable gap in 2015). The RCI does not, however, apply all aspects of competitiveness to each region in the same manner (ergo to the three different major groups into one of which each region falls). Rather, it equally assumes three categories of regions (medium, intermediate and highly developed) that determine the necessary foci for the regions and applies a weighting scheme to account for these interregional differences. I.e., whereas less developed regions supposedly need to focus on infrastructure and education, highly developed regions need to focus more on innovation and technology (Ibid.). The division is made on the basis of regional GDP per head in purchasing power parity. The RCI is based on the idea of regional competitiveness “defined as the ability to offer an attractive and sustainable environment for firms and residents to live and work” (Ibid.), thereby attempting to include both the aspects of the regional business environment and the population’s well-being at a given point in time in one concept. The eleven dimensions of competitiveness are:

Table 1: The 11 Pillars of the European Regional Competitiveness Index

Basic	Efficiency	Innovation
Institutions	Higher Education, Training & Lifelong Learning	Technological Readiness
Macroeconomic Stability	Labour Market Efficiency	Business Sophistication
Infrastructure	Market Size	Innovation
Health		
Quality of Primary & Secondary Education		

Source: Own Illustration after: Dijkstra et al. (2011)

While the RCI is most assuredly not perfect as every index must inevitably fail to represent the complexity of regional reality, it does provide a reference figure on which to base the identification of relevant dimensions for cross-border cooperation action and thereby the aspects to be investigated in the subsequent case study. Since the goal is not to measure regional competitiveness *per se* but to assess the influence of cross-border cooperation on the regional competitiveness of Euroregions, it is not necessary to finally and holistically define the different dimensions and indicators that together reveal the competitiveness of a region. Instead, the goal is to identify fields of action where cross-border cooperation affects competitiveness. Moreover, no further division between inputs and outputs is needed as the cross-border cooperation process itself can be understood as the input, and any output might be relevant as long as a given activity can be linked to the overarching cross-border cooperation process framework.

Inspired by both the European Regional Competitiveness Index and the famous three pillars of sustainability, I have therefore decided to take economic, social and environmental dimensions from the fields of **labour market** (i.e., employment and income), **infrastructure** (including transport and digital infrastructure), **cooperation & network building**, **living conditions** (poverty risk, access to public services, health, education) and **environmental aspects** (that need to be further defined in the case studies, based on the territories' characteristics) into consideration. The main focus thus lies on the well-being of the regional populations. It will also be important to consider the potential for capacity building, the individual motivations and goals of the Euroregions in question, and the specific obstacles that the regions are facing in consequence of their border location. Some important indicators and areas that without a doubt would have been enriching (such as social equality and culture) are notably missing. The reason for this is a lack of data and activities to analyse. Lastly, since the main framework for cross-border cooperation in Europe today is Interreg, this framework also majorly determines the focus of the comparative case study.

5. The Methodology of Comparative Case Studies

This chapter marks the start of the practical part of this thesis, for which the preceding chapters have laid the theoretical foundations. The method chosen to evaluate the impact of cross-border cooperation on the competitiveness of Euroregions is a comparative case study. Before the two selected Euroregions and the data sources that the case study is built upon are presented in more detail, the methodology of comparative case studies itself shall be explained and justified first.

While mainly associated with the social sciences, case studies are a very popular method in a large variety of academic disciplines, be those economics, history, political sciences or psychology. Despite their popularity, questions concerning their usefulness and correct application are not without controversy. Case studies, as a qualitative method, are tools whose biggest virtue lies in them enabling in-depth analyses of single phenomena – the case(s) – as opposed to statistical methods, whose main strength lies in their breadth (Flyvbjerg, 2011: 314). The case study approach does not, however, in itself impose a specific practice of studying the chosen phenomena. It can be done either qualitatively, quantitatively, analytically, hermeneutically or via a mixed methods approach (Ibid.: 301). Therefore, choosing to conduct a case study is “not so much making a methodological choice as a choice of what is to be studied” (Ibid.). Key for any case study is the definition of both the case and the context. Other characteristics that define case studies are them often being undertaken over time – further adding to the depth of the knowledge produced in case studies – and them often being iterative in nature (Goodrick, 2014: 1). The latter, however, are aspects that this thesis will, due to its limited scope and time, inevitably fail to satisfy.

For the longest time, case studies (as qualitative methods in general) suffered from being tainted with the stigma of producing non-generalisable and thus inferior scientific knowledge. Today, not only is the ‘absolute’ value and usefulness of generalised knowledge increasingly challenged and the dependence of knowledge on the circumstances – the context – stressed, but for many scholars, “research is [nowadays] problem-driven and not methodology-driven” (Flyvbjerg, 2011: 313). Therefore, it is all about reflecting the assets of a case study for the decision of when and why to choose this particular approach – in the case of this thesis, even the approach of a *comparative* case study. As the name already indicates, comparative case studies cover more than one case, aim for comparison within and across contexts, and thus enable the production of more generalisable knowledge with an emphasis on causality – i.e., the questions of how and why: “Comparative case studies may be selected [...] when there is a need to understand and explain how features within the context influence the success of programme or policy initiatives.” (Goodrick, 2014: 1)

A necessary precondition for comparing, contrasting and analysing similarities and differences that might influence success and failure of, e.g., a policy intervention, is the clear description of the cases and a clear definition of the goals that are being pursued in the respective case studies. In this thesis, the latter has already been assured through the previous, theoretical chapters. Data for comparative case studies can be collected from a variety of different sources, such as fieldwork or interviews. In this work, I chose to base the subsequent case study exclusively on document analysis. The main reason for this was feasibility. While it would without a doubt have been beneficial to base the analysis on interviews as well, a choice needed to be made. Seeing that the dimensions for analysis defined in the previous chapter necessitate a certain breadth of data on which the comparative case study needs to be based upon, the decision for a document analysis seemed the most reasonable. Another choice that has been made due to feasibility reasoning was to limit the case study to two cases only, to limit the trade-offs in terms of both depth and detail that would have necessarily had to be made when broadening the scope to further cases (Ibid.: 4).

As mentioned above, a clear definition of the cases and their description are a mandatory precondition for successful analysis and knowledge creation. The first question that then logically follows is what exactly a 'case' is. The classic answer is that a case is a 'bounded system'⁵ that is distinct from its context, divided by the boundaries of the case. However, this notion of a bounded system has been criticised for being inherently restrictive as a variable-oriented notion of comparison, which "assumes that a study identifies (or even bounds) specific units [...] and holds them constant while varying other factors or variables to test hypotheses" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017: 7). As a result, the unit of analysis is separated from the context rather than made amenable to a search for connections (Ibid.). Instead, comparative case studies should not only try to identify specific units of analysis to compare and contrast them but apply a heuristic logic of analysis that views cases as processes and tries to understand how phenomena have come to be and how they are interconnected (Ibid.: 8). Context does not define the boundaries of the case but is an integral part of it itself. Thus, it is of central importance for understanding phenomena to contrast them with distinct cases and locations, to include different levels (macro, meso and micro) and to consider their historical evolutions (Ibid.: 14).

These reflections on what a case is and the relevance of context are important because they determine the approach and understanding of the subsequent comparative case study of the influence of cross-border cooperation on the competitiveness of (two selected) Euroregions. I opted to analyse two Euroregions at two distinct border contexts that are very different in their structure and functions and that each define the circumstances and possibilities of action for the

⁵ A term coined by Louis Smith and popularised by Robert E. Stake.

Euroregions in different ways. One is located at the Franco-German and the other one at the German-Czech border. The choice for these specific borders was, of course, made due to the nature of the Master's programme that frames the context of this thesis. I also aimed at not limiting the examination of the Euroregions to the regional level only but at broadening the horizon to the local, national and European perspective as well as to the historicity and becoming of the two Euroregional phenomena.

In what follows, the two Euroregional structures of the Greater Region and the Euregio Egrensis will therefore both first be presented at some length in order to establish a sufficient understanding for subsequent analysis, comparison and contrast. Then their aims, functions and motivations shall be addressed since it is them that differentiate and characterise individual Euroregions and give reason to their involvement in cross-border cooperation. Afterwards, specific activities in the different fields of action will be presented before lastly the Euroregions are compared and the impact of their cross-border cooperation engagement on their competitiveness is evaluated.

6. The Two Cases to Be Studied

This case study is exclusively relying on data stemming from document analysis, which raises the issue of dependency on the availability of sufficient data and material on which to base the study. And indeed, data and document availability differ greatly between the two selected Euroregions. Seeing that the choice of these two particular Euroregions was made on the basis of them differing in scope and function, this comes as no surprise. The Greater Region is one of the older cross-border cooperation structures in Europe and covers a territory where some of the most elaborate forms of cross-border cooperation exist. As a result, territorial observation has been one of the main foci of the Greater Region for a long time, and no less than three institutions are concerned with it: the Greater Region's Geographical Information System, the Interregional Labour Market Observatory and the network of the Statistical Offices of the Greater Region (Summit Secretariat of the Greater Region, n.d.: Greater Region). The great value of these institutions not least lies in them enabling cross-border processing of data, most of which stems from national – and therefore distinctly differing – contexts. In addition, extensive reports on the economic and social situation of the Greater Region are published at regular intervals, including a statistical-quantitative catalogue of indicators, which also proved to be an invaluable resource for the purpose of this thesis. All of the above in itself is, furthermore, a first good example of functioning cross-border cooperation (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020).

In contrast to this, the situation is very different for the Euregio Egrensis. Not only is this cross-border cooperation structure much younger than the Greater Region, it is also much smaller in scope and thus has far fewer resources and possibilities at its disposal. There is no comparable institution for data collection and territorial observation, and much of the data used in the present study therefore stems from Eurostat. Multiple issues are connected to this. First, regional data from Eurostat is either based on the NUTS 2 or NUTS 3 classification of regions, neither of which reflect the specific territory of the Euregio Egrensis particularly well. Especially NUTS 2 is far too large in scope to allow for accurate conclusions regarding the border area in question. The same also applies to NUTS 3, although to a much lesser degree. Secondly, the territory of the Euregio is subject to two distinct Interreg programmes, thus two frameworks for cooperation exist in the region simultaneously, calling for further caution when drawing conclusions specific to the border area of the Euroregion. There also is a profound lack of interest in the Euregio Egrensis in the available literature. This is, again, the opposite case for the Greater Region. Much information on the second case therefore had to be drawn directly from the websites of the organisations that together comprise the Euregio Egrensis.

One last remark needs to be made concerning the timeframe analysed, as a choice needed to be made due to the limited scope of this thesis. Naturally, the presentation of the two cases primarily aims at explaining their situation today, while to a large extent also taking their historical evolutions into account. The analysis of individual activities and projects mainly focuses on the now finished Interreg V period 2014-2020, since Interreg and thus the main European framework for cross-border cooperation majorly determined the focus of this study. However, I have also included activities and projects that date back longer or have been going on for a longer period of time, highlighting characteristic attempts of cooperation, the reduction of border obstacles and the enhancement of regional competitiveness whenever it was deemed opportune to do so.

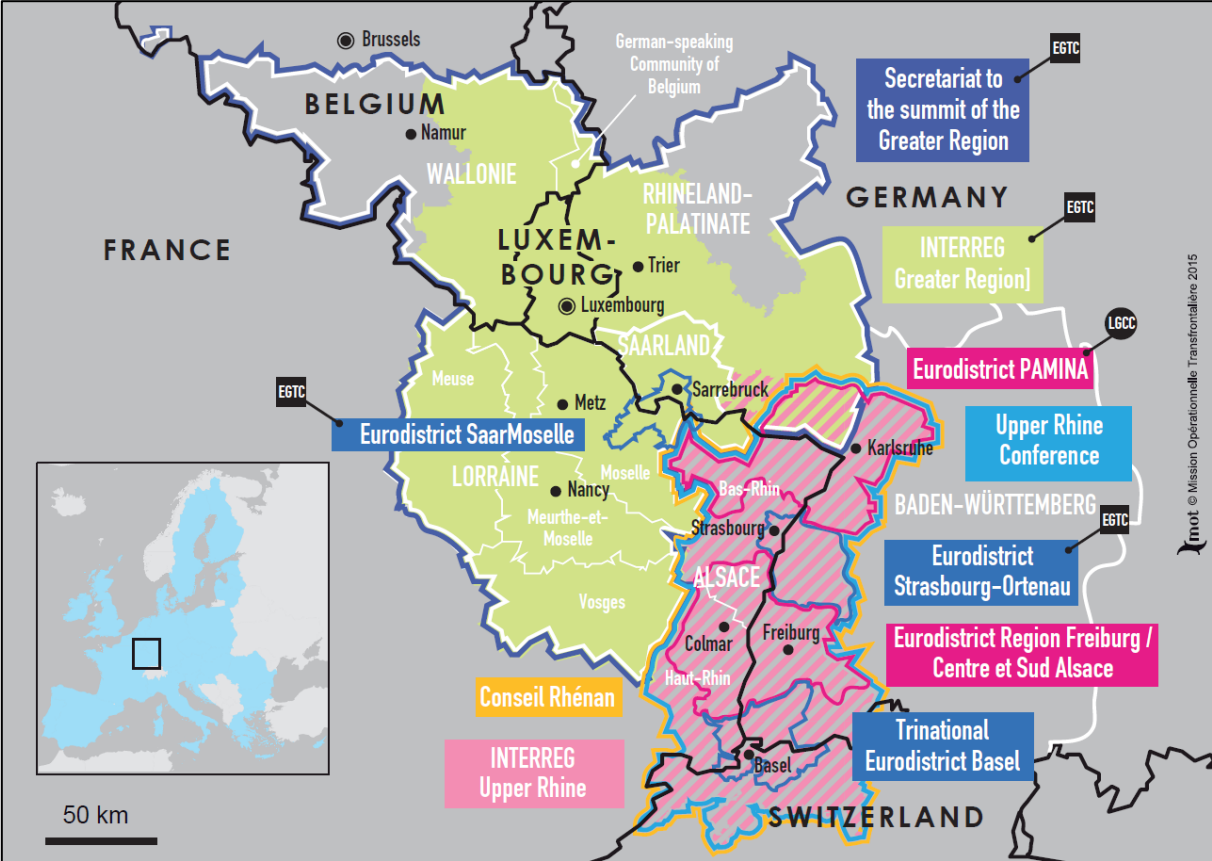
6.1 The Franco-German Border: The Case of the Greater Region

The first case to present and study is the so-called ‘Greater Region’, situated at the intersection of no less than six intra-European national borders, one of which is the Franco-German border between the French territory of Lorraine (since 2016 part of the French region Grand Est) and the two German Länder of Saarland and Rhineland-Palatinate. The Greater Region is an excellent example for the development and cardinal reasoning behind European cross-border cooperation.

The Franco-German border, or more precisely: the area that encompasses the territories that today demarcate the two national states of France and Germany, has without a doubt been one of the most contested and fought over areas in the history of Europe. Over the last half a dozen centuries, it has been the site of numerous wars, conflicts, territorial claims (since the 19th century especially over the territories of Alsace and Lorraine) as well as the horrors of World Wars I and II. The first half of the 20th century had left a deep scar in Europe in general and between France and Germany in particular. It was the Elysée Treaty in 1963 that marked the official beginning of reconciliation and ultimately proclaimed friendship between France and (West)Germany – a treaty that today is often depicted as one of the milestones in the European integration process. It not only required regular meetings between the two states at all political levels via a consultation mechanism (since then, e.g., the French head of state and the German head of government have had to meet at least twice a year), but also laid the groundwork for bilateral cooperation programmes and initiatives such as the Franco-German Youth Office that involved the populations of the two states in general and of the respective border regions in particular (Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, 2019). The latter is of special relevance due to the significance of bottom-up processes and structures for cooperation across borders. Therefore, the Elysée Treaty simultaneously marks the

beginning of institutionalised Franco-German cross-border cooperation post-World War II. The importance of the Elysée Treaty up to this day is also reflected in the recent Treaty of Aachen, a bilateral treaty on Franco-German cooperation and integration, signed on 22 January 2019. It was specifically envisioned as a follow-up and renewal of the Elysée Treaty, and as such also addressed the issue of Franco-German cross-border cooperation, namely with the creation of the new Franco-German Cross-Border Cooperation Committee (DG REGIO, n.d.: 3).

Figure 2: Franco-German Cross-Border Territory



Source: Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (n.d.) France-Germany

Institutionalised European cross-border cooperation at the Franco-German border via Interreg is nowadays managed through two large Interreg programmes: Upper Rhine and Greater Region⁶, which encompass the areas along the Rhine and Moselle-Saar basins, respectively (see Figure 2). Both are of multinational character and include other countries as well: in the case of the Upper Rhine programme Switzerland and in the case of the Greater Region programme Belgium and Luxembourg. Another characteristic of cross-border cooperation specific to the Franco-German border are ‘Eurodistricts’, of which there currently are five. Eurodistricts are another but by no means clearly defined cross-border cooperation structure. The notion was coined at the end of the

⁶ Note that although largely the same, the territories covered by the cross-border *entity* and the Interreg *programme* Greater Region are not 100% congruent.

1980s and became popularised at the beginning of the 2000s, when, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty, the joint declaration of Jacques Chirac and Gerhard Schröder called for the establishment of such Eurodistricts to reinforce cross-border cooperation (Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière, n.d., France-Germany). However, neither the Council of Europe nor the European Union seem to have made any attempts to officially adopt the idea of Eurodistricts, which makes them another example of an entity based on self-proclamation and pre-existing legal bases, such as the EGTC. If there is a distinguishing feature at all, they appear to be conceptualised as smaller in scale than Euroregions and to concentrate on metropolitan areas.

Of course, the Greater Region must not be reduced to the particularities of the Franco-German border only. The latter has mainly been taken as an exemplification of the developments and reasonings for cross-border cooperation in Western Europe after World War II.

6.1.1 History of Origins

The origins of the cross-border cooperation structure of Greater Region are to be found in the Elysée Treaty and the regular Franco-German summit meetings stipulated therein. At one such summit meeting in 1969, it was decided to set up a ‘Intergovernmental Commission’ by the two states that was shortly thereafter, in 1971, joined by the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the other four regions that today together comprise the Greater Region. Fittingly for an example of European scope, the initial primary topic to discuss was the crisis of the coal and steel industry that at the time affected each of the regions (Summit Secretariat of the Greater Region, n.d.: Greater Region). The further institutional development of the Greater Region is similarly emblematic for the larger developments of European cross-border cooperation in the second half of the 20th century. In 1980 (not within the framework of the Madrid Convention, but following the same logic of cross-border cooperation based on state arrangements), an intergovernmental agreement on cooperation in the Greater Region was concluded. The idea was to formalise cooperation across borders to enhance it and provide a legal basis for the work of the Intergovernmental Commission established in 1969 and the ‘Regional Commission SaarLorLux-Trier-Westpfalz’⁷ (Gløersen et al., 2020: 46). The next decades were characterised by further progressive institutionalisation. Notably,

⁷ There also exists a non-profit association under Luxembourg law, the ‘EuRegio SaarLorLuxRhine’ founded in 1995, which specifically represents the interests of the municipalities of the Greater Region as actors of cross-border cooperation. After the successive fusion of the Regional Commission and the Summit, it is the main remaining organisation representing the municipalities of the Greater Region. The overall cross-border structure and thus the whole ‘Euroregion’ Greater Region, however, is larger and not limited to the association EuRegio SaarLorLuxRhine.

in 1995⁸ a first ‘Summit of the Executives of the Greater Region’ took place, which incorporated the acting representatives of the executives of all partner regions into the Greater Region structure (Summit Secretariat of the Greater Region, n.d.: Eckdaten). Furthermore, a first ‘Joint Secretariat’ was created in 1999, and in 2013/14 the ‘Summit Secretariat of the Greater Region’ (Ibid.). This overview of the Greater Region’s institutional historical development is deemed necessary here for two reasons. For one thing, it archetypically exemplifies the institutionalisation of European cross-border cooperation, and for another, it helps in the understanding of the functioning of the Greater Region structure today.

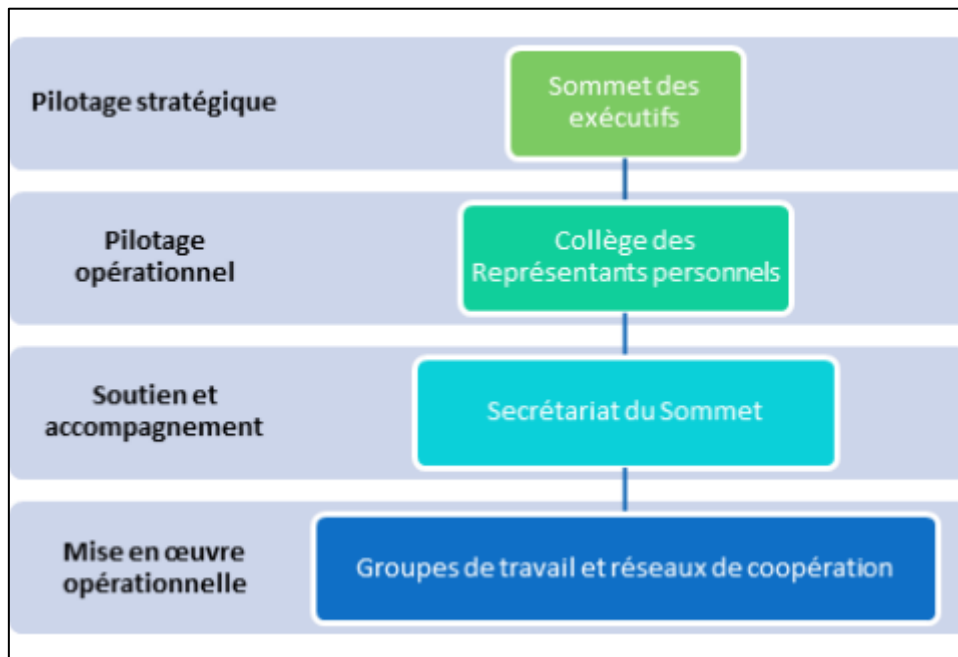
6.1.2 Institutional Structure

One of the particularities of the Greater Region (political) cooperation concept is the unusually strong involvement of national and regional governments in the governance of the cross-border cooperation structure. At the same time, this means that the Greater Region is much less of a bottom-up structure than many other Euroregions. The Summit of the Greater Region⁹ is at the forefront of institutional cooperation and responsible for the establishment and steering of the strategic guidelines of the Greater Region. It is organised after the idea of rotating presidency every 24 months. The operational management, however, is the responsibility of the ‘Committee of the Personal Representatives’, which in turn is supported by the Summit Secretariat of the Greater Region. The Summit Secretariat is, as of today, officially set up as an EGTC and the main point of contact of the cross-border cooperation structure. Finally, the implementation of the political agenda is assured through multiple thematic ‘Working Groups’ (see Figure 3; Gløersen et al., 2020: 53; Summit Secretariat of the Greater Region, n.d.: Greater Region).

⁸ A side note: at the same time, in 1996, the Karlsruhe Agreement was signed. It is a treaty between the states of France, Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland that regulates cross-border cooperation between local authorities and local public bodies and provides the legal basis for, i.a., the many Eurodistricts alongside the Franco-German border. In contrast to the ‘Saar-Lor-Lux Agreement’ of 1980, the Karlsruhe Agreement does build upon the Madrid Convention Framework (Gløersen et al., 2020: 47).

⁹ Comprising the prime minister of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the minister presidents of Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland, Wallonia, the Federation Wallonia-Brussels and the German-speaking Community of Belgium as well as the prefect of the region of Grand Est, the president of the Conseil régional of the region of Grand Est and the presidents of the Conseils départemental of the three Lorraine departments of Meurthe-et-Moselle, Moselle and Meuse.

Figure 3: Structure of the Summit of the Greater Region



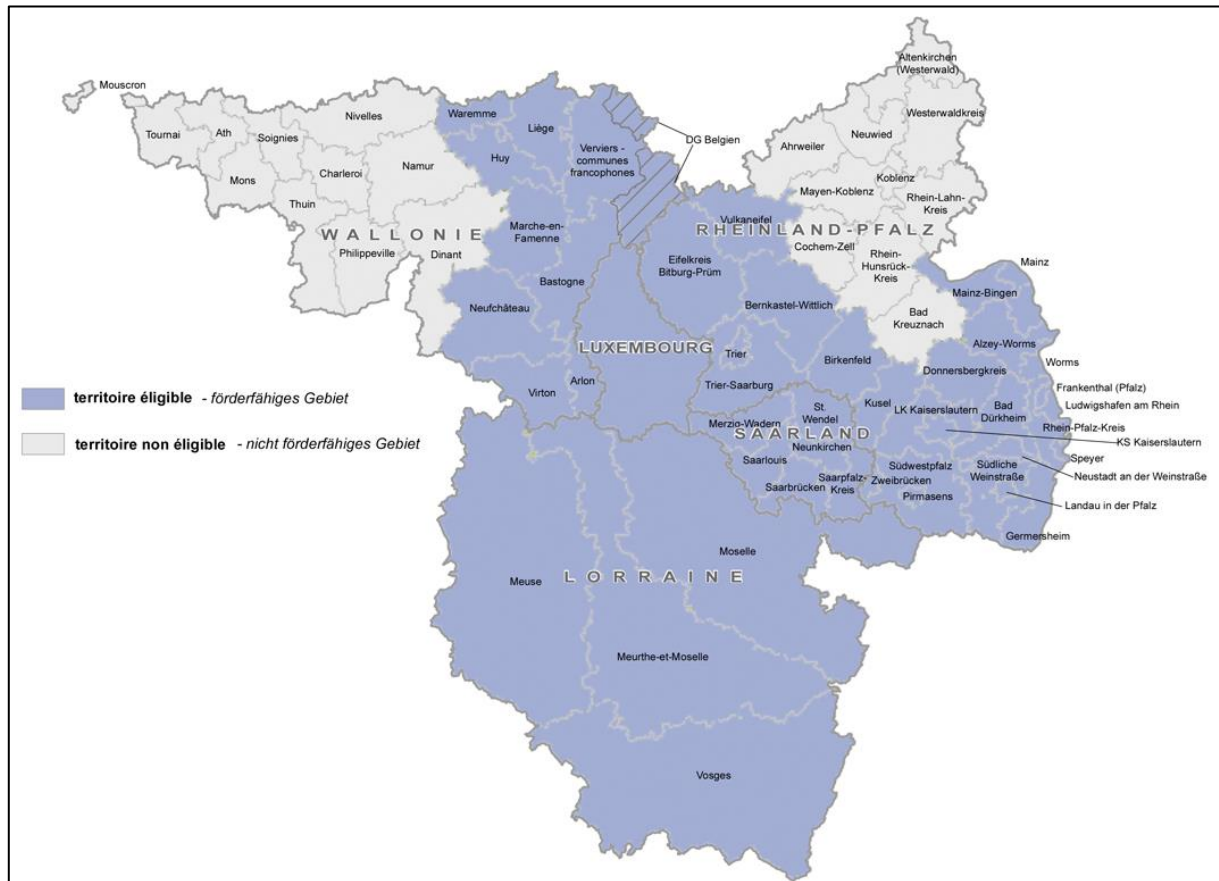
Source: Summit Secretariat of the Greater Region (n.d.) Sommet

Two other important actors in the institutional structure of the Greater Region include the consultative bodies of the ‘Interregional Parliamentary Council’ – created in 1986 and composed of representatives of the parliamentary assemblies of each of the five member regions – and the ‘Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region’ – created in 1996/97 and composed of representatives of trade associations as well as social and professional organisations from the regions, thus representing the interests of both employees and employers of the region (Gløersen et al., 2020: 53). Lastly, the administrative authority of the Interreg programme Greater Region is to be named. Since 2014, it has combined the management of Interreg funding for the whole of the Greater Region, which was previously divided into individual geographical entities (Interreg Greater Region, 2019: 8). The administrative authority is also constructed as an EGTC and supported by the Joint Secretariat of the Greater Region (Ibid.: 114ff.). While the inclusion of the diverse actors and stakeholders of cross-border cooperation via the different institutions is one of the strengths of the Greater Region and a good example of multi-level governance, the large number of structures that have been set up over the years (without even mentioning the many cross-border structures that exist at lower levels than the political structure headed by the Summit of the Greater Region) is at the same time also creating issues of overlapping and duplication (Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière, n.d., France-Germany).

6.1.3 Financing and Funding

The main source of funding for the financing of cross-border cooperation action in the Greater Region is the Interreg V A Greater Region Programme (the programme being smaller than the whole territory and covering 47 NUTS 3 regions in the Greater Region altogether; see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Interreg V A Greater Region Programme Area



Source: Interreg Greater Region (n.d.) Homepage

The total budget of the programme amounted to about €140 million for the now ended 2014-2020 period and stemmed exclusively from the European Regional Development Fund (Interreg Greater Region, 2019: 102). Since additionality is one of the principles of EU funding nowadays, projects financed by the ERDF could only be co-financed up to a maximum of 60% via Interreg. The remaining 40% had to be financed from public funds, effectively increasing the budget of the Greater Region to more than €234 million for the 5th Interreg programming period (Ibid.: 103). Each programme in the Interreg framework had to concentrate at least 80% of its budget on a maximum of four thematic objectives among eleven EU priorities in order to be eligible for funding by the ERDF. The strategy of the Greater Region programme was based on the ‘tritych’ of ‘employment – territorial development – economy’, which put the promotion of employment in

the large regional labour market at the top of the list of priorities (Ibid.: 8). This ‘trptych’ was equivalent to the four Interreg investment priorities of *viii*) ‘Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility’, *vi*) ‘Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency’, *ix*) ‘Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination’ and lastly *iii*) ‘Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs’ (Interreg Greater Region, n.d., Programmstrategie).¹⁰

Another financing tool, although much smaller in scale, to mention briefly at this point is the ‘Cooperation Fund’ that was created as a pilot project by the Summit Secretariat of the Greater Region in 2019. The Cooperation Fund aims to support local citizen-driven cross-border projects in order to strengthen the common sense of belonging to the Greater Region. In its first year, the fund financed a total of 10 projects with a sum of about €40,000 (Summit Secretariat of the Greater Region, 2020: Kooperationsfonds). It is intended to be continued in 2021.

6.1.4 The Territory

The Greater Region encompasses the territories of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, Lorraine in France, the Belgian region of Wallonia (including the German speaking community of Ostbelgien) as well as the German Länder of Rhineland-Palatinate and the Saarland (see Figure 5). It is often said that the Greater Region ‘lies at the heart of (historic) Europe’, covering territories of four of the initial six founding members of the European Communities, situated at the crossroads of the major European rivers Rhine, Meuse, Moselle and Saar and located in between the major conurbations of Brussels, Rhine-Ruhr, Rhine-Main, Rhine-Neckar, Basel/Mulhouse and Paris. In total, the Greater Region covers an area of some 65,400km², with more than 11.6 million inhabitants – which equals about 2.3% of the total EU population – who altogether speak three different languages: French, German and Luxembourgian (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020; Summit Secretariat of the Greater Region, n.d.: Greater Region).

With an average of 178 inhabitants per km², the Greater Region is one of the most densely populated areas in all of Europe. However, there are some remarkable differences between the individual regions. In general, the Greater Region is characterised by a diversity of space and a polycentric distribution of urban functions (Interreg Greater Region, 2019: 7). Three major

¹⁰ The next implementation of Interreg Greater Region (VI, 2021-2027) is also planned to focus on four policy objectives further divided into eleven specific objectives, namely ‘a Greener, carbon free Europe’, ‘a more Social Europe’, ‘a Europe closer to citizens’ and ‘a more Connected Europe’. I was, however, not (yet) able to find any concrete numbers on the budget and financing for the 2021-2027 period.

agglomerations exist in the territory, the biggest in the east, alongside the Rhine corridor between the cities of Mainz and Ludwigshafen. A second exists in the north of Wallonia around the cities of Charleroi and Liège. The last one stretches along both sides of the Saar, covering, amongst others, the cities of Luxembourg, Esch-sur-Alzette, Trier and Saarbrücken. Due to these conglomerations, the population distribution between the individual regions varies significantly. Wallonia and Rhineland-Palatinate have by far the highest populations in total (roughly 3.7 and 4 million, respectively, in 2019), followed by Lorraine, the Saarland and finally Luxembourg (2.3 million, 1 million, 600,000). Due to their relative size, however, the last two are the most densely populated (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020.: 9-11).

Figure 5: Tourism Map of the Greater Region

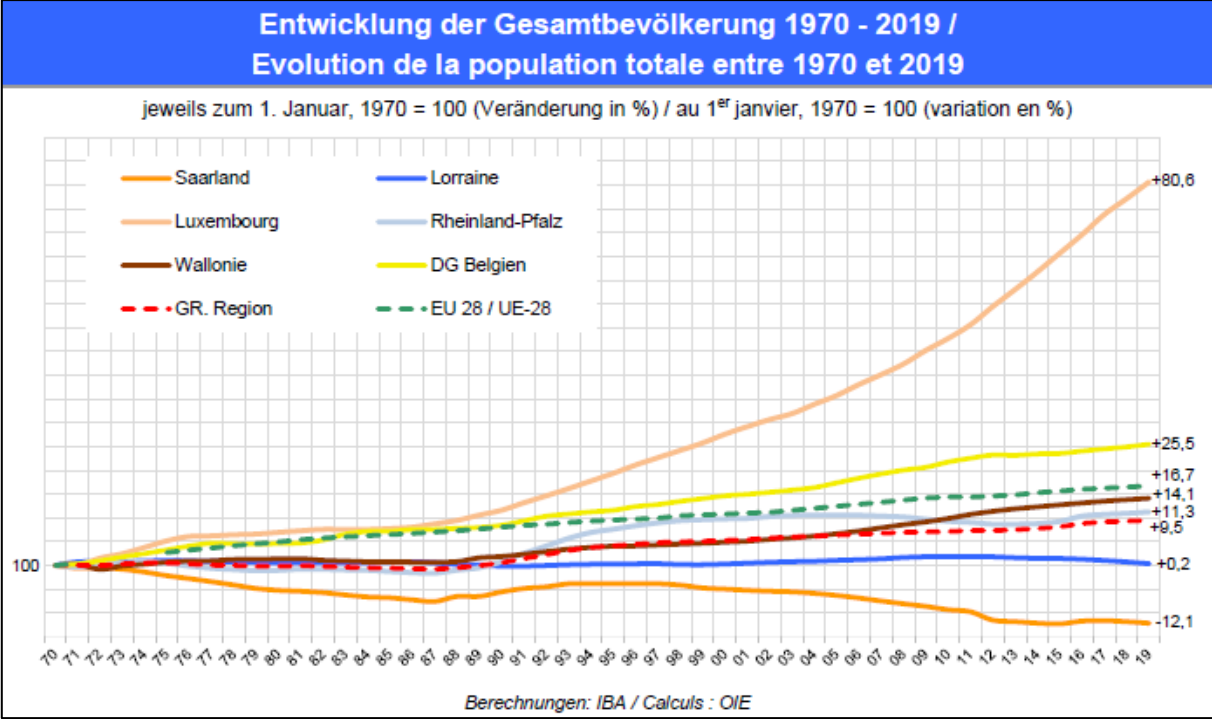


Source: Geographical Information System of the Greater Region (2021)

It is also interesting to consider the development and projection of the demographics in the Greater Region in regard to the overarching issues of cohesion and competitiveness. Since 1970, the total population of the Greater Region has increased by 9.5%, which is (especially since the mid-1990s) considerably below the EU-28 average of 16.7%. Even more remarkable, however, are the developments of the individual regions. While the population of Luxembourg increased by the

staggering number of 80.6% and the regions of Wallonia and Rhineland-Palatinate also reported positive numbers, the population of Lorraine has stagnated, and the population of the Saarland even decreased (Ibid.: 14; see Figure 6) – a development that is expected to continue in the future.

Figure 6: Total Population Development in the Greater Region



Source: Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 14

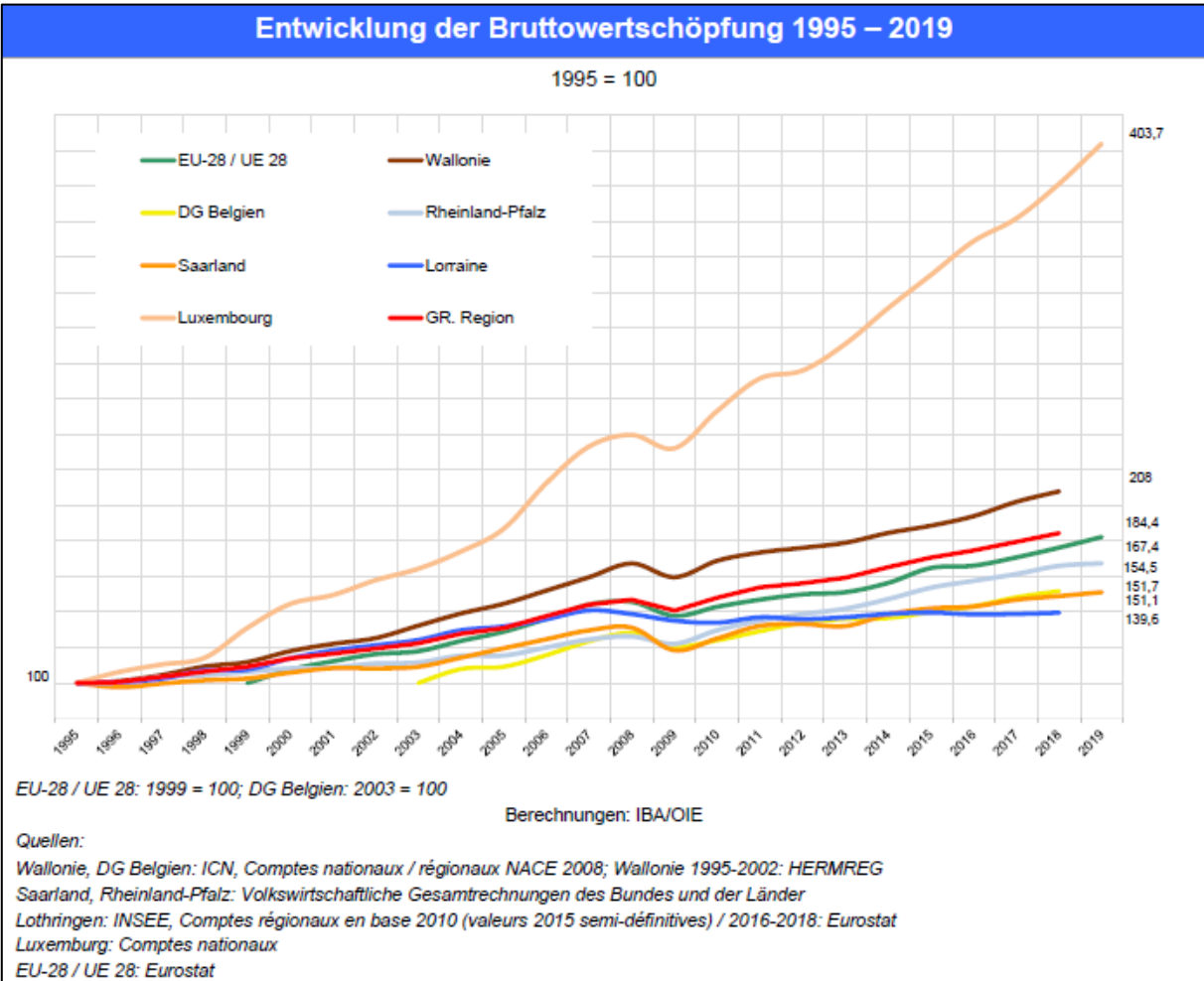
This discrepancy between the member regions is even greater when looking at the percentages of the working age population. Luxembourg already has the highest percentage of inhabitants between the ages of 20 and 64. Although the whole of the Greater Region will be affected considerably by the demographic change, it is projected that the Saarland and Rhineland-Palatinate will be the most severely hit, and Wallonia and Luxembourg much less so (Ibid.: 12, 16).

The ageing of the local population is typical for former industrialised areas, a characteristic that holds true for all of the member regions. Only Luxembourg is a special case here, due to its unique economic development in the last decades (Ibid.: 98f.). The territory of the Greater Region is indeed an archetypical example of the structural changes in the European economies in the last decades. Formerly heavily industrialised regions, the secondary sector accounted for only 21.1% of the gross value added in the Greater Region in 2018. Although the figure in the German speaking territories was still significantly higher than the EU average, it amounted to only 18.1% in Lorraine and 17.7% in Wallonia. The tertiary sector has become the dominant sector in the Greater Region in the past decades, especially in Luxembourg, where it amounted to 86.7% – largely due to the dominant financial sector that has developed there. With 5.5%, construction in the Greater Region

equalled exactly the EU average, while the primary sector amounted to just 1.1%. In general, the shares of the primary and secondary sectors are declining in favour of the tertiary (Ibid.: 20, 102).

When looking at indicators trying to display the overall economic performance of the Greater Region over time, the impression of disparity between the individual regions is reinforced. Sticking to value added, this parameter has increased by 84% since 1995, which is higher than the EU average of 76.3%. While Luxembourg reported an immense increase of 303.7%, the figures in Lorraine (about 40%), the Saarland (51.1%) and Rhineland-Palatinate (67.4%) were below the EU average. Only Wallonia was above the EU average, too, with an increase of 108% (see Figure 7). Overall, value added amounted to about 2.5% of the total EU wealth in 2018 – compared to a population share of around 2.3% (Ibid.: 101).

Figure 7: Gross Value Added Development in the Greater Region



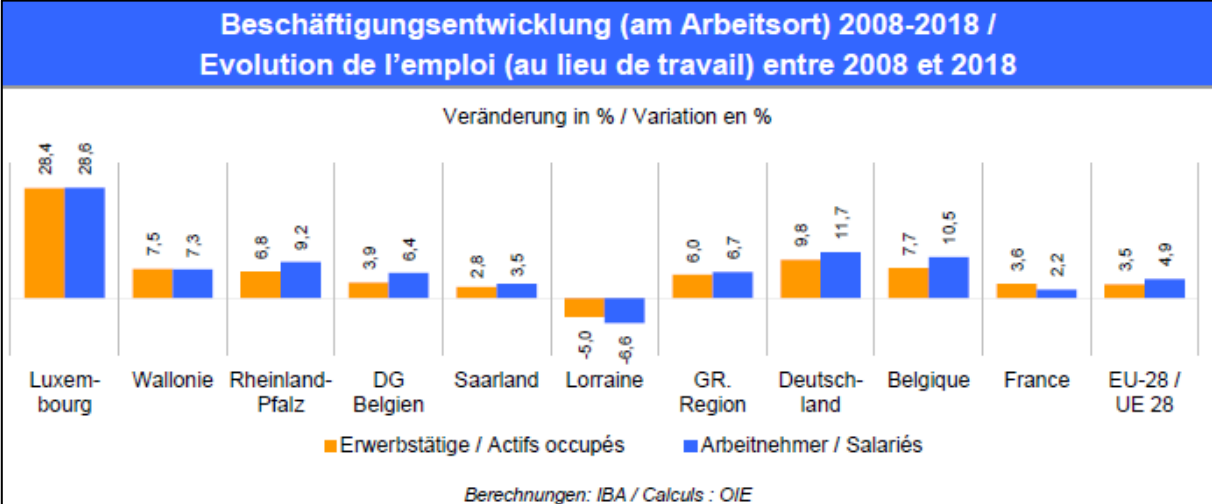
Source: Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 102

The same applies when looking at GDP per capita, where Luxembourg accounts for by far the highest amount with more than 2.5 times of the EU average. The second highest levels of GDP per capita are reported by the German border regions. All of the French and Belgian NUTS 3

regions have lower GDP per capita figures than those in Luxembourg and Germany, and they are also all below the EU average (DG REGIO, n.d.: 2). However, these numbers may only serve as a rough assessment of the economic performance and should not be taken as a main or even the only factor in the evaluation of the Greater Region’s regional performance and competitiveness.

Since the financial crisis in 2008, the employment trend has overall been positive in the Greater Region. Both the percentage of people in paid work and that of employees increased by 6.0% and 6.7%, respectively, and thus at a higher rate than the EU average (3.5% and 4.9%). Again, the picture drastically differs when looking at the individual regions, though. While it grew considerably in Luxembourg (28.4%, 28.6%), it only increased slightly in Wallonia, Rhineland-Palatinate and the Saarland, and even decreased in Lorraine (-5.0%, -6.6%) (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 43; see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Employment Development in the Greater Region



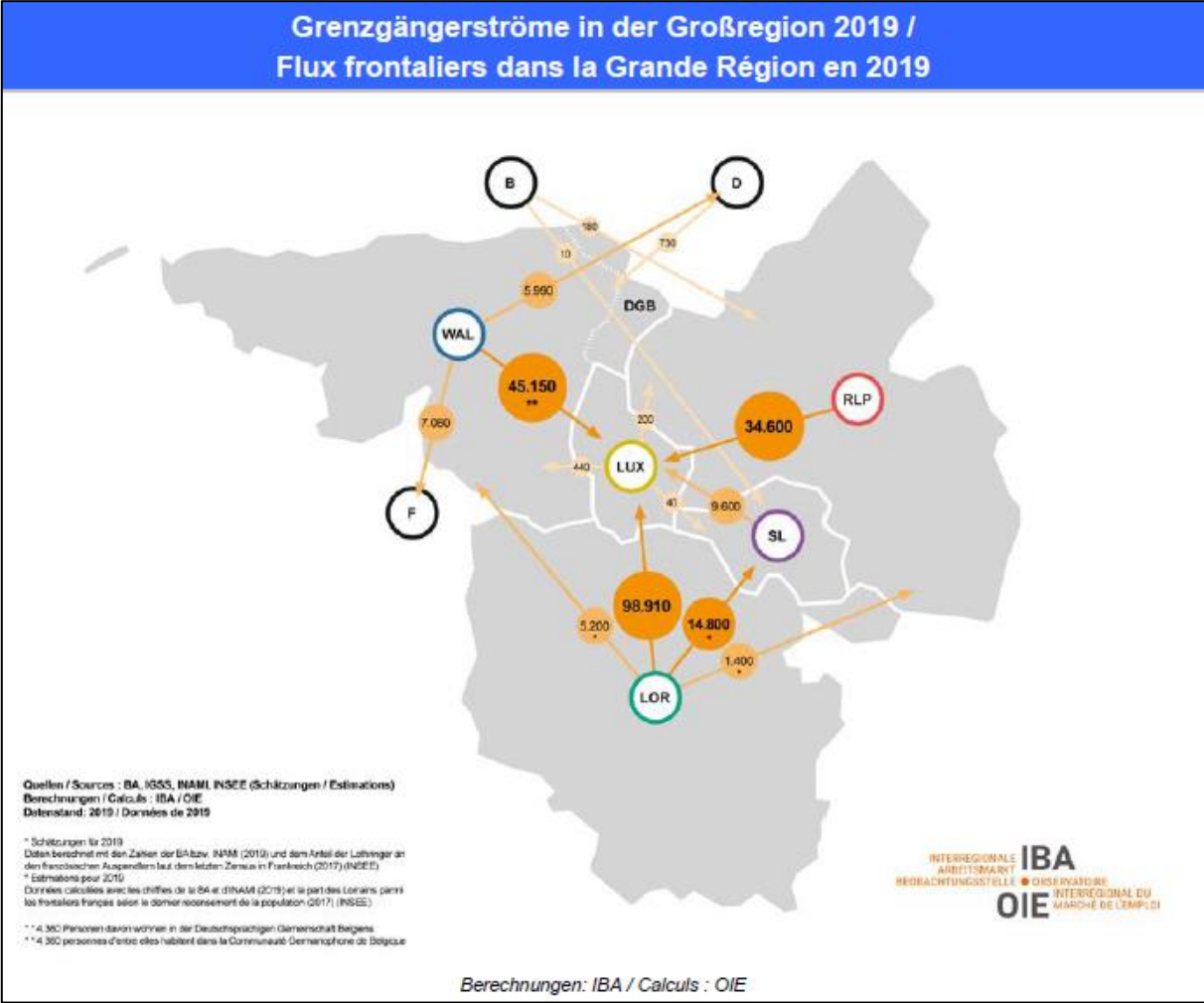
Source: Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 43

Lorraine also was the region with the highest unemployment rate in 2019, with 8.1% – again higher than the EU average of 6.3%. The overall harmonised unemployment rate of the Greater Region, in turn, was below the EU average, with 5.2%. Here, Rhineland-Palatinate accounted for the lowest rate, with 2.7% (Ibid.: 54). Again, these numbers should only be considered supportive in a rough estimation of the territorial situation of the Greater Region, since unemployment numbers are typically subject to a considerable exertion of influence, e.g., through instruments such as furlough schemes and temporary employment. Moreover, different types of unemployment are not equally problematic for a given region (i.e., frictional unemployment being much less of an issue than structural or cyclical unemployment).

One of the most remarkable characteristics of the Greater Region is its high number of everyday cross-border commuters. In fact, it is the region with the highest number of cross-border

commuters in all of Europe, which amounted to 248,000 per day in 2019. More than half of them come from Lorraine (around 153,000), and the vast majority of commuters in the Greater Region have Luxembourg as their destination (roughly 200,000 per day). Apart from Luxembourg, only the Saarland records a positive commuter balance, although much smaller than the former, with about 6,700 per day (see Figure 9). The main reasons for the differences in the extent and direction of the commuter flows are job offers and corresponding earning opportunities (Ibid.: 59f.).

Figure 9: Cross-Border Commuters in the Greater Region



Source: Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 59

Since 2000 (the beginning of communal collection of statistical data on the cross-border flows), the number of cross-border commuters has almost doubled. Once more, this development is largely due to the attractiveness of Luxembourg to its neighbouring regions. At the same time, the flow towards the German Länder, and thus also their respective attractiveness, has decreased. This development is congruent with the decline in importance of the secondary sector and the increase in importance of the tertiary sector. However, it is uncertain if this trend will continue as it is likely that due to the increase in digital work opportunities, the COVID-19 pandemic will have long-

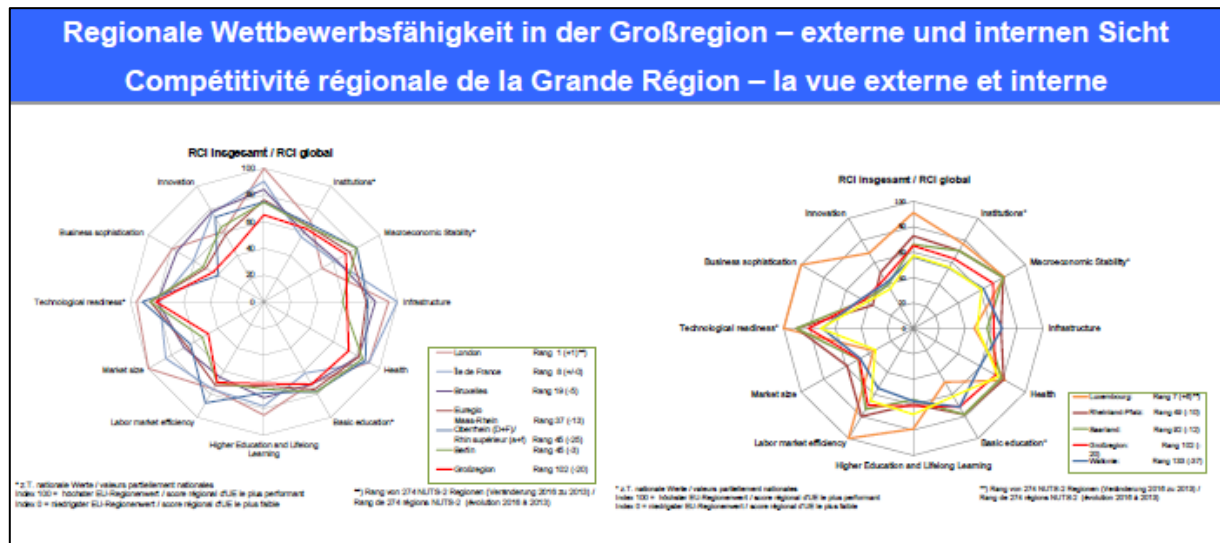
lasting negative impacts on cross-border commuting in the Greater Region. Another main reason for this is that due to the demographic change the labour demand is predicted to rise in each of the five regions, potentially lowering the incentive to cross borders in search of work (Ibid.: 122-126).

The Greater Region is characterised by a good road network, with road density levels above EU average and numerous border crossings (DG REGIO, n.d.: 5, 8). However, car traffic is still too high for the density of roads, which is partly attributed to a weakness in public transport and the notable lack of cross-border tariff integration (Gløersen et al., 2020: 22). This is not least the result of “an institutional asymmetry between cooperation partners in the Greater Region impacting negatively on the harmonisation of public transport services” (DG REGIO, n.d.: 8), i.e., the Greater Region consisting of one nation state, two German Federal Länder, French local, regional, and central-state authorities as well as local, regional and federal Belgian authorities. Access to cross-border rail services is also only considered to be at mid-range in comparison to other EU border regions (Ibid.: 9) The existing railway network, however, ensures good connections to the nearby European gateways to global freight traffic, while for intercontinental connections the Greater Region is dependent on airports in the neighbouring metropolitan regions (Gløersen et al., 2020: 21). In sum, it appears that cross-border mobility in the Greater Region is too dependent on roads and thus environmentally less desirable car traffic. Concerning digitalisation, information seems to only be provided at national level, which makes any meaningful statement on the regional level difficult. Generally speaking, the countries of Belgium, France, Germany and Luxembourg seem to perform slightly above the EU average regarding digitalisation (DG REGIO, n.d.: 9f.).

The reports on the economic and social situation of the Greater Region also specifically address the issue of the Greater Region’s competitiveness. Congruent with mainstream economic theory, the discussion centres on the situation of the business environment, especially the state of SMEs in the territory and obstacles preventing them from expanding their activities across the borders of the area. While more and more SMEs expand their business across borders, existing obstacles still prevent many others from doing the same. However, the competitiveness analysis majorly relies on the European Regional Competitiveness Index and attempts, as such, to present a broader picture (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 129f.). According to the RCI, the Greater Region as a whole ranked 102nd of all 268 NUTS 2 regions in 2019. Yet once again the internal perspective reveals an entirely different picture. While Luxembourg was in 7th place of the ranking, the second ‘best’ sub-region was Rhineland-Palatinate in 50th place, while Lorraine was the region ranked lowest in 132nd place (Ibid.: 25f.). Still, “the combined scoring for all indicators ranks the Greater Region as almost 20% above the EU average (i.e. substantially more competitive)” (DG REGIO, n.d.: 7). All regions were furthermore assessed as being relatively

competitive in comparison to EU averages. Unsurprisingly, innovation capacity, investments in research and development as well as network and cluster building are all considered key factors for regional competitiveness in the report on the economic and social situation in the region – categories in which the whole of the Greater Region is assessed as being very close to the EU average or even exceeding it in some cases (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 132; see Figure 10).

Figure 10: The Greater Region’s Regional Competitiveness according to the European RCI



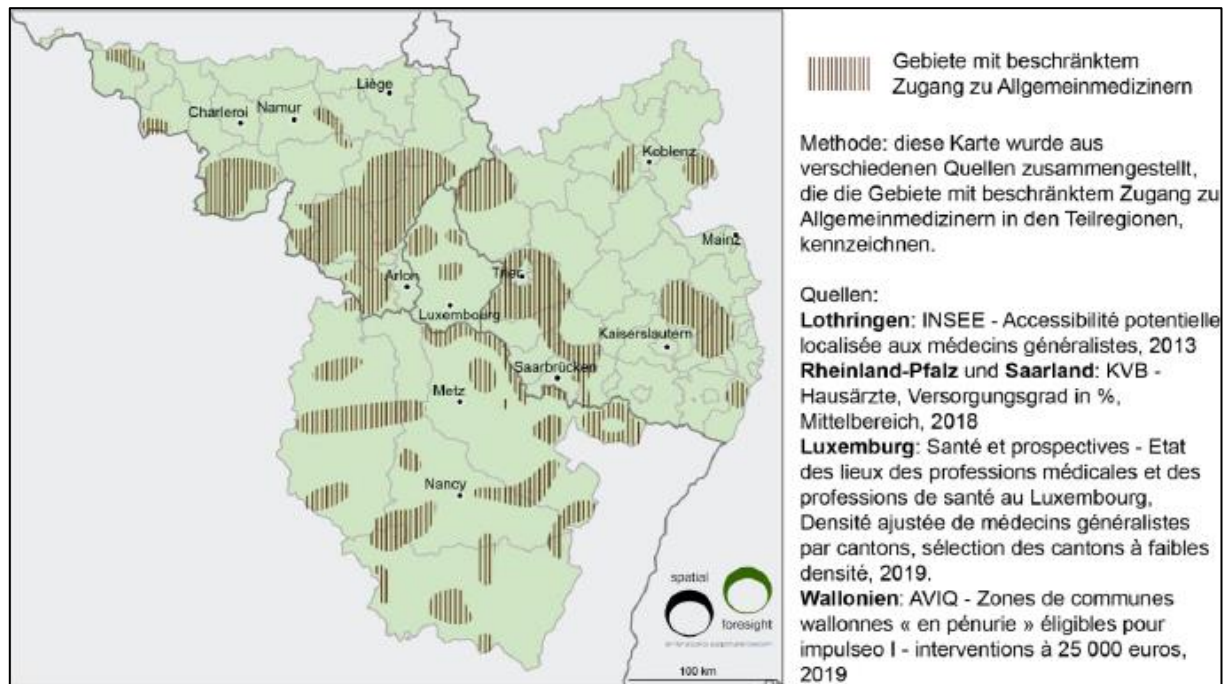
Source: Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 131

A factor of central importance for the evaluation of cohesion and competitiveness are the living conditions in a region. Regarding the Greater Region, the impression of disparity is once more overwhelming. While the average disposable household income amounted to €20,860 for the whole of the Greater Region it was €32,372 in Luxembourg and thus almost double the amount compared with Wallonia, which recorded the lowest average disposable household income: €18,778 (Ibid.: 71). Even though these figures have to be taken with a grain of salt as they do not reflect consumer prices, the discrepancy is considerable. The risk of poverty rate, defined as the proportion of people living on less than 60% of the median income of the population, was at 17.7% in 2017 and thus slightly higher than the EU average of 17.1%. This was also true for Luxembourg, which recorded a rate of 18.3%. Wallonia had the highest rate (21.9%). Remarkably, Rhineland-Palatinate was the only region that had a lower rate than the respective national average (Ibid.: 74). Between 2006 and 2017, the risk of poverty rate increased in each of the partner regions: the most in Luxembourg (4.6%), Wallonia (3.1%), Rhineland-Palatinate (2.4%) and the Saarland (0.8%). Only in Lorraine did it increase by a lower rate than the EU average (0.3% and 0.4%, respectively) (Ibid.: 121).

Access to health care provisions is another crucially important aspect for the overall living conditions of a region. Differences between the national health care systems significantly hinder

access to health care services across borders in the Greater Region, which is, especially in case of an emergency, a serious issue and results in a lack of medical care in certain border areas (Gløersen et al., 2020: 33). Access to the ‘foreign’ health care systems is further hindered by the absence of a cross-border third-party payment system (DG REGIO, n.d.: 16f.). Another issue are small-scale rural areas with limited access to general practitioners, which exist in the territories of all member regions (Gløersen et al., 2020: 32; see Figure 11).

Figure 11: Areas with Limited Access to General Practitioners in the Greater Region



Source: Gløersen et al., 2020: 33

The level of education is generally very high in the Greater Region. More than 80% of the adult population has achieved an upper secondary educational qualification (corresponding to ISCED levels 3 and 4), which is 1.9% higher than the EU average. A third of the population even obtained a higher education qualification (ISCED 5-8). Here again, Luxembourg stands out in the interregional comparison, with a figure of 47%, followed by Wallonia with 37.7% (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 63f.). Congruent with the general characteristics of the Greater Region, a particularity regarding higher education is the high number of students enrolled in cross-border study programmes and student mobility (more than 1,000 students in the 2018/19 academic year), to which the ‘University of the Greater Region’, a cross-border network of six partner universities from all five partner regions, contributes significantly (Ibid.: 66). While most of the region has good access to schooling, some areas alongside the Belgian-Luxembourg border have been identified as ‘isolated areas’, indicating poor access to both primary and secondary schools (DG REGIO, n.d.: 16). Another persistent issue in the Greater Region regarding the field

of education is the share of early school and apprenticeship leavers, which in 2019 amounted to 10.1%. The Saarland (11.7%), Rhineland-Palatinate (11.6%) and Wallonia (10.9%) all surpassed the EU average of 10.3%. Only Luxembourg (7.2%) and Lorraine (6.6%) had significantly lower rates to record (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 67).

The Greater Region is labelled as the ‘green lung’ of Northwest Europe, due to 52% of its area being covered by agricultural land and 38% by forest (Gløersen et al.: 24). There are multiple (also cross-border) designated areas of natural protection in the Greater Region, among which are two important wetland areas and relevant grassland ecosystems. Most of the protected areas are located in one of a total of 26 national or regional nature parks in the Greater Region, which altogether cover about 24% of the total territory. They are therefore considered to be important actors for nature conservation in the region (Ibid.: 25). In addition, “several areas within the Greater Region are assessed as having potential for Green Infrastructure networks, with a relatively high capacity to deliver ecosystem services” (DG REGIO, n.d.: 13). Despite these efforts, however, the quantity and quality of habitats in the Greater Region has been in progressive decline (Gløersen et al.: 25).

6.1.5 Aims and Functions

Concerning the topic of aims and functions, an issue of definition arises. The *territory* of the Greater Region is not synonymous to the (political) *structure* of the Greater Region, and cross-border cooperation is generally not synonymous to the Interreg *programme* Greater Region. Rather, many actors in the territory are active stakeholders in the process of cross-border cooperation, pursuing their own goals and objectives. There are also other structures and organisations operating in the above presented territory of the Greater Region besides the one that is headed by the Summit of the Greater Region. Lastly, cross-border cooperation activities pursue more objectives than only those described in the Interreg cooperation programmes. As presented above, any action that is aiming at reducing cross-border obstacles could potentially be named here. However, some form of reduction of complexity needed to be made in order to be able to identify cases that then may be subject to comparison. The main organisation for cross-border cooperation in the Greater Region is the structure Greater Region that is headed by the Summit of the Greater Region. And the main framework for cross-border cooperation in Europe today is Interreg. Therefore, the choice was made to limit this topic on a presentation of the specific aims and functions as identified by the structure Greater Region and as described in the respective Interreg cooperation programme documents. This way, it is guaranteed that the overarching issues and obstacles for cooperation specific to the territory as well as the major goals and fields of action are covered.

The Greater Region itself states that its objectives are concentrated on the following areas: “Mobility and regional development; Education and lifelong learning; Economy and competitiveness; Society and security; Tourism and culture; and Environment and sustainability.” (Summit Secretariat of the Greater Region, n.d.: Greater Region) From this and from the above presented Interreg ‘trptych’, it is quite evident that the field of mobility is the main focus of the Greater Region – an observation that is of course tied to the fact that the Greater Region is the region with the highest number of cross-border commuters in Europe. Cross-border labour mobility is understood to be one of the main reasons for the positive economic development in the region in the past decades (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 90). Two areas are the main targets of mobility facilitation action: education and training, and the removal of mobility obstacles faced by workers and trainees alike (Interreg Greater Region, 2019: 8). The ‘University of the Greater Region’ project is a good example to name here, simultaneously serving the goals of promoting cross-border training programmes and removing mobility obstacles.

The large number of commuters in the region is, however, also the cause for a number of specific challenges concerning spatial development. Namely, environmental issues connected to mass individual car usage (in turn a result of the issues in public transport) as well as urban sprawl are calling for more sustainable development in the Greater Region. There also exist significant social challenges in regard to housing. While some areas are suffering from settlement pressure and an increased demand for housing, others are becoming increasingly depopulated. More isolated areas in the Greater Region include Moselle in France, some parts of the German Länder as well as Verviers, Bastogne and Virton in Belgium (DG REGIO, n.d.: 6). These challenges are accompanied by structural changes and thus altering demands for facilities and services. Another side effect of heavy commuting is a progressive loss of social cohesion and alienation between commuters and non-commuters. The Greater Region has therefore identified the need to tackle these challenges by reducing commuting hours, improving the availability of public transport and other transport models, and by adjusting the demand for facilities and services in the now ended 2014-2020 Interreg cooperation programme (Interreg Greater Region, 2019: 11f.).

A second general goal of the Greater Region, which indirectly also affects the development of the cross-border labour market, is the regional development of the territory, which seeks to enhance the living conditions of the population. Here, the target fields of action are the natural and cultural heritage, improved resource management (such as circular economy initiatives) and the enhancement of the provision of health and other public services (Ibid.: 9). Lastly, the ongoing structural changes call for the promotion of new development paths, for which innovation – and thereby the promotion of research and development – was identified as a crucial element of future

economic development. It should be noted that the Greater Region itself understands all measures tackling the structural challenges (i.e., the promotion of innovation) as directly improving the competitiveness and attractiveness of the region (Ibid.). Next to the structural changes, the demographic change is a major driving force for cross-border cooperation action, again mainly in view of the interregional labour market. Strengthening the cross-border labour market, matching skills with the demands of companies better, developing the attractiveness of the area and making full use of the available workforce have all been considered key elements for the past 2014-2020 Interreg programming period (Ibid.: 10) as well as the changing demand for facilities and services, especially concerning health facilities (Ibid.: 12).

While it has become fairly clear by now that the main motivation and driver of the Greater Region structure is (and has always been) the enhancement of *economic* cross-border cooperation and its main function is understood to be the facilitation and improvement of cross-border commuting and the labour market, the many challenges that the Greater Region sees itself confronted with today are increasingly necessitating a balanced and sustainable spatial development and corresponding action (Ibid.: 15). This is not least because the facilitation of cross-border labour mobility simultaneously appears to be a major instrument to tackle the issue of intra-regional disparities and – in light of the many discrepancies between Luxembourg and the other regions – one of the main sources of it. The responsible authorities of the Greater Region are, of course, well aware of this issue. This is why the past joint Interreg programme specifically stated that since 2011 the participating areas of the region had been pursuing the goal of promoting a coherent, balanced and thus sustainable spatial development (Interreg Greater Region, 2019: 7).

6.1.6 Activities

As a result of the particular history of origins of the Greater Region and its structure being headed by the acting representatives of the executives of all partner regions, the territory is a beneficiary of many policies, agreements and treaties on the national and regional level that specifically aim to enhance cross-border cooperation. The importance of the Elysée Treaty and the Treaty of Aachen for this has already been emphasised. It should also be stressed that the Summit of the Greater Region and the other institutions of the structure Greater Region themselves are governance instruments that aid in overcoming border obstacles. The two EGTCs in the region – the Summit Secretariat and the Interreg programme authority – may, as facilitators of institutional cooperation and financial management, serve as prime examples (DG REGIO, n.d.: 20).

A few other cooperation initiatives merit further attention. Due to the extraordinary importance of cross-border commuting in the Greater Region, overcoming administrative hurdles has been a major objective for quite a while. In 2005, the Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region initiated a first working group on the issue, and in 2011 a first ‘Task Force Frontaliers’ was founded in the framework of Interreg IV. Due to its success, the project was continued in 2015 (Interreg V) as ‘Task Force 2.0’, with a total budget of €3.3 million, and ended only very recently, at the end of June 2021. Its main task was to develop legal and administrative solutions to cross-border commuting problems of a fundamental nature (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 143; DG REGIO, n.d.: 16). Specifically tasked with collecting comparable and interpretable information on the cross-border labour market in the territory since 1998 already is the cross-border diagnostic system ‘Interregional Job Market Observatory’ (IBA·OIE)¹¹, thus providing the basis for labour market policy interventions (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 142f.; DG REGIO, n.d.: 16). It is also the IBA·OIE that, on behalf of the Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, publishes the above mentioned ‘Report on the Economic and Social Situation of the Greater Region’ (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 142). The report itself is an important source of information on the cross-border situation and major prevailing obstacles in the Greater Region. A third initiative concerning the governance of overcoming labour market barriers – although not unique to the Greater Region – is the Greater Region partnership of the EURES (EUROpean Employment Services) programme. EURES is important to mention in this context because it functions as a helpdesk for individuals in need of information or guidance concerning problems related to working and living on different sides of a border and thus in different national systems.

One of the main areas of action targeting mobility facilitation (next to the removal of mobility obstacles) is the field of education and training – usually labelled as a measure to improve regional competitiveness (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 130). An important treaty in this area that was arranged during Interreg V is the ‘Framework Agreement on Cross-Border Vocational Training in the Greater Region’¹², worked out under the leadership of the ‘Labour Market’ working group (Gløersen et al.: 13). The agreement is the first initiative that aimed at defining objectives and providing a common framework for vocational training and cross-border vocational mobility in the Greater Region, thus at the same time at increasing educational qualifications and reducing mobility obstacles (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 137). Additionally, multiple projects were financed through Interreg that also sought

¹¹ ‘Interregionale Arbeitsmarktbeobachtungsstelle·Observatoire interrégional du marché de l’emploi’ (IBA·OIE).

¹² Rahmenvereinbarung über grenzüberschreitende Berufsbildung in der Großregion/Accord-cadre relatif à la formation professionnelle transfrontalière dans la Grande Région.

to increase cross-border mobility of both young adults in internships and as part of their vocational training (FagA/CAMT) and students in transnational projects (MobiPro.GR) and practice-oriented study programmes (BRIDGE). The very large SESAM'GR project (with a budget of approximately €8,5 million) furthermore aimed at developing a framework for conveying key competencies such as language and intercultural skills to individuals growing up in the Greater Region (Interreg Greater Region, n.d., Projekte; Gløersen et al.: 30). Especially language skills are understood as one of the main barriers to labour market mobility (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 136). Lastly, the above-mentioned University of the Greater Region (UniGR) is a beacon project in the field of education. It was launched in 2008 as an Interreg IV project and today functions as an association under Luxembourg law. The UniGR is a cooperation network of seven institutions of higher education, covering each of the partner regions and providing their students, amongst others, with the status of being a student of the UniGR, which enables them to attend courses, take part in exams and thus have academic credentials recognised and gives them free access to libraries, refectories and other infrastructures (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 159). A new addition to the University of the Greater Region during Interreg V was the UniGR-Center for Border Studies, a 'European Competence and Knowledge Centre for Border Area Research' (Ibid.; Interreg Greater Region, n.d., Projekte).

All of these measures need to be understood from the perspective of network and capacity building, too. Here, especially barriers to the activities of SMEs across national borders have been identified as a prevailing obstacle (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 130). Supporting regional SMEs is also often the goal of cluster initiatives and centres of excellence. An example of a cross-border research cluster aiming to support SMEs in the introduction of new technologies and financed under Interreg V is the Robotix-Academy project, which was involved in the issue of industrialised robotics (Ibid.: 133; Interreg Greater Region, n.d., Projekte).

Digitalisation is another major contemporary issue in the Greater Region. This has not least been proven by the COVID-19 pandemic, when digital communication tools often became the only possibility to virtually 'cross' the then physically closed borders (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 155). However, there is still much that needs to be done in this regard. To give but one example, a pilot project that attempted to create a digital information platform for the Greater Region was launched in 2012 but ultimately failed to deliver the desired results due to a lack of resources (Ibid.: 145). Another initiative under Interreg V that aimed at enhancing the cross-border labour market via increased skills and competencies in the broad field of digitalisation was the DigiMob Industrie 4.0 project (Interreg Greater Region, n.d., Projekte). Digitalisation also influences the issues of infrastructure and (physical) mobility significantly.

Since 2019, the Greater Region has been, next to two major railway line projects ('Eurocaprail': Brussels – Luxembourg – Strasbourg, and 'POS Nordast': Paris – Saarbrücken – Frankfurt), the site of the first European cross-border test field for automated and connected driving (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 157). 2019 also marked the start of the TERMINAL project, which investigates the possibilities of automated vehicles for cross-border commuter traffic (Ibid.; Interreg Greater Region, n.d., Projekte). Since 2006, mobility has also been the subject of multiple 'traffic conferences', which were direct results of the many problems in the field. Especially the high number of car traffic commuters is a major issue for both the economy and the environment, and one that demands improvements in public transport (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 147f.). One successful initiative that aimed at improving public transport in the region and needs to be named in this context is the 'Mobiregio' mobility portal. It has its origins in an Interreg IV project from 2012 and today equally functions as both a communication platform for the different actors and stakeholders of public transport in the region and a cross-border journey planner for end users (Ibid.).

Another field where mobility and overcoming border obstacles are of critical importance is health. For one thing, this is due to the demographic developments and the accompanying changing need for the provision of services. For another, the COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly revealed the importance of cross-border cooperation in the case of emergencies and an overburdening of the health system. For a couple of years now, a separate working group has therefore been charged with stocktaking of the different public health services and possibilities for cooperation (Ibid.: 149). Multiple so-called ZOASTs (Zones Organisées d'Accès aux Soins Transfrontaliers) exist at the Belgian-French border, facilitating access to medical treatments in hospitals at the respective other side of the border. Furthermore, patients from the French speaking territories have, since 2008, benefitted from regulated access to medical services across borders via the COSANTÉ platform, which was funded under Interreg IV as well (Ibid.: 151). Another example of a cooperation initiative for cases of catastrophe is the INTER'RED project, whose main goal is to better coordinate the actions of civil protection and disaster management in the Greater Region (Interreg Greater Region, n.d., Projekte). The relevance of such projects was sadly not least proven by the flood disaster in July 2021, which hit parts of the partner territories very heavily. A more recent initiative (Interreg V) aiming at better cooperation between health care facilities and better access to local health care in the whole of the Greater Region is the COSAN project (Ibid.; Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 152). Albeit these various attempts at solving the issue of cross-border health care access, however, cooperation in the field of health is, as of today, primarily composed of patchy agreements and suffering from the lack of a holistic strategy (Gløersen et al.: 34).

The last field to discuss is that of environment and sustainability. Here, activities in recent years have, among others, concentrated on the creation of a cross-border meta-cluster in environmental engineering (GREATER GREEN), with the aim of providing support for the development of new technologies (Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region, 2020: 158). Another focus has been on networks uniting various stakeholders in the field of environmental protection, which attempt to develop innovative solutions and support a more participative regional society (NOE-NOAH) (Interreg Greater Region, n.d., Projekte). Climate change is another field of action that is lacking a holistic approach, where each partner region has set its own goals concerning greenhouse gas emissions and energy consumption. This represents a major barrier to cooperation and joint initiatives. As a consequence, Interreg projects with direct contributions to the EU climate and energy policy goals have been rare, as mainly research-based projects have received funding (Gløersen et al.: 27).

6.2 The German-Czech Border: The Case of the Euregio Egrensis

The second case in this thesis differs significantly from the Greater Region, in regard to its border context, scope, possibilities and thus resulting aims and functions. The 'Euregio Egrensis' covers parts of the territory on both sides of the German-Czech border. In Czechia, these are the areas of today's Karlovarský kraj and the northern parts of the Plzeňský kraj. Interestingly, the Euregio Egrensis itself does not refer to these rather new regional entities¹³ in its self-conception but to the historical territory of Bohemia. On the German side, the area encompasses parts of the three Länder of Bavaria, Saxony and Thuringia (see Figure 15). This mix between 'new' and 'old' Länder frames the border region in a particular way and has significant ramifications for its functioning.

The history of the territories alongside what today is the border dividing the two nation states of the Czech Republic and Germany is equally marked by peaceful coexistence and close interrelations and by repression, murder and expulsion. While German and Czech territories (as part of the historical Kingdom of Bohemia) were both part of the Holy Roman Empire, the latter were, from the early modern period onwards, ruled by the Habsburg Monarchy and later became part of the multinational entity of Austria-Hungary. The history of an independent Czech nation state only began in the wake of World War I, with the creation of Czechoslovakia. After the German occupation during World War II, Czechoslovakia was largely re-established, and in 1993 it split

¹³ The 14 contemporary kraj, which might roughly translate as regions, have only existed as self-governing territorial units since a constitutional amendment in 2000.

into the two states of the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. Due to the German partition between 1949 and 1990, post-World War II German-Czech relations and cooperation differed greatly between the two German states and Czechoslovakia. While the German Democratic Republic established relations with its southern neighbour quickly after its founding, it was not until 1973 and the Treaty of Prague that West-Germany officially ceded its territorial claims over the Sudetenland and the two states established first diplomatic relations. Today's relationship between the unified Federal Republic of Germany and the Czech Republic is mainly built upon the Czech-German Declaration from 1997, in which both states committed themselves to base their relations on a spirit of good neighbourliness and not to burden them with political and legal issues stemming from the past (Auswärtiges Amt, 2021). Today's area of the Euregio Egrensis thus consisted of two very different borders at the time: one that was relatively open (between two countries of the Warsaw Pact) and another one that was firmly closed (the 'Iron Curtain' separating Czechoslovakia and the GDR from the NATO member West-Germany for the most part of the second half of the 20th century).

As is the case at the Franco-German border, institutionalised European cross-border cooperation today is based on two distinct Interreg programmes (prior to the joining of the Czech Republic to the European Union in 2004, the main framework was the PHARE-CBC programme): the SN-CZ programme at the Czech-Saxon border, which also includes some parts of Thuringia, and the ETZ/EÚS Bavaria-Czech Republic (BY-CZ) programme at the Bavarian-Czech border. In contrast to the Franco-German border, these two programmes are strictly bilateral and do not include third countries. The German-Czech border is an excellent example of the rapid increase in Euroregions after 1990. Until 1994, four more Euroregions next to the Euregio Egrensis were founded, partly covering territories of the neighbouring states of Poland and Austria. In addition, the 'Europaregion Danube-Vltava' was established in 2011, which is closely connected to one of said Euroregions (the 'Euregio Bavarian Forest – Bohemian Forest – Lower Inn') (Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière, n.d., Czech Republic-Germany).

6.2.1 History of Origins

The origins of the Euregio Egrensis are closely connected to the disintegration of the 'Eastern Bloc' and the accompanying successive opening of the borders between 'East' and 'West'. First ideas for the creation of a municipal-regional forum for cross-border activities in this part of the German-Czech border(s) already existed in 1989. Just one year later, the decision to found a 'Euregio' was taken at a symposium in Marktredwitz (Euregio Egrensis, 2013). Again, the influence

of *the* Euregio at the Dutch-German border as a role model is apparent. In 1992 and 1993, three working communities were founded, one each in Bavaria, Bohemia and Saxony/Thuringia.¹⁴ In Germany, they were set up in the form of non-profit associations, and in Czechia in the form of a regional association of towns and municipalities. Still in 1993, the three working communities signed an agreement on the establishment of the Euregio Egrensis as a joint cross-border institution in Cheb, in order to coordinate and promote cross-border cooperation in a spirit of good neighbourliness and friendship (Ibid.). This was the founding act of the new cross-border cooperation structure. The name Egrensis is derived of Eger, both the name of an ancient imperial city in the Holy Roman Empire and the river Eger, alongside which a Bohemian-Bavarian-Saxon cultural landscape – the ‘Regio Egire’ – with common roots and traditions dating back to the 12th century had been identified (Schramek, 2014: 120). The early years were characterised by disillusion, as the Czech working community was suffering from a lack of any form of state support. However, until the end of the century, the Euregio managed to gain widespread acceptance (Ibid.: 125).

6.2.2 Institutional Structure

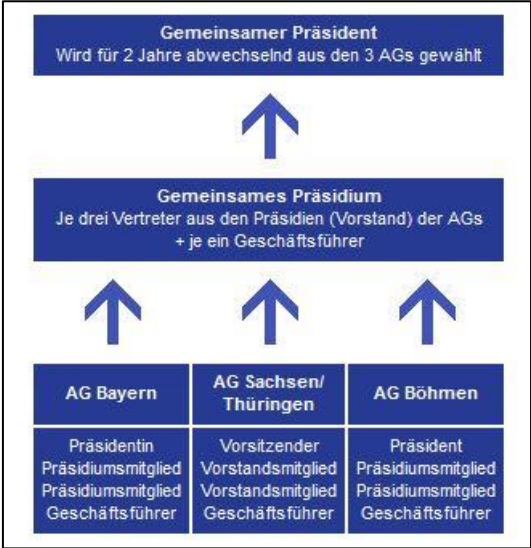
The three independent working communities represent the institutional foundation of the Euregio Egrensis. Each of them unites local authorities (cities and municipalities) as their members.¹⁵ As non-profit associations, the two German working communities are furthermore open to any natural or legal person with a legitimate interest in the affairs of the Euregio. Members are divided into constituent (local authorities and regional planning associations) and cooperating members (other interested individuals, institutions, associations or societies) (Euregio Egrensis, 2015). Therefore, the Euregio Egrensis can be regarded as much more of a bottom-up structure of cross-border cooperation than the Greater Region. Each of the three working communities has its own responsible presidium or executive committee. Additionally, each has their own office (in Marktredwitz, Plauen and Karlsbad, respectively), staffed by a full-time director and other employees. The guidelines for the work of the whole Euregio, however, are set by the ‘Joint Presidium’. It consists of three representatives of the presidiums and executive committees of each

¹⁴ The three working communities of the Euregio Egrensis are: the ‘Euregio Egrensis Arbeitsgemeinschaft Bayern’, the ‘Euregio Egrensis Arbeitsgemeinschaft Vogtland/Westerzgebirge’ (today ‘Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sachsen/Thüringen’), and the ‘pracovního sdružení Euregia Egrensis’.

¹⁵ In Saxony/Thuringia, those are the Vogtlandkreis, parts of the Erzgebirgskreis (Aue and Schwarzenberg), the Saale-Orla-Kreis, the Landkreis Greiz and the city of Plauen, in Bavaria, the nine Landkreise Amberg-Sulzbach, Bayreuth, Hof, Kronach, Kulmbach, Neustadt a.d. Waldnaab, Schwandorf, Tirschenreuth and Wunsiedel i.F. as well as the four urban districts of Amberg, Bayreuth, Hof and Weiden. On the Czech side, the pracovního sdružení comprises the entirety of the Karlovarský kraj and the former county of Tachov, today part of the Plzeňský kraj.

of the three individual working communities and is supported by its own administrative office. Working groups set up specifically for this purpose (e.g., labour market groups) are responsible for the realisation of the individual projects to meet the thematic targets identified by the Joint Presidium. The members of the Joint Presidium meet at least twice a year. A new representative from one of the three working communities is elected chair of the Joint Presidium about every two years (Euregio Egrensis, n.d., Organisationsstruktur; see Figure 12). Lastly, each of the three working communities has its own thematic focus: language (Bavaria), transport and infrastructure (Saxony/Thuringia) and tourism, including the spa and bath industry (Bohemia). The fact that three working communities instead of one cross-border organisation were founded is the result of a lack of an adequate legal instrument at the time (Schramek, 2014: 322f.). However, plans to turn the Euregio into an EGTC dating from 2010 have not been realised until today either (Ibid.: 125).

Figure 12: Organisational Structure of the Euregio Egrensis



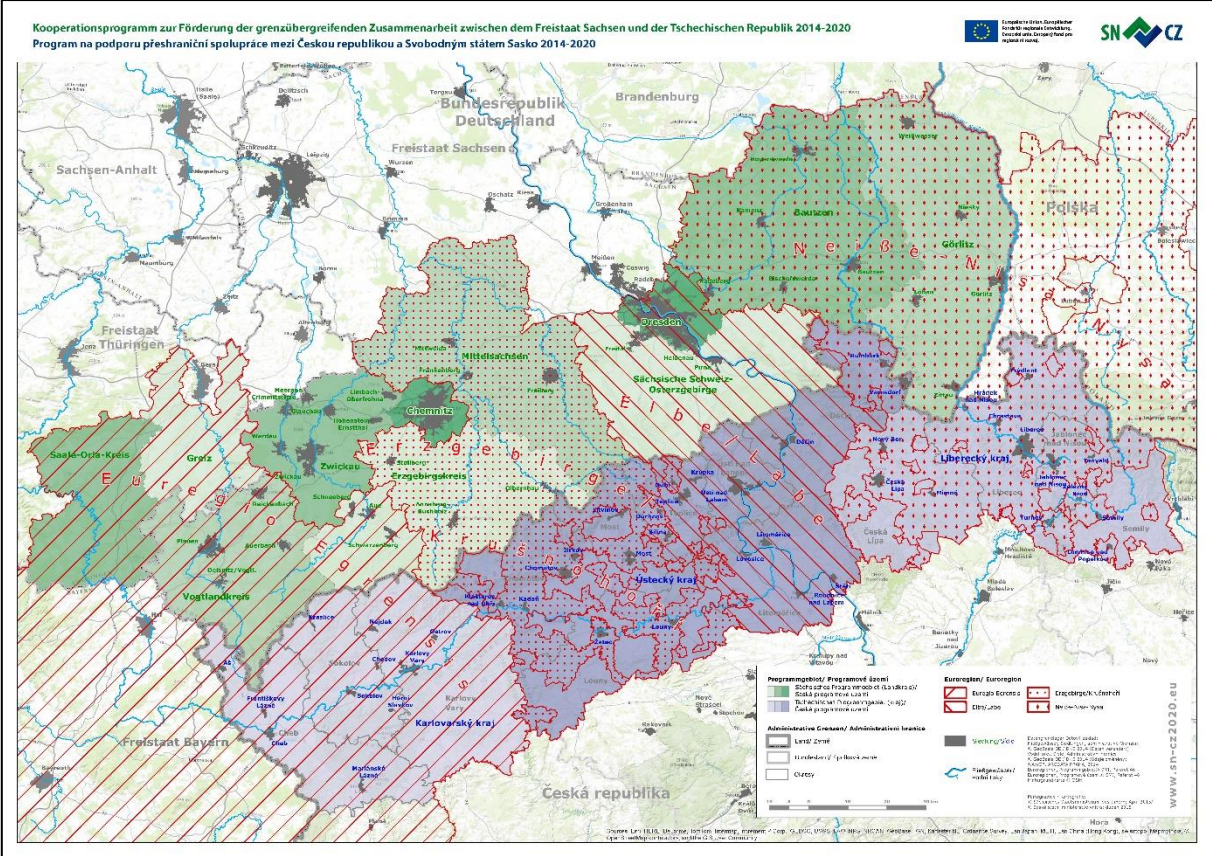
Source: Euregio Egrensis, (n.d.) Organisationsstruktur

6.2.3 Financing and Funding

The main source of funding for cross-border cooperation activities in the Euregio Egrensis are the two Interreg programmes SN-CZ and BY-CZ (Schramek, 2014: 167). Together, they cover the entirety of the territory of the Euregio (in case of the Karlovarský kraj even both programmes apply simultaneously; see Figures 13 and 14). In contrast to the case of the Greater Region, however, the two Interreg programmes are larger in scope than the Euregio itself. Furthermore, neither the working communities nor the Joint Presidency are the managing authorities of the programmes. Those are the Czech Ministry of Regional Development, the Saxon State Ministry

for Regional Development and the Bavarian Ministry of Economic Affairs, who are thus also mainly responsible for the decisions on the thematic objectives of each programme.

Figure 13: Interreg V A SN-CZ Programme Area



Source: Interreg SN-CZ (n.d.) Überblick

While the Euregio Egrensis has, as member of the monitoring committees of the two programmes, some influence over the decision on which projects are to be funded through Interreg, the larger programme projects (with a total sum of more than €25,000) are not the Euregio’s main avenue of action. Instead, the three working communities are mainly aiming at initiating and accompanying face-to-face encounter projects through the ‘Small Projects Funds’ (in case of BY-CZ ‘Disposal Fund’¹⁶). Here, all Euroregions have their own funding budget in each Interreg period. In case of SN-CZ 2014-2020, the Euregio Egrensis had a total of €2,583,539.99 at its disposal (Euregio Egrensis, 2020: 50) – compared to the programme’s total resources of €157,967,067 (Interreg SN-CZ, 2020: 93). The Small Projects Fund primarily finances local initiatives with a total budget of no more than €30,000 and up to €15,000 from the ERDF budget. Almost everyone and everything is potentially eligible for funding through the Small Projects Fund. The main requirement is that it is a joint project undertaken by partners from both sides of the border (Interreg SN-CZ, 2019). In the case of BY-CZ, the budget of the Disposal Fund amounted to €309,808.40 (Interreg BY-CZ,

¹⁶ ‘Dispositionsfonds’.

2021), compared to the total Interreg programme's budget of €114,320,755 (Interreg BY-CZ, 2015: 70). In addition to Interreg, the two Länder of Saxony and Thuringia also have their own funding guidelines for international cooperation and European promotion, respectively, through which cross-border cooperation projects in the region might be funded (Euregio Egrensis, n.d., Förderhilfe). The last one to name is the 'German-Czech Future Fund', an endowment fund that was created as a result of the Czech-German Declaration in 1997 and which specifically promotes projects that aim at bringing people together and enhancing the common cultural and historical understanding (Auswärtiges Amt, 2021; Schramek, 2014: 172f.).

Figure 14: Interreg V A BY-CZ Programme Area



Source: Interreg BY-CZ (n.d.) Förderung

6.2.4 The Territory

The territory of the Euregio Egrensis covers a total area of around 17,000km², with a population of about 2 million. Nearly 50% of that population lives in Bavaria, 30% in Saxony and Thuringia, and the remaining 20% in Bohemia (Euregio Egrensis, n.d., Über uns). With a population density of roughly 118 inhabitants per km², the Euregio is one of the more rural areas in central Europe. Especially the areas closest to the border are very sparsely populated, due to it being defined by the natural barrier of the low mountain range ridge (Interreg BY-CZ, 2015: 7). Accordingly, the majority of people live in the four big Bavarian agglomerations of Bayreuth, Hof, Amberg and Weiden i. d. OPf, which creates large interregional differences (Eurostat, 2021: demo_r_d3dens).

Figure 15: Map of the Euregio Egrensis



Source: Euregio Egrensis (n.d.) Mapa sdružení

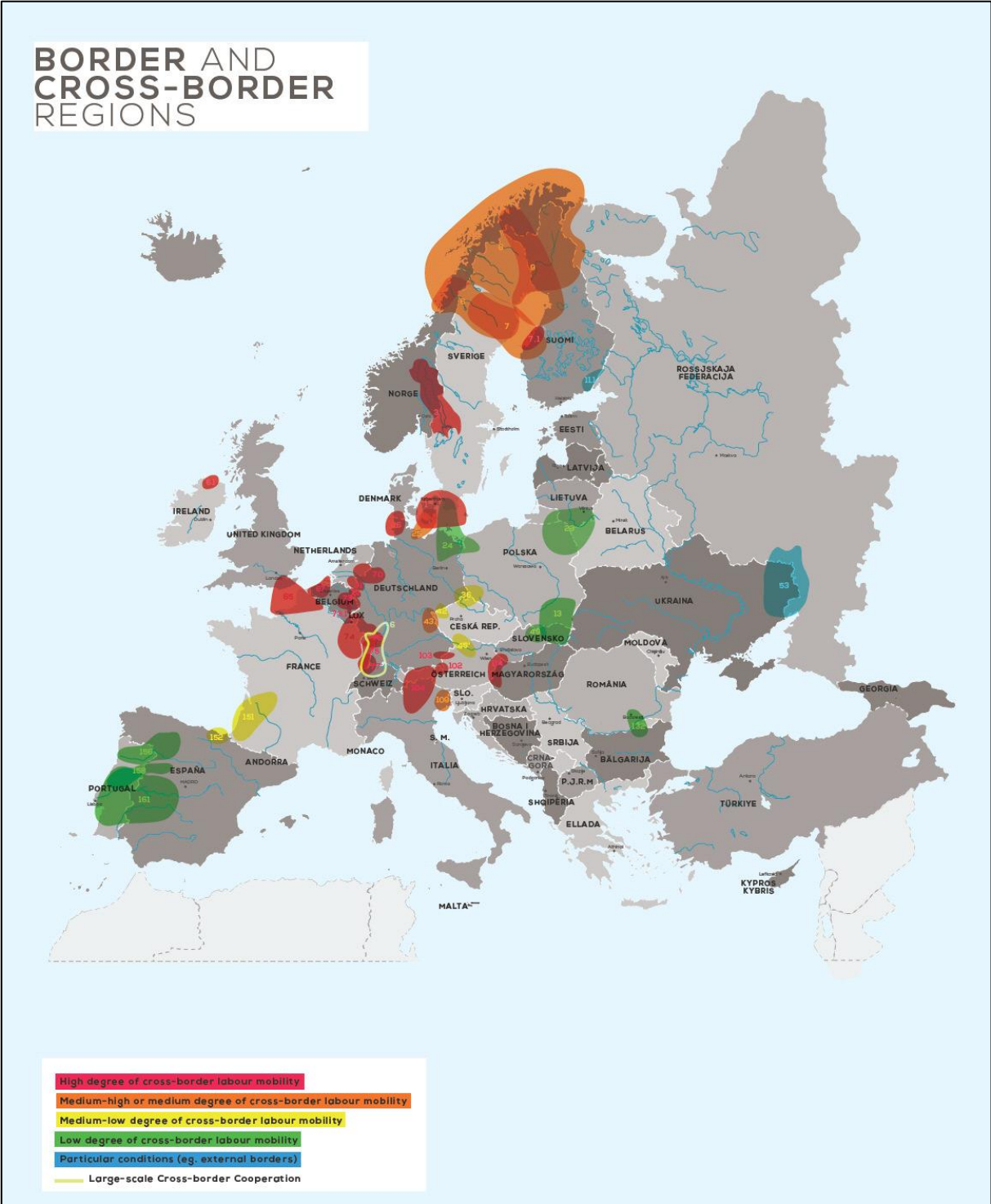
With the exception of Plzeňský kraj, all regions directly adjacent to the border suffered from negative population growth between 2014 and 2020. The Saxon Erzgebirgskreis and Vogtlandkreis, to give an example, had to account for a loss of 1.05% and 1.04%, respectively. This is in significant contrast to the average EU-27 population growth of 1.01% (Eurostat, 2021: demo_r_pjanind3). Even before 2014, however, the region was characterised by population decline, which is largely attributed to the structural changes, as the decline of traditional industries in the region has led to widespread job losses (Schramek, 2014: 118). Combined with a current median population age of

52.7 and 53.2, population development is thus a major issue for the two Saxon territories. However, this is also true for most of the Euregio Egrensis. With the sole exceptions of Bayreuth and the city of Hof, the median age of the population in each municipality of the region in 2020 was higher than in 2014. In 2020, the two Czech territories of Plzeňský kraj (43.2) and Karlovarský kraj (44.0) had the comparatively youngest populations, while the Vogtlandkreis and Greiz (54.2) had the oldest (Eurostat, 2021: demo_r_pjanind3). These trends are expected to continue in the future (Interreg SN-CZ, 2020: 14). Just like many other areas in Europe, the territory of the Euregio is affected by structural changes. Throughout the area, the importance of the primary and secondary sectors is in continuous decline in favour of the tertiary sector. However, the secondary sector still plays an essential role in parts of the territory, where it has accounted for a significant share of economic output up to this day (Interreg BY-CZ, 2015: 8).

When looking at economic development and performance indicators, an enormous intra-regional disparity becomes apparent. In 2018, GDP per capita in the two Czech territories of Plzeňský kraj and Karlovarský kraj (NUTS 3) amounted to only €17,900 and €12,700 respectively, while the German NUTS 2 territories Oberpfalz (€42,500), Oberfranken (€38,300), Chemnitz (€28,500) and Thüringen (€29,000), which cover the territories of the Euregio, all achieved significantly higher figures. Furthermore, only the Bavarian territories accounted for a GDP per capita higher than the EU-27 average of €30,200 (Eurostat, 2021: nama_10r_3gdp; nama_10r_2gdp), which is largely thanks to their major city agglomerations (Interreg BY-CZ, 2015: 8). This means that next to significant disparities between the individual areas, the territory is also characterised by a considerable economic disparity between rural and urban areas. Concerning the real growth rate of regional gross value added, every area recorded positive numbers between 2015 and 2019, albeit all in single digits, with the sole exception of the NUTS 2 region of Jihozápad (which includes Karlovarský kraj), which recorded an increase of 13% (Eurostat, 2021: nama_10r_2gvagr).

Regarding raw unemployment rates, it appears that the situation has mostly been improving in all areas of the Euregio in recent years. While in 2010, rates of up to 11.5% (NUTS 2 region Chemnitz) and 11.1% (NUTS 2 region Severozápad, of which Plzeňský kraj is a part) were recorded, the German territories of Chemnitz and Thüringen recorded the highest rates in 2019, with 3.7% each, and Jihozápad the lowest (1.5%) (Eurostat, 2021: lfst_r_lfu3rt). Again, however, these figures need to be considered with caution regarding their explanatory power.

Figure 16: Cross-Border Mobility in Europe



Source: AEBR, 2012: 10

The Euregio Egrensis does not provide any data on commuters, and Eurostat only has some total numbers for the Czech NUTS 2 regions of Jihozápad and Severozápad readily available (20,100 and 25,200 in 2020, respectively) (Eurostat, 2021: lfst_r_lfe2ecomm). While it is likely that the majority of these people commuted to Germany, no further differentiation between the border countries (Poland, Germany and Austria) is made. In a report on the obstacles limiting labour

market mobility in border regions of 2012, the AEBR estimated that the borders in question were characterised by only a medium-low or medium-high to medium degree of cross-border labour mobility (see Figure 16). However, this assessment was not based on quantitative numbers. It was estimated via questionnaires and reports already available, and primarily aimed at the stock-taking of mobility obstacles (AGEG, 2012). One of the major obstacles to cross-border cooperation in the Euregio Egrensis is, without a doubt, language, and it is to be assumed that the lack of language skills also considerably hinders cross-border commuting in the region (Interreg BY-CZ, 2015: 17).

A satisfactory evaluation of the infrastructure in the border region is difficult to achieve here since it seems that a holistic analysis of the situation specifically for the territory of the Euregio is missing. Data by Eurostat is provided either on the national or on the NUTS 2 level, and due to the sheer size of the latter, the results will inevitably be skewed for the border area itself. However, both Interreg programme documents for the 2014-2020 period attest the rail and road infrastructure at the Saxon-Czech and Bavarian-Czech border a reasonably good quality that nevertheless needs improving to potentially further benefit from the region's inherent economic potential, especially regarding tourism and the rich cultural and natural heritage of the region (Interreg BY-CZ, 2015: 13). The improvement of the 'soft tourism' (cycling and hiking) infrastructure is specifically named (Interreg SN-CZ, 2020: 16). By and large, the same applies to public transport (Ibid.: 18). Regarding digital infrastructure, no sufficient information is provided.

When attempting to assess the living conditions in the Euregio Egrensis, the impression of inter-regional disparity deepens. In 2018, the average (non-price adjusted) disposable income in Euro per capita was between €19,300 (Thuringia) and €22,700 (both Bavarian NUTS 2 regions) in the German territories, and €8,600 (Severozápad) and €9,400 (Jihozápad) in the Czech territories, which is less than half (Eurostat, 2021: nama_10r_2hhinc). While these numbers do not give an absolute account of the living conditions in the different regions, the gap between German and Czech areas is more than evident. Somewhat contrary to this, in 2018, the rate of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion was lowest in Jihozápad (9.4%) and estimated highest in Chemnitz (20.3%). All other NUTS 2 regions are estimated to account for very high rates between 17.3% (Oberpfalz) and 20.2% (Thuringia) (Eurostat, 2021: ilc_peps11).

It is not quite apparent either how the Euregio performs regarding health care and access to other social services. Prior to Interreg V, the SN-CZ cooperation programme attested that the population's access to basic social services was generally ensured in the programme area. However, in light of the demographic change – which the Saxon areas will be disproportionately affected by – guaranteeing close-by social services is not expected to be an easy endeavour in the future (Interreg SN-CZ, 2020: 20). Beyond cooperation in disaster control (especially flood protection),

the states of Germany and the Czech Republic signed a framework agreement on cross-border rescue services in 2013 (Ibid.: 15), providing a legal basis to practices previously based on informal agreements (Interreg BY-CZ, 2015: 19).

Education levels are estimated to be reasonably good in the border territories, especially regarding the number of early school-leavers. However, participation in tertiary education is a concern, which is again closely connected to the demographic change and the high amount of young people leaving the area (Interreg SN-CZ, 2020: 17; Interreg BY-CZ, 2015: 14f.). Multiple school and higher education partnerships between Czech and German territories exist. However, cross-border mobility of students is assessed as being quite low (Interreg SN-CZ, 2020: 17). Once again, language skills are a major obstacle to further cooperation (Interreg BY-CZ, 2015: 19). Another concern are the different vocational education systems (dual system-based in Germany, school-based system in the Czech Republic) (Ibid.: 15), which hinder cross-border mobility and labour market integration.

The border territory is characterised by a large number of conservation areas of larger and smaller scales alongside the ‘green belt’, which is the German-Czech border. They include the Erzgebirge to the North, the Fichtelgebirge and Oberpfälzer Wald to the West and South, and the Slavkovský les to the East – much of which is part of the Natura 2000 network (Interreg BY-CZ, 2015: 11f.). Furthermore, multiple agreements and institutions for the protection of the natural habitat exist between the two states, such as the ‘International Commission for the Protection of the Elbe’ and the ‘German-Czech Border Water Commission’ (Ibid.: 12; Interreg SN-CZ, 2020: 16). The protection of the natural habitat in the region is not only important for – sustainable – environmental but also for economic reasons, due to its role as a tourist attraction. The same is true for the cultural heritage on both sides of the border. In the territory of the Euregio Egrensis, the so-called ‘West Bohemian Spa Triangle’, which comprises the cities of Karlovy Vary, Františkovy Lázně and Mariánské Lázně is of particular importance (Ibid.). A major concern regarding the environment are the large and still active surface mining areas in Karlovarský kraj.

6.2.5 Aims and Functions

The purpose of the three working communities that together constitute the Euregio Egrensis is defined in the articles of their respective associations, which for the largest and essential parts are similar, if not identical. To take the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sachsen/Thüringen as an example: “The purpose of the association is the promotion of international ethos, understanding, mutual tolerance and reconciliation, as well as a comprehensive, peaceful, and partnership-based cooperation to

overcome the consequences of the hitherto dividing borders in the centre of Europe”¹⁷ (Euregio Egrensis, 2015: §2; translation my own). What becomes immediately evident is the spirit of the early 1990s, which was the basis for the willingness to engage in cross-border cooperation after the newly established border permeability in the region. Nevertheless, the promotion of intercultural understanding and the reduction of (culturally) dividing barriers (e.g., language skills) has remained the predominant goal of the Euregio Egrensis up until today (Schramek, 2014: 145). To this end, the main function of the working communities is to initiate and coordinate face-to-face encounters and activities, for which the Small Projects Funds of the two Interreg programmes are the main financial instruments (Ibid.: 126). The targets for such encounter-based projects range from municipalities and schools to other non-profit organisations. In addition, one of the defined goals of the working communities is to support actors in cross-border cooperation by informing them about funding opportunities and to help them with searching for project partners and with accounting (Euregio Egrensis, n.d., Über uns).

Since the constituting members of the working communities are the local authorities in the region, the aims of the Euregio are subject to the overarching regional development strategies. These goals are also reflected in the Interreg programmes’ thematic objectives, which oftentimes aim to supplement national and regional strategies (BY-CZ: 6; 19). The two Interreg programmes SN-CZ and BY-CZ shared three of their four thematic objectives in the 2014-2020 period. Those were: *ν*) ‘Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management’, *ι*) ‘Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency’ and *ξ*) ‘Investing in education, training and lifelong learning’. Together, these objectives clearly reflect the need and wish to preserve the regions’ most important – the human and natural – capitals. Furthermore, the critical importance of cooperation in education is evident, not only for an integrated labour market that will help overcome the challenges arising from the demographic change, but even more so for an overall enhanced intercultural understanding (Interreg SN-CZ, 2020; Interreg BY-CZ, 2015).

6.2.6 Activities

Projects and initiatives in the territory of the Euregio Egrensis differ in that they are either ‘large scale projects’ directly initiated in the framework of the two Interreg programmes or smaller projects aiming at face-to-face encounters initiated and supported by the Euregio and financed

¹⁷ “Zweck des Vereins ist die Förderung der internationalen Gesinnung, der Völkerverständigung, der Toleranz und Aussöhnung sowie eines umfassenden, friedlichen, partnerschaftlichen Zusammenwirkens zur Überwindung der Folgen der bisher trennenden Grenzen in der Mitte Europas.”

through its Small Projects Funds or other financing tools. Moreover, many projects are directly undertaken by the Euregio Egrensis itself (Schramek, 2014: 537f.).

In accordance with the aims and functions of the Euregio, the latter are first and foremost youth and language activities. One of the first projects that the working communities ever launched in 1992 was a Youth Summer Camp for 11 to 14-year-olds living in the region. Since then, a youth camp has been organised every summer, with its location rotating between the areas of the three working communities each year (Euregio Egrensis, n.d., Projekte). Additionally, young people in the region have the opportunity to partake in an exchange school year on the other side of the border. So far, however, this offer only exist between the Bavarian and Bohemian territories (Euregio Egrensis, n.d., Grenzüberschreitende Aktivitäten). Both initiatives not only aim at enhancing intercultural understanding and competences but also and predominantly at language skills. A beacon project of the Euregio Egrensis in this regard is the 'Language Offensive'. It is a project that since 2005 has attempted to raise awareness for the 'other' language spoken in the common region (especially of Germans for the Czech language) and to support in acquiring language skills by connecting already existing offers better and expanding them further (Ibid.). The Language Offensive aims at day-care centres, primary and secondary schools, and of course at the summer camp via 'language animations' and classic language classes. Noteworthy are also two German-Czech dictionaries specifically created for cross-border firefighters and emergency rescue services (Ibid.). Another annual activity that aims at raising awareness for cross-border cooperation in the region is the 'Euregio Egrensis Prize', which honours German-Czech initiatives promoting intercultural understanding and cooperation (Ibid.).

The Euregio also undertakes significant efforts to facilitate cooperation between Czech and German municipalities, institutions, schools and associations. The many encounter projects enabled through the Small Projects Funds may also be understood from this perspective (Euregio Egrensis, n.d., Projekte). Another initiative that the Euregio Egrensis was involved in and that meant to enhance both networking and cooperation at the German-Czech border was the construction of three 'Consulting Offices' in Bavaria, one of which is based at the Euregio Egrensis (Euregio Egrensis, n.d., Grenzüberschreitende Aktivitäten).

Connecting the different territories of the region better is also often one of the primary goals of tourism-related activities initiated by the Euregio. They include the creation of new, often thematic, cross-border walking trails such as the Interreg SN-CZ V projects 'Culture trail of the reeves', cross-border cycle paths (primarily under Interreg II and III), or the provision of maps and brochures (Euregio Egrensis, n.d., Projekte). An outstanding example for the latter is the Euregio Egrensis 'Map Portal', also developed under Interreg SN-CZ V under the lead of the pracovního

sdrúžení Euregia Egrensis and which functions as a common touristic portal for the whole of the region (Euregio Egrensis, n.d., Ziel). One of the main achievements of the region that help significantly connect the different territories with each other is the light rail system EgroNet. EgroNet is a cooperation network of about 50 transport services, originally created in the 1990s as a cross-border mobility system and an Expo 2000 project for the World Exhibition in Hanover. Today, it offers a more comfortable cross-border ticket system and acts as an information platform for touristic offers in the region and beyond (BY-CZ: 19). Another initiative to name here is the reactivation of the Selb-Aš/Asch railway line, a project that has been realised not least due to the support of the Euregio (Schramek, 2014: 161).

Of the many projects financed under Interreg V, two in which the Euregio Egrensis was directly involved as a project partner are the Clara III sister projects (SN-CZ and BY-CZ). As the name indicates, they were follow-up projects to Clara II (Interreg IV). The two projects (the dual structure was necessary due to the impossibility of trilateral funding through two distinct Interreg programmes) primarily sought to enhance the joint partnership cooperation of the public administration in the region, namely regarding issues directly impacting the lives of citizens on both sides of the border: civil protection; tourism; youth, education and social affairs; public administration and information systems; regional development and spatial planning; environmental protection; and lastly transport. Clara is thus a notable attempt of creating a framework for solving cross-border issues and reducing border obstacles through the cooperation of local public authorities in a holistic manner (Euregio Egrensis, n.d., Projekte; Euregio Egrensis, n.d., Grenzüberschreitende Aktivitäten).

7. Results and Discussion

Now that the Greater Region and the Euregio Egrensis have been presented at reasonable length and their functioning, goals and activities have been analysed, the two cases shall, in a next step be compared and evaluated: first, the defining contexts and resulting possibility horizons, and second, the actions of the Euroregions in the different fields of cross-border cooperation and their impact on the fulfilment of the overarching goals of regional competitiveness and territorial cohesion.

The first aspect that substantially differentiates the Greater Region and the Euregio Egrensis are the border contexts. Not only does the territory of the Greater Region cover six European borders and the Euregio Egrensis only two (arguably up to three, depending on how the status of the former inner-German border is assessed), the two cases differ above all in the time span of existing cross-border cooperation. While agreements such as the Elysée Treaty laid the foundation for institutionalised cross-border cooperation in what today is the Greater Region back in the 1960s already, the ‘Iron Curtain’ between the Federal Republic of Germany and Czechoslovakia prevented any comparable form of cooperation until the beginning of the 1990s. As a consequence, while both the Elysée Treaty and the Czech-German Declaration aimed at overcoming past conflicts and differences, for which cross-border cooperation was and still is seen as a main instrument, cooperation in the Greater Region appears to be taken much more for granted today and the need to stress the willingness for ‘good neighbourliness’ appears much less urgent. Accordingly, the roots of the Greater Region date back far longer than those of the Euregio Egrensis. In general, the German-Czech border has remained the greater obstacle to cooperation up until today. However, the COVID-19 pandemic also demonstrated how quickly borders that appear naturally permeable can become closed again. Fitting to the differing reasonings for cross-border cooperation at the time, the first main issue of the Greater Region was the crisis of the coal and steel industry, while the Euregio Egrensis was created to promote a spirit of friendship and intercultural rapprochement. Both the Greater Region and the Euregio Egrensis exist in parallel and simultaneously to a number of other cross-border entities alongside their respective border(s).

Both cases also differ significantly in the structural set-up of their main organisational entities. Due to the historical evolution of the Greater Region structure, it today is characterised by an unusually high involvement of national and regional authorities, which find their institutional expression in the Summit of the Greater Region. The Euregio Egrensis’s equivalent to the Summit is the Joint Presidency. However, since the latter is composed of three representatives of each of the three working communities that together constitute the institutional foundation of the Euregio, the Joint Presidency is composed of local authorities. It is therefore reasonable to state that the Greater

Region has more of a top-down, and the Euregio Egrensis more of a bottom-up character. Both the Summit and the Joint Presidency function after the principle of a rotating presidency, so that each of the constituent member regions consecutively is in charge. Both institutions are, furthermore, responsible for the elaboration of the overarching strategic guidelines for cooperation action, while their execution is a matter for individual working groups, which in turn are supported by the respective secretariats of the cross-border structures. Lastly, and not least due to its size and historical development, the Greater Region assembles many other relevant institutions under its roof, notably the Interregional Parliamentary Council and the Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region. In contrast to this, the Euregio Egrensis structure is limited to the three working communities. However, being non-profit associations, the two German organisations are open to a wide variety of other stakeholders other than just local authorities. Furthermore, the Euregio Egrensis is a prime example of a cross-border cooperation structure, where the creation of a single functional entity was prevented due to the lack of a suitable supporting legal instrument.

In both cases, the majority of funding for the financing of cross-border cooperation action stems from Interreg programmes – but the scope and availability differ greatly. In the case of the Greater Region, one single Interreg programme exists, which covers most of the territory that cooperates under the roof of the Summit. Even though the Summit secretariat and the Interreg Greater Region managing authority are not the same, they work together closely and share the same premises. Thus – and simplified –, the Greater Region has its own Interreg programme available to it and, during Interreg V, oversaw a budget of roughly €140 million. In contrast to this, the Interreg financial means that the Euregio Egrensis had direct influence over (the SN-CZ Small Projects Fund and the BY-CZ Disposal Fund) were much smaller, with around €2.5 million and €300,000. The Euregio is, after all, only one of the beneficiaries of the two Interreg programmes at the German-Czech border, and not the managing authority of either of them (although a member of the monitoring committees). In addition to Interreg, other funding possibilities for cross-border cooperation exist in both cases. For the Greater Region, the Cooperation Fund was mentioned briefly, which is the Summit's own funding instrument. For the Euregio Egrensis, mainly the German-Czech Future Fund, but also the financial instruments of the German Länder of Saxony and Thuringia that support European cooperation are to be named.

Due to the importance of Interreg for both cross-border cooperation structures, their aims and functions are to a significant degree subject to the strategies of the respective programme(s). While the strategy of the Greater Region programme is based on the 'trptych' of 'employment – territorial development – economy', or more precisely: on the idea of promoting the regional labour market, action at the German-Czech border has mainly focused on preserving and enhancing the region's

human and natural capital. Furthermore, it is the declared primary goal of the Euregio Egrensis to work towards the promotion of intercultural understanding and the reduction of culturally dividing barriers through the initiation of face-to-face encounters. As a consequence of its characteristic as the region with the highest number of commuters in Europe, the main focus of the Greater Region is both the reduction of mobility (i.e., economic) obstacles and finding solutions to the (social and environmental) challenges resulting from said high number of commuters. However, being a coalition of regional and national authorities, the Greater Region also pursues its own spatial development strategy, including but not limited to measures targeting education and training.

Table 2: At a Glance Comparison of the Greater Region and the Euregio Egrensis

	Greater Region	Euregio Egrensis
Territory:	Area: 65,400 km ² Population: 11.6 million States: 4 (BE, FR, LU, DE) Languages: 3	Area: 17,000 km ² Population: 2 million States: 2 (DE, CZ) Languages: 2
Origins:	Intergovernmental Commission (1969)	Symposium in Marktredwitz (1990)
Foundation:	1995 (Summit of the Greater Region)	1993 (Joint Agreement in Cheb)
Institutional Structure:	Head: Summit of the Greater Region Operational Management: Summit Secretariat (EGTC) Consultative Bodies: Interregional Parliamentary Council Economic and Social Committee	Head: Joint Presidency Working Communities: Arbeitsgemeinschaft Bayern Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sachsen/Thüringen Pracovního sdružení Euregia Egrensis
Financing (Interreg V):	Interreg V Greater Region (€139,802,646)	Interreg V SN-CZ – Kleinprojektfonds (€2,583,539.99) Interreg V BY-CZ – Dispositionsfonds (€309,808.40)

Source: Own illustration

Significant efforts are being undertaken in the Greater Region and the Euregio Egrensis to reduce border obstacles to mobility, each according to their own possibilities and goals. In the former, these efforts are primarily made with regard to the interregional labour market, and include projects (e.g., the Task Force Frontaliers) and institutional set-ups (e.g., the Interregional Job Market Observatory) alike. In the latter, mobility efforts mainly aim to enable and incite intercultural encounters and tourism. The annual Youth Summer Camp organised by the Euregio is an example for such encounters, as are the many other face-to-face encounters supported through the respective small project funds. Although these cooperation actions differ considerable in their

scope and scale, they share the same objective of making the borders in question as permeable and their crossing as natural as possible. In both cases, infrastructure improvements have been identified as a necessary precondition for increased cross-border mobility. While the Summit of the Greater Region, being an institution that unites national and regional executive representatives, is able to launch infrastructure projects of European scope (such as the two railway line projects Eurocaprail and POS Nordast), comparable projects are not within the power of the Euregio. Rather, its own infrastructure projects focus on the development of 'soft tourism' and the provision of information and maps on hiking and cycling trails. A prevailing issue regarding the infrastructure in either region is public transport. Both have aimed to tackle this issue with cross-border mobility portals (Mobiregio and EgroNet respectively), among others, and attempted to coordinate offers and ticketing. While the Mobiregio portal has only remained a communication platform for the stakeholders of public transport and a cross-border journey planner for end users, EgroNet already functions successfully as a cooperation network of transport services, including a cross-border ticket system, and acts as an information platform for touristic offers in the region. Here, the larger scope of the Greater Region has proven to be disadvantageous, as the lack of cross-border tariff integration is largely attributed to the institutional asymmetry between the cooperation partners. Nevertheless, the constant increase in the (pre-COVID-19) number of commuters is proof of the success of mobility obstacle reduction in the Greater Region. To whose primary benefit this is, however, is an entirely different question. An evaluation of the activities in the Euregio supported by similar figures is much more difficult to offer, due to the lack of comparable information on the number of commuters and/or tourists.

Another field of action that also aims at both enhancing labour market integration and intercultural understanding is education and training, as differences between national and regional education systems and a lack of language skills are major issues. Therefore, this field has seen equally considerable efforts. Supra-regional agreements (such as the Framework Agreement on Cross-Border Vocational Training in the Greater Region) and sub-regional cooperation arrangements (e.g., between schools on both sides of the German-Czech border) have been initiated for this purpose. Many individual projects have been launched as well, especially such that aim at enhancing language skills (e.g., the SESAM'GR project and the Euregio's 'Language Offensive'), which have been identified as one of the major obstacles to cross-border cooperation both by the Greater Region and the Euregio Egrensis. An aspect in which the two cases differ significantly is mobility and cooperation in higher education. While the Greater Region is characterised by a large number of cross-border students in higher education, this is a major concern in the Euregio Egrensis – both due to the lack of language skills but also due to the demographic change and the large number of young people emigrating from the region. Moreover, education efforts always need to be

considered from the perspective of network and capacity building. In both cases, most cross-border initiatives concerned with this field of action seem to mainly concentrate on establishing research clusters attached to institutions of higher education. ‘Classic’ innovation clusters and networks that aim to specifically support cross-border SME activities, however, appear to be largely missing in both territories. Furthermore, many SMEs in the Greater Region and the Euregio Egrensis are still subject to considerable border obstacles, preventing them from expanding their activities to the other side of the respective border(s).

Two other critically important areas of cross-border cooperation action when considering regional competitiveness, but at the same time somewhat out of the scope for direct action by the Euregio Egrensis, are access to health care and other public services as well as the field of environmental protection. Access to health care is an aspect where the peripherality of border regions becomes particularly visible – especially in the case of an emergency. Since time is often of the essence and the nearest health care facility on the other side of a national border, functioning cross-border cooperation in rescue services and disaster control can be life-saving. Both in the Greater Region and at the German-Czech border, (bilateral) agreements have been concluded to allow for legal cross-border rescue services. While progress has been made regarding emergencies, general access to medical services remains an unresolved issue that is oftentimes subject to patchy agreements and misses holistic strategies. An example of this are the ZOASTs at the Belgian-French border, a concept that only recently has been expanded to other parts of the Greater Region (Gløersen et al., 2020: 34). Functional cross-border cooperation could also prove to be invaluable in the future regarding access to other public services, especially in regions which are highly affected by the demographic change and which, as a consequence, experience both a loss in access and a change in the need for close-by social services. Although a couple of networks concerned with social inclusion have been created in the territory of the Greater Region since the 2000s (Ibid.: 42f.), much still needs to be done in both cases analysed in this thesis.

Lastly, environmental protection is another crucially important aspect for cross-border regions. Not only is cross-border cooperation often the only viable way to tackle environmental issues, environmental protection initiatives also directly influence the natural capital and well-being potential for the local populations. As is the case in the field of health, both agreements on the supra-regional level (especially concerning water protection) and individual local projects (aiming at network creation and awareness raising) have contributed to the progress that has been achieved in this field in recent years. Nevertheless, the lack of holistic strategies concerning issues such as energy consumption and climate change in the Greater Region as well as in the Euregio Egrensis has had a noticeable negative impact up until this day.

8. Conclusion

How is the influence of cross-border cooperation on the competitiveness of Euroregions finally to be evaluated, specifically in the two cases of the Greater Region and the Euregio Egrensis?

Cross-border cooperation is a very complex and diverse phenomenon and subject to many different motivations and obstacles. Generally speaking, it is a voluntary process that might include any concerted action of partners from more than one side of a given border and that is aiming at improving neighbourly relations and the overall situation of life. One of the most important incentives for regional actors to partake in cross-border cooperation is overcoming the disadvantages that result from the peripheral character of their territories due to their border location and diminishing the barrier effects of that border. On a larger scale, cooperation has been of central importance to the European integration process in the wake of World War II, which not only brought along a progressive need for cross-border cooperation but also saw a subsequent institutionalisation of the process. The case of the Greater Region gives testimony to this. One of the reasons for the progressive institutionalisation was the regional disparity that increased with each enlargement of the European Union. As a consequence, territorial cohesion became an official goal of the union, and one of the main instruments to achieve this goal has been cross-border cooperation and the Interreg programme, which has become the main framework for cross-border cooperation action on the continent. Oftentimes, the key outcome of these cooperation efforts is understood to be increased ‘regional competitiveness’.

The Euroregional concept is first and foremost characterised by its diversity. The notion of Euroregion might simultaneously define a territorial space and an organisational entity that often is an actor in formalised cooperation across borders, which aids in the facilitation of the process. Euroregions can differ significantly in their scope and legal bases, which provide them with power to act in the cross-border cooperation process (or a lack thereof), define their functioning and functions, and influence their chances of success and failure. The two cases analysed in this thesis have proven to be excellent examples of the diversity of the subject. In fact, they have been chosen specifically to enable and provide a multifaceted and in-depth picture of the complex issue of cross-border cooperation on multiple levels. All Euroregions share some of their motivations, namely the willingness to find solutions to the commonly identified interests and problems – and of course the financial motivation of Interreg funding. However, it is also their individual, context-born motivations that differentiate Euroregions and, in turn, define their own specific goals, strategies, functions and limitations.

One goal that frames the actions of each and every Euroregion in a dual way is regional competitiveness. For one thing, one of the defined goals of the Interreg programme (i.e., European Territorial Cooperation) is to increase the competitiveness of peripheral border regions and to thus contribute to higher territorial cohesion in Europe. For another, ever since the idea of competitiveness was transferred from its (micro-economic) business context to the macro-economic territorial context of nations and regions in the 1990s, it has become a dominant thought that regions need to increase their competitiveness in order to survive in the ‘competition of the regions’. As a major consequence, regions have aimed at improving the conditions of their business environments and at inciting capacity building (possibly more than any other in the area of innovation) in order to attract new businesses to the region and to raise the total productivity of the business environment. While none of these efforts are bad or wrong *per se*, this one-sided concentration on the business environment is accompanied by the danger of blurring the view on the ultimate goal of all regional efforts towards increased competitiveness – the enhanced well-being of the local populations.

The connecting line between cross-border cooperation and regional competitiveness is thus that joint initiatives which reduce border obstacles might positively affect the well-being of the populations while simultaneously contributing towards the goal of territorial cohesion. This can take various and differing forms and can happen in different fields and areas. It is also important to stress that the measurement of the influence of cooperation initiatives must go beyond economic output indicators such as GDP and total productivity. The comparative case study of the Greater Region and the Euregio Egrensis has given an example for how the scope and thus the possibilities, but also motivations might differ between individual Euroregions. Notwithstanding their differences, both Euroregions are able to positively influence the competitiveness of their respective border territories through their activities, as Euroregions can function successfully with different scopes and at different development levels.

In some cases, it is easier than in others to directly link a rise in the quality of life to cooperation action that aimed at and resulted in borders being less of an obstacle for the local populations. This is the case for health care, emergency rescue and general access to other public services. Another example are cross-border activities aiming at environmental protection. Both in the Greater Region and the Euregio Egrensis, considerable progress has been made in these regards in recent years. Even though much still needs to be done, it is without a doubt possible to state that cross-border cooperation actions have had a direct positive impact on the well-being of the respective populations and thus also on the competitiveness of the two Euroregions. However, these are also examples where cooperation is largely based on agreements concluded at the supra-regional level,

which raises the question of whether Euroregions must be of a certain size or composed of authorities higher than the local level in order to effect meaningful changes to the competitiveness of their territories. While often its size and scope are undeniably beneficial to the Greater Region (the different institutions for the territorial observation are prime examples here), they have also proved to be disadvantageous in the case of joint cross-border mobility portals in public transport. Moreover, it must not be assumed that the many small-scale intercultural encounter projects of the Euregio Egrensis do not positively impact the well-being of the local populations, even though it is much more difficult to have this effect reflected in numerical assessments. Cross-border cooperation is defined by differences in motivations and goals, and any evaluation of success must be based on the fulfilment of these specific individual aims and functions. However, it should also be said that the line at which the evaluation crosses into the domain of normative inflections is thin. One needs to believe in the value of intercultural dialogue and cross-border cooperation to some degree in order to derive a positive impact of these cooperation activities as presented in the case study conducted in this thesis. At this point, it also becomes evident that this thesis could have benefited greatly from additional methodological approaches, such as a fieldwork study and interviews, in order to base these conclusions on a broader basis and to gain an insight into the local populations' own evaluation of the cross-border cooperation efforts.

Another conclusion that derives from the discussion of the scope and success of individual Euroregional actions is the importance of the border context, which defines the conditions of cross-border cooperation, and of the prevailing dependence on state support. While in the past century, the history of the German-Czech border has entailed a main focus on intercultural understanding up until today, cross-border cooperation in the Greater Region, at the cross-roads of 'historic Europe', has since its beginnings in the late 1960s shifted towards more direct actions that specifically impact cross-border economic activities. The Greater Region has also benefitted greatly from inter-state agreements in the past, whereas the Euregio Egrensis has, especially during its beginnings, suffered from a notable lack of state support and the lack of a legal instrument to found itself upon. Here, the contradictory nature of borders becomes particularly visible.

Other popular methods to measure the well-being of a population are employment and income. An issue that becomes immediately evident in this context is that in individual cases it is difficult to say whether a reduction in unemployment numbers or a rise in disposable income has directly arisen from cross-border cooperation activities. What this case study has shown, however, is that significant efforts are successfully being undertaken to reduce the obstacles to more integrated cross-border labour markets. This is highly evident in the case of the Greater Region, but the various efforts of the Euregio Egrensis to encourage exchanges in education and enhanced

language skills as well as soft tourism are contributing working towards this goal, too. At the same time, the labour market example shines a spotlight on an important issue that is inherent to cross-border cooperation in Euroregions, namely that the efforts might lead to disproportionately high benefits for individual sub-regions and thereby create new, inner-Euroregional disparities. When looking at the evolution in the Greater Region in the past decades and the many discrepancies between Luxembourg and the other regions, one can certainly make an argument for this. It also remains to be seen whether the disparities at the German-Czech border will decline over time.

To conclude: Both the theoretical and the practical analysis of cross-border cooperation in and through Euroregional structures have revealed the reasoning behind cooperation efforts across borders in Europe as well as the many obstacles to the process that still prevail today despite the many efforts towards an increased permeability of borders over the years. Cross-border cooperation is by no means a panacea to the issue of regional disparities, nor is necessarily the 'hegemonic' call for regional competitiveness. However, prevailing border obstacles are not only one of the biggest issues for cross-border cooperation and the development of border regions, they are also the main reason for it. In view of the developments in recent years, of Brexit, 'Trumpism' and the demonstration of the fragile nature of Europe's open borders by the COVID-19 pandemic, overcoming dividing border contradictions is possibly more important today than ever.

9. References

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Statement of Authorship

I hereby declare that I have written this thesis by myself, without outside help, and that I have not used any aids other than those indicated. In particular, I declare that I have marked all verbatim and analogous citations from other works as such.

Cologne, 13.08.2021

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Friedrichs', written over a dotted line.

Jerome Friedrichs