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Summary of the master's thesis

**Cross-border Cooperation in French-German Non-Profit
Organisations**

***La Coopération Transfrontalière des Acteurs Publics de la
Sécurité Civile***

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Statement

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1. Introduction

The present master's thesis has been written within the frame of an internship in the department of cross-border cooperation at the fire and rescue service of the French department Bas-Rhin in Alsace, which is a part of the Upper Rhine – a trinational cooperation region that used to be monolingual, but became bilingual due to a number of historical events.

In the first place, one addresses the question about the organisation and ensurance of the fire control and protection in the neighbouring countries France and Germany. As the insight into the French system is already gained through the internship, it is described with the help of inside information and online resources. Contrariwise, there is a lack of experience concerning the German system so that friends who are committed volunteer and professional fire-fighters have been consulted. Thus, the presentation of the results resembles a descriptive comparison of the two systems in their entirety. The reason behind this is the scarcity of comparable publications and the importance of a mutual understanding.

In the second place, one analyses the effects of the current corona crisis on the cross-border cooperation by taking the example of two employees of the fire and rescue service Bas-Rhin. Their reports deal with the communication and project management in the trinational Upper Rhine region in times of the sanitary crisis and the patient transfer across borders. The aim is to gain scientific knowledge by collecting data on the current events and to make the results publicly available. Moreover, conclusions and recommendations for the future should be formulated based on the experience of the interviewed persons.

This summary introduces the reader to the relative state of research and essential concepts of the respective field of study, such as cross-border cooperation, the funding programme INTERREG including sample projects and the phenomenon civil security. This is completed by a characterisation of the cooperation region where the research took place and a brief look on relevant forms of organization and organizational culture.

Naturally, one explains also the applied research method, which is a qualitative approach that is having recourse to interview techniques, followed by a presentation of the case study's findings. Finally, the conclusion contains an outlook that opens up new possible perspectives for the cross-border cooperation in the field of civil security.

2. State of research

Owing to the particularity of the research context and the actuality of the topic, the amount of existing research literature is quite small. Many publications dealing with the current corona crisis have not been published, yet, and the work of the fire services is too special to be of interest for non-specialist researchers or too time consuming in terms of preparation vis-à-vis a topic of no moment. This is why the research questions could solely be the best possible framed with one case study addressing a collaboration of fire-fighters in the Dutch-German border region, an experiment about the way of dealing with a crisis, studies on intercultural competence and openness of similar services like public authorities or the police such as research papers on the general cross-border cooperation in the Upper Rhine, for example in the shape of projects supported by INTERREG.

In fact, the fire service in the Upper Rhine region does not tend to be a topic, that has not been approached so far. So the Franco-German-Swiss Conference of the Upper Rhine, which was established in the 1990s, published French-German dictionaries of the technical jargon used by the fire-fighters (Cf. Oberrheinkonferenz, 2013/2015) as well as a comparative study of coexisting information systems in the region to ease the cross-border cooperation (Cf. Expertengruppe Oberrheinkonferenz, 2015).

An already explored example of cooperation is the amicable collaboration between fire services at the Dutch-German border (Cf. Dahles & van Hees, 2004). Step by step and with the aim to overcome and eliminate all technical and linguistic obstacles of cooperation for an emergency, the German and Dutch fire-fighters regularly train together. Dahles and van Hees examine the commonalities and discrepancies between the two fire brigades, inter alia regarding the formation, and the influence of the border on the collaboration. They conclude, that even though national borders seem to have become transparent by now – at least in times of calm –, the political and organisational barriers and above all the symbolic constructions of borders in the minds of the people still keep existing and vanish more slowly. That is the reason why the fire-fighters do not work together the royal way.

Furthermore, a team composed of German and French researchers tested the behavior of individuals in a crisis situation in the context of a three-day blackout via a role play with students from both countries (Cf. Mahdavian, Platt, Wiens, Klein & Schultmann, 2020). The result is, that the political authorities have to guarantee a constant and transparent flow of information, if they do not want to lose people's

trust. As for the citizens, they take action themselves very late in the crisis. This goes along with the feeling of severe anxiety, what also occurs remarkably late towards the end of the role play.

The two handbooks “Interkulturelle Kommunikation und Kompetenz“ (Cf. Straub, Weidemann & Weidemann, 2007) and “Interkulturelle Öffnung“ (Cf. Vanderheiden, 2014) take a look at the various fields of activity of public authorities, the police, the military, rescue services, volunteering and science from an intercultural point of view. Next to that, there is a publication dealing with seafaring (Cf. Brenker, Möckel & Strohschneider, 2014). They demonstrate that, although all domains more or less discuss the topic of interculturality, there is a lot to catch up on in order to face the problems with sovereignty. That refers, for instance, to the presence and support of employees and customers with a migrant background or adequate conciliatory measures in case of internal or external intercultural conflicts, which is highly important in emergency situations and patient care, but also for the engagement of volunteers at civil security services. In contrast, interculturality is rather considered as an obstacle at sea. Nevertheless, procedures and instructions on board are tried to be standardized to avoid communication problems. In turn, Zeuschel (Cf. Zeuschel, 2003: 308) admittedly lists negative aspects of multicultural project teams, but underlines the positive aspects of the project work in a multicultural team naming mainly the possibility to work almost autonomously together on a common task, detached from the everyday professional environment and context, and limited in time.

Last but not least, several studies are about the diverse cross-border collaboration in the Upper Rhine region. All authors estimate, that the Upper Rhine is a bright cooperation region with a promising future, if all parties involved pull together (Cf. Baasner & Seidendorf, 2016 : 75 und 82). Unfortunately, it depends on the motivation and initiative of those responsible (Cf. Pallagst, Hartz & Caesar, 2018: 338). The only points of criticism are the discovery of linguistic and institutional barriers to cooperation over and over again (Cf. Pallagst et al., 2018: 342ff.) as well as the insufficient implication of the civil society in the project work and the effort to set up microprojects in comparison to classic projects (Cf. Kulawik, 2018: 195). Otherwise, the Upper Rhine is a unique cooperation region in Europe (Cf. Kulawik, 2018: 189). Just the corona crisis was recently able to harm it. Already the refugee crisis in 2015 caused a temporary closure of the border and, so that the cross-border cooperation

experienced an odd impediment (Cf. Caesar & Pallagst, 2018: 12). The ongoing isolation and its consequences for the French border regions and their population has lately been thematised by a short report of the organization “Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière” in 2020. After the evaluation of statements coming from their own network, first survey findings and newspaper articles, the organisation claims an improvement of the cross-border governance, taking into account the European Union, while maintaining the responsibilities of the member states based on the subsidiarity principle and on condition of preference of the civil society over institutions of any kind.

Moreover, specific terms and concepts need to be defined by consulting scholarly literature. The word “border” has a centuries-long history (Cf. Böckler, 2007: 34) and de facto many forms of expression (Cf. Kleinschmidt, 2014: 4). Although political borders as a line and institution are nowadays fading in many places (Cf. Paasi, 1999: 678s.), they still decide on inclusion and exclusion and therefore have an identity-establishing function (Cf. Kaufmann, 2017: 8). The surroundings of a border define the border area, in which the inner and the outer, division and transgression interact on multiple levels (Cf. Doll & Gelberg, 2014: 18s.). The Upper Rhine is considered to be a cooperation region thanks to its strategic and autonomous character and the variety of cross-border collaboration projects (Cf. Kulawik, 2018: 21).

The civil security is a national competence (Cf. Würtenberger, 2010: 247) and one of the missions of the fire services (Cf. Schavan, 2010: 27). But also the European Union possesses complementary competencies to foster the European cohesion (Cf. Altwickler, 2017: 153). The term “security” is much-debated and hard to define because of its multifacetedness, however, it describes a general need for and a measure of people’s quality of life (Cf. Albrecht, 2010: 111). Consequently, the civil security concerns the protection of the population in public space (Cf. Gusy, 2010: 279f.) as well as the preservation of the reached standard of living.

Well-known antagonists of the security are the risk and the crisis: “Während das Risiko die Wahrscheinlichkeit des Eintretens einer Gefahr darstellt, ist bei einer Krise die Gefahr bereits eingetreten“ (*While the risk represents the probability of a danger becoming real, in a crisis the danger has already become real*) (Merten, 2013 : 157). Such events have to be prevented and in case of their realisation they have to be

managed. Hereby, the communication is a crucial issue (Cf. Merten, 2013: 168). Next to different natural and man-made incidents, intercultural problems have to be taken into consideration as well (Cf. Pelletier, 2019).

By the way, culture has not that many visible artefacts like symbols, buildings or language, but a lot of invisible norms and values representing the basic rules of work that have not necessarily been written down (Cf. Homma & Barschke, 2014: 4-8).

The present master's thesis tries to understand the cultural organization of the fire services. One has to know, that the fire and rescue services are no non-governmental non-profit organisations, but public-autonomous institutions that are not profit-oriented either (Cf. Gabler Wirtschaftslexikon, 2018). With that said, the title of the case study is put right before starting with the explication of the research method.

3. Method

The master's thesis is based on a qualitative research approach. Accordingly, qualitative interviews have been conducted to answer the initial research questions. Regarding the first research question of how the fire service is organised in Germany, three semi-guided expert interviews have been conducted in German language. The guideline that has been prepared in advance contains several questions and topics, that should be broached during the conversation and serves the researcher as a reminder in the course of the interview (Cf. Strübing, 2018: 101ff.). This allows a structured and at the same time open interrogation of the interlocutor in order to discover, understand and contextualise a field of research, for example the fire service (Cf. Strübing, 2018: 107). Besides, an expert is any person with special knowledge concerning a particular domain, which is not generally accessible.

The second research question of what effects the corona crisis has or had on the cross-border cooperation, is going to be answered by means of two narrative interviews in French language (Cf. Strübing, 2018: 109f.). Initially, this method has been developed by Schütze in the 1970s for biography research. The aim is to obtain a detailed and subjective life story. So as to gain an insight into a chosen chapter of life of the interviewee, Flick recommends to combine the narrative and the semi-structured interview strategy (Cf. Misoch, 2019: 60ff.). Like for the semi-structured expert interview, the researcher asks a stimulating question in the beginning to animate the interlocutor's storytelling. The purely narrative procedure does not

foresee to ask intermediary questions, but rather asking questions at the end of the interview (Cf. Strübing, 2018: 109f.). Contrarywise, the mixed variant makes asking associative questions whilst the conversation possible, if necessary and justified (Cf. Misoch, 2019: 60ff.). That way, subjective concepts and definitions of words can be won. After all, both interview methods incline to have a normal everyday conversation. Thereby, it is key that the researcher creates a good atmosphere and carefully listens to the interviewee and (Cf. Strübing, 2018: 101ff.).

This is equally important, when the interview does not take place face-to-face, but online via a software enabling videocalls (Cf. Misoch, 2019: 177f.). This alternative is very useful as it is free, mobile and time efficient. Also gestures, facial expressions and voice can be recorded and the physical distance generates a feeling of protection, security and anonymity. Thus, the internet connection represents a risk for the long-distance communication and the researcher as well as the interviewee do need the necessary equipment.

Anyways, the results resemble an individual structure of narration and of meanings, whereas the narrative approach grants the interviewed person more freedom (Cf. Strübing, 2018: 109f.). In general, the interviewee is put at the heart of the conversation, so all what has been said is of interest for the study. The researcher has to accept the complexity of the narration, the subjective perspective of the interviewed person and the abundance of shared information and nothing of that shall be ignored (Cf. Strübing, 2018: 105f.). Subsequently, the conversation is verbatim and completely unchanged transcribed in order to have a foundation for the following analysis (Cf. Fuß & Karbach, 2014: 59ff.). The basic transcript documents breaks, breathing, overlaps, turn-taking and non-verbal elements. In addition to that, volume, accentuation, disruption and incomprehensive parts can be noted down. This happens sequence by sequence, while one sequence has a time interval of one to five seconds. What was said is mostly anonymised and marked with line numbers. The basic transcript presents the foundation for the subsequent analysis of the interview. There are different strategies to analyse an interview. The present case study refers to the content analysis which was developed by Mayring (Cf. Strübing, 2018: 104). In this case, the content is pooled, simplified and categorised. The categories can either be defined beforehand (deductive approach), or formulated afterwards on the basis of the gained material (inductive approach). The present master's thesis uses the deductive approach for the analysis of the interviews in line

with the first research question and the inductive approach for the analysis of the interviews conducted in the scope of the second research question. There is also the possibility to reconstruct what was said, so that an interpretative analysis of the narrative logic can be made (Cf. Misoch, 2019: 60ff.). This method is used by objective hermeneutics, the documentary method as well as the grounded theory. The deductive analysis and interpretation of the first three interviews is illustrated by different colours directly in the transcript. The inductive analysis of the other two interviews takes place tabular.

4. Context

The Alsace, with its ambivalent French-German past, and more precisely the Eurometropole Strasbourg (Cf. Gorse, 2019) is home to many European institutions and belongs to the cross-border cooperation region of the Franco-German-Swiss Conference of the Upper Rhine, which is of outstanding economic and scientific power (Cf. Hertz & Caesar, 2018: 48).

The fire and rescue service of the French Department Bas-Rhin (SDIS 67) is also located there. Founded by law in 1996 it is responsible for all fire brigades and fire-fighters of the department (Cf. SDIS67) and hosts the emergency call centre that receives and handles emergency calls via the call number 18 (Cf. SDIS 67, 2018).

So far, the SDIS 67 was already two times lead partner of cross-border cooperation projects in the frame of INTERREG-A – a financial instrument of the European regional and cohesion policy that brings together different territories of Europe since 1986 (Cf. European Commission). It subsidises projects in order to enhance the convergence among the member states of the European Union (Cf. European Commission, 2010: 3ff.). The budget and financing priorities of the program are set for seven years. The current financing phase for an intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth including the mission of territorial harmonisation began in 2014 and ends in 2020 and is soon going to be replaced by five newly assorted financing targets (Cf. Commission Européenne). Hence, investments in research, digitalisation, economy, energy transition, mobility and infrastructure, education and employment as well as health and sustainable regional development strategies between 2021 and 2027 aim at creating a more intelligent, greener, better connected and more social Europe that is closer to the citizens.

Meanwhile, the INTERREG program of the European Union is split in three categories: cross-border (A), transnational (B) and interregional (C) cooperation (Cf. European Commission). Currently, there are about sixty cooperation regions, among others the Upper Rhine region. This year, the financial aid tool INTERREG-A Upper Rhine celebrates its 30 years anniversary. Since its creation, it has co-financed more than 800 projects with 225 billion euros in total.

The fire and rescue service Bas-Rhin benefited from it, too, so as to ameliorate the security on the river Rhine. In 2008, the first project worth 2.5 billion euros ended after five years with the first operation of the French-German fireboat called “Europa-1” (Cf. SDIS 67, 2020). From then on, it is always ready for operation and staffed with firefighters from Strasburg and Kehl. Two years later, this project was followed by another one, which lasted also five years and got financially supported by the European Union with 2.9 billion euros (Cf. CRERF-MÜB). The objective was to build a floating training centre for fire-fighters named “Mobile Übungsanlage Binnengewässer (MÜB)” serving at the preparation for operations that concern present risks and dangers on the Rhine. As it is installed on board of an old tankship, the training centre can land both on the French and German side of the Rhine. As a consequence, it enables the exchange of experiences and the adaptation of operation techniques across borders. It is a lighthouse project of cross-border collaboration in the field of civil security. At present, the SDIS 67 is working on the renewal and extension of existent agreements on the cross-border cooperation in emergency situations and began to implement the idea of a “cross-border academy of risks” aiming at an organized interdisciplinary discourse about actual dangers in the Upper Rhine territory as well as regularly arranged multilingual trainings with local emergency personnel from France, Germany and Switzerland.

Other INTERREG projects of that type are spread all over the European continent such as at the French border to Belgium, Luxemburg and Germany, the Spanish-Portuguese borderland, between Turkey and Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania, Poland and Czech Republic or along the European coastline.

5. Results

In this part of the summary, the findings of the master’s thesis are going to be presented. The results are primarily generated by interviews that have been conducted. The two research questions are examined separately in two subchapters.

Part 1: Organisation of fire services in France and Germany

Based on the concept and definition of the term “organisational culture”, five categories have been predefined for the analysis and interpretation of the interview results: the fire-fighters’ motivation for their (volunteer) engagement, their tasks, the necessary requirements and qualifications to become a volunteer or professional fire-fighter, the organisation of the fire brigades and their intercultural openness in view of their international network and European cooperation.

All interviewees mention the local proximity, personal contacts and the will to help other people as principal motivation. Some add the fun factor and learning effect as well as the adequate wage in case of a professional engagement at a fire brigade.

Unfortunately, there is no data revealing the motivation of French fire-fighters, so it is not possible to compare the two nationalities’ interest. Next to that general interest, it is necessary to have a good level of fitness, to be able to work in a team and to learn continuously, to have a good self-assessment and protective instinct to become a fire-fighter. Those who have enough time will acquire all other indispensable qualifications thanks to internal trainings and further education in order to fulfill the central task of the fire brigade.

“*Retten, Bergen, Löschen, Schützen*“ (rescue, retrieve, extinguish, protect) is the motto of the German fire brigades, which largely corresponds to the missions defined in France. However, the volunteer fire brigades in Germany do not provide an emergency medical service like the fire and rescue service in France. In contrast, the presence of special units and equipment depends on the local conditions and risks in both countries. Furthermore, the two countries try to constantly improve their image to recruit junior fire-fighters and to obtain the populations’ confidence.

With regards to the organization and functioning of the fire brigades there are, except for the hierarchical structuring with clear roles, commands and abbreviations as well as uniformed staff, some discrepancies. Indeed, the classification of the fire brigades according to their size is similar, but their administration takes place on different levels. In Germany the responsibility lies on the municipalities and districts. The district is also in charge of the emergency call center that receives, handles and assigns emergency calls in the locality. In France, however, all these tasks are managed by the French departments, but the emergency call center only receives the calls intended for the fire service (call number 18). In Germany, again, the

responsibility at the site of operation is carried either by the emergency call center or the professional fire brigade. Moreover, a fire brigade is composed of various groups that perform different tasks. It is striking, that Germany counts much more volunteer fire-fighters than Germany. Nonetheless, the professional fire-fighters have the status of civil servants in both countries as long as they meet certain criteria.

Since the interviews have been conducted with people living far from the border, only a few cooperation partners from foreign countries emerge. Contacts have been mainly established with other fire brigades in the locality. Otherwise, one could name at most a handful of foreign partner fire brigades on the level of the youth fire brigade, that invite or are invited to participate in competitions and camps. For example, the support of Swedish fire services during the forest fires in Scandinavia represents an extraordinary exception. Yet, all interviewees agree that there should be more collaboration of that kind on European level. Coincidentally, they doubt the realisation of the idea because of technical, linguistic and administrative barriers. But the fire and rescue service Bas-Rhin which is located close to the border shows, that those types of cooperation are possible thanks to the help of INTERREG.

Farther, one can identify parallels between the research findings of the present master's thesis and the today's state of research. For instance, the intercultural openness of the fire services can be improved like that of voluntary services in general or the police. At the same time, the demand for more internationalisation is low as it is considered to be an obstacle similar to the seafaring. Even the article about the collaboration of two volunteer fire services at the Dutch-German border reveals that a project in the style of INTERREG is too complex for a small fire brigade.

Finally, the interview results are very satisfying, even though one of the interviewees can afterwards not be seen as an expert anymore. Anyways, this refers to the test of the guideline. Besides, one of the interviews has been conducted with a former professional fire-fighter in the military. As a consequence, the spectrum of findings has been enlarged, albeit the content turned out to be less relevant and interesting for the planned case study as revealed by the analysis and interpretation of the interview. Already a closer look at the conduct of the interview testifies the assumption. This is why those elements are in need of improvement.

Part 2: Effects of the corona crisis on cross-border cooperation

The results of the second survey could hardly be more different, like the measures taken by the French and German government against the pandemic. Due to the rapid spread of the virus in France, the government put the whole population under quarantine; from 17 March to 11 Mai 2020 (Cf. Audreau & Vaudano, 2020). Public institutions had to close and the restrictions during the lockdown were extremely stern (Cf. Escieaux, 2020). Since mid of July it is compulsory to wear a mask in a closed room (Cf. Direction de l'information légale et administrative [Premier ministre], 2020).

In Germany, the situation initially seemed a bit more under control, thus the government decreed nationwide contact restrictions between the 22 March and the 19 April 2020 (Cf. MDR). Furthermore, wearing a mask became mandatory at the end of April. However, the rules can vary from federal state to federal state and demonstrations against the decreed measures take place regularly. The German chancellor Merkel advises caution, but somehow one has to admit that Germany has managed the crisis well so far, while the French president Macron in the meantime declared war against the virus (Cf. Faure, 2020). Certainly, the system of government plays an important role referring to the handling of the pandemic and complicates the comparison of the two countries as France is a centrally organized state and Germany is built on federal states (Cf. Baasner & Seidendorf, 2016: 14). Besides, the European Union merely had an advisory function towards its member states and put together a financial package (Cf. Haahr, 2020).

Alike the correlation of the development and the management of the crisis and the state apparatus, the position within a company or organization seems to influence the professional experience of the crisis. One report by an administrative staff member illustrates the perspective of a person that had to work in home office during the national quarantine, while another report by a medical staff member tells of the active participation in patient transfers from France to Germany.

On the one hand, one notices that, at the climax of the pandemic, the cross-border cooperation was limited to the necessary; that is to say the organisation and implementation of patient transfers. Other projects and working groups were temporarily stagnant and remained silent over a long time. The crisis was mainly

solved on national level. The high number of cases in France and the overload of French hospitals above all in Paris and in the east of France led to an early closure of the border on behalf of the German government for reasons of protection, what dealt a severe blow to France. Furthermore, the border control even concerned self-organised patient transfers by ambulance between two hospitals and hindered them to cross the border. Additionally, there is evidence of xenophobic attitudes in Germany towards French people. The general lack of internal and external sources of information about the fight against the virus and the cross-border cooperation in the Upper Rhine region as well as the disagreement of French politicians on the crisis management and the absence of the European Union in the discussion reinforces the frustration. Beyond that, the crisis management from Paris did not meet the needs of the medical staff in terms of masks, medicaments, oxygen and respirators. Surely, this is not only the fault of politics; the economy and industry also have a say. Also, the life in isolation because of the strict quarantine measures must be added. All these facts lead to the conclusion, that this period is a complicated and brutal one which results in a critical and pessimistic reflection on the cross-border cooperation. Especially people, who contain the French-German heritage within themselves and who live for the preservation of the friendship between the two countries are affected. Despite the advisability, it is uncertain, if people will draw lessons from all of this in the near future.

On the other hand, there were many Germans, who were worried about their French colleagues and the development of the virus in France and vice versa, so that new friendships arose from the crisis. Germany, which again comes out as a good example of the crisis, also provided France free hospital beds for care of Covid-19 patients. In the context of the patient transfer via ambulance and helicopter, new contacts between German and French hospitals have been made. Yet, new collaborations within France have emerged from the crisis, for example between the fire and rescue department, the medical emergency service and the military. The warm welcome of the French medical staff in Germany will be kept in good memory and potential linguistic or technical barriers could be broken down together, for instance, because someone randomly spoke the language of the other or simply because someone ceded for use the own medical equipment in case of different standards and incompatible connections. In fact, the practical experience trained the foreign vocabulary of one or two. The stability of the patients before, during and after

the transfer represented the one and only risk, especially in the helicopter since the power supply of the medical equipment was delicate. But finally, one could say that there is a will and an interest to pursue the structures' exchange and to continue the cooperation within the country and across borders as long as it is based on equality. There is even talk of a federal Europe aiming to facilitate the collaboration between member states. Other ideas contain the conducting of a meeting lasting several days to reflect on the crisis, the creation of a cross-border map that shows all hospitals of the region and their specialisations as well as a common European GPS system to locate the ambulances and fire engines. At last, more cooperation and mutual inspiration means less barriers, faster intervention and a higher level of safety for the European population at the same time.

The results show positive and negative aspects of the cross-border cooperation in view of the current pandemic. This is also reflected by the language use and narrative style of the interviewees. Nonetheless, the summary of two individual points of view is not decisive enough. Therefore, more experience reports have to complete the present survey in order to obtain a better overall picture of the crisis experience of the staff of the fire and rescue service Bas-Rhin but also of other actors of the cross-border collaboration or civil security. A preliminary comparison with the findings of the study conducted by the organisation "Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière" reveals similarities. Still, the present master's thesis delivers insightful results, that can also stand for themselves.

Further, the way of conducting the interviews and the presentation of the findings need to be commented in the end. As the interviews have been conducted in French language, it is possible that, through the eyes of the researcher, who has German as a first language, some mentioned points did not get enough attention due to potential problems of understanding. The two-dimensional presentation of the research findings in tabulation can be improved, too. Although it traces back the topics of the narration, the multi-layered character of what was said gets greatly reduced. Nevertheless, the simplification of the content allows a better overview and is considered to be sufficient for the present research work.

6. Conclusion

The research results reveal commonalities and differences of the fire services in France and Germany as well as positive and negative effects of the corona crisis on the cross-border cooperation in the domain of civil security. Hence, suggestions for improvement and guidance for the future shall be proposed in this conclusion.

First of all, it is of great importance to learn from the current crisis in order to be better prepared for the upcoming second infection wave or health emergency in a cross-border context. Therefore it is helpful to organise a full-day or multi-day in-person session with stakeholders from the civil security and cross-border cooperation sector to openly discuss positive and negative aspects of the actual crisis management in view of its improvement. Additionally, scientific studies can contribute to this discussion by objectively observing, analysing and evaluating the current events. Nevertheless, the publication of such studies remains to be seen because of the enduring crisis.

Furthermore, it is just as important to maintain the positive impacts of the crisis instead of simply revert back to normal and the previous situation. That concerns for example the extraordinary collaboration between the fire and rescue service and the medical emergency service in the French department Bas-Rhin, but also the cooperation between hospitals located in different European countries.

Besides, the communication of the crisis and the communication during the crisis on regional, national and European level must be improved, since the flow of information has not been clear and guaranteed for everyone. Especially the role of the European Union in such a crisis has to be better defined for the future; otherwise it is going to make a powerless impression again.

In order to reduce or eliminate the existing barriers of the cross-border cooperation in the field of civil security even further, it is worthwhile to continue and intensify the French-German-Swiss project work in the Upper Rhine region. Above all the financial instrument INTERREG of the European Union is made for that. It promotes the maximum harmonisation of French and German fire brigades, which in turn eases the collaboration between the two countries.

Last but not least, creating facts through scientific research is crucial to refute conspiracy theories and to legitimate the measures taken by the governments against the pandemic.

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