



Initiativkreis Metropolitane  
Grenzregionen

# Cross-Border Metropolitan Regions

## // Abstract

of the final report for the Federal Government's demonstration project of spatial planning (MORO) "Supra-regional partnerships in cross-border functional regions"



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# 1. Position “cross-border metropolitan regions” now!

In recent decades, many cross-border regions have been able to develop into promising European residential and economic areas – despite their peripheral location, which is problematic from a national perspective. The contributing factors include **40 years of cross-border cooperation**, with a large number of successful projects which have furthered the integration process within Europe in a manner that is tangible for the population.

When the spatial development models passed for Germany by the 2006 Federal Spatial Planning Conference of Ministers were elaborated, the border areas had not been taken into account to an adequate degree. And this despite the fact that metropolitan cross-border regions, in particular, can easily measure up to the two key premises of the “Growth and Innovation” model of the Federal Government and the Länder. On the one hand there is the expectation that **regions with a “motor function” for economic, societal and social development** will emerge and/or gain in importance in the wake of globalisation and internationalisation. This certainly includes Germany’s acknowledged metropolitan regions, but other “motor regions” can also be identified. On the other hand, the model is based

on the assumption that the mobilisation of regional development potentials can be improved by networking the sub-regions more intensively. This not only applies to a closer cooperation between the cities and their environs, but also to relationships on a larger scale – between cities in polycentric regions, or between the city and the federal state/city and countryside (Stadt und Land). The discourse abounds in pithy formulations such as alliance for growth, community of joint liability, or **partnership**.

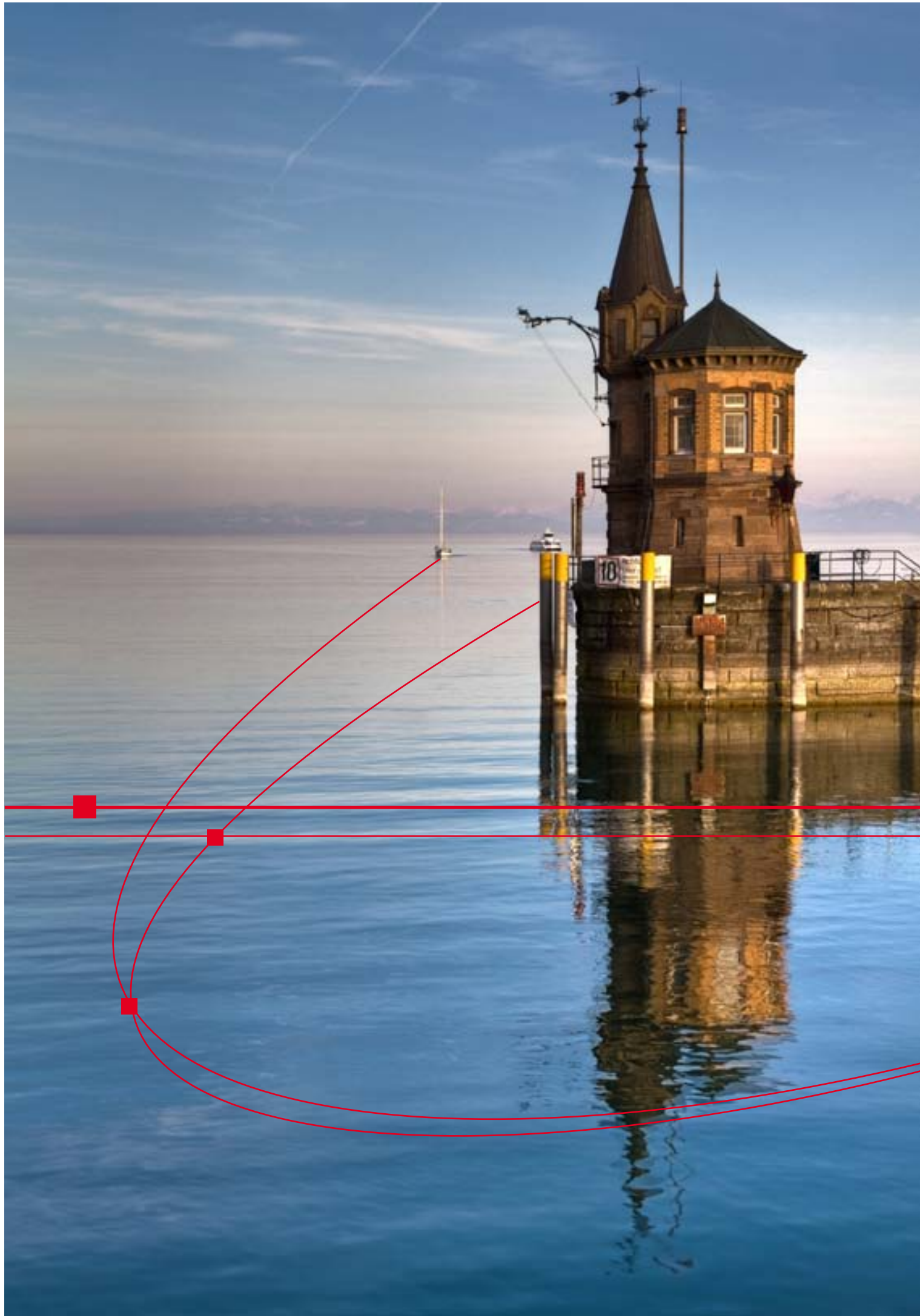
Both aspects – motor regions and large-scale cooperation patterns – are very clearly applicable to metropolitan cross-border regions.

The actors are highly aware of the changed role and the potentials of their regions. They demand that this also be recognised within a national and European context. A first step in this direction consists of appropriately anchoring the cross-border metropolitan regions in German spatial planning models, soon to be updated. In addition to this, an effort should be made to ensure that

**metropolitan border regions receive the corresponding attention** in European structural policy.

The “Supra-regional partnerships in cross-border functional regions“ **Demonstration Project of Spatial Planning** (MORO) was launched in 2008 and provided an opportunity for positioning border areas in the interaction of European urban and metropolitan regions, while demonstrating the functioning of large-scale partnerships in a cross-border context at the same time. The initiative was launched by the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development (BMVBS) and the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR) in cooperation with Regio Aachen, the regional associations Mittlerer Oberrhein, Südlicher Oberrhein, Hochrhein-Bodensee and Bodensee-Oberschwaben, as well as the federal state of Saarland as the leading partner.





## 2. Cross-border regions today

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Nowhere else is the success of **European integration** as directly tangible in people's lives as in the cross-border regions. The European Community's four basic freedoms for perfecting Europe's internal market – the free movement of people, goods, capital and services – have opened up new possibilities, for example in selecting one's place of residence, educational facility or workplace location, or while shopping or spending one's leisure time. Another boon is the joint currency of the Euro-zone, which makes living in border regions much easier. A great variety of regional cross-border regulations and projects have meanwhile served to achieve many improvements in everyday life. As particularly diverse living, economic and cultural spaces, cross-border regions with metropolitan potentials can nowadays make specific contributions towards reinforcing European economic power and integration – they are a “Europe in miniature”.

The conditions for their further development are hence favourable, but it is also clear that cross-border regions face unique challenges. A “look inside” still reveals obstacles

**to successful cross-border regional development.**

These include, for example, the frequently lacking harmonisation of national laws and regulations, differences in the respective planning and administrative systems on both sides of the border, or the lack of tools in the area of conflict management. Language barriers and cultural differences continue to exist and hamper cooperation. Although the population avails itself of the varied offers which

the border regions provide in all areas, the networking and complementarity often leave much to be desired: duplicate structures in national sub-regions impede the bundling of resources.

**Cross-border integration is therefore a permanent task, but one which offers a wide range of opportunities:**

the interplay of national sub-regions and systems harbours great potential for innovative ways. The upshot for the initiative's project partnership being that, besides positioning the cross-border regions “towards the outside”, an examination of the locational advantages and disadvantages within the regions themselves also needs to be aimed for.

**In future, too, the actors in the border regions will need assistance if they are to gain room for manoeuvre for continued successful repositioning.**

Cross-border cooperation experienced a tremendous upswing with the introduction of the European joint initiative INTERREG in the beginning of the 1990s. Ever since then many projects and initiatives have served to advance cross-border spatial development. Border regions have been recognised as particularly relevant spaces for European integration and development, initially by the joint initiative INTERREG, and now, in the current funding period, with the structural Objective 3 of “European territorial cooperation”. This position needs to be consolidated in view of the next funding period from 2014 to 2020, whilst simultaneously drumming up support on a national level.







### 3. Shared self-conceptions in metropolitan cross-border regions

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A shared self-conception is required to consolidate the internal and external perception of large-scale European border regions and render them recognisable

as a „new“ kind of space on a national and European level.

The ultimate aim lies in demonstrating the unique features, qualities and potentials of these areas, as well as in consolidating existing cooperation structures, and deepening regionalisation processes on this basis.

The project partners defined

four central attributes

according to which metropolitan border regions are characterised by

1. cross-border functional interrelations and commonalities,
2. existing institutional agreements for large-scale cross-border cooperation,
3. large-scale regionalisation processes and a polycentric spatial structure, as well as
4. metropolitan locational factors and potentials for growth and innovation.

An important indicator for

cross-border interrelations

is provided by border-crossing commuters, for example. The regions involved in the demonstration project show the highest figures in Europe in this respect. This highlights the increasing integration of labour markets in cross-border regions. While many day-to-day interrelationships and connections are focused on the regions near the border,

large-scale regionalisation processes

come to the forefront in cross-border metropolitan regions – comparable to the German metropolitan regions – in order to be able to emerge as competitive spaces for cooperation and action on a European or even global scale.

Unlike (most) German metropolitan regions, cross-border metropolitan regions are able to build

on institutions of cross-border cooperation which have been established for decades.

The establishment of these institutions was mostly occasioned by issues which were regionally specific and in need of a cross-border solution. The cooperation structures were steadily developed and continuously adjusted to new challenges, further reforms are being planned.

A structural analysis of the regions involved reveals their

polycentric character,

meaning that they do not consist of a single urban centre, but rather of many small and medium-sized centres, as well as their interactional areas, which frequently stretch across national borders. Some of them are already organised in cross-border networks of cities. The urban centres and economic hubs of the cross-border regions are generally distributed across the various national sub-regions, which certainly makes joining forces more difficult.

But the border regions can absolutely compare with the interior regions where their

metropolitan locational functions

are concerned. This is confirmed by the new BBSR study “Metropolitan Regions in Europe” (BBSR 2010). The “Metroborder” ESPON-project carried out by Luxembourg University also identified “cross-border polycentric metropolitan regions (CBPMR)” and provided new data regarding this type of space within Europe (ESPON/University of Luxembourg 2010).





## 4. Europe in miniature – optimising cross-border governance

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**Cross-border cooperation on a European level can generally be expected to markedly gain in importance**

over the coming years. The concept of cross-border metropolitan regions can contribute to the alignment of long-standing cooperation structures with new joint objectives, and to their optimisation in the sense of regional governance. Important “adjusting screws” for this were highlighted as part of the demonstration project.

One of these “adjusting screws” is thought to concern the persistent tendency to pursue sectoral policies and realise individual projects within the cross-border cooperation. Although strategic concepts already exist in all the regions taking part in the demonstration project, their binding effect remains small. What is also frequently lacking is a reliable data basis for the entire border region. Future programmes and projects are meant to address potentials and obstacles in a more targeted manner, in order to put scarce resources to a more efficient use. A stronger strategic aspect is indispensable for this, with the objective of

**linking aims and projects more effectively as part of an integrated development policy for cross-border regions, and of mutually coordinating them.**

The so-called multi-level problem is particularly pronounced in cross-border regions. Cooperation partners facing each other in cross-border panels and/or institutions are often from various institutional levels, with correspondingly varied responsibilities and discretionary competence, from municipal representatives to those of the state. The functions of the facilities and panels on the various levels of activity are furthermore in most cases not clearly distinguished from one another. There is a need to clarify in future which task should be meaningfully anchored on which level, and what an effective interweaving of these levels may look like. In this process the overarching level would be tasked with providing the framework conditions for

**large-scale cooperation in the sense of metropolitan cross-border regions.**

Cross-border cooperation in panels and organisations, but also in informal networks and projects, has so far been shaped by public-sector players, often from the government. But opening up existing cooperation structures to actors from the economy, science and civil society alone will not do. Instead, the cooperation of potential

**new partners**

and “carers” able to effectively support the objectives of integrated cross-border regional development needs to be actively motivated. This requires attractive cooperation offers just as much as a more flexible design of the cross-border cooperation’s spatial bearings. The latter shall in future be more strongly aligned with real and/or potential-related interactions, and less with formal administrative borders. The trend towards a

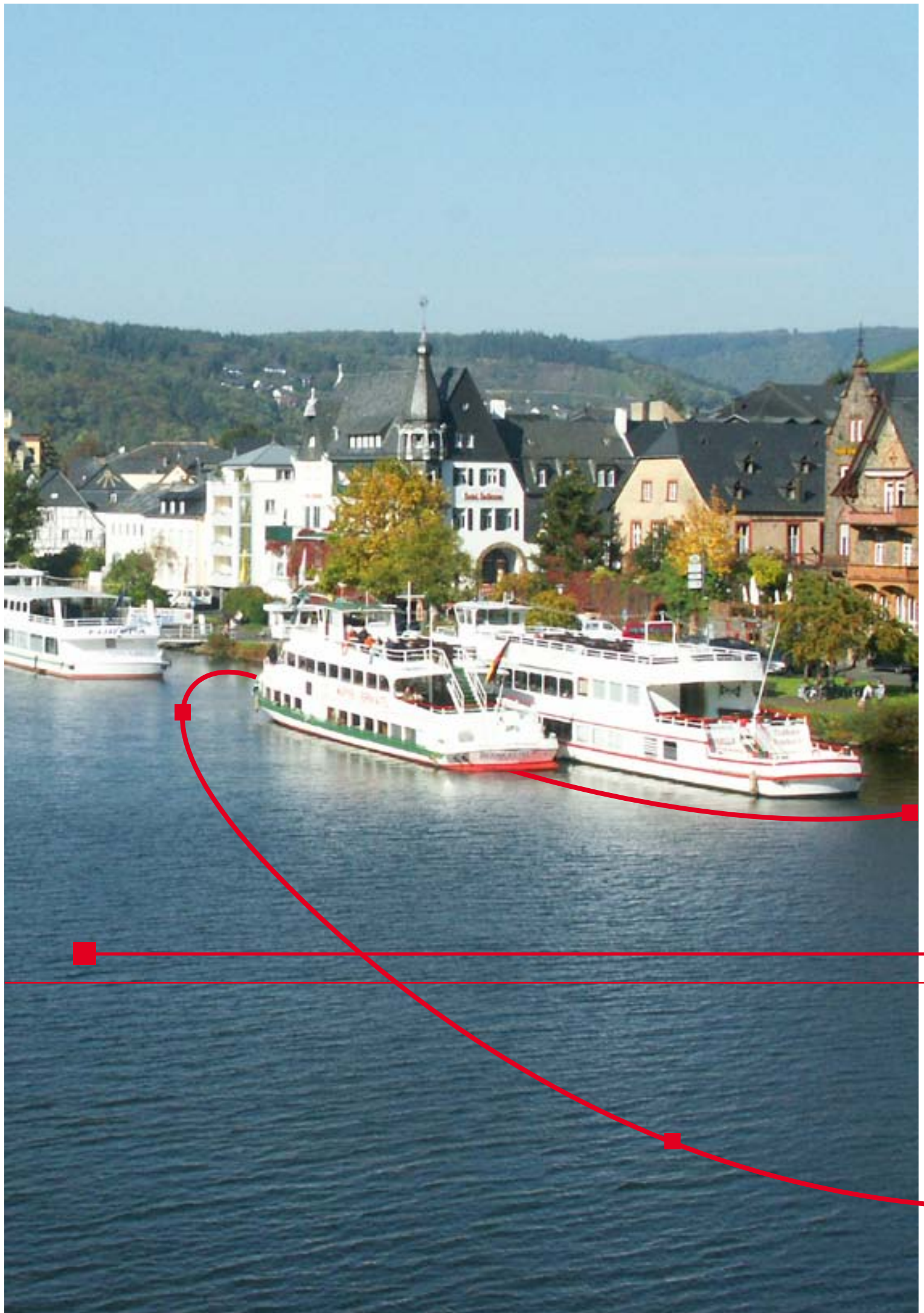
**“variable geometry”,**

which has already prevailed within a national context on a regional level in many cases, is still only in the gestation stage in cross-border terms.

Cross-border institutions are an important factor; in the past they simultaneously symbolised the willingness of the involved partners to cooperate. But although they have been undergoing development for decades, their degree of organisation is rather weak. Yet the need for formalised institutions and processes becomes particularly great wherever conflict-laden issues need to be resolved. Existing institutions should be developed within their specific cooperation culture in imitation of the organisational, financial, personnel and, most of all, competence-related facilities of metropolitan regions such as Stuttgart, Rhein-Neckar or Hanover. At the moment, a

**tendency towards institutional consolidation and initiatives for creating more powerful organisational structures**

on the level of large-scale cooperation structures are observable in all the regions involved, strengthening the metropolitan cross-border areas as engines for European spatial development and integration.





## 5. Strengthening strengths – removing obstacles: strategic and operative fields of action

Thanks to their variety and potential as well as their know-how in transnational cooperation, cross-border metropolitan regions feature unique opportunities for spatial development, but also find themselves confronted by locational disadvantages.

The project partnership has identified **important strategic and operative fields of action**

designed to boost the motor function of these regions within Europe.

Strategic fields of action relate to concepts and processes which improve the foundation for territorial cooperation. The

**development of shared images and perspectives**

is particularly decisive in view of the large scale of metropolitan border regions, whose “operative figures” far exceed the population’s day-to-day purviews. Most of all for cross-border region’s residents, vivid images and motifs can provide a heretofore “abstract” regional scenery with a (new) spatial perspective and serve to promote identity. But these images also have an impact on the everyday practice of regional actors: they can visualise possible development scenarios, spatial visions or cross-border region models, and thereby create a framework for integrative planning, technical planning or concrete projects. This provides the actors involved with a shared stance and the cross-border region with future prospects, both of which tie the regional players to agreed objectives whilst simultaneously promoting internal perception.

One pronounced deficit in all the regions taking part in the demonstration project, and one they probably have in common with most cross-border regions, is the lack of comparable and comprehensively available data.

**Developing cross-border information management**

and/or regional monitoring is hence of particular strategic importance. The foundations for collecting, evaluating and applying geoinformation for municipal and regional users are laid with the help of cross-border geoinformation portals.

One term frequently heard in cross-border cooperation is “fair weather politics”, where difficult problems tend to be neglected. Although conflicts are also an everyday occurrence at the borders between the Länder within Germany, they can be more easily resolved there, thanks to the absence of language barriers or serious differences in the legal and planning system, and because formalised procedures anchored in planning law bindingly provide for involvement of the neighbours. If metropolitan border regions are to take effect as engines for development, any (planning) culture developed and implemented in planning routines needs to also allow

**critical spatial development topics** to be addressed.

Operative fields of action relate to definitive questions and tasks regarding the internal and external functioning of the cross-border region. The internal functioning can be optimised by

**improving the respective hard and soft locational factors and interlinking them within the border region.**

The starting points here consist of promoting cross-border mobility, linking infrastructures and offers more effectively, or specifying the division of labour and functions between the sub-regions. Another potential for action is provided by the design of joint border-crossing economic areas and the development of high school cooperation programmes. The external functioning, and hence successful positioning in the international locational competition, is conditional to the forces being joined and the specific strengths of the cross-border regions being promoted in a targeted manner (strengthening strengths).

Strategic and operative fields of action offer starting points for

**key projects** which breathe life into the metropolitan cross-border region concept.





## 6. Making more targeted use of European structural policy

It took a long time for European structural policy to focus on the cross-border regions.

**The upturn in cross-border cooperation began with the INTERREG joint initiative.**

The cross-border regions have benefited from the possibility of realising co-financed, cross-border projects to this day. The success of INTERREG is undisputed and shapes the cooperation in these regions. With the fourth funding period (2007-2013) the joint INTERREG initiative has been integrated in the mainstream funding of European structural policy as a new Objective 3 of “European territorial cooperation“. This has served to markedly upgrade the territorial dimension within the European integration process, with the former gaining in importance as a result.

The INTERREG programme has undergone continuous further development based on the experiences gathered in the most recent funding period's programme and project work. Now, near the end of the fourth funding period, initial considerations regarding the design of the fifth funding period from 2013 to 2020 are emerging. There are promising starting points for an optimal application and improvement in the efficiency of cross-border cooperation, including a simplification of the programme, reinforcement of the strategic element in the project's generation, promoting the variety of players, higher budgeting, and linking INTERREG with the programme for Objective 2.

an independent spatial category within Europe, and turning the latter into a central topic of European cohesion policy.

Especially given the implementation of the “Europe 2020” strategy within a context of growth policy targets, it hence appears essential to point out the special and not yet fully used potentials of cross-border metropolitan regions for growth and innovation in Europe.

**The intensification of (large-scale) cross-border cooperation,**

which is required for making meaningful use of the potentials of these regions, will not come about automatically, however. It

**requires active support on all levels, so that border regions can become model regions for a Europe of 2020.**

To achieve this end, the interlinkage of funding programmes on a European and national level with the strategies and key projects of the metropolitan regions needs to be improved.

**In the upcoming redesign of European cohesion policy, greater attention is also to be paid to territorial cohesion, as well as to the regional and urban dimension, as a matter of principle.**

This is an excellent starting point for strengthening the position of cross-border metropolitan regions as





## 7. Acting as a network: safeguarding interests jointly

Creating a long-term network has always been the project partnership's aim, ever since the cooperation began on the "Supra-regional partnerships in cross-border functional regions" demonstration project.

**The interests of cross-border metropolitan regions can be represented more effectively as a team.**

The cross-border metropolitan regions initiative (Initiativkreis Metropolitane Grenzregionen, IMeG) was established in Berlin on March 17, 2011, as part of the demonstration project's final event. The IMeG's two-year initial phase is also assisted via the federal MORO initiative.

The IMeG is open to institutions from border regions with comparable spatial and functional structures. It addresses actors in regional planning in particular, thus pursuing a clearly territorial perspective; focussing on the regional planning policy and regional development approach. Instead of creating a new cross-border institution, the initiative aims to assist existing cooperation structures in further developing the territorial cooperation.

**In order to ensure a successful positioning and cooperation of cross-border metropolitan regions within Germany and Europe, the initiative aims to find further partners and actively support the work of cross-border institutions and European networks.**

Internally, the IMeG aims to boost the specific development opportunities of the cross-border regions as a "learning network", and to clear obstacles in cross-border spatial planning. This requires:

- that overarching strategies aiming at functional integration and large-scale partnerships be combined with key projects; to this end cooperation structures and the regional governance are to be developed further
- that better use be made of European and national funding policies, that they be synchronised, and that an effort be made to achieve greater coordination between neighbouring states where cross-border spatial planning and development are concerned
- the concept of "strong cross-border regions as drivers of development" be further developed

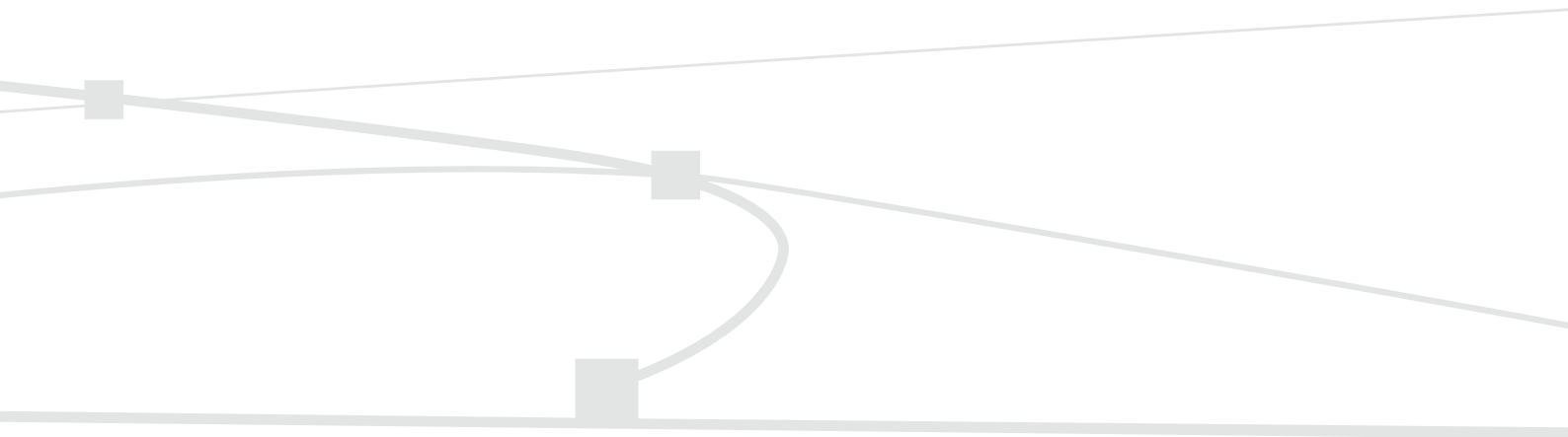
These "internal" objectives are augmented by others oriented externally. Here the aim must lie in adopting a position in order to

- anchor strong cross-border regions as "motor" areas in spatial planning models and thus develop a coordinated policy of the federal and Länder governments for these cross-border regions
- position cross-border metropolitan regions within the European spatial development discourse
- connect the initiative to networks in Europe





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