

TEIN4citizens – Engaging civil society in cross-border regions for the future of Europe

Mobility, Environment, Culture, Identity & Multilingualism - Borderless in Europe?

Together with the Eurodistrict Strasbourg-Ortenau, the Euro-Institut organised eight online workshops and a panel discussion on the German-French border from 13-22 April 2021, in which more than 130 citizens discussed their ideas and wishes for the future of Europe together with representatives of local politics, the EU institutions and other border regions. The focus was on four topics: Mobility, Environment, Culture, Multilingualism & Identity. Expectations were formulated not only for the political decision-makers in the Upper Rhine region, but also for those at the European level.

In the context of the Coronavirus pandemic, which affected people in the Upper Rhine region, especially due to border closures in the spring of 2020, many participants expressed the wish for increased cross-border and European cooperation and the hope that the proposals developed during the event would give new impetus to cross-border projects in order to realise a Europe of open borders.

1. The future of local cross-border cooperation

As in other border regions, the everyday life of many citizens in the Upper Rhine region has a cross-border dimension. As this is not always possible without obstacles and restrictions, the participants formulated a number of ideas and expectations to promote cross-border cooperation in the Upper Rhine.

Language or **multilingualism** shapes one's own identity and is the key to communication in a region which is interconnected across borders. The participants agreed that language learning must be promoted from an early age, also outside of school, for example through civil society initiatives that give citizens, schools and cities the opportunity to meet up and build networks. Furthermore, the training of teachers and the recognition of their university degrees is of crucial importance in order to promote the mobility of staff to neighbouring countries and thus offer pupils the opportunity to be taught by native speakers.

„I wish we would learn other languages from an early age, i.e. through a lot of exchanges.“

Cross-border **culture** thrives on a diverse cultural offer for all ages, so that better networking of the actors on both sides of a border is essential in this area. In order to facilitate access to this offer, information about it must be improved, e.g. through a cross-border cultural calendar.

Mobility promotes the growing together of a cross-border region. Thus, one of the priorities expressed by the citizens was the improvement of cross-border public transport services. These services should not only include improved frequency, but also a common tariff system to make it easier to buy tickets. This could be achieved, among other things, through a cross-border mobility app. Emphasis was also placed on the further development of alternative transport options, especially cycling and the use of waterways.

Environmental protection was recognised by the participants as a cross-border field of action, with expectations focussing in particular on improving air quality and the cross-border recognition of

environmental badges. The citizens also hoped for assistance from the local level in the area of groundwater protection and environmentally friendly energy production.

2. Ideas and proposals for the future of Europe

The citizens of the border region often experience the effects of the construction and increasing integration of the European Union very concretely in their daily lives. The opportunities, but also the resulting challenges, are particularly perceived here. Therefore, ideas and opinions for the future development of Europe were also discussed in the online workshops.

In order to fully implement the principle of **multilingualism**, which is considered to be at the heart of European identity, the participants called for the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages to be fully applied in all EU member states. In addition, the idea of a European and multilingual media platform that would make it possible to watch films and series in the original language and subtitles in all other European languages was discussed several times. Exchange and meetings also play an important role in promoting multilingualism; one idea would be to introduce a programme similar to Erasmus+ for all ages and professional groups.

“There is a lot of European funding but sometimes it is not known or accessible. The funding programmes should be made more visible and accessible so that they are adapted to the associations.”

Access to **cultural events** also plays an important role at the European level in order to promote a common European cultural heritage. In order to expand this offer, secure funding is crucial. The participants demanded that the European level not only facilitate access to funding, especially for smaller institutions, but also provide more support to strengthen the

engagement of artists, actors and other cultural professionals in joint projects.

In order to guarantee the free movement of persons as one of the four EU fundamental freedoms and unhindered **mobility**, increased coordination between the EU member states will be necessary in the future, especially in pandemic situations. But fast, efficient, user-friendly and inexpensive transport connections are also important outside of times of crises. According to the participants, this could be achieved, among other things, by introducing the ECBM into European law. The connection of rural areas to this infrastructure and common ticket systems were also mentioned as important topics.

Ideas discussed by the participants in the field of **environment**, aimed at a European harmonisation and tightening of standards with regard to air and water pollution. A healthy environment should contribute to the well-being of all citizens in the EU, so the desire for less plastic packaging and the ban on the use of glyphosate were also topics of discussion.

„We need a common European vision of the planet, whether it's nuclear power, polluting industries or coal-fired power plants.”

Annexe: Programme of the online events Strasbourg/Kehl 13.– 22.04.2021

13.04.2021	<p>Multilingualism and identity</p> <p><i>What role does multilingualism play in regional, national and European identity(ies)? How should multilingualism be promoted?</i></p> <p>Marta Kmet, Pedagogical Centre for Polish Minority Schools in Český Těšín, Czech Republic Jordi Cires, University of Girona, Spain</p>
14.04.2021	<p>Culture</p> <p><i>What constitutes cross-border and European culture? How can cultural projects and cultural actors be supported?</i></p> <p>Virginie Soulier, Universität Perpignan, France Marek Olszewski, Olza association, Poland & Hynek Böhm, Euroschola, Czech Republic</p>
15.04.2021	<p>Mobility</p> <p><i>How can cross-border mobility oriented towards the needs of users be strengthened? How should sustainable mobility be promoted?</i></p> <p>Peter Ulrich, Leibniz-Institut für Raumbezogene Sozialforschung, Germany Martine Camiade, Institut for Catalan Studies, Spain</p>
16.04.2021	<p>Environment</p> <p><i>How should the major environmental issues in border regions be addressed? How should environmental protection be thought through further across borders and at European level?</i></p> <p>Loic Delhuyenne, Eurométropole de Lille, France Martin Unfried, ITEM/Maastricht University, Netherlands</p>
22.04.2021	<p>Panel discussion</p> <p><i>Presentation and discussion of the online workshop results</i></p> <p>Anne Sander, European Parliament, Straßburg Nathalie Verschelde, European Commission, DG Regional and Urban Policy, Brussels Frank Scherer, Landrat Ortenaukreis and President of the ED Strasbourg-Ortenau Jeanne Barseghian, Mayor of the city of Straßburg and Vice-President of the Eurodistrikt Strasbourg-Ortenau Joshua Frey, Member of the regional parliament of Baden-Württemberg, Vice-President of the Oberrheinrats and the Euro-Institut Anthony Soares, Centre for Cross Border Studies, Northern Ireland Thomas Richomme, Student, Sciences Po Straßburg</p>

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