



Interreg

Euregio Meuse-Rhine



EUROPEAN UNION
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CROSSQUALITY

HANDBOOK

Analyzing the Quality of
Cross-Border Cooperation

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The partners – Institute for Transnational and Euregional cross border Cooperation and Mobility at Maastricht University, the RWTH Aachen, the University of Liège, the University of Hasselt and the EGTC Euregio Meuse-Rhine – say thank you!



Maastricht University

Institute for Transnational and Euregional cross border cooperation and Mobility / ITEM



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBC	Cross-Border Cooperation
EGTC	Euregio Meuse-Rhine, our project partner
(Interreg) EMR	(Interreg) Euregio Meuse-Rhine
EU	European Union
Euregio/Euroregion	Collective term for institutionalized cross-border cooperation initiatives throughout Europe
Interreg EMR	Programme Interreg Euregio Meuse Rhine (2014-220)
TIA	Territorial Impact Assessment

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INTRODUCTION

This document provides practical guidance on how to assess the quality of cross-border cooperation (CBC). The methodology was developed as part of the Interreg project 'Crossquality' within the Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine (EMR) programme. The focus is to determine whether the impact of a specific INTERREG programme on the quality of CBC in different sectors can adequately be assessed. Our approach therefore aims at facilitating the ex-post evaluation of Interreg programmes in particular with respect to CBC qualities. This handbook has been compiled for practitioners who want to gain deeper insights into CBC achievements in Interreg EMR or other Interreg territories. It should be seen as a supplement to existing methods for conducting programme evaluations, which until now have not focused on CBC qualities and their impacts hitherto. The methodology suggested here can significantly broaden the scope of future programme evaluations.

This handbook serves to instruct users on how to conduct a CBC assessment, introducing a methodology that combines the different instruments such as expert interviews, expert workshops, a survey and the analysis of indicators and sectors. The handbook also discusses practical questions, such as how to find adequate experts, how to conduct workshops according to specific guidelines, and it provides hints for the analysis, conclusions and presentation of results.

Additional to the handbook, a 'Research Report' explains in more detail the scientific rationale of the methodology. Further, the results of actually applying the methodology to Interreg funded projects in the Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine programme area will be published as a 'Final Report: Results of the Impact Assessment'. These reports are therefore complementary to this handbook.

The Crossquality project has produced answers to the following questions:

- How can we measure the quality of cross-border networks and institutions, and can we trace links between Interreg projects and the quality of cooperation of public sector bodies, companies or citizens in our cross-border region?
- Do cross-border programmes and projects foster the development of effective transnational cooperation networks?
- Does Interreg funding produce valuable and sustainable networks for expedient collaboration within the programme area of Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine?

Accordingly, the 'Crossquality' project has developed and applied a methodology for an assessment of the quality of CBC of the Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine at the end of the 2014-2020 period. A major project objective was intended to create and test a methodology that can be applied also to future Interreg funding periods and to other programmes. The approach

should help monitor whether and how progress detected in CBC can be further stimulated. The methodology shall therefore be used to trace and evidence CBC improvements also in the future. In this sense, this handbook is a practical tool for practitioners (for instance, a programme secretariat) who want to more thoroughly explore and better understand the quality of CBC in their programme area.

2 RELEVANCE: CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

What is meant by CBC in the European Union (EU)? Comparing the different Interreg programmes, it can be noticed that between them, the aims and objectives of CBC vary (Medeiros 2018). For many years, the stimulation of cross-border economic activities and cooperation in the field of infrastructure has been prioritized. Mitigating major border constraints was not the main objective of EU CBC programmes right from the start, but came up only during Interreg IV (Medeiros 2018). The same holds for supporting CBC with respect to qualities of cooperation and collaboration. Only the new programming period (Interreg VI 2021-2-27) has shown a special focus on cross-border governance in order to support stable coordination structures. Accordingly, the search for an appropriate assessment methodology is based on the assumption that improving the quality of CBC between different stakeholders in an Interreg programme area, forms both an essential objective of Interreg

programmes and a crucial precondition for better cross-border cohesion. Against this backdrop, the Crossquality project has engaged in developing a methodology that leads to a more precise and differentiated measurement of major CBC qualities, addressing various aspects of cooperation.

The methodology rests on two conceptual pillars:

- 1) the so-called “**coordination scale**”, which predominantly measures ‘hard’ aspects of CBC (see Metcalfe 1996); and
- 2) an analysis of ‘soft’ aspects. The assessment questions always refer to at least one of these pillars. The aim of the ‘pilot’ Interreg assessment for the EMR was to capture CBC qualities within certain funded projects, and thus to obtain a broader picture of cooperation characteristics in different sectors, and finally for evaluating the CBC effects of the Interreg EMR programme

as a whole. The following sections present the different aspects of CBC used as the basis for the work of Les Metcalfe who developed a coordination scale for EU policy coordination. “Each step in the scale represents a set of linkages between organizations in a policy network” (Metcalfe 1993:20). Metcalfe’s original scale was adapted for our purpose. The following aspects of CBC pragmatically suggest a list of research topics that structure the different steps in the research process (individual interviews, workshops/focus groups and a survey). The crucial issue is how experts who have dealt or currently deal with Interreg projects assess the quality of supported CBC in the following areas:

1	Cross-border exchange of information
2	Cross-border consultation amongst partners
3	Avoiding conflicts
4	Formulating joint priorities/objectives
5	Possibility to establish and finance a joint coordination body by the partners
6	Possibility to finance future cross-border services by the partners

In addition to these aspects derived from the coordination scale, we added further dimensions that derive more from network theory (like trust) or are specific to CBC (coping with different languages and cultural attitudes; see the Research Report for details). These additional ‘soft’ indicators that matter for CBC measurement are:

7	Cross-border personal contacts
8	Level of trust between actors
9	Coping with different languages
10	Coping with cultural attitudes
11	Development of trust within the project network

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METHODOLOGY: EXPERT INTERVIEWS, WORKSHOPS, SURVEY

As already mentioned, the purpose of the Crossquality project was to develop a methodology that can be used more widely to assess CBC qualities in various Interreg programmes. Hence, the applicability and replicability of the methodology is kept simple, hence not too cumbersome. The approach consists of expert interviews, expert workshops, and a written survey and is structured by the following steps:

- 1** **Preparation:** Analysis of the Interreg Programme with respect to sectors, networks and experts
- 2** **Application:** conducting expert interviews, expert workshops and a survey
- 3** **Final report:** analysing the results and writing the report

The first step is to analyse the specific Interreg programme and define sectors where it can be assumed that there are existing CBC networks resulting from previous or current Interreg projects. Practitioners (hereinafter referred to as 'experts') who engage in an Interreg project in a thematic sector (for instance public transport or the health sector) have specific, often region related experience through contributing to one or more projects and existing networks in the sector. Clustering different sectors in the assessment process allows for comparing qualities of CBC between sectors, for revealing features that especially foster or hinder cooperation, and for identifying the conditions that support establishing more stable cross-border networks. Individual expert interviews offer the best way to initially analyse specific sector settings. These interviews provide first insights into individual experiences and the kinds of experts involved in Interreg projects who can assess different aspects of CBC.

Box 1

WHAT IS AN EXPERT?

The only type of experts who can adequately judge on CBC qualities in a specific sector are practitioners who currently deal with cross-border projects or have dealt with projects in the past. For the assessment approach, a combination of both suits best.

There are two major types of experts:

**A Lead or Project Partner
(anybody now participating in
at least one Interreg project or
who has done so in the past)**

**An overall 'expert' on CBC more
generally, who also has experience
in cooperation outside of the
framework of Interreg projects**

Both actor types can be part of important sector networks. When experts are not Lead Partners or Project Partners in current projects, they can probably refer to Interreg projects in the past. It is also important to include experts with a great deal of Interreg experience, on the one hand, and experts involved in just one or two projects under their belt, on the other hand, because their views on certain aspects differ: the former experts can draw on experience from past projects, have a wider understanding and a sort of 'Interreg memory'; experts with experiences on only one project rather focus on details that mark current projects and their administration, and they may be less prejudiced by previous experience. This is important with respect to the aim of the assessment: to focus on a single programming period.

The interviews also serve to prepare the second step involving an expert workshop with a group of experts in the same sector. In addition to the individual opinions, the expert workshop is conducive to the exchange of experience concerning different aspects of actually perceived and experienced CBC. As part of the discussions, the workshop participants are asked to individually score different aspects of cooperation. In summary, the scoring exercise and the lively debates in the workshop arena result in a set of overall scores for the specific sector. It tells how the experts, for instance, in the public transport sector assess the quality of information exchange, the way they consulted each other, or how future common activities could be planned as part of the cooperation in the Interreg project. Consequently, for each sector a lively debate is instigated on how effective information has been exchanged across the border in a certain project, and whether interaction continued after the programme period terminates.

Lastly, the third tool, an online survey addressed to a broader group of experts with experience in Interreg cooperation, can confirm whether the sample of individually interviewed experts and expert workshops have produced insights that represent assessments of a larger group. Depending on the resources available to carry out this methodology, which consists of three data-collection methods, it is possible to only use one for a sort of quick scan. If time and resources are limited, we recommend only organising for instance the expert workshops. Experience from the pilot application was that the expert workshops often stimulated very differentiated debate on various CBC qualities and characteristics, leading to a good understanding of the particular situation in one policy sector.

Box 2

EXPERIENCES FROM THE PILOT APPLICATION

During the pilot application, we first conducted semi-structured **individual interviews** with both types of experts (via video meeting) to validate our questions and check experts' expertise. This step has helped confirm that our workshop questions go into the right direction, and additional questions were obtained to complete our methodological approach. Our individual interaction with experts has also bolstered our understanding of how Interreg projects should be evaluated (what kind of question makes sense), and it provided deeper insight into projects and the sectoral cross-border network. We started with a small number of interviews with experts, to gain a better idea about which questions are appropriate for the expert workshops.

This required a relatively short interview guideline. We worked with a small list of open questions that seemed to be appropriate. Later on, questions used in the individual expert interviews were also integrated into the workshops to identify differing regional perspectives and stimulate debates on varying ideas.

To streamline the approach, we conducted a test workshop for validating our questions.

In total, a selection of five **sectoral expert workshops** were organised. Selection was necessary because some sectors don't comprise enough projects and experts for a workshop. Which sectors offer enough scope strongly depends on the specific situation in an Interreg programme area.

Since our methodology should be broadly applicable and practicable, we recommend concentrating only on the most important sectors. The number of workshops that can possibly be realized always depends on positive responses from invited experts: we cannot recommend holding a workshop with a set of experts who represent too few regions and/or projects.

The third instrument, the online survey, is a mainly quantitative, standardized research method designed to empirically capture statistically valid input from a larger number of actors. This questionnaire-based approach is useful for systematically capturing patterns of CBC including the sectors covered by interview or workshop participants. For some parts of the questionnaire, a scale rating is requested; other more qualitative questions offer scope for rating as well. Open text answers may be less practicable for large numbers of respondents.

1	Individual interviews
2	Sectoral expert workshops
3	Online survey

Box 3

DATA PROTECTION & PRIVACY

The methodology is concentrated at gathering valuable qualitative and quantitative data. In this respect it is important to be aware of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and data protection and privacy in general. The GDPR is applicable when data is processed (meaning collected to store, viewed to use) in a way that an individual can be identified in a direct or indirect way (personal data). In general, the GDPR obliges to have a good reason and a valid legal base to process personal data, to process anonymized data, or to process pseudonymised data, where the latter is not fully anonymised, but still personally – indirectly – relatable data. It is important, before starting to gather, store and analyse data to reflect deeply on the necessities with regard to privacy regulations. For this, it is important to create a Data Management Plan (DMP) before starting to gather data. In a DMP, a plan is made for processing the data in all its aspects and taking into account what is necessary to comply with privacy regulations. Good reasons and legal bases are, amongst others: general interest or informed consent. It is highly recommended to make use of Informed Consent forms when gathering, storing and analysing data in the course of this assessment methodology. To comply with the GDPR it is important to discuss the approach and storage

3.1. SELECTION OF SECTORS

For implementing the assessment approach, the range of Interreg projects of a specific Interreg programme has to be divided into distinctly demarcated sectors. In our pilot case, the officially existing categorization did not fit with our research goals, as shaped mainly according to political programme objectives and did not necessarily reflect thematic sectors for which specific networks and CBC qualities may be detected (described in detail in the Research Report).



The cross border public transport in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine is managed by a collaboration of several organisations. Perfect thus for finding experts for our workshops.

Our own categorization of sectors is the following:

Education (focus on cooperation between schools/with neighbouring languages)

Labour market & businesses (cooperation between employment agencies and cross-border business networks)

Research & innovation (cooperation between companies and universities)

Police cooperation & crisis management

Health & well-being (part of EMRIC issues/euPrevent)

Culture & media, tourism

Nature conservation, urban & rural planning, environment

Energy transition & climate policy

Public transportation & cooperation between other public services

Social integration

How such a categorization is done depends also on the initial stakeholder analysis of the Interreg programme. As already mentioned, when applying the methodology, a major task is to screen the entire programme and sort different projects and stakeholders according to similar headings in order to find out whether the given sectors provide a suitable allocation.

Some sectors may contain fairly large numbers of founded projects, which makes further subdivision recommendable. Other sectors contain

just a few projects. Our experience tells that a set of 4 to 6 sector-related workshops should be organized, including experts from sectors that seem to matter most in terms of CBC development. This may apply to sectors that comprise many Interreg projects, but also to sectors with fewer projects that, nevertheless, seem to be most promising with regard to important CBC network formation. It is recommended to start with a 'test' workshop on a sector where stable CBC networks can probably be detected easily.

3.2. HOW TO FIND EXPERTS

A list of projects can be found on each individual Interreg website. Based on this information a table can be compiled that categorizes the projects. This helps selecting sector-related workshop groups that virtually speak the same 'sectoral language' relating, for instance, to the topics of health, public transportation etc. In any sector, different actors like universities, hospitals, firms and municipalities can be included. The regional antennas of the respective Interreg programme will certainly be of help when searching for the

right contacts, unless already explicitly listed on the partner, project or Interreg website. We recommend contacting experts directly personally, as this leads to better responses than using general email addresses of projects. If the contact data of responsible experts are publicly available in relation to the Interreg project (e.g. project or partner websites), one could assume that no data privacy problems should be encountered. From a data protection point of view, it is always helpful to ask for permission first.

3.3. HOW TO CONDUCT EXPERT INTERVIEWS

Expert interviews are interviews with Project or Lead Partners from Interreg projects in one of the regions involved (in the pilot case, this was the EMR). Alternatively, interviews can be carried out with other experienced actors in a cross-border context (see box 4 for a list of possible questions that can be sent to experts invited). Individual expert interviews are crucial for indicating whether contacted people can truly count as experts who may contribute significant knowledge to a workshop. These interviews

should therefore be conducted before the expert workshops. We recommend semi-structured interviews, because the expert's answer can also bring in additional ideas and aspects not covered by the interview guideline.

Each interview should start with a short introduction of the project. The questions depicted below could be used as open questions for qualitative interviews with experts. The expert interviews cover questions that will again be used

in the workshops and/or survey. The individual interviews, however, focus on the initial perception of the individual experts themselves, whereas the workshop raises more well thought out opinions after discussing different topics with colleagues. The core interview questions concern the general influence of Interreg projects and the programme on the quality of CBC and the stability of the network in a sector, including soft aspects, such as cultural understanding or trust, commonly considered as important network elements (Nuisl 2003). Dependent on the course of the conversation, the order of the questions and the focus can be slightly adjusted.

What is 'Quality of cooperation' in your opinion?

This is an initial general question to stimulate reflection on the focus of the assessment.

After having been involved in an Interreg project, do you feel closer to partners in the border region? Would you start more cross-border projects because of your experience?

The first question generally explores the expert's ideas about the quality of CBC in terms of a rough subjective impression. The second question digs a bit deeper, capturing the actor's perception and experiences of the impact of the expert's own participation in an Interreg project on CBC qualities overall. During the pilot application, these opening questions worked well for both interviews and workshops.

How did your cross-border awareness change? Are you more interested in cross-border projects in general after your Interreg experience?

Assumingly, the expressed interest in future cross-border projects can be taken as an indicator for the success of previous projects. Positive experiences in CBC probably entail a greater willingness to be involved also in future cross-border activities.

Did your network become more diverse, do you have more cross-border contacts or new contacts with other sectors or fields of work?

This question directly addresses the effects of the funded project on CBC and other networks. It may also serve as a starting question, as it helps familiarize the interviewed expert with the general assessment focus, too. The question refers to the extension of network relationships across borders and between different sectors, based on the assumption that an Interreg project should not only increase the intensity of project-internal contacts, but also the wider reach of a network. This question should therefore produce more detailed information on the network-related benefits instigated by the project.

How often do you share information, such as newsletters, brochures or informal emails, with the former partners now?

This question is the first one that refers directly to the cooperation scale (introduced above). The issue of information exchange can be regarded as a starting point for any higher form of CBC as well as a prerequisite for good network cooperation. For experts currently deal with or recently dealt with one particular Interreg project, the question captures relevant experience. The following questions take up further aspects of the cooperation scale.

How would you assess the quality of consultation between the project partners?

In this respect, consultation means searching for advice. This question reveals the experts' interest in their project partners' opinions and the perceived openness to learn from each other, which reaches beyond pure information exchange.

How would you assess the ability to solve conflicts between the project partners (if there were conflicts)?

Accordingly, conflict-solving capabilities should also be considered an essential element of successful CBC.

Were the project partners able to agree on common priorities, including with respect to cooperation after the project period? Was it even possible to agree on joint coordination financed by own means?

A question like this one is needed to address a core idea of Interreg cooperation per se: Project funding should instigate sustainable, ongoing CBC among partners who should, in the ideal case, be willing to continue financing future cooperation themselves.

The next set of suggested questions refers to 'soft' aspects of CBC (according to our rationale depicted above):

How did you handle different languages among the project partners? Did the project increase capabilities to communicate well?

How did you cope with different cultural attitudes of the project partners? Did the project help improve mutual understanding?

Did you develop good personal contacts with individual project partners as a result of the project or do you still share personal information with former project partners even after the end of a project?

A major motivation for the last question on certain network qualities is that effective business or other functional relationships between project partners often go hand in hand with good personal contacts. These linkages can therefore be regarded as an indicator for good network relations potentially bearing important business-related benefits.

What experience do you have with project administration, such as payments, specific reporting regulations and administrative burden?

If there are negative experiences: What can be improved in the administrative aspects of the Interreg programme, such as payment on time, regulations, reporting obligations and other forms of bureaucracy? How did they affect cooperation? These questions focus on experience with Interreg projects in general. We learned from the expert interviews that administrative aspects of Interreg projects can strongly influence on the partners' resources and their propensities to cooperate. It is therefore useful to find out in which regards administrative aspects affect CBC, and how this has changed over time.

Which important partners could tell us more about the quality of cross-border cooperation?

Taking up a snowballing approach, we suggest to pragmatically ask experts in the end to recommend other project colleagues who could be interviewed, too. Concomitantly, this question offers to learn more about the expert's broader network setting in the given sector.

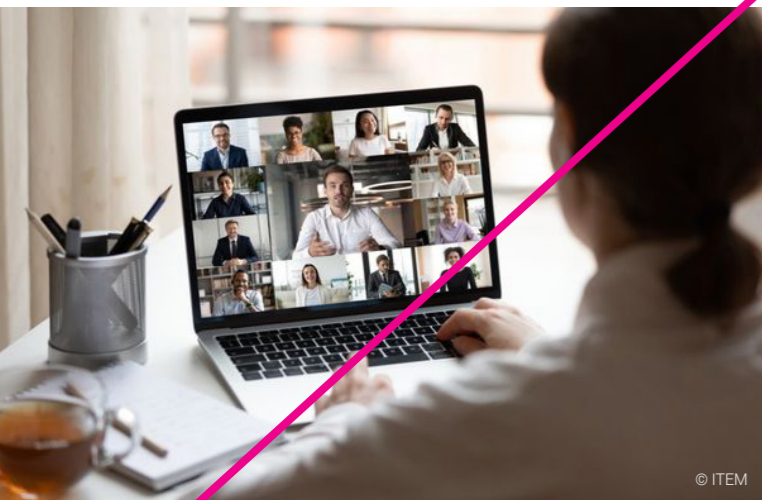
It goes without saying that the interview should be concluded by thanking the expert, explaining later steps of the assessment, inviting this person to an expert workshop (if appropriate), and offering to share the final results with him or her.

Box 4

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR EXPERT INTERVIEWS

- What experience do you have with cross-border cooperation within and outside of Interreg projects?
- What is 'Quality of cooperation' in your opinion?
- After having been involved in an Interreg project, do you feel closer to partners in the border region? Would you start more cross-border projects because of your experience?
- How did your cross-border awareness change? Are you more interested in cross-border projects in general after your Interreg experience?
- Did your network become more diverse, do you have more cross-border contacts or new contacts with other sectors or fields of work?
- How often do you share information, such as newsletters, brochures or informal emails, with the former partners now?
- How would you assess the quality of consultation between the project partners?
- How would you assess the ability to solve conflicts between the project partners (if there were conflicts)?
- Were the project partners able to agree on common priorities, including with respect to cooperation after the project period? Was it even possible to agree on joint coordination financed by own means?
- How did you handle different languages among the project partners? Did the project increase capabilities to communicate well?
- How did you cope with different cultural attitudes of the project partners? Did the project help improve mutual understanding?
- Did you develop good personal contacts with individual project partners as a result of the project or do you still share personal information with former project partners even after the end of a project?
- What experience do you have with project administration, such as payments, specific reporting regulations and administrative burden?
- Or: What can be improved in the administrative aspects of the Interreg programme, such as payment on time, regulations, reporting obligations and other forms of bureaucracy? How did they affect cooperation?
- Which important partners could tell us more about the quality of cross-border cooperation?

3.4. THE EXPERT WORKSHOPS



Screenshot taken in the pilot workshop on Mobility

As outlined above, the individual expert interviews are conceived as crucial preparation for the expert workshops. The interviews permit to better assess whether an expert represents a good and suitable choice for being included in the sector-specific workshop. Further, the information obtained in the interviews provides important

first impression of CBC characteristics prevailing in that sector. Moving beyond interview results, the expert workshops should produce more broadly valid, shared perceptions and reflections on different aspects of CBC, revealing a broader picture for assessment. The workshops collect judgements also using scores, which produces data that also allow for comparing workshop results for different sectors.

Depending on available resources for the CBC assessment exercise, we recommend organising 4 to 6 expert workshops that could be planned for the largest sectors of an Interreg programme. The number of participants per workshop may vary from 5 to 10. When working with smaller groups, more profound and in-depth debates can be achieved. The quality of the experts in terms of CBC experience matters more for participant selection than the number of participants.

Box 5

EXPERIENCES WITH WORKSHOP ORGANISATION

In our pilot-case it has proven practical to organise the workshops online and limiting the time to 1.5 to 2 hours, depending on the number of participants. Our experience was that experts are more inclined to join an online event. Otherwise, participation is obstructed by long travel times, as even shorter distances in a programme area still demand from the project actors to invest almost an entire working day for taking part in the workshop. We had positive experiences choosing Fridays.

For capturing the workshop results, one member of the assessment team must take notes and write a report. Digitally recording the workshop helps capture all relevant findings. However, when preparing the workshop, experts need to be informed about recording and data protection issues beforehand. When the workshop is recorded or an automatic transcript is produced, the participants may have to give their formal permission. It therefore is important to make use of Informed Consent forms, that participating respondent should fill in beforehand. It also supports the assessment process to send an overview of the main questions to the experts before the workshop event, as part of the official invitation mail (see box 6 for suggested questions).

During the pilot workshops, one can use online software program like "Mentimeter" for collecting different statements and aggregated scorings on different CBC topics (see e.g., under www.mentimeter.com). The Mentimeter platform (or similar platforms that fulfil the same purpose) offers helpful tools for visualizing the workshop outcomes by supporting the creation of presentations and their integration into a video conference program. During the workshop, participants can easily join with a code without registration (under www.menti.com). The workshop leader needs to briefly introduce the technical use of this platform. To facilitate the replication of the methodology, a proposed list of questions and a schedule format for the workshop is shown in box 6.

Organise the workshops online;

Duration of the workshop shouldn't exceed 1.5 to 2hrs;

Capture what is being said by recording the online workshop;

Offer your participants a visualization using tools like Mentimeter.

EXPERT WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

00:00 Introduction

Arrival of participants and solving of technical problems. Greeting, introductory words about the workshop and a short (!) introduction by the participants and researchers.

00:20 Open questions

Question 1: *Appetizer question What are the first things you think about when defining good cross-border cooperation?*

Question 2: *Resulting from the project: Did your contacts become more diverse, do you have more cross-border contacts, or even new contacts in other sectors or fields of work?*

00:30 Questions part I: Cooperation within your project (1)

First questions and presentation of the scale from 1 to 5 and the Mentimeter tool.

Scale from 1 to 5: very bad – bad – neither good nor bad – good – very good

Presentation of the Mentimeter tool.

Question 3: *How would you assess the quality of cooperation in your Interreg project?*

Scale from 1 to 5: very bad – bad – neither good nor bad – good – very good

- Cross-border information
- Cross-border consultation
- Avoiding conflicts

- Formulating joint priorities/objectives
- Possibility to establish and finance a joint coordination body by the partners
- Possibility to finance future cross-border services by the partners

Every expert rates each sub-item from 1 to 5 in Mentimeter. The scoring starts with the first sub-item. Afterwards, the moderator asks for verbal explanations of scores through a few phrases, before asking about the next sub-item. Around 3 minutes (average) are allowed to discuss each sub-item. More discussion may be required for individual sub-items.

01:00 Short break

01:10 Questions part I: Cooperation within your project (2)

Soft indicators of CBC

- Cross-border personal contacts
- Coping with different languages
- Coping with cultural attitudes
- Development of trust within the project network

Scale from 1 to 5: very bad – bad – neither good nor bad – good – very good

Questions Part II: Cooperation within Interreg as a whole

Question 4: *What is your assessment with respect to cross-border cooperation in your sector over time?*

Scale from 1 to 5: negative or no effect – minor positive effect – positive effect – strong positive effect – very strong positive effect

Question 5: *How would you rate the influence of your Interreg project on the general quality of cross-border cooperation in your sector?*

Scale from 1 to 5: negative or no effect – minor positive effect – positive effect – strong positive effect – very strong positive effect

01:30 Closing

Question 6:

A) *What is your experience with administrative aspects of the Interreg programme, such as payment on time, regulations, reporting obligations and other forms of bureaucracy?*

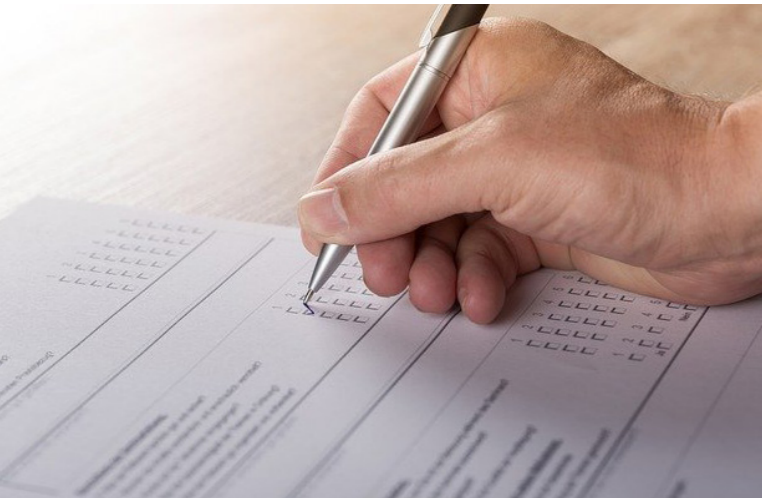
B) *How did they affect cooperation?*

Short summary, offer to receive the results of the research project, thanks, farewell.

01:45 End

Saving recorded workshop video.

3.5. SURVEY



In addition to the individual expert interviews and expert workshops, an online survey should complete the obtained results on CBC achievements in a quantitatively manner. The survey pursues the objectives of the survey: to allow a larger target group to voice their opinion on different CBC aspects. This method permits the researchers to further broaden the picture, include more stakeholders and also compile more quantitative data on CBC

assessment. The results of the individual expert interviews and expert workshops can then be discussed in light of the broader picture from the survey. The link to the online survey could be distributed via the Interreg secretariat in order to reach as many Project Partners and Lead Partners as possible. The questions in the survey questionnaire closely follow the logics of those already presented for the interviews and workshops. Annex I presents the questions used by us in the Crossquality pilot application.

For our survey we used the software program Qualtrics, but many other online tools offer easy approaches towards conducting an online survey as well. It matters with respect to the duration period of the survey how effective target groups can be reached. Keeping the online survey open for a few weeks should suffice when the Interreg secretariat helps distribute the link directly to all the potential participants.

Box 7

SUGGESTED SURVEY QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1

What is 'Quality of cooperation' in your opinion? What aspects are characteristic of good cooperation? (Open question)

QUESTION 2

Do you have experience with cross-border cooperation within and/or outside of Interreg projects? (Answers: Within and/or outside of Interreg)

QUESTION 2 a/b

What experience do you have with cross-border cooperation within/outside of Interreg projects? (Open question, within/outside of depends on the former answer. If both: Both questions)

QUESTION 3

Did your contacts become more diverse as a result of the project(s), do you have more cross-border contacts, or even new contacts with other sectors or fields of work? (Open question)

QUESTION 4

How would you assess the quality of practical aspects of cooperation during your specific Interreg project? (Rating from 1 to 5 for nine sub-items) Sub-items: sharing of information, communication among partners, internal project infrastructure - cloud/newsletter/etc., communication with the Lead Partner, quality of joint internal meetings, quality of joint meetings with externals, coping with language differences, coping with cultural differences, coping with conflicts.

QUESTION 5

What is your assessment of general cooperation across the border in your sector today in comparison with 2013 (start of the recent Interreg programme)? (Rating from 1 to 5 for nine sub-items) Sub-items: cross-border information within your sector/project, cross-border consultation, avoiding cross-border divergences/conflict solving, formulating joint priorities/objectives and lobbying activities, consistency of a joint strategy/work programme with subsequent joint activities, situation of joint projects (Interreg or others) with one financing scheme and joint responsibilities, integration of the cross-border network in your sector into the broader governance structures of the Euregio Meuse-Rhine region, stability of the organisational structure of coordination in the sector (i.e. a common secretariat) without Interreg funding, possibility to establish joint public services (such as Information Points) with a shared budget independent of Interreg project funding.

QUESTION 6

How would you rate the influence of your Interreg project on the general quality of cross-border cooperation in your sector? (Rating from 1 to 5 for four sub-items) Sub-items: cross-border information within the sector, cross-border consultation, ability to formulate joint priorities/objectives/lobbying activities, stability of the organisational structure of coordination in the sector (i.e. a common secretariat) without Interreg funding.

QUESTION 7

What could be improved in the administrative aspects of the Interreg programme, such as payment on time, regulations, reporting obligations and other forms of bureaucracy? How did the administrative aspects of the Interreg programme affect cooperation? (Open question)

3.6. RATING SCALE

A reflected use of rating scales is recommended both for assessment related parts of the expert workshop (as indicated above) and for the written survey. In our case, we have decided to use a rating scale that reaches from 1 to 5 for most questions calling for the experts' quantifiable judgements. We have applied this scale range to acquire a more formal and normed set of measurements for various CBC qualities, which can also more easily be processed than only capturing qualitative text information. Our approach, for instance, has coded the assessment of different aspects of the coordination scale (information, consultation, etc.) along a range from very bad (=1) to very good (=5; see the workshop outline in box 6). A five-point-scale bears the logical advantage to offer a 'neutral' mean element. Sometimes respondents cannot distinctly judge on a CBC related effect, and offering a neutral score prevented us from forcing experts to clearly take position (some assessments professionals, however, may want respondents to actually decide between good or bad, which makes a four-step scale recommendable for these cases). Scale distinctions can also capture degrees of affirmation, measuring, for instance, the sequence no improvement – minor positive improvement – positive improvement – strong positive improvement – very strong positive improvement.

Overall, the use of a rating scale allows for several dimensions of comparison, also helping corroborate the validity of results and, potentially, dynamic changes for coming years. First of all, the compilation of scores permits to some extent meaningful comparisons between different sectors addressed within one Interreg programme, or between different Interreg programmes, but referring to the same thematic sector. And concerning the temporal dimension, aggregated scores allow for comparing results for different points in time when also applied in future assessments. In the case of the expert workshops, experts can be even asked to explain their scoring decisions, hence, to report details that bolster an also qualitative analysis of CBC. In the pilot study, the expedient mixed-methods combination of qualitative analysis with quantitative elements has proven useful in terms of both practicability and the production of solid insights.

4

ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 ANALYSING THE QUALITATIVE RESULTS

A central issue for deriving rigorous CBC assessment results is how to systematically analyse all the individual expert interviews (Mayring 2004). The approach briefly depicted below has been developed and used for the expert interviews conducted in our pilot study, but not for the workshops. As described above, the workshops could be analysed through more standardized approaches due to the use of Mentimeter slides and scoring tables for capturing results.

Analysing the expert interview transcripts requires other approaches. Due to requirements for adequate data protection management, we recommend creating a table with code acronyms (for the different experts) for the internal analysis of findings (e.g. code AL1 for the expert from Aachen (A) working in the field of labour market and business (L) with the number 1; see the example below). For communication purposes, random numbers should be used for each participant (as also exemplified in the following table).

Table 2: Internal analysis of the findings

Acronym	Question	Category	Labels
AL1	What experience do you have with cross-border cooperation within and/or outside of Interreg projects?	1 high experience	Current Interreg project, 'guest' in a former Interreg project and many cross-border projects, part of a huge network
HT3	What is 'Quality of Cooperation' in your opinion?	1 sharing of information	Names sharing of information, learning from other cities

A major advantage of such a table structure for sorting acquired answers and statements is that similar answers can be clustered according to categories for the final report. Our experiences with the pilot study showed that experts sometimes provide viable answers to early questions only later in the interview (mentioning, for instance, important statements referring to question 1 only towards the end of the conversation). In these cases, clustering logically related answers helps find the right spot for each statement. Sometimes answers provide insights related to two different questions and should therefore be sorted to two categories. We recommend to cluster answers along the following aspects:

Table 2: Table 3: Clustering of answers

- Quality of cooperation in general;
.....
- Sectoral networks in general;
.....
- The specific cross-border context mentioned;
.....
- Existing contacts with former partners;
.....
- Whether the experts are interested in further Interreg and cross-border projects;
.....
- Information and communication during the project;
.....
- Language, culture and coping with conflicts.

When assessing the validity of captured expert statements, highly region-specific responses should be identified and evaluated separately. Some interview answers may specifically relate only to one region within the Interreg program territory, or a certain CBC aspect is just mentioned by experts belonging to one region. It is particularly important to account for such region-specific findings during the analysis.

Box 8

SOME EXPERIENCES WITH RESPECT TO ANALYTICAL CHALLENGES

When applying the CBC quality assessment, a reflection on variable interpretations of terminology seems necessary. For instance, the word 'culture' can be understood in different ways. Therefore, the analysis of all statements referring to culture should also include a reflection on the possible understandings of this term by specific experts. In the interviews we also asked about possible improvements in the field of Interreg administration, collecting inspiring proposals for this topic. To adequately analyse all the different answers, we developed the following subcategories: payments, the Interreg rules (such as the number of options for requesting changes), technical specifications (such as size of logos on webpages). We also introduced a separate subcategory for comments reaching beyond the research question.

- take different understandings of a term into account,
- when analysing different answers, try to develop subcategories (here related to possible improvements to the Interreg administration).

4.2. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Against the backdrop of user requirements, a recommendation is to present a report of assessment results that is not burdened with too much detail, but concisely highlights the main findings in a well comprehensible way. The report should meet the interests not only of the technically advanced experts dealing with Interreg programmes, but also of a

broader audience of practitioners of CBC. In terms of recommended components, the final report should include results on all covered sectors, as well as on the impact assessment for the entire program. It should discuss the captured scores, explanations and reasons for persisting CBC problems.

A convincing and logical sound report could include the following elements:

- describing the different steps in the assessment process, the questions asked in the expert interviews, workshops and the survey questionnaire,
- the main body of the report should describe the major results of the instruments applied, describing the different views on the quality of cooperation by sector and the different factors that had an influence on the different aspects of cross-border cooperation,
- the authors should also transparently admit relevant shortcomings (such as inadequate numbers of workshop participants, etc.),
- the results should be presented also against the background of practical implementation conditions (such as online communication, technical restrictions),
- and the report could also include experiences with respect to different aspects of the methodology, potentially leading to proposed improvements.

Box 9

COMPARISON OF RESULTS

The presentation of findings should take into account that in the future another research will have to repeat the application with respect to the same program. This should enable a meaningful comparison of results across different funding periods. After the experiences from the pilot application, we assume that it will be easier to compare trends of CBC development over time within one program area than to juxtapose results of different program territories. Each region is marked by specific endowments, economic and social structures, culture and history that have a specific influence on CBC. Accordingly, the preconditions for CBC development vary between different cross-border territories. For example, the area of the pilot application, the Interreg programme EMR with its three language boundaries and its five different partner regions, provides an illustrative example for programme specific characteristics. In addition, specific administrative practices can significantly differ between Interreg programmes as well, as often mentioned by experts who made experiences with different programmes. And external influences on CBC qualities must be taken into account when interpreting results, too. Our assessment project Crossquality for instance (as all projects in the period 2020-2022), was conducted during the Covid pandemic crisis. Consequently, any meeting, be it internal or including invited external experts, had to be held online. During this time, borders were even completely closed for a short while, which substantially hampered any CBC development. Quite obviously, any comparison between recent crisis-affected CBC features and those identified in the future must take the special circumstances into account.

5

FINAL REMARKS

The Crossquality team expresses the hope that this handbook will help those interested in conducting a similar exercise and assessing the impact of a specific Interreg programme with respect to the quality of CBC in a certain programme area. As already mentioned, we would like to offer a format that can be easily adapted to the special conditions of a certain programme or to the purpose of the exercise. Meaning, that individual instruments can be used – like expert workshops – in order to get a snapshot of the quality of cooperation in a certain sector, without conducting interviews or a full survey. If the use of limited resources or instruments is reflected in the report, it will be evident that comparisons with earlier or future programme assessments are difficult. In this case, the added value could be a comparison of different sectors within a certain programme.

In our Crossquality 'Final Report: Impact of the Euregio Meuse-Rhine INTERREG Programme on the quality of cross-border cooperation' we roll out in greater detail the results of the pilot assessment and the first application of the methodology developed for this purpose. For those who are interested in the scientific background, we published as well as a 'Research Report' that presents the theoretical background in more details. The authors would also be happy to answer any feedback or questions concerning the methodology. We will be pleased to discuss various aspects of the application of the methodology with other colleagues.

CONTACT INFORMATION

ITEM Maastricht University
Kapoenstraat 2
6211 KW Maastricht
+31 43 388 3233
item@maastrichtuniversity.nl

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Bouillonstraat 1-3, 6211 LH Maastricht

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