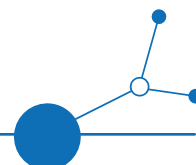


Joint Report on Field Trips and Study Visits



Final Version
05 2026





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INTRODUCTION

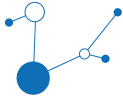
The present document gives an overview of the field trips and study tours organised within the framework of the BorderLabs CE project. The project proposal foresaw at least three study visits/field trips “to support the co-learning process, allowing the in-depth investigation of interesting cases and the involvement of local and regional key actors and stakeholders, including political decision makers”. The purpose of the report is to summarise the lessons learnt in the three thematic fields of the project, namely cross-border planning, cross-border participatory governance and obstacle management. All these lessons have been included in the Charter for participatory cross-border cooperation governance in Central Europe, and will impact the follow-up of the five pilots and, hopefully, the integration process of Central Europe.

To orientate the selection of the destinations, in March 2025, CESC drafted a concept on study tours and thematic expert workshops. The concept, which expanded to the conceptual frames of the three thematic workshops, coupled with a list of potential study visit destinations, was discussed and approved at the partner meeting held in Dresden on 6 May, 2025. To facilitate the selection, CESC has made a proposal on three exemplary destinations, which was presented at the online partner meeting of 18 September 2025, when the partners had the opportunity to report their preferences. Upon the approval of the proposal, CESC has contacted the representatives of the selected destinations. The final decision about the timing and the intentions of participating was made at the partner meeting held in Gorizia, on 21 October, 2025 (see Table 1).

Table 1- Agreed timing and foreseen participants of the study visits

Study tour & timing	Trinational Eurodistrict of Basel 17-18 March 2026 arrivals: 16 March 2026	Meuse-Rhine Euregio 15-16 April 2026 arrivals: 14 April 2026	Greater Copenhagen with the Nordic Council May 2026
SMIL/IU	X (3)		
IRT	X (4-5)	X (3-4)	
ER Nisa		X (2-3)	X (2-4)
City of Frankfurt (Oder)	X (2)	X (2)	
EGTC GO		X (2)	X (2)
EGTC Ister-Granum		X (2-3)	
EGTC Novum	X (2)		
Upper Austria		X (1)	
Associated partners, guests	RPV Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia (1)		MMR ČR (1)

The study tours took place on 17 and 18 March 2026 in the cross-border agglomeration of Basel, on 15 and 16 April in the trilateral EURegio Meuse-Rhine, and on 12-13 May in Greater Copenhagen. CESC has provided comprehensive services for the participants, including: communication with the hosts, and agreement on the professional content and the logistics of the study visits; making proposals on accommodation; coordination of the movement of the group in the destination area; documentation of the visits (photo, report, news).



1. Basic information on the study visits

1.1. The Trinational Eurodistrict of Basel

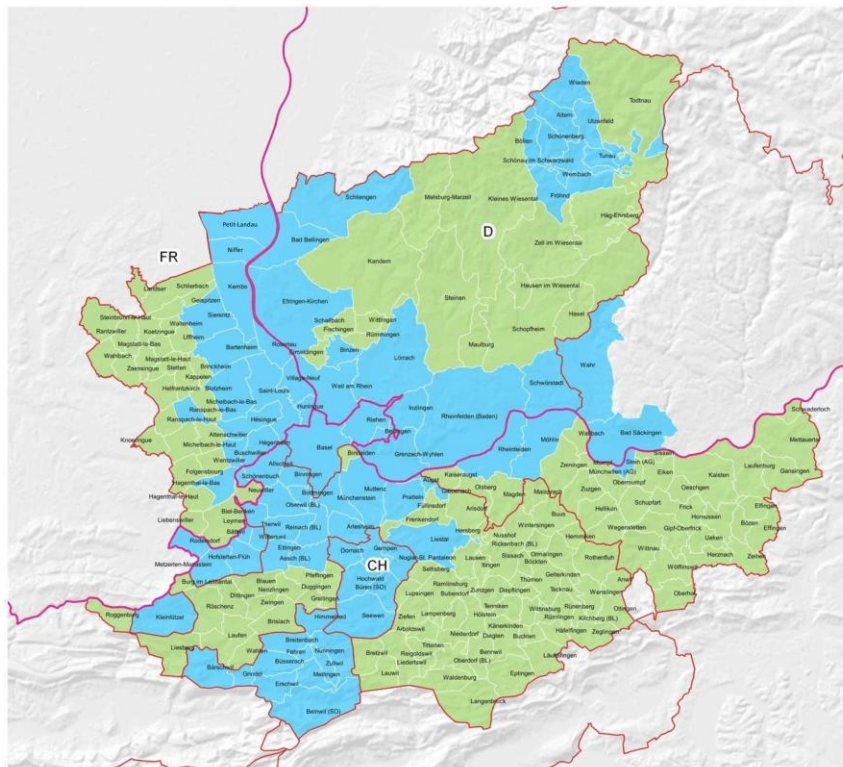
The cross-border agglomeration of Basel is one of the most advanced cross-border integrations in Europe. The Regio Basiliensis was established in 1963 by Swiss representatives of business and the academic sphere to ensure the framework for the Swiss participation in the Upper Rhine projects. Since that time, the association has been generating a plethora of new cooperation structures and projects and has become a model for CBC in Europe. One of the most successful results of the association's mission is the establishment of the Eurodistrict, including 83 Swiss, French and German municipalities, and their population of nearly 1 million.

Map 1 - The Trinational Eurodistrict of Basel

Gemeinden im Trinationalen
Eurodistrict Basel

Legende

TEB - Mitgliedsgemeinde
Weitere Gemeinden im TEB - Perimeter



Stand: 2025
Masstab 1:250.000

Source: <https://www.eurodistrictbasel.eu/de/ueber-den-teb/unser-gebiet-und-unsere-mitglieder.html>

Participants of the study tour:

- Katarzyna Acedońska, Regional Development Institute of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship
- Christian Berger, City of Bratislava/baum_cityregion
- Sören Bollmann, City of Frankfurt (Oder)
- Aneta Eibin, NOVUM EGTC
- Johannes Haselsteiner, Amt der NÖ Landesregierung
- Melinda Istenes-Benczi, CESC



- Ferenc Ivanics, CESC
- Natalia Marysiok, Regional Development Institute of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship
- Gyula Ocskay, CESC
- Milan Pátek, Saxon State Ministry for Infrastructure and Regional Development (SMIL)
- Martin Reents, INFRASTRUKTUR & UMWELT

The agenda of the study visit:

BorderLabs CE: Transnational project visit
17-18 March 2026

17 March, Tuesday

8:25: Leaving Hotel Ibis Styles Basel City by public transportation

9:30: Meet – Great Hall, Lörrach District Office

9:45-10:00: Welcome by First State Officer, District of Lörrach / Ulrich Hoehler

10:00-12:00: Presentations

- ETB & projects – Frédéric Duvinage, Director
- Regio Basiliensis and the Swiss perspective on cross-border cooperation – Dr. Manuel Friesicke, Managing Director
- CeA+SACT, Alsatian cross-border cooperation – Elise Lachat, Project Manager

12:00-13:20: Lunch at [Esquina Lörrach](#)

13:20-14:00: Travel by private bus

14:00-15:30: Presentations – Alpha Building, Saint-Louis

- INFOBEST – Marc Borer, Project Manager
- Parc des Carrières project – Marion Préfol, Head of Environment Department
- Visit to the Parc des Carrières

17:00: Arrival by private bus to Hotel Ibis Styles Basel City

18 March, Wednesday

9:20: Leaving Hotel Ibis Styles Basel City by public transportation

9:45: Meet – Baudepartement Basel

10:00-11:00: Presentation by Dr. Sebastian Wilske, Executive Director, Regionalverband Hochrhein-Bodensee

- Spatial Concept of the High Rhine
- Spatial Concept of the Upper Rhine (CRS)
- Agglomeration Programme
- IMeG

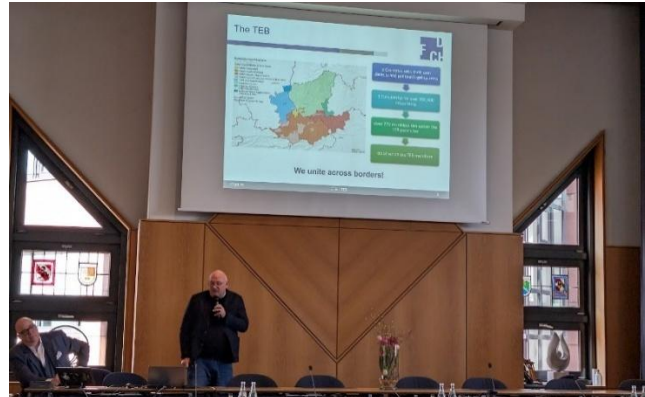
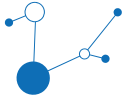
11:00-12:00: Presentation of the 3Land Project by French and Swiss representatives and viewing of the model

12:00-14:00: Lunch at [Zum Isaak](#)

14:00- : Tourist bus tour of the 3Land Area and Rheinfelden (DE) & Rheinfelden (CH)

17:00: Arrival to SBB train station Basel

Online map



1.2. The EURegio Meuse-Rhine

The Meuse-Rhine EURegion was established in 1976 as a consultative network, which was registered in 1991 as a Dutch foundation, and transformed into an EGTC in 2019. The Euroregion comprises territories from Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. The seat is located in Eupen (which is the capital of the German-speaking minority of Belgium), but the office is operated in Maastricht (NL).

The Euroregion might be the best performing EGTC in Europe, characterised by a very broad portfolio and a very large governance structure.



Map 2 - Territories of the EURegion Meuse-Rhine

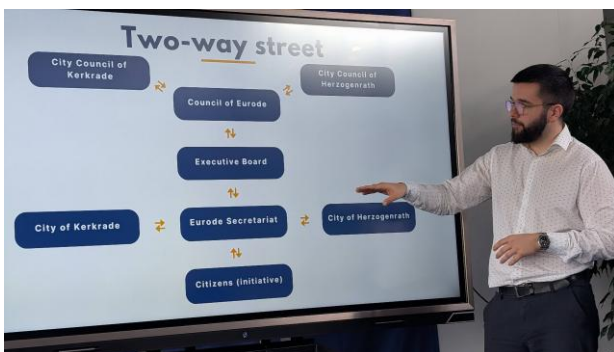
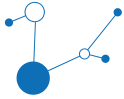
Administrative Gliederung – Administratieve indeling – Division administrative



Source: <https://euregio-mr.info/en/ueber-uns/geschichte/>

Participants of the study tour:

- Kitti Dubniczki, CESC
- Roland Hesz, CESC
- Ferenc Ivanics, Győr-Moson-Sopron County Council
- Darina Nagy, Ister-Granum EGTC
- Péter Nagy, Ister-Granum EGTC
- Lilla Ocskay, CESC
- Katja Rosner, State Government of Upper Austria
- Dorottya Varga, Békés County Council Office



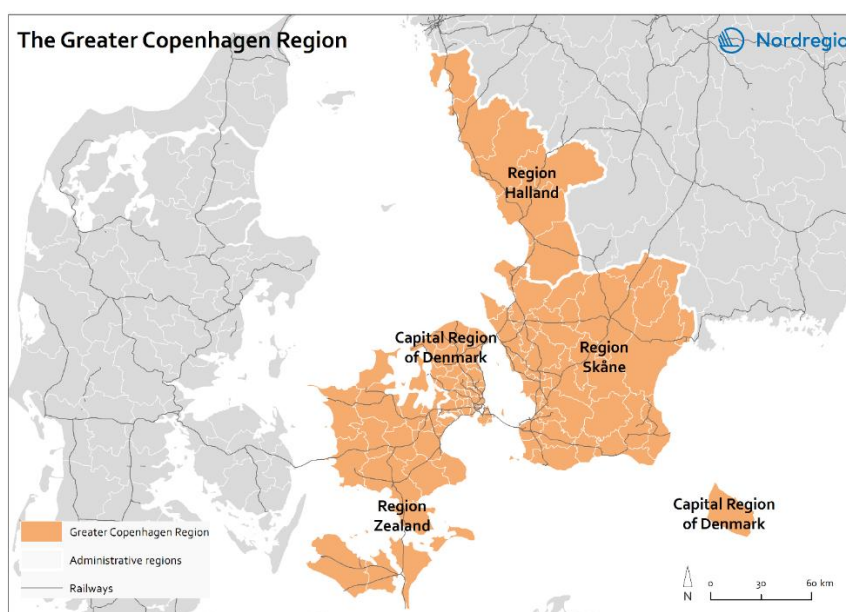
1.3. Greater Copenhagen

The Greater Copenhagen Region includes the territories of 2 Danish and 2 Swedish regional municipalities around the capital city of Denmark. The cross-border metropolitan zone has been organically developing on the two sides of the Öresund Strait. After the decision was made on the construction of the Öresund Bridge (in 1991), Skåne Region and the Danish municipalities of Copenhagen and surroundings established the Öresund Committee (in 1993). The cooperation was re-named and enlarged in 2016, since when it has been called the Greater Copenhagen Region, producing 25% of the Danish and Swedish welfare. The Bridge has created lively movements (nearly 20 thousand Danish people moved to Southern Sweden) and advanced public transport connections. The region is home to green innovation, involving 17 universities.



The study tour included a visit to the Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers (located in Copenhagen), where the participants could study the Nordic model of obstacle management.

Map 3 - The Greater Copenhagen Region



<https://nordregio.org/maps/greater-copenhagen-region/>

Participants of the study tour:

- Giulia Bonn, EGTC GO
- Elisa Di Marco, Friuli Venezia Giulia Region
- Ondřej Havlíček, Euroregion Nisa
- Melinda Istenes-Benczi, CESC
- Romina Kocina, EGTC GO
- Klemen Košir, Slovenian Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Energy
- Gyula Ocskay, CESC
- Micaela Passon, EGTC GO
- Csaba Síki, CESC



The agenda of the study visit:

BorderLabs CE: Transnational project visit

Copenhagen, 12-13 May 2026

12 May, Tuesday

8:45 Arrival at the Nordic House (*Ved Stranden 18, Copenhagen*)

9:00 Welcome and tour the table

9:10 Short introduction to BorderLabs project

9:25 The Nordic Cooperation and the Nordic Council of Ministers

9:50 Freedom of Movement in the Nordics

11:00 Preparedness and resilience in a Nordic context

11:30 Joint lunch with Greater Copenhagen at restaurant Kronborg (*Brolæggerstræde 12*)

13:00 Arrival at Greater Copenhagen Secretariat (*Nørregade 7b, Copenhagen*)

13:05 Greater Copenhagen

14:15 Interreg Øresund-Kattegat-Skagerrak

15:00 Pause/Coffee break

15:15 STRING Megaregion

16:00 Copenhagen Capacity

16:45 End of day 1.

13 May, Wednesday

9:15 Arrival at the residence of the Swedish Ambassador in Copenhagen (*Sankt Annæ Plads 15, Copenhagen*)

9:30 The Swedish Embassy and its role in a cross-border context

10:30 Joint transport to Malmö, Sweden

12:00 Lunch in Malmö (venue TBD)

13:15 Arrival at Øresunddirekt (*Hjälmarégatan, Malmö*)

13:30 Welcome and tour de table

13:45 The Øresund Region – from vision to reality

14:45 Øresunddirekt – a cross-border information service

15:45 Dialogue about lessons learned and future cooperation

16:15 End of day 2.

Greater Copenhagen Secretariat
Nørregade 7b,
Copenhagen

Nordic House
Ved Stranden
18, Copenhagen

Residence of the
Swedish Ambassador
in Copenhagen
Sankt Annæ Plads 15,
Copenhagen

Online map

Øresunddirekt
Hjälmarégatan, Malmö



2. Lessons learnt

2.1. Cross-border strategic planning

2.1.1. Basel

One of the clearest lessons from the Basel study tour is that cross-border planning only works when it is treated as a permanent public task, not as a temporary project. In the Basel area, planning is supported by a layered institutional system rather than by a single organisation. At the wider Upper Rhine scale, the Upper Rhine Conference provides a structured framework with a steering committee, plenary assembly, joint secretariat and twelve working groups, including groups on regional planning, regional transport policy, environment and statistics. At the Swiss and metropolitan level, Regio Basiliensis acts as the Swiss partner for Upper Rhine cooperation and coordinates cooperation instruments such as Interreg Upper Rhine, while the Canton of Basel-Stadt participates in trilateral cooperation bodies dealing with spatial planning, mobility, housing, culture and tourism. The lesson here is that cross-border planning needs institutional continuity



across several territorial scales: metropolitan issues cannot be managed well if they are disconnected from wider regional coordination, and vice versa.

A second lesson is that cross-border planning depends on a shared spatial vision before it can produce concrete investments. The 3Land case is particularly instructive in this respect. The partners first moved from an initial development vision to a joint planning agreement in 2012, then commissioned a spatial concept in 2013-2015, and only afterwards deepened the work through further agreements, thematic studies and implementation-oriented steps. This sequencing matters. In fragmented border areas, municipalities may be tempted to begin with isolated infrastructure or real-estate decisions, but the Basel experience suggests that it is more effective to begin by agreeing on a common territorial logic: what kind of area is being planned, what functions it should fulfil, and how development on one side of the border affects the others. The 3Land documents show that the partners explicitly framed the area as a shared cross-border space, rather than as three juxtaposed national fragments. That is a crucial planning lesson, because without such a shared frame, later decisions on transport, land use or public space remain difficult to align.

A third important lesson is that successful cross-border planning is integrative by nature. In 3Land, the official spatial concept does not isolate urban development from mobility or landscape. On the contrary, it links nature and landscape, mobility and urban development, and it explicitly puts forward ideas such as public green spaces, riverside paths, and bridges connecting the countries. The planning agreements likewise combine goals that are often handled separately in conventional sectoral systems: access to the Rhine, better transport connections, a common traffic concept, densification, mixed uses, and the avoidance of structural and social segregation. This demonstrates that border regions cannot afford a narrow planning approach. Where administrative systems differ, the most productive common language is often spatial rather than legal: partners may have different planning laws, but they can still agree on connected public spaces, multimodal accessibility, river access, or the desired balance between housing, employment and open space. The Basel case therefore shows that cross-border planning works best when it is built around a territorially coherent set of objectives rather than around disconnected sectoral measures.

A fourth lesson is that cross-border planning requires common standards, even when legal systems remain different. One of the most interesting elements in the Basel area is the trinational criteria catalogue developed for 3Land. Officially, this catalogue defines cross-border standards for sustainable development and construction and is intended to guide transformation in the area across national boundaries. Importantly, the catalogue does not focus only on environmental criteria: it also includes social and socio-political aspects, seeks to improve connectivity, prioritises walking, cycling and public transport, and promotes user-oriented and cooperative development. This is highly instructive from a planning perspective. Cross-border territories usually cannot fully harmonise national legal frameworks, at least not in the short term. But they can still create shared reference points that shape projects in similar directions. In practice, this means that cross-border planning often advances not through legal unification, but through agreed principles, labels, review procedures and jointly used technical documents. Basel's example suggests that these "soft" planning instruments are not secondary; they are often the real bridge between different systems.

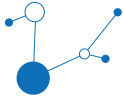
A fifth lesson is that planning must remain understandable and useful beyond professional circles. The Basel case shows that technical planning work was accompanied by efforts to make the cross-



border territory readable to the wider public. The 3Land spatial concept was not only prepared by experts; it was also presented in a travelling exhibition in the three countries and discussed at public events, with visitor feedback collected through a survey. This is significant because cross-border planning always faces a democratic challenge: many of its benefits are long-term and territorially diffuse, while many of its obstacles are immediate and experienced in everyday life. In this context, citizen-oriented institutions matter. The Basel cooperation architecture includes INFOBEST PALMRAIN, a public, free and multilingual advisory service dealing with practical cross-border questions concerning life, work and business between Germany, France and Switzerland. Although INFOBEST is not a planning authority, its existence is relevant for planning because it helps reduce the gap between strategic territorial visions and daily administrative reality. The broader lesson is that cross-border planning gains legitimacy when it is accompanied by institutions that translate complexity into concrete public value.

A sixth lesson is that cross-border planning should be understood as incremental and cumulative. The Basel region did not arrive at its present level of cooperation overnight. Regio Basiliensis dates back to 1963; the wider Upper Rhine framework has decades of development behind it; and 3Land itself has progressed through successive agreements in 2012, 2016 and 2022. The official 3Land material is particularly revealing here: each agreement did not replace the earlier work, but rather built on it by adding partners, refining priorities and moving from vision to concept, and from concept to implementation tools. This long time horizon is an important lesson for other border regions. Cross-border planning is rarely linear, and it is seldom “finished.” It tends to evolve through repeated rounds of confidence-building, knowledge production, political (re)commitment and selective implementation. The Basel example therefore suggests that the most resilient planning frameworks are those that can absorb change without losing continuity. In that sense, the durability of the process may be just as important as any single project outcome.

Finally, successful cross-border planning presupposes a supportive institutional environment. On the one hand, it refers to the governance system that owns the relevant competencies to launch and implement soft planning activities, and to translate the soft plans to hard ones. In the case of Basel, the initiator’s role is mostly played by the ETB. However, the Eurodistrict, being an association established by French law, lacks the competencies to make the plans a reality. The involvement of different-level authorities not only provides legitimacy for the cross-border plans, but it also facilitates the implementation. On the other hand, the realisation of the cross-border plans makes access to funding necessary. The Swiss agglomeration program enabling the authorities to invest Swiss money beyond the border is a best-practice model for the entire Europe on how cross-border planning can steer the development of real cross-border functional areas. Furthermore, this model stimulates further planning activities, meeting the highest standards set by the evaluation system applied. Overall, the main lesson from Basel is that cross-border planning succeeds when it combines long-term governance, a shared spatial narrative, integrative planning content, common quality standards and citizen-oriented support structures. The region shows that borders do not disappear simply because cooperation is politically desired. What makes a difference is the patient construction of institutions and planning tools that allow different systems to act in a coordinated way over time. That is perhaps the most valuable lesson of all: effective cross-border planning is not mainly about removing borders in a symbolic sense, but about building practical mechanisms through which spatial development can be jointly imagined, negotiated and implemented.



2.1.2. Maastricht

The Euregio Meuse-Rhine (EMR) has evolved into a European „laboratory” of cross-border planning, moving from simple diplomatic gestures toward sophisticated, functional integration. One of the lessons learned is that cross-border planning must be treated as a permanent public task rather than a temporary project-based endeavor to successfully mitigate the „border tax”, which results in an estimated 8% to 20% loss in regional GDP.

A primary methodological lesson from the EMR is the necessary transition from expansive, aspirational strategies to focused, actionable workplans. The region initially developed an ambitious planning document titled „Strategy 2030”, but planning experts soon realised it contained more goals than could be realistically managed or financed. This led to a „reality check” where strategic goals were mapped against the actual political will and resource commitments of the five partner regions. The resulting “Workplan 2026+” introduced the „Signed Money” requirement: a strict rule stating that no initiative can remain in the plan unless it has a guaranteed financing background and a clear human capacity commitment. This prevents to waste time due to unachievable goals and ensures that planning is rooted in available capacities rather than mere political rhetoric. Successful planners map the individual strategies of the five partner regions and only pursue topics where there is a collective political will and „skin in the game” in terms of funding and workforce.

Second, effective planning requires the involvement of local citizens. In the EMR citizen participation events ensure opportunities to identify where and how residents actually experience the existence of the border in their daily lives. The EMR have involved as many as 280 citizens in the finalisation of its strategic document (Strategy 2030). With regard to the Dutch-German Eurode cooperation, direct citizen feedback is encouraged by tools like the „Mayor’s Councilment Hour”. It provides planners with direct, uninhibited feedback on local border issues from the residents themselves. Eurode operates on a “two-way street” philosophy, ensuring that cross-border integration is both a top-down and a bottom-up process. Local residents are encouraged to initiate project ideas. The secretariat’s role is to evaluate these initiatives for their potential cross-border impact and, where appropriate, bring them to the Executive Board and Council meetings for formal decision-making.

A third lesson is the recognition of the importance of empowering local actors in the planning and development scene. Small Project Funds (SPF) in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine (EMR) and Eurode serve as vital instruments for empowering local municipalities and other relevant local stakeholders by providing them with the necessary time and resources to resolve specific local challenges. A primary lesson for other border regions is the need for radical simplicity, employing simplified application forms to ensure that non-professional actors, such as schools and local sport clubs, can access funding with minimal bureaucratic burden. The Eurode cooperation demonstrates that even very small subsidies, sometimes as little as €500 per project, can generate significant social value by supporting initiatives like cross-border football camps, school visits, and shared cultural events. These “mini-projects” are essential for normalising the border for the next generation, effectively transitioning cross-border integration from a top-down political vision into a daily, bottom-up reality.

As a fourth lesson is the identified danger of „Interreg dependency”. Planners have recognised that relying solely on European grants creates a fragile ecosystem where cooperation risks



collapsing once the funding period expires. The „Starter Engine Logic” is advised to be applied: Interreg money should be explicitly planned as a „kick-off” mechanism, serving as the initial investment to launch cooperation, rather than a long-term life-support machine. It is worth planning with structural transition in mind: for an initiative to survive, the planning process must include a transition into permanent structures funded directly by the member municipalities or states. Local Commitment is also connected to sustainable structures: in the Eurode model, sustainability is achieved through direct member contributions, where partners contribute 57 cents per inhabitant to support the local Small Project Fund.

2.1.3. Copenhagen

The study visit showed that cross-border planning in a highly integrated metropolitan region is not only about land use or spatial plans in the narrow sense. It is about coordinating mobility, labour markets, infrastructure, economic development, green transition and access to services across national systems.

A first important lesson is that cross-border planning needs a clear functional territorial frame. Greater Copenhagen provides such a framework by bringing together two countries, four regions and 85 municipalities around the shared goals of labour-market integration, infrastructure, mobility and green transition. This makes it possible to plan beyond administrative borders and to treat Copenhagen, Malmö, Scania, Zealand and the wider metropolitan area as parts of one interconnected development space.

A second lesson is that planning must be evidence-based. The Øresundindex is particularly relevant in this regard, because it measures integration through indicators such as passenger journeys, commuting, students, companies, freight transport, migration, guest nights and residents in the neighbouring country. For cross-border planning, this type of monitoring is essential: it shows where integration is growing, where bottlenecks may appear, and where political or infrastructural intervention is needed.

A third lesson is that infrastructure is the backbone of cross-border spatial development, but it must be understood strategically. The Øresund Bridge created the basis for daily commuting and metropolitan integration, while the Fehmarn Belt Fixed Link is expected to reposition the region within a much wider European context. The discussions on future Øresund connections, including the possible Øresund metro and other fixed-link options, showed that mature cross-border regions need to plan decades ahead.

A fourth lesson is that cross-border planning must connect physical mobility with labour-market and economic planning. Greater Copenhagen’s key areas – labour market, infrastructure and green transition – show that transport links are not planned for their own sake, but as tools for better access to jobs, skills, businesses and services. This is highly relevant for BorderLabs CE, where many border regions also face the challenge of linking mobility planning with labour shortages, public-service access and territorial cohesion.

Finally, the case shows that cross-border planning works best when several territorial scales are aligned. Øresund provides the frameworks for direct cross-border urban functional integration, Greater Copenhagen acts at metropolitan scale, while STRING places the region in a larger Oslo-Gothenburg-Malmö-Copenhagen-Hamburg megaregional context. The main lesson for BorderLabs CE is that cross-border planning should not be treated as a one-off document, but as a continuous



governance process combining data, infrastructure, political coordination and long-term territorial vision.

2.2. Cross-border participatory governance

2.2.1. Basel

One of the most important lessons from the Basel experience is that cross-border participatory governance has to be organised as a permanent part of governance, not treated as an occasional consultation exercise. In the Basel trinational agglomeration, participation is embedded in the regular work of institutions. The Canton of Basel-Stadt describes the Trinational Eurodistrict Basel (TEB/ETB) as a body working not only on transport, education and culture, but also on civic dialogue, while the ETB itself presents its role as initiating projects, organising political exchange and launching initiatives in civil society. This suggests a broad understanding of participation: not merely asking citizens for opinions from time to time, but building structures through which elected representatives, institutions and residents can interact across borders on a continuous basis.

A first concrete lesson is that cross-border participation benefits from having a stable representative arena below the level of national governments. In the Basel case, the ETB's Consultative Council brings together 20 Swiss, 15 French and 15 German local councillors or elected representatives. It is regularly informed about the activities of the association, invited to take positions on important dossiers, meets at least twice a year, and works through six permanent thematic commissions ranging from culture and youth to transport, health, environment and territorial development. Crucially, it is not only a discussion forum: it can issue motions, positions and resolutions and submit requests to the ETB's steering bodies. The lesson here is that participatory governance in cross-border regions becomes more robust when elected local actors are given an institutionalised channel to deliberate jointly and feed demands upward into decision-making. In a border region, this kind of structured intermediary forum is especially valuable because many practical cross-border concerns arise below the national level but still require coordinated political attention.

A second lesson is that effective participation needs more than one format. The ETB's work on its Strategy 2030 is especially instructive because it combined broad consultation with more deliberative dialogue. According to the ETB, around 1,200 people responded to its questionnaire on cross-border obstacles, priorities and project ideas. The process was then deepened through an online citizen dialogue organised with the Euro-Institut and the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT). The participatory process included a questionnaire, citizen workshops and a forum, and the themes discussed were in part identified by the participants themselves. The resulting agenda covered issues such as education and plurilingualism, cross-border information, public transport, health, culture and leisure, citizen participation, climate and environment, and legal obstacles. This points to an important governance lesson: in cross-border settings, participation works best when it combines breadth and depth. Open questionnaires can map concerns widely, but smaller deliberative formats are needed to turn diffuse experience into priorities, recommendations and project ideas.

A third lesson is that cross-border participatory governance should treat residents as holders of practical expertise, not merely as end-users of policy. The ETB explicitly framed inhabitants as



“experts of everyday life” who know where cross-border cooperation functions well and where daily obstacles remain. This is more than a rhetorical detail. In cross-border regions, many problems are not visible from inside a single administrative body: they emerge only when people study in one country, work in another, use services in a third, or try to navigate among divergent rules, transport systems and information channels. The Strategy 2030 consultation revealed, for example, that respondents considered cross-border life an asset, but also pointed to persistent barriers in mobility, information and access to services, and generated 406 concerns or concrete project ideas. The lesson is that participatory governance in border regions should not be seen only as a legitimacy tool; it is also a way of producing knowledge that administrations often cannot generate by themselves.

A fourth lesson is that participation becomes credible only when there is a visible path from consultation to follow-up. One of the strengths of the ETB process was that the results were not presented as a symbolic exercise. The ETB stated that the ideas gathered from residents would feed into its political and technical groups, where feasibility and the relevant institutional interlocutors would be identified. Likewise, during the citizen forum, the ETB leadership explicitly committed itself to forwarding the suggestions to the relevant political and technical instances and to making the results public. This is an important point for cross-border governance more generally. Participation easily becomes frustrating when institutions collect ideas but do not explain what happens next. The Basel example suggests that even where not every suggestion can be implemented, participatory governance is stronger when institutions clearly show how citizen input enters the decision chain.

A fifth lesson is that cross-border participation needs small-scale, accessible instruments that create repeated contact between people. The ETB’s Meeting Fund, launched in 2016, supports cross-border encounter projects with co-financing between 250 and 3,000 euro/Swiss francs, up to 60% of total project cost, provided that the initiative has cross-border and intercultural added value and promotes exchanges between inhabitants of the trinational agglomeration. According to the ETB, this fund has already supported more than 70 encounter projects since 2016 in fields such as sport, culture, theatre and music. In addition, the School Meeting Fund, introduced in 2017, supports bi- or trinational exchanges between schools and pre-schools, also up to 60% of eligible costs and up to 500 euro/Swiss francs, with an explicit focus on bilingualism and interculturality. The lesson is that participatory governance is strengthened not only by major institutional reforms, but also by modest and practical tools that help people actually meet across borders. In a border region, social familiarity is itself a governance resource: repeated encounters make cooperation less abstract and can gradually build the trust on which more formal cooperation depends.

A sixth lesson is that participation should be connected to concrete projects and not remain detached from implementation. The 3Land process offers a good example of this. The official 3Land material states that the spatial concept was presented in 2015 through a travelling exhibition in Basel, Weil am Rhein and Huningue, accompanied by numerous public events and a visitor survey. Also, the partners’ second planning agreement of 2016 was based on the findings of the spatial concept and feedback from the public. Even though 3Land is primarily a planning project, this is also a lesson in participatory governance: public dialogue is most meaningful when it is tied to an identifiable process, a visible territory and decisions that will continue after the consultation is over. People are more likely to engage when they can see what is being discussed,



what the possible options are, and how their feedback may shape later steps and produce tangible results.

Finally, the Basel case also shows that cross-border participatory governance needs democratic anchoring at several territorial levels at once. At the Upper Rhine scale, the Upper Rhine Conference provides the institutional framework for cooperation through a steering committee, plenary assembly, joint secretariat and twelve working groups. Basel-Stadt also highlights the role of the Upper Rhine Council, which it describes as the “parliament” of the Upper Rhine region and as a source of greater democratic legitimacy for trinational cooperation, as well as the Trinational Metropolitan Region, whose structure includes a civil society pillar alongside science, business and politics. The lesson here is that participation in border regions cannot be reduced to one institution or one scale. It works best when local consultation, metropolitan coordination and wider regional representation are linked together. This multi-level structure helps ensure that citizen concerns do not remain trapped at the level where they were first expressed, but can circulate upward into broader political arenas.

2.2.2. Maastricht

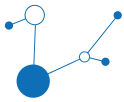
Lessons emphasise shifting from symbolic cooperation to functional integration that directly involves citizens and stakeholders.

First, create „micro-arenas” for local citizens’ dialogue: at the local level, governance should provide residents with direct access to decision-makers to solve neighborhood-level border issues. The Eurode „Mayor’s Councilment Hour” is a prime example, where citizens from either side of the border have 15 minutes to speak with both mayors simultaneously, ensuring local grievances are addressed without being lost in regional bureaucracy.

Second, ensure low-threshold accessibility (Small Project Fund): to involve non-professional actors like schools, sports clubs, and small cultural groups, governance must offer simple application processes with minimal bureaucratic hurdles. The Small Project Fund (SPF) of the Eurode could be used as an example for simplified forms for grants as small as 500 EUR, empowering local citizens to organise events like football camps or language exchanges that build a shared regional identity.

Third, it is worth focusing on next generations and social integration: participatory governance should not only address current problems but also aim to „border-blind” the next generation through shared social and educational infrastructure. Best practices include bilingual daycare centers and library systems of the Eurode where a single subscription is valid in both countries, effectively integrating the daily lives of families across the border. Another great example is the official labelling of bilingual schools within the EMR.

Fourth, the ecosystem approach is very much relevant for other border regions too. Cross-border participatory governance in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine (EMR) represents a shift from traditional, top-down administration to an inclusive „ecosystem of cooperation” that integrates citizens, local municipalities, and professional stakeholders into the planning and development processes. Networking is above all: the EMR experience demonstrates that cross-border governance is less about grand architectural changes and more about multi-level governance, pragmatic workarounds, and building institutional trust between civil servants.



Finally, the „form follows function” principle, meaning that governance structures should adapt to the specific needs (of a project) rather than forcing projects into rigid existing frameworks has been accepted across the EMR. It comes with drafting flexible frameworks. The **sixth** lesson is that competence many times exceeds financial and human resources of a dedicated management structure. It is worth supporting governance models that prioritise bringing the right people with relevant competencies to the table to enable decisions. E.g. the Aachener Verkehrsverbund (AVV) serves as a primary public transport authority that has successfully transformed the Aachen-Maastricht-Liège triangle into a blueprint for cross-border mobility. Its success is rooted in pragmatic governance and a focus on long-term sustainability rather than short-term project cycles. It has a lean management: despite the complexity of coordinating three different national systems, the AVV operates this specific coordination with a remarkably small team of just two employees.

2.2.3. Copenhagen

The study visit demonstrated that participatory governance in mature cross-border regions does not depend on one single institution. Instead, it is distributed across several complementary mechanisms: political representation through Greater Copenhagen, citizen and business support through Øresunddirekt, data-based public knowledge through Øresundsinstituttet, programme-based stakeholder involvement through Interreg ÖKS, and wider macro-regional advocacy through STRING.

A first lesson is that participation becomes more effective when it is linked to functional realities. The Øresund region is not an artificial cooperation space: tens of thousands of people cross the border for work, more than 40 million passenger journeys are registered annually, and labour-market, transport and service systems are deeply interconnected. In such a region, public participation is not only about consultation; it is about understanding and improving the daily systems that people already use.

A second lesson is the importance of evidence-based governance. The Øresundindex provides a clear example of how a border region can measure integration over time through indicators that are understandable for both professionals and policymakers. Because the index covers traffic, labour market, business activity and everyday integration, it creates a common factual basis for political debate.

A third lesson is that participatory governance needs service points that are close to citizens. Øresunddirekt demonstrates how practical questions from commuters, jobseekers, businesses and residents can be turned into institutional knowledge. Citizens often do not formulate their problem as a “legal obstacle”; they simply need to know how to work, pay taxes, access social security, move, study or operate a business across the border. The governance value of an information service lies precisely in its ability to translate these everyday questions into patterns that authorities can understand and act upon.

A fourth lesson is that cross-border participation should not be limited to citizens alone. Greater Copenhagen shows the importance of involving political representatives, municipalities, regions, labour-market actors, universities and businesses in a shared metropolitan framework. STRING adds another level by connecting regions and cities around infrastructure, green transition and



global competitiveness. This means that participatory governance in border regions must include both bottom-up citizen knowledge and strategic stakeholder coordination.

Finally, the Øresund case confirms that participation becomes credible when it is connected to action. The region's institutional architecture is not only consultative: it is linked to tax negotiations, labour-market matching, transport planning, Interreg funding, information services and bilateral political declarations. This is a key lesson for BorderLabs CE: participatory governance should be designed so that citizens' and stakeholders' inputs can move toward concrete administrative, political or project-based follow-up.

2.3. Obstacle management

2.3.1. Basel

One of the clearest lessons from the Basel/Upper Rhine experience is that cross-border legal obstacles should not be treated as isolated anomalies, but as a structural feature of integrated border regions. The Upper Rhine Conference has explicitly described national borders together with administrative, cultural, linguistic and infrastructural boundaries as obstacles that have to be overcome in order to unlock the potential of cross-border territories. This is an important starting point, because it shifts the perspective from individual "problems" to systemic mismatch between neighbouring legal and administrative orders. In a region such as Basel, where the same functional area spans Switzerland, France and Germany, legal obstacles are not occasional exceptions; they are part of everyday cross-border life.

A first lesson, therefore, is that the management of legal obstacles requires a multi-level institutional architecture. In the Upper Rhine, the legal basis for this is not left to informal goodwill alone. The 2000 Agreement on Cross-border Co-operation in the Upper Rhine Region established a joint Governmental Commission, while also relying on the Franco-German-Swiss Upper Rhine Conference as the regional commission through which much of the practical work is channelled. The Agreement is especially revealing because it states that the Governmental Commission is responsible for matters of cross-border cooperation that cannot be dealt with by the Upper Rhine Conference, and that it may draw up recommendations and prepare draft agreements where appropriate. This shows that effective obstacle management needs escalation paths: some problems can be addressed by regional coordination and expert dialogue, while others require intergovernmental attention or even changes to existing legal frameworks.

This reflection is based on that not all legal obstacles arise at the same territorial scale, so they should not all be managed in the same way. The Upper Rhine Conference's own analysis makes this point very clearly. It notes that at the Eurodistrict level, local interventions are often hindered by different laws and administrative rules, for example in the field of everyday mobility. At the scale of the wider Upper Rhine region, by contrast, what is needed is broader political coordination concerning the functional networking of actors and systems. This distinction matters a great deal. A border obstacle concerning a daily bus or tram connection, access to a nearby service, or the interpretation of administrative procedures cannot always wait for a high-level diplomatic solution; yet a region also needs institutions capable of lifting recurring problems out of the case-by-case level and framing them as matters for wider political action. The Basel experience



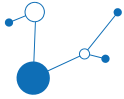
suggests that obstacle management works best when it combines local problem-solving with higher-level political escalation.

A second lesson is that frontline advisory and mediation services are not peripheral to legal-obstacle management; they are one of its core instruments. In the Basel trinational area, this role is played above all by INFOBEST PALMRAIN. INFOBEST is a public, free and multilingual service, and Basel-Stadt presents INFOBEST PALMRAIN as the place that supports people in all matters relating to cross-border living, working and doing business between Germany, France and Switzerland. The INFOBEST network itself shows how broad the relevant fields are: its thematic areas include work, taxes, social security, family benefits, moving, education, recognition of qualifications, and vehicle/traffic matters. This is a major practical lesson. Many legal obstacles in border regions do not first appear as grand constitutional questions; they appear as concrete problems of taxation, pension rights, family allowances, diploma recognition, unemployment insurance, or administrative paperwork. An institution that can explain rules, help navigate authorities, and reduce language barriers is therefore not merely a helpdesk; it is part of the governance system through which legal obstacles are made visible and manageable.

A third lesson is that good obstacle management must remain close to citizens' lived experience. The 2000 Upper Rhine Agreement explicitly links cross-border cooperation to the idea of creating "a Europe close to the citizen." This is not just symbolic language. In practice, the region's institutions repeatedly treat everyday cross-border life as a source of knowledge about where borders still "bite". The Trinational Eurodistrict Basel's citizen-participation process for its Strategy 2030, for example, explicitly asked residents what positive developments they had observed in cross-border life and which obstacles they still encountered. The analytical lesson here is that legal-obstacle management should not start only from statutes and administrative competences; it should also start from the everyday situations in which citizens experience incompatibilities between neighbouring systems. Where institutions systematically listen to these experiences, they are better able to distinguish between one-off problems, information deficits, and deeper structural incompatibilities that call for political or legal follow-up.

A fourth lesson is that many cross-border legal obstacles cannot be "solved" by full legal harmonisation, so regions need robust soft mechanisms of coordination. The Upper Rhine Conference has pointed to the continuing shortage of suitable transnational legal forms and to the fact that local interventions are often impeded by divergent legal and administrative rules. It also argued that European support for cross-border territories should not be limited to funding, but should be aimed more broadly at systemic dismantling of persisting obstacles. This is a very important insight. In regions such as Basel, neighbouring states retain different constitutional orders, legal traditions and administrative cultures. Waiting for complete harmonisation would paralyse action. The more realistic approach is to use a combination of recommendations, working groups, technical coordination, pilot projects, case-based mediation and selective institutional innovation. In other words, effective obstacle management often depends less on eliminating difference than on creating workable procedures across difference.

A fifth lesson is that expert networks matter because cross-border legal obstacles usually have a hybrid or multi-faceted nature. Basel-Stadt describes the Upper Rhine Conference as the most important institutional framework for cross-border regional cooperation for the canton, with twelve permanent working groups and several hundred experts exchanging in specialised administrations. Many obstacles sit at the boundary of several legal and policy fields at the same



time. A single issue may involve transport law, fiscal rules, labour-market regulation, health insurance, recognition of diplomas, or the division of competences between different territorial authorities. The practical lesson is that obstacle management requires fora where specialists can compare rules, identify points of friction and develop operational responses together. Legal obstacles in border regions are rarely solved by lawyers alone; they are managed through sustained interaction between legal, administrative and sectoral expertise.

Finally, the Basel/Upper Rhine experience suggests that the most successful management of cross-border legal obstacles combines institutional durability with pragmatic problem-solving. The region has built its system over decades: the 2000 Upper Rhine Agreement replaced the earlier 1975 arrangement on neighbourhood issues, while contemporary institutions such as the Upper Rhine Conference, the Eurodistrict and INFOBEST continue to operate as complementary layers rather than substitutes for one another. This gradual development is itself a lesson. Cross-border legal obstacles are rarely removed once and for all; they have to be monitored, interpreted, negotiated and re-addressed as mobility patterns, labour markets, services and legal rules evolve. What the Basel region demonstrates is not the disappearance of legal obstacles, but the construction of a governance environment capable of identifying them early, handling them practically, and escalating them when necessary. That is perhaps the most valuable lesson of all: in integrated border regions, the effective management of legal obstacles depends less on a single breakthrough solution than on the long-term capacity to connect citizens' everyday problems with appropriate administrative and political response mechanisms.

2.3.2. Maastricht

One of the most fundamental („ground level”) lessons derived from the contemporary management of integration in highly functional cross-border territories is that legal and administrative obstacles should no longer be viewed as incidental anomalies, but as structural features of mismatched national systems. The management of these obstacles requires a shift from reactive, curative measures toward a permanent, preventive, and multi-layered institutional architecture. The prerequisite for effective governance is not the existence of a structure, but the actual capacity and legal competence of the staff to solve problems.

A primary lesson is the primacy of prevention meaning the necessity of ex-ante cross-border impact assessment. Impact assessment concerns the need for moving from “fixing” problems to preventing them through systematic legislative analysis. The pioneering work of the ITEM Institute (Institute for Transnational and Euregional Cross-Border Cooperation and Mobility of the Maastricht University) demonstrates that cross-border integration is most effectively managed when potential obstacles are identified before national or EU legislation comes into force.

This lesson also indicates that effective obstacle management must be embedded in the national legislative process to avoid the perpetual cycle of retroactive “repairing” of legal frameworks. Analytically, the so-called “Ex-ante Cross-Border Impact Assessment” serves as a vital legal instrument that evaluates how proposed laws will affect the daily lives of the 75,000 cross-border commuters in the region. The fact that the Dutch government adopted the “Guideline Border Effects”, based on the methodology developed by ITEM, is justified by roughly 10% to 15% of all new regulations requiring a formal cross-border review. It is important to apply a process that ensures that border effects are articulated in explanatory memoranda of laws, forcing national ministries to recognise the border region not as a periphery, but as a functionally integrated space.



To sum up, legislative prevention is practical as identifying potential issues ex-ante (before a law is passed) is significantly more efficient than trying to fix legal frictions ex-post (after implementation).

A second important lesson is that strategic territorial visions must be supported by accessible mechanisms that translate citizens' everyday frustrations into actionable policy advice to tackle legal and administrative obstacles. The Schakelpunt (Switching Point) Flanders-Netherlands serves as a best-practice model for this bottom-up obstacle management. Its workflow illustrates a structured methodology: starting with a low-barrier submission form designed for institutions and organisations, followed by a "Quick Scan" conducted by ITEM experts to determine if the hurdle is legal, administrative, or simply an information deficit. Crucially, the Schakelpunt model teaches us that not all obstacles require formal changes to the law; many can be resolved through "deviation" or administrative workarounds. The success of this platform, having handled over 35 complex cases ranging from waste transport to parental leave benefits, rests on its ability to provide a clear path to high-level ministerial councils. This vertical integration ensures that local "pain points" are not lost in regional bureaucracy but are directly channelled to the competent authorities who possess the legal mandate to authorise deviations or amendments.

A third important lesson is that even when treaties are in place, a discrepancy between law and practice can persist, necessitating specialised sectoral coordination (offices). The EMRIC (Euregio Meuse-Rhine Incident Response and Crisis Management) partnership demonstrates this in the field of emergency services. The lesson from EMRIC is that cross-border safety depends on the creation of permanent structures that act as a crisis team linkage. By developing the Eumed Plan and harmonising firefighting protocols, EMRIC has moved beyond temporary Interreg projects into a stable institutional framework that facilitates nearly 900 cross-border ambulance deployments annually. This sectoral integration shows that legal obstacles are rarely solved by lawyers alone; they require sustained interaction between administrative, medical, and technical expertise to ensure that life-saving actions are „border-blind”.

The fourth lesson highlights the value of pragmatism over legal perfectionism, particularly e.g. in transport integration. The public transport organisation of Aachener Verkehrsverbund (AVV) has successfully transformed a trilateral triangle into a mobility hub through „pragmatic hacks”. A standout example is the revenue model for the Euregionticket: rather than creating a legal nightmare by attempting to split revenues across three nations with different VAT rates, the partners adopted a „seller-keeps-all” logic. This simple administrative arrangement incentivises all partners to maximise sales while removing the need for an expensive international clearinghouse. Furthermore, the AVV's success in facilitating cabotage rights for cross-border buses, i.e. allowing them to function as local buses once they cross the national borderline, shows that targeted legal workarounds can effectively bypass rigid national transport monopolies. The lesson for other regions is that simplifying financial and operational rules is often the most productive way to build legal and physical accessibility across borders. The primary goal is finding „practical solutions” that work immediately, such as information protocols or administrative workarounds, rather than waiting years for formal law modifications.

A fifth lesson is that reducing frictions by effective information provision is of great importance since many times lack of information and misunderstandings hamper cross-border employment and many other life events with regard to the border situation. It is crucial to have dedicated human capacity on ground that can navigate along the „tsunami of bureaucracy” hitting border regions.



The network of Grenzinfopunkt (GIP) and Grenzarbeit offices provides the high-level expertise needed to handle individual cases regarding taxation, social security, and pensions on the spot. These offices serve between 16,000 and 20,000 citizens annually, proving that specialised counselling is not a peripheral service but a core instrument of cross-border obstacle management. The integration of Grenzarbeit, which focuses on job mediation to retain young talent in the region, shows that labour-market obstacles are best managed through the „one-stop-shop principle“. By bringing Dutch, German, and Belgian labour experts together under one roof (as seen in the Eurode Business Center), the region has facilitated over 1,200 cross-border job placements. This illustrates that legal obstacle management gains legitimacy when it is accompanied by institutions that translate systemic complexity into concrete personal advantage, such as a job or a secured pension. The one-stop-shop principle provides a well-known and easy-to-access single point of contact for both employers and job seekers (see the example of GrenzInfoPunkt and Grensarbeid).

Finally, the overarching lesson from the EMR experience is that successful obstacle management presupposes an institutional environment characterised by the „I don't care“ approach to hierarchies. It is effective to prioritise getting individuals with actual competence and mandate to the table, regardless of their national title. This pragmatic culture allows the region to transition from temporary, project-based Interreg funding into permanent administrative structures that can survive funding gaps and support legal accessibility on a long-term basis.

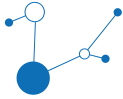
2.3.3. Copenhagen

The study visit strongly confirmed that cross-border legal and administrative obstacles are a normal feature of integrated border regions. They do not disappear simply because cooperation is mature or because mobility is high. On the contrary, the more people commute, move, study, work and do business across the border, the more visible differences between legal, fiscal, social-security and administrative systems occur.

A first lesson is that obstacle management requires a multi-level system. In the Nordic model, Info Norden and regional information services receive and structure practical questions; the Freedom of Movement Council analyses and prioritises obstacles; the Nordic Council of Ministers and national authorities provide political responsibility and possible follow-up. This division of labour is highly relevant for Central Europe, where many obstacles also require cooperation between local actors, national ministries and cross-border institutions.

A second lesson is that information provision and obstacle management should be connected. Øresunddirekt does not only answer individual questions; it also identifies and reports cross-border obstacles and provides information about solutions or workarounds. This makes the service a bridge between citizens and policymaking. For BorderLabs CE, this supports the idea that help-desk functions can be more than communication tools: they can become early-warning systems for systemic legal and administrative problems.

A third lesson is that not every problem is an obstacle in the same sense. Some problems are caused by lack of information, others by false administrative practices, and others by deeper incompatibilities between national legal systems. The Nordic approach is useful because it separates identification, analysis, prioritisation and political escalation. This helps avoid treating



every individual case as a legislative problem, while still allowing recurring or structurally important cases to be lifted to the appropriate level.

A fourth lesson is that obstacle management needs political commitment. The Øresund region's recent work on the Danish-Swedish tax agreement, labour-market mobility and third-country nationals shows that technical analysis alone is not enough. When obstacles affect taxation, residence permits, social security or border controls, solutions require national-level decisions. This is why the connection between Greater Copenhagen, national ministries and bilateral diplomacy is so important.

A fifth lesson is that cross-border obstacles should be monitored dynamically. The Øresundindex shows that integration changes over time: commuting can grow, travel can recover after crises, business patterns can shift, and new infrastructure can create new opportunities and risks. Obstacle-management systems therefore also need to evolve. They should not only solve existing problems, but also anticipate new ones e.g., arising from telework, digital identification, infrastructure expansion, crisis preparedness, climate transition and labour-market shortages.

The most important overall lesson is that the Øresund region does not treat obstacles as isolated failures of cooperation. Instead, it has built a governance environment in which obstacles can be noticed, interpreted, communicated, prioritised and sometimes escalated. For BorderLabs CE, this is perhaps the most transferable message: effective obstacle management depends on durable institutions, trusted information channels, comparable data, political access and a continuous connection between everyday experience and strategic decision-making.