



CRISI -Project¹ Policy Briefing 2/2016

The CRISI -project aims to provide an improved understanding of cross-border regional cooperation in terms of how different types of proximity and the integration of cross-border regional innovation systems (CBRIS) impact on knowledge transfer and innovation in SMEs.

The project is funded by the Marie Curie Actions Intra-European Fellowship within the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) of the EU under Grant PIEF-GA-2013-624930.

The project has generated the following empirically and theoretically informed ideas and policy suggestions:

- We linked the CBRIS literature to the policy concept of smart specialization (S3) in a paper (forthcoming) examining a case study region, the French-German Upper Rhine area. Amongst the conclusions, the following points are generalizable to other cross-border regions:
 - Joint smart specialization strategies, via common research and innovation efforts, can play an important role in generating opportunities for strengthening existing cross-border ties and relations in innovation policy. Cross-border regions and organisations should fully explore these opportunities for funding, resources and development.
 - Potential future policy developments, with regards to S3 and CBRIS integration, include:
 - 1) Identification of areas of joint specialisation
 - 2) Transfer of good practices
 - 3) Facilitation of knowledge transfer
 - 4) Promotion of network formation
 - 5) Exploitation of positive differences across borders

¹ Cross-Border Regional Innovation System Integration -Project (CRISI -Project)



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- A review of “border region studies” has led to a critical scrutiny of the current managerialist approaches to academic agendas that privilege dominant and trendy topics at the expense of others: these risk narrowing intellectual developments and stifling innovation. Therefore:
 - It is important to rethink academic performance systems which, unintentionally penalize researchers for not always targeting the very top of very well defined research fields within the social sciences or economics, which tend to favour general or theoretical papers over those which have strong ‘local’ (e.g. border regions) focus.
 - Instead, there is a strong argument that researchers should be rewarded for engagement with the local economy.
- In a series of papers focusing on the measurement of CBRIS integration, we have developed straightforward measures, including a science-technology-innovation (STI) index, that can be updated relatively easily on a regular basis. This has been applied to the case study regions of the project (especially the Danish-Swedish Oresund region) but could also be applied in other cross-border regions potentially helping policy-makers to monitor CBRIS integration processes.
 - An extension of this work to cross-border twin cities (forthcoming paper) suggests that cross-border regions in general and cross-border twin cities in particular should learn from each other how to perform better and improve their policy outcomes. Therefore, border regions could potentially benefit from applying the analytical framework introduced in this project via benchmarking their performance against well-known examples of cross-border cooperation (e.g. the Danish-Swedish Oresund region; the Finnish-Swedish Tornio River Valley; the Danish-German Sønderjylland–Schleswig region, the French-German Upper Rhine area, etc. studied in this project). Policy guidelines could be based on this benchmarking exercise.



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- The findings of a study (forthcoming paper) on the selection of foreign innovation partners leads to the conclusion that, first of all, a location near international borders (and/or international airports) enables firms to better integrate into cross-border innovation cooperation networks and thus increase the likelihood of innovation cooperation with international partners. Secondly, having R&D activities abroad also increases the likelihood of cross-border innovation cooperation. These issues should be taken into account when making decision on the location of headquarters and R&D facilities. Finally, governments should provide tools and assistance for firms seeking to increase their innovativeness by international collaboration.

Additionally, the project collected primary data material via an online-based survey (targeted to SMEs in CBRs) and interviews (targeted to participants in EU-funded cross-border cooperation projects). The data suggest interesting recommendations from the respondents and interviewees for local, national and EU-level policy-makers, including:

- When designating programme areas (such as INTERREG or ENI CBC) for EU funded cross-border cooperation projects the geographical delineations should be relaxed. This would allow participation from outside the region/country in cases where suitable partners cannot be found within the programme area.
- The reporting requirements of the EU for funded cross-border cooperation projects should be streamlined.
- The preparation stage of cross-border cooperation programmes' funding periods was criticized as being overly long. This leads to gaps in funding that can effectively "kill" existing cross-border cooperation established during the previous funding period.
- Funds directed at facilitating the projects' preparation stage (e.g. allowing for face-to-face meetings with potential project partners) would alleviate the risk of wasting the efforts of previously funded projects, and would support the emergence of new cross-border collaborations.
- According to our survey results, among the most common obstacles to cross-border cooperation – the others being the differences in language, laws, regulations and business culture – was that local governments (municipal and regional) do not participate sufficiently in facilitating cross-border cooperation. This needs to be addressed by the administrative bodies in border regions in future.



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Further reading:

Makkonen, T. (2016). Measuring cross-border regional integration with composite indicators: The Oresund integration index. In Jeremic, V., Z. Radojicic & M. Dobrota (Eds): *Emerging Trends in the Development and Application of Composite Indicators* (pp. 1-19). IGI Global: Hershey. [LINK](#)

Makkonen, T. & Mitze, T. (2016). Comment: The EU is good for collaboration but doesn't level the playing field. *Research Europe* (17 March). [PDF](#)

Makkonen, T. & Rohde, S. (2016). Cross-border regional innovation systems: Conceptual backgrounds, empirical evidence and policy implications. *European Planning Studies* 24(9): 1623–1642. [LINK](#)

Makkonen, T., A. Weidenfeld & A. Williams (2016). Cross-border regional innovation system integration: An analytical framework. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* [LINK](#)

Makkonen, T. & A. Williams (2016). Border region studies: The structure of an 'offbeat' field of regional studies. *Regional Studies, Regional Science* 3(1): 693–705. [LINK](#) (Open access)

Policy Briefings:

[1/2015](#)

[1/2016](#)

Links:

Marie curie actions:

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/>

CRISI -project webpage:

http://www.surrey.ac.uk/shtm/research/projects/Economic/knowledge_transfer_in_cross_border_regional_innovation_systems.htm

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