

**PRE-EVENT BRIEF**

# **ACTAREA Workshop: The Franco-German Cross-border Area Strasbourg-Ortenau**

February 2024



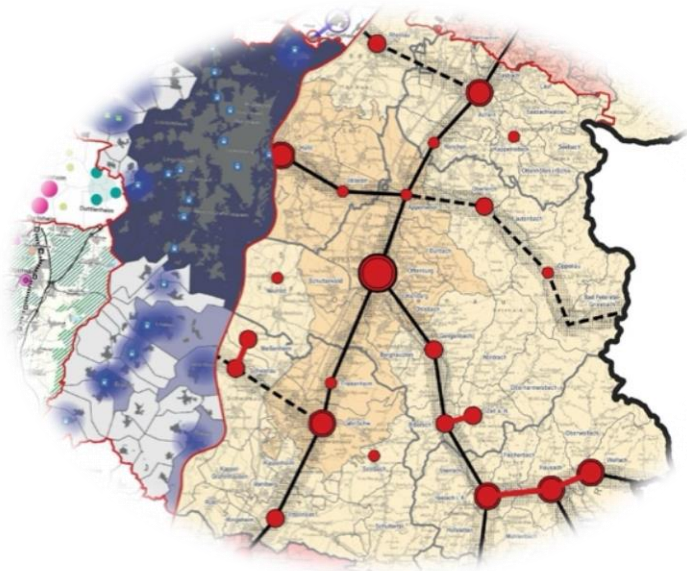
# Introduction

The intensification of cross-border cooperation is an ongoing development. This applies not only to the German-French border regions, but also to the EU's internal and external border regions in general. The European Commission's 2017 communication on the development of EU border regions showed that the EU's internal border regions account for 40 % of EU territory and generate 30 % of the EU's GDP. This communication also makes it clear that 30 % of the population lives there and that almost two million of them are border commuters. A study by the EU Commission from the same year showed that there are still numerous legal and administrative barriers in these regions that hinder cross-border cooperation<sup>1</sup>. Finally, the crises that have occurred since then, in particular the COVID-19 crisis, have highlighted the need for further action.

Against this backdrop, the adoption of the Treaty of Aachen in January 2019 is a priority in the Franco-German context. The interdependent area around Strasbourg-Ortenau can look back on decades of cooperation. It is based on well-established cross-border governance structures that, in addition to the five Eurodistricts, include the Upper Rhine Conference and the Greater Region Summit and is one of the most integrated border regions in the EU.

Despite these positive basic conditions, there are still obstacles to cooperation in this area. To this end, the BBSR (Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development) and the ANCT (Agence Nationale de la cohésion des territoires) jointly carried out the first Franco-German model spatial planning project (MORO) "Strengthening cross-border components in spatial development and spatial planning plans: two French-German simulation games"<sup>2</sup> from 2020 to 2022. This made it clear that a lack of a common understanding of space hinders the development of cross-border strategies. The workshop, which was commissioned by the BBSR as the contact point for the ESPON programme, is intended to contribute to the development of a common understanding of the interdependent space in the Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict and thus identify suitable action perimeters for cross-border strategies and projects.

The workshop is part of the "Thematic Action Plan" (TAP) on the topic of "Governance of new Geographies" of the ESPON 2030 programme. The development of a common understanding will therefore take place using the ACTAREA web application developed by the ESPON programme. On the Upper Rhine in the Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict, the workshop is dedicated to the topics of "Labour market and housing", "Leisure" and "Mobility".



*Illustration 1: Structural map section - Strasbourg-Ortenau interlinking area as part of the Upper Rhine region (Source: Office berchtoldkrass in the framework of spatial concept Oberrhein)*

<sup>1</sup> Politecnico Milano (2017): Quantification of the effects of legal and administrative border obstacles in land border regions. [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information/publications/studies/2017/quantification-of-the-effects-of-legal-and-administrative-border-obstacles-in-land-border-regions](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/studies/2017/quantification-of-the-effects-of-legal-and-administrative-border-obstacles-in-land-border-regions)

<sup>2</sup> BBSR (2023): <https://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/forschung/programme/moro/studien/2020/deutsch-franzoesische-planspiele/01-start.html>

# Workshop: Methodology, topics and structure

The use of the ACTAREA web application is decisive for the entire workshop structure and its content, which is why this methodological approach is first briefly described below before the actual workshop topics and the course of the workshop can be discussed.

## ACTAREA web application

The ESPON ACTAREA web application was developed as a tool for workshops in the context of collaborative processes. It is a tool for the participatory development of schematic maps ('mapshots') and syntheses. These enable a spatial visualisation of the organisation of administrative areas, institutional areas of responsibility and influence ('institutional maps').

Planning professionals, public actors, entrepreneurs and citizens have spatial perceptions of the areas in which they live or operate. These perceptions influence their daily mobility (what is far away? What is close?), their assessment of and support for local development projects, and the way they identify with their geographical surroundings.

The **mapshots** allow a conceptual representation of an interdependence area with geographical features, patterns and trends that are relevant to the observed or potential interdependence dynamics. These visualisations are created during the workshop by the workshop participants in small groups on the basis of a schematic reference map.

Cooperation across administrative boundaries is characterised not least by the respective institutional context and the cooperation environment of the respective interlinking aspect. Topic-specific **institutional maps** summarise this environment in a simplified way and help to understand the institutional context and the cooperation environment of the specific object of cooperation. These are prepared in advance so that they can be discussed and clarified with the workshop participants during the workshop.

## Workshop topics

The Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict is characterised by its central location with surrounding European transport corridors, which contribute to above-average accessibility and attractiveness and are considered an important growth factor.<sup>3</sup> The Eurodistrict belongs to the northern part of the Upper Rhine region and comprises 112 municipalities - including the 61 French municipalities of the Eurometropolis of Strasbourg and the Communauté de communes du Canton d'Erstein as well as the 51 German municipalities of the Ortenau district. The almost one million inhabitants of the Eurodistrict are almost equally distributed on both sides of the border and have grown slightly in recent years (between 2016 and 2020). This balance within the Eurodistrict is also visible in the distribution of the number of jobs and the gross domestic product. This is particularly evident in the comparison between the Eurometropolis of Strasbourg and the Ortenau district<sup>4</sup>.

In addition, there are a number of differences that characterise the cooperation and interdependencies in the Eurodistrict. For example, monocentric structures with the Eurometropolis of Strasbourg in the French part of the Eurodistrict contrast with polycentric structures on the German side; the area is organised in a complementary way with the different centres and development axes.

---

<sup>3</sup> Trinationale Metropolregion Oberrhein (n. d.): <https://www.rmtmo.eu/de/de/rmt-tmo/das-gebiet-des-oberrheins.html>

<sup>4</sup> Statistisches Landesamt Baden-Württemberg (<https://www.statistik-bw.de/>) and Insee (<https://www.insee.fr/en/accueil>) – Estimation by ADEUS, Annex to Insee Data (national calculation)

## Labour market and housing

In order to identify the interdependencies and their potential in the Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict on the subject of 'labour market and housing', a number of other differences are significant, which make it possible to identify important complementarities for cooperation:

- The different spatial structures also influence the economic structures. In the French part, these are concentrated in the Strasbourg metropolitan region, while the Ortenau district as a whole has established itself as an attractive location for work and business, benefiting not least from its proximity to Strasbourg and the Rhine.
- This is associated with a concentration of large commercial locations around Strasbourg on the one hand and a distribution across the four centres of Achern, Kehl, Offenburg and Lahr on the other. This differentiation is also visible in terms of its spatial distribution and density for the downstream commercial locations.
- The economic structure of the Ortenau district is highly diversified. It consists predominantly of medium-sized companies, particularly in the manufacturing sector, whose markets are mostly not dependent on large companies. The French part of the Eurodistrict has a clearer service orientation, not least due to the functions of the Eurometropolis of Strasbourg as a university and research centre, the location of the European Parliament and its importance for tourism.
- The population forecasts indicate varying growth in the sub-regions up to 2036, with the highest growth in the Eurometropolis of Strasbourg and only a slight increase of a few thousand inhabitants in the Ortenau district.<sup>5</sup>
- The previously considerable differences in unemployment rates have decreased significantly since 2020. The difference between the Ortenau district and the labour market district of Selestat Erstein is now only around 1 percentage point, while the difference to the Eurometropolis of Strasbourg is still around 3 percentage points<sup>6</sup>.
- New jobs were created on both sides of the border between 2008 and 2018. The growth in the Ortenau district was more than three times as high as in Strasbourg (SCoTERS)<sup>7</sup>. Current developments (as of autumn 2023) also point to further growth in jobs subject to social insurance contributions in the Ortenau district, with unemployment figures remaining more or less unchanged<sup>8</sup>.
- Although the proportion of workers commuting to Ortenaukreis from the French side appears to be comparatively low, the absolute number of cross-border commuters in Ortenaukreis in 2018 (7,926) was higher than in almost all other German regions of the Franco-German border area (48,200). This number continued to rise in the following years and reached 8,387 people in 2021 (an increase of 6%), while the number of French cross-border commuters to Germany in the entire border region fell to 48,200 in 2021<sup>9</sup>.

---

<sup>5</sup> Corinne Challand, Marie-Laure Kayali, Insee (2018): Bevölkerung des Grand Est im Jahr 2035 :zwischen dem deutschen demografischen Schock und dem Wohlstand von Luxemburg und der Schweiz (<https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/3607820>) und <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2011101?geo=EPCI-200067924#consulter-sommaire>

<sup>6</sup> INSEE, Landestatistik (2023): [https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2011101?geo=EPCI-200067924#tableau-EMP\\_G2](https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2011101?geo=EPCI-200067924#tableau-EMP_G2) & [https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2011101?geo=EPCI-246700488#graphique-POP\\_G2](https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2011101?geo=EPCI-246700488#graphique-POP_G2)

<sup>7</sup> Scoters (2019): <https://www.scoters.org/>

<sup>8</sup> Der Guller Stadtanzeiger Medien, Ausgabe Offenburg (2023): [https://www.stadtanzeiger-ortenau.de/offenburg-stadt/c-lokales/arbeitslosigkeit-steigt-im-ortenaukreis\\_a92043](https://www.stadtanzeiger-ortenau.de/offenburg-stadt/c-lokales/arbeitslosigkeit-steigt-im-ortenaukreis_a92043)

<sup>9</sup> Insee (2018): <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/6444588> and Bundesagentur für Arbeit (DE)/Bundesamt für Statistik (CH) ([https://www.eures-t.basleratlas.ch/#c=indicator&i=gg\\_arbeitsort.total&s=2021&view=map2](https://www.eures-t.basleratlas.ch/#c=indicator&i=gg_arbeitsort.total&s=2021&view=map2))

- An increasing shortage of skilled labour and highly qualified workers is becoming apparent on both sides of the border. Due to this situation, the responsible authorities of the Ortenau district have introduced measures together with their French partners to help German companies with labour shortages to facilitate the employment of French workers<sup>10</sup>.
- On both sides of the border, new housing of a comparable size has been continuously created in recent decades<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, Strasbourg appears more attractive as a place to live than Offenburg, for example, especially for potential workers who could be recruited from outside the Eurodistrict, even though many highly qualified jobs are located on the German side of the Eurodistrict. Consequently, the Ortenau district has an interest in creating access to housing for newly arrived skilled workers in Strasbourg in order to make job offers in Offenburg and the surrounding area more attractive.
- All sub-regions of the Eurodistrict have a well-developed road network and connections to public transport. Apart from a Rhine ferry, the cross-border transport axes are limited to four connections. This limits cross-border accessibility in terms of the time required for cross-border commuters who live away from the main axes. In addition, public cross-border transport is generally more expensive than domestic connections.

From these observations, three main perspectives can be derived for the workshop's questions:

- Perception of cross-border employment development:
  - Which work locations are particularly important for cross-border interdependencies (commuter flows) and how are they connected in terms of transport (in general and with regard to public transport)?
  - Which business locations are particularly important for cross-border links?
  - How are business locations connected in terms of transport (in general and with regard to public transport) and to what extent can a pooling of business locations create further potential for interdependencies in the labour market?
- Localisation of relevant Franco-German employment opportunities:
  - Where have the new jobs been created for French workers that have reduced unemployment rates?
  - Where are the particularly dynamic business locations?
  - Where can the joint efforts for living in France and working in the Ortenau district (and vice versa) be located and in which sectors/economic areas?
  - Where will the expected new jobs relevant to cross-border employment opportunities be located?
  - What does this mean for the localisation of training capacities on both sides of the border?
  - Where is there a need for the development of commuter-relevant public transport services to strengthen an integrated labour market?
- Localisation of the relevant residential districts:
  - Which residential locations are particularly important for cross-border interdependencies (commuter flows) and how are they connected by transport?

---

<sup>10</sup> ADEUS (2020): [https://www.adeus.org/wp-content/uploads/13283\\_file\\_note-311\\_economie\\_ortenu-de\\_ji-web.pdf](https://www.adeus.org/wp-content/uploads/13283_file_note-311_economie_ortenu-de_ji-web.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> ADEUS (2017): [https://www.scoters.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/4-Eurometropole\\_2017.pdf](https://www.scoters.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/4-Eurometropole_2017.pdf); Eurometropole Strasbourg (2021): <https://www.strasbourg.eu/documents/976405/302979249/0/79f14db2-9e4f-8503-0a07-3831729c10f6>; Insee (2023): [https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2011101?geo=EPCI-246700488#tableau-LOG\\_G1](https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2011101?geo=EPCI-246700488#tableau-LOG_G1); Insee (2020): <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2011101?geo=EPCI-200067924#chiffre-cle-3>; Statistisches Landesamt Baden-Württemberg (2022/2023): <https://www.statistik-bw.de/>

- Where will the additional residential neighbourhoods be located and to what extent are they relevant for potential commuter flows?
- What does the expected location of future jobs and residential areas mean for the development of cross-border commuters and the development of labour market interdependencies?

## Leisure time

The area of the Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict is characterised by a high diversity of tourist attractions, which at the same time offers the inhabitants of the Eurodistrict a wide range of leisure and recreational activities. On the one hand, this includes many natural leisure opportunities (hiking and cycling trails, nature reserves, banks of the Rhine, bathing lakes, etc.), a variety of sights (e.g. castles and palaces), the Europapark as one of the most famous leisure and theme parks in Germany and urban cultural offerings (especially in Strasbourg). This is complemented by an extensive selection of local events on both sides of the Rhine, offering further leisure activities for all age groups.

The differences, but also some similarities on both sides of the border in terms of leisure and recreational activities, as well as the perception of these, become clear on the basis of a differentiated view of the offers:

- Despite their different character (apart from national and international tourists), the local recreation areas on both sides of the Rhine are mainly visited by the inhabitants of the respective country, as the border is still perceived as a border by many people in everyday life.
- Despite the concentration of the variety of cultural and urban offers of supra-regional or international importance in the metropolis of Strasbourg, the city is not considered a natural place for leisure activities on the German side.
- Outdoor swimming pools, playgrounds and picnic areas tend to be more widespread and more 'open' on the German side, which also makes them very attractive to residents of the French part of the Eurodistrict. However, language and comprehension difficulties and the unevenly distributed attractiveness of these sites also lead to conflicts among users<sup>12</sup>.
- The Europapark in the south of the German part of the Eurodistrict, like the metropolis of Strasbourg, also stands out from other leisure and recreational facilities in the region due to its supra-regional significance.
- Local initiatives to strengthen cross-border leisure activities contribute to networking:
  - The binational theatre Eurodistrict BADen ALSace (BAAL) has a comprehensive intercultural orientation.<sup>13</sup> It organises the annual cross-border children's and youth theatre days "Allez hop" and offers a comprehensive cultural education programme. With the new amphitheatre on the Rhine in Neuried, it has been offering a unique venue for international encounters with a multilingual cultural programme since 2019.
  - The Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict contributes to strengthening cross-border leisure activities with numerous projects in the fields of culture, sport and tourism.<sup>14</sup>
  - The "Leisure Timetable" website offers comprehensive information for excursions to Alsace and the Vosges, Baden-Württemberg and the Black Forest in the other national language. Based on the organisation of excursions by train and bus, the regions on both sides of the Rhine are presented and cross-border leisure activities are specifically addressed by the choice of language for the maps, timetables and fare information.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Welt (2019): <https://www.welt.de/vermischtes/article196774061/Grenzregion-im-Suedwesten-Warum-in-den-Freibae-dern-von-Kehl-nun-franzoesische-Regeln-gelten.html>

<sup>13</sup> Theater Eurodistrict BADen Alsace (n. d.): <http://theater-baden-alsace.com/>

<sup>14</sup> Eurodistrict Strasbourg-Ortenau (n. d.): <https://www.eurodistrict.eu/de>

<sup>15</sup> Verkehrsclub Deutschland (VCD), Regionalverband Südbaden (2023): <https://vcd-freizeitfahrplan.eu/de/>

- In addition to public transport connections, the Vis-à-Vis bus<sup>16</sup> offers excursions from Lahr (or the surrounding area) to Erstein and Obernai and vice versa every Saturday from June to December. This includes free bicycle transport for exploring the neighbouring country as well as information on special events in the towns along the bus route.

From these observations, three main perspectives can be derived for the workshop's questions:

- Perception of the cross-border leisure and local recreation offer:
  - What complementarities and developments can be observed in recent years and how can they be localised?
  - Which places / offers are not used across borders, but have the potential to be used across borders?
  - Where are the places used by residents on both sides of the border?
- Localisation of potentials for future places of leisure encounters:
  - What characterises the places used by people on both sides of the border compared to other leisure and recreational facilities?
  - Which places for leisure activities (spatially and by type of leisure activity) could be suitable as meeting places (sense of togetherness)?
  - Which spatial perimeters are suitable for localising attractive locations for cross-border leisure activities?
  - Where can complementarities for future leisure and local recreation be strengthened in terms of cross-border utilisation?
- Need for improved coordination of the provision of leisure activities:
  - Where and for which services is there a need for better coordination in their development?
  - What mobility requirements would result from changes to attractive cross-border leisure activities?
  - Where can the future high-speed cycle path between Strasbourg and Offenburg promote cross-border leisure activities?
  - Which leisure activities are suitable for cross-border (joint) marketing?

---

<sup>16</sup> Zweckverband Vis-à-vis (2023): <https://www.vis-a-vis-online.eu/vis-a-vis-bus.620.htm>







This PRE-EVENT BRIEF is conducted within the ESPON 2030 Cooperation Programme, partly financed by the European Regional Development Fund .

The ESPON EGTC is the Single Beneficiary of the ESPON 2030 Cooperation Programme. The Single Operation within the programme is implemented by the ESPON EGTC and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the EU Member States and the Partner States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

This delivery does not necessarily reflect the opinions of members of the ESPON 2030 Monitoring Committee.

**Coordination:**

Anna Hellings (Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development, BBSR)

Claire Duvernet (Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development, BBSR)

Dr Philipp Gareis (Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development, BBSR)

**Authors**

Dr Sabine Zillmer (Spatial Foresight)

Hélène Bernard (AT<sup>2</sup>)

Dr Jean Claude Zeimet (Spatial Foresight)

Kirsti Hagemann (Spatial Foresight)

**Information on ESPON and its projects can be found at [www.espon.eu](http://www.espon.eu).**

The website provides the possibility to download and examine the most recent documents produced by finalised and ongoing ESPON projects.

**© ESPON 2030**

Layout and graphic design by BGRAPHIC, Denmark

Printing, reproduction or quotation is authorised provided the source is acknowledged and a copy is forwarded to the ESPON EGTC in Luxembourg.

Contact: [info@espon.eu](mailto:info@espon.eu)

# ESPON



Co-funded by  
the European Union  
Interreg

[espon.eu](https://espon.eu)



## ESPON 2030

ESPON EGTC  
11 Avenue John F. Kennedy  
L-1855 Luxembourg  
Grand Duchy of Luxembourg  
Phone: +352 20 600 280  
Email: [info@espon.eu](mailto:info@espon.eu)  
[www.espon.eu](https://www.espon.eu)

The ESPON EGTC is the Single Beneficiary of the ESPON 2030 Cooperation Programme. The Single Operation within the programme is implemented by the ESPON EGTC and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the EU Member States and the Partner States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

### Disclaimer

This delivery does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the members of the ESPON 2030 Monitoring Committee.