SUMMARY

A team of ÖAR Regional Consultants Ltd., "Joanneum Research Forschungsgesellschaft mbH" and the University St. Gallen has been assigned by the Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning (ÖROK) to accomplish a study on "Europaregionen" – Challenges, Goals and Types of Cooperation.

Following the underlying tender an "Europaregion" is defined as
⌃ "cross-border cooperation of economic areas with more than regional relevance" respectively
⌃ "regions, where settlement and economic interlinks have gained a strong cross-border character and therefore there is a need for cross-border cooperation."

This study shall point out the different characters of these cross-border cooperations, and describe their capabilities but also their limits. Following the assignment the objective of the study is the identification of core criteria for well-working "Europaregionen".

Five "Europaregionen" with Austrian partner regions have been investigated in 40 interviews and additional research – **strongly supported by representatives** of the regions. These insights have been discussed with the representatives of the regions in two innovatively designed workshops.

> **WITH AUSTRIAN PARTNER REGIONS:**
>
> ⌃ Regio Bodensee
> ⌃ Tirol-Südtirol-Trentino
> ⌃ EuroparegionSalzburg
> ⌃ CENTROPE
> ⌃ Zukunftsregion Südost

These case studies comprehend all Austrian provinces resp. their centres (except the province Upper Austria resp. the city of Linz).

Based on the already identified challenges in the cases with Austrian partner regions the experiences of other "Europaregionen" without Austrian participation have been investigated. These regions illustrate different approaches for solutions resp. different approaches to handle the

> **WITHOUT AUSTRIAN PARTICIPATION:**
>
> ⌃ Euregio Maas-Rhein
> ⌃ Euroregion Neisse-Nisa-Nysa
> ⌃ Öresund-Region
> ⌃ Großregion SaarLorLuxRhein
> ⌃ Transmanche/Rives-Manche

identified challenges. To some extend these cases also give a clue about possible hurdles in the development of "Europaregionen".

The **five cases with Austrian partner regions** represent the diversity of "Europaregionen":

Both, the **Bodenseeraum** and the **"Europaregion" Salzburg** are characterised by well established cooperation systems and a high density of cross-border social and economic interlinks. In the case of the "Europaregion" Salzburg one can speak about ONE functionally interlinked region. In the case of the Bodenseeraum there are (much older) more dense cooperation structures but the social and economic interlinks of the entire region are minor compared to Salzburg region. Instead of a common regional identity a common problem-based identity is prevailing at the Bodenseeraum, that is the protection of its common natural resource, the lake "Bodensee".

The **"Europaregion" Tirol – Südtirol – Trentino** is strongly influenced by its history. There are functional interlinks even if they are not so clearly shaped as in Salzburg. With the "Brennerachse" (Brenner motorway) there is a dominating and common (and commonly perceived) traffic problem. The cooperation structure is - compared to Salzburg and the Regio Bodensee - less differentiated. There is a high, factual cooperation volume (this means active interlinks at the level of culture, politics and economy).

The establishment of cooperation needs time. This is also a reason why the young "Europaregionen" **CENTROPE** and **Zukunftsregion** do not show many tangible effects so far. At the same time they have a difficult starting basis as both can not be described as functional interlinked regions nor do they have a clearly perceived common – and only commonly solvable – problem.

The **form of organisation** and the **intensity of the participation of different stakeholders/actors** do significantly differ between the "Europaregionen". The different forms vary from the assistance for "Europaregionen" by existing departments of the Provincial Government (Tirol – Südtirol – Trentino), to the establishment of new coordinating offices ("Europaregion" Salzburg, Regio Bodensee) to a project organisation aiming to develop new structures (CENTROPE).

Other examples do on the one hand emphasise all kinds of differences of "Europaregionen" and on the other hand confirm the existence of common challenges in the development of their structures and

processes like the better integration of different levels and groups of actors.

What all "Europaregionen" have in common is the effort to implement the "idea Europe" at regional level. Other common issues – and derivable success criteria – can be summarised in six fields:

1. "Europaregionen" come into existence by **political initiative**; the political decision makers have an important and difficult role in the development and implementation of "Europaregionen".

It is a political idea resp. initiative which makes a more or less interlinked cross-border region a "Europaregion"; therefore the political actors are of special importance.

All cases show that the initial impulse to establish a "Europaregion" comes from a political initiative or that there is at least some kind of political support. The starting point is a (more or less significant) cause, which can be a common problem (for example the possible ecological destabilisation of the lake "Bodensee") or a change of the geopolitical framework (for example new economic conditions after the fall of the iron curtain or after the EU accession of Austria in the case of the "Europaregion" Salzburg). An example of a significant cause to intensify the cooperation is the building of the Öresund-bridge between Denmark and Sweden. This has been a very clear cause (which has been clearly perceived by the political decision makers but also by the international public).

Whether the regional politicians operate as project promoters of the "Europaregion" themselves (for example in the Öresund Region) or support dedicated persons (mainly in administration); a main success criterion of "Europaregionen" is the availability and the distinct ability of committed individuals to cooperate. This ability is signed by the (personal) interest for cooperation, openness for the "other" side and ability to develop cooperation in partnership, even if there is a different factual distribution of power (financially, politically and other).

Already existing cross-border cooperations and networks of the political decision makers are important success criteria for "Europaregionen". The networking at the level of administration is also essential, as the work at administration level may allow more continuity.

2. "Europaregionen" comprehend **cross border areas** (with more or less "fuzzy" geographical outline) that are characterised by

- different levels of complexity,
- different density of economic, social and political interlinks,
- different extent of perception as common area (region) and
- different preconditions for cooperation.

The cases examined in the context of this study vary significantly in size, complexity and existing interlinks. The study describes the framework conditions to facilitate an "easy" development of a "Europaregion": This conditions include a possibly low level of complexity (low number of regions involved, little differences in languages, culture, competences, resources), as well as possibly high levels of economic, social and political interlinks (where the geographical stretch do match the entire region), clear perception of the value added of the "Europaregion" by different actors and a good cooperation infrastructure (in the meaning of technical infrastructure but also distinct ability and chances to cooperate of the actors).

Following the definition of the study "Europaregionen" comprehend important economic areas, so always a rather high level of complexity can be expected. However, the "Europaregion" Salzburg with its 0.8 Mio. inhabitants differs significantly from the "Zukunftsregion" with up to 17 Mio. Very big "Europaregionen" having a high level of complexity generally have a more difficult basis to start. However, the example of the "Großregion" (SaarLorLuxRhein) demonstrates that a "Europaregion" can also be established in a region with four participating countries having a population of more than 11 Mio.

An important factor for the complexity of "Europaregionen" is the participation of different levels of hierarchies – which is mastered in many different ways. Some cases base the "Europaregion" mainly on communal collaboration (example Euroregion Neisse-Nisa-Nysa) – having the advantage of relative little differences in competences and interest but the disadvantage to exclude essential competences at regional and national level.

The "Europaregion" Tirol-Südtirol-Trentino bases mainly on the cooperation at provincial level. CENTROPE includes besides the regional (this means provincial) level bigger cities in its structures. In the „Großregion" (SaarLorLuxRhein) national, regional and communal levels are included in different types of organisations. For all examples it is true that it is a major challenge to balance the inclusion of different levels.

3. "Europaregionen" are not limited to areas which have the "best" preconditions. In fact "Europaregionen" can be established at all different framework conditions, when they are **designed to match the situation**. The match has to cover
- their objectives and strategies
- their activities, core processes and their range of services and
- their form of organisation

A "matching" design of "Europaregionen" means for example to set realistic objectives that go with the initial situation.

For all examined cases there is one fundamental objective (even if not always explicitly stated): The "Europaregion" is supposed to implement the "idea Europe" at regional level, this means that by the integration of its sub-regions the "Europaregion" will be strengthened and it will be empowered to solve problems and to make better use of its potential. Moreover three different objectives can be identified:

⌃ Improving and better utilizing (mainly economic) potentials
⌃ Solving and regulating common (mainly spatial) problems
⌃ Reducing barriers of cross-border cooperation in all fields of life

For very complex regions with (for the time being) low levels of interlinks in the overall region or other difficult starting conditions (for example Zukunftsregion, CENTROPE) it would be difficult to set coordinated development of the region in all political fields as its main and short-term objective. Neither there is a clear pressure of problems nor a perceivable value added for the regional actors. Here it is much more important to create long-term potentials of cooperation by setting definitive (coordinated) short-term activities.

Looking at the case studies an interrelation between long-term („visionary") objectives and not minor important short-term success becomes visible. Short-term problems that have to be mastered quickly – like the possible scenario of destabilisation of the Bodensee – can become the starting point for a continuous and lasting cooperation. However, the case of Transmanche shows that a definitive cause itself is not enough to build a lasting "Europaregion". If this cause does not exist any more (e.g. because the problem was solved) the political project "Europaregion" can be seen as (more or less clearly) finished, as soon as there are no other expectations and objectives.

Not only the visions and objectives of the case studies differ. "Europaregionen" also have a different repertoire of „core processes", starting from trust-building to the identification of common needs up to efforts to make the cooperation more binding.

Also here it is true that not every "Europaregion" has to implement each of the possible core processes. However it is important to build a solid basis for the cooperation before other steps are set. Achieving a higher degree of formalisation of the cooperation – which is e. g. an objective in the "Europaregion" Salzburg – can only be successful if elementary core processes (like building trust and common visions) work properly and are not endangered by the formalisation.

Finally the form of organisation has to match the requirements – the initial situation, the objectives but also the given resources and tasks.

4. "Europaregionen" can be organised in many different ways. The study names four **organisation logics** that are used in an adequate mix:

⌃ **"Political logic"** as essential basis of "Europaregionen", to set signs for cooperation to the regional actors
⌃ **"Project logic"** to work on specific problem settings in a very focused manner and to test out cooperation
⌃ **"Regulation logic"** to achieve (formally) binding commitments
⌃ **"Network logic"** to integrate, activate and support many different actors

The public presentation as a political project signals backing and support for the organisation of an "Europaregion". Vice versa the consideration of „political logic" is essential for the organisations because political decision makers have to take on an important and difficult role at the development of "Europaregionen". However if an "Europaregion" was organised exclusively by political statements the positive effects of this logic would decline and loose credibility.

The „regulation logic" gives clear orientation for "Europaregionen"; consequently out of a "Europaregion" a new regional authority with own competences and resources emerges. The possibilities of such a type of organisation seem to be luring but the implementation is difficult and risky. A high degree of formalisation can make "Europaregionen" inflexible. Therefore such kind of development seems only to be recommendable for "Europaregionen" that have a solid basis and broad acceptance for orientation towards "regulation logic". None of the "Europaregionen" is currently organised prevailingly according to this logic. The soonest is the Euregio Maas-Rhein, at all cases with Austrian participation the "Europaregion" Salzburg shows preferences to orientate its future development according to this logic.

The strongest shaped logics are in all cases those that favour the implementation of individual activities ("project logic") and the networking of existing actors ("network logic"). Both logics allow definitive and visible activities at relative low risk. So the implementation of the "network logic" can be done by organisations with low resources and competences and can achieve results in many topics by activating measures (comparable to a regional management model). The disadvantage of a sole orientation at the „project logic" or the „network logic" is that a harmonised overall development can only be achieved by a high level of coordination of all actors. The Öresund-Region is a good-practise example in terms of the "network logic": It shows an intentionally informally designed organisation form. At the same time poor coherence and the thread of "fragmentation" of the activities are named as crucial points in the Öresund-Region.

The four presented logics are supposed to give orientation to "Europaregionen" about the positioning of the own organisations and the pursued development. All four logics are differently represented by the actors in all investigated regions. The art of organisational development of "Europaregionen" seems to be to find the right position (based on initial situation, objectives and resources) in the mix of these logics.

5. "Europaregionen" are in an ongoing **conflicting situation** between reduction of **complexity** (clear borders, clear rules and clear structures) and increasing their **scope of capabilities** by including relevant competences and resources.

To stay capable of acting in their complex environment "Europaregionen" try to keep the level of complexity as low as possible. At the same time chances to act do only exist when different groups of actors and levels of hierarchy are included – whereby complexity increases again.

For example there are many different competences and resources to develop "Europaregionen" at national level – however this level is hardly integrated in the "Europaregionen". Especially "Network Organisations" have to stretch their resources at various groups of actors. Thus public relations and participation become important success criteria.

An approach to escape this conflicting situation is a broad formalisation of "Europaregionen" with own resources and competences. This way allows "unpunished" reduction of complexity due to higher autonomy. But this solution cannot be recommended without major restrictions (see also remarks on "regulation logic" at the previous page). Another possibility is to establish operational structures that go with the level of complexity (this means also complex forms of organisation). In this case the risk is that the need and time for coordination will be perceived as more demanding as the benefit of the cooperation itself. Again, the art of organisational development of "Europaregionen" is rather to look for individual solutions than to stick to given designs.

For example: In the "Europaregion" Tirol-Südtirol-Trentino three administrative bodies of the three participating countries are the major actors involving other administrative bodies following given needs and demands. By doing so, they found a solution with relative low structural complexity. Otherwise in the „Großregion" (SaarLorLuxRhein) there are several structures to include actors (in a more or less formal way) up to an "Interregional Council of Parliamentarians".

The "Euregio-Council" of the Euregio Maas-Rhein includes many representatives of different interest groups in operations. In the Regio Bodensee a large number of actors is actively involved without having a (formal) frame for their lively cooperation.

6. The **effects** of "Europaregionen" can be found mainly in the field of awareness building. These effects are the basis for a long-term process within that also other – spatially visible – effects can be achieved.

Most of the time the effects of "Europaregionen" can be hardly directly allocated to concrete activities and often the effects are hard to measure. Important effects in the field of awareness building often face rather little – directly allocated – effects in the field of spatial planning or economic development. When examining the cases it clearly appears that "Europaregionen" need a long time to achieve visible and tangible effects as the building of "Europaregionen" is a long-term process in itself. Even if in the beginning prevailingly "soft" effects are achieved, these effects should not be underestimated. The resulting awareness and trust is a major basis for more tangible results.

The balance between long-term objectives and instant successes once again becomes an essential success criterion for "Europaregionen".

Altogether "success" can only be seen and measured in relation with the objectives set of the individual "Europaregion". Common **success criteria** exist at four levels:

⌃ **„Simple" regions** (complexity is easy to handle, high density of interlinks, common identity, existing cooperation culture and -infrastructure)

⌃ A **significant** (possibly identity-building) **value added** of cooperation for the relevant actors (for example a common problem)

⌃ The **matching design** of structures and processes (partnership of main actors and competences, open-mind-ness, clear and transparent responsibilities, coherent strategies) based on matching objectives, strategies and activities

⌃ **Ability and engagement of individuals** – especially of political decision makers – for cross-border cooperation.