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Master Thesis : Regional and European Project Management

The Strasbourg - Ortenau Eurodistrict: Establishment, missions, operation, results



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1. Introduction	3
1.1 Context and state of the art	3
1.2 Selection of the bibliography	4
1.3 Méthodology	4
2. Theoretical background to cross-border cooperation	4
2.1 The origin of EGTCs	4
2.2 The necessity of creating EGTCs	5
2.3 Functioning principles of Eurodistricts according to EGTCs	6
3. Requirements of the cooperation between Strasbourg and the Ortenaukreis	6
3.1. The cross-border area of the Upper Rhine	6
3.2 The constellation of cooperation entities in the Upper Rhine region	7
3.2.1. Cross-border cooperation at state level	7
3.2.2. Regional cross-border cooperation in the Upper Rhine area	7
3.3 Euroregions and "multi-level governance"	9
4. The historical background and existing cooperation in the Strasbourg-Ortenau area	9
4.1. Historical connections between France and Germany along the Alsatian border	9
4.2 The first links between Strasbourg and Kehl	10
4.3. The first attempts of cooperation before the Eurodistrict	10
5. The creation of the Eurodistrict, its missions and achievements	11
5.1. The affirmation of the term "Eurodistrict" and the agreement on the political creation of the Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict	11
5.2. The creation of the Eurodistrict and its functioning	11
5.3. The objectives and cross-border projects of the Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict	12
6. Development prospects for the Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict	14
6.1. The territorial and strategic evolution of the Eurodistrict	14
6.2. Better coordination with the RMT and other Upper Rhine bodies	14
6.3. Scalar hierarchical complementarity and the Treaty of Aachen	15
Conclusion	15
Bibliography	17
Monographs	17
Sitography	19

1. Introduction

1.1 Context and state of the art

The various advances made at the start of European integration were primarily aimed at guaranteeing peace on the old continent for as long as possible. Over time, other missions were added, such as the fair economic integration of territories and the reduction of economic and social inequalities. To achieve this, the European Union develops new tools enabling the joint development of attractive areas, the creation of technical support structures for the regions, the removal of border controls, the provision of financial support and the consolidation of legal instruments. One of these instruments will be the EGTC, which is not necessarily linked to the European Union. The aim of this legal instrument is to facilitate and promote territorial cooperation (cross-border, transnational or interregional), with a view to strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion.

The Franco-German friendship is a recent development in the history of the two countries, which have long been at the centre of international tensions. In this context, Alsace-Moselle was one of the bones of contention that each country wanted to wrest back. The announcement of the creation of a Eurodistrict is highly symbolic of the 40th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty.

The city of Strasbourg and the Ortenaukreis are located in a common geographical area known as the Upper Rhine. This crossroads of 3 countries at the heart of Europe has long been an area of exchange and cooperation. Numerous cross-border organisations have been structuring this area for many years. In this context, the regional area seems to be becoming the scale of governance. But few similar cross-border structures exist in Europe. Its aim is to create new forms of cooperation that no-one in Europe has developed before.

This dissertation will provide a chronology of cross-border exchanges in the Strasbourg-Ortenau sector, showing how it has been innovative and inspiring. It will explain how it has become a key player despite the existence of various and varied cross-border bodies in the Upper Rhine. We will look at the limits of the Eurodistrict, and highlight the problems that persist. Finally, it will attempt to show how the Strasbourg-Ortenau

Eurodistrict aims to become an internationally attractive area thanks to the support of the Upper Rhine Metropolitan Region (RMT).

1.2 Selection of the bibliography

Many publications have already been written on the Eurodistrict, but they do not cover the latest developments or the complexity of regional links. The bibliography will be made up of previous scientific works on the Eurodistrict and scientific articles on the intercultural and cross-border theoretical framework. Recent press articles and a semi-structured interview will be used to analyse recent developments in the Eurodistrict. The interview is with a person from outside the Eurodistrict who works actively with the Eurodistrict and is fully aware of the cross-border institutional landscape. The interview also provides a practical perspective of the Eurodistrict without being biased.

1.3 Méthodology

This report will be divided into 5 main parts. The first part of the dissertation will describe the cooperation frameworks that existed before the creation of the Eurodistricts.

The second part focuses on existing cross-border cooperation in the Upper Rhine and the historical past of the Strasbourg-Ortenau region. The third part will look at the beginnings of the Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict. The fourth part will deal with the creation of the Strasbourg-Ortenau EGTC and will explain its operation, missions and achievements. The fifth part will serve as a discussion and will put the EGTC in perspective with the other cross-border cooperation partners, talk about its possible development and show why this scale of local governance is necessary for the citizens of the Upper Rhine.

2. Theoretical background to cross-border cooperation

2.1 The origin of EGTCs

The Madrid Protocol of 1980 established an initial legal basis for cooperation between local and regional authorities across borders. It was initiated by the Council of Europe, an institution not linked to the European Union. The EU's drive towards regionalisation began in the 1960s and was initially aimed at harmonising the economies of

Europe's regions. The emergence of the Schengen area in 1985 facilitated the mobility of individuals and generated new exchanges, notably with an increase in cross-border workers. 40% of European regions share a border and 0.9% of the population crosses borders every day. New exchanges create new cross-border needs, which must be resolved at different levels of governance. Within the trinational Upper Rhine region, cross-border cooperation is intensifying to tackle issues such as employment, health, mobility, education and research.

In the 1990s, the European Union was preparing for enlargement to the east, and was looking for ways to strengthen economic cohesion and minimise regional disparities. The Amsterdam Treaty of 1997 strengthened cohesion policy and opened the way to "enhanced cooperation", which should maintain the Union's objectives. However, a specific legal framework is still needed to encourage the local development of initiatives and to enable a wide range of cooperation between different local structures within the European Union.

2.2 The necessity of creating EGTCs

But the Treaty of Madrid and the Treaty of Amsterdam are not enough to create cooperations, because it is difficult to implement them.

The Madrid Protocol enables to create the legal conditions necessary, in a given area, to create other forms of cooperation that have still to be established. To clarify this point, let's take the example of the Upper Rhine.

In the Upper Rhine, the Madrid Protocol led to the signing of the Karlsruhe Agreement on 23 January 1996. This agreement was signed by Germany, France, Luxembourg and the Swiss Confederation. It provides favourable legal conditions at all levels of local administration for the creation of cross-border cooperation. They do not receive new competences, but cooperate together in those that are allocated to them and shared respectfully. But creating a legal framework before creating cooperation areas complicates the creation of these areas. Some EU Member States are not signatories to the Madrid Protocol, which comes under the umbrella of the Council of Europe. In addition, the multitude of potential forms of cooperation, which differ from one agreement to another, complicates the involvement of the European Union, which cannot really support them. The creation of EGTCs under European law incorporates the principles of cooperation listed in the Madrid protocol, but opens up the scope of application and simplifies procedures for their creation, while avoiding as far as possible restrictions on the areas of application.

2.3 Functioning principles of Eurodistricts according to EGTCs

Since 5 July 2006, a European Union regulation has introduced EGTCs to resolve these harmonisation problems. In 2013 this regulation was amended to clarify and improve their creation and operation. Each EGTC operates separately, with its own missions and locally defined frameworks. The use of the term "Eurodistrict" symbolises identification with Europe and may strengthen a sense of new identity in cross-border regions. They may be formed by at least two entities in two Member States, whether local administrations, companies responsible for operating services of economic interest or associations.

3. Requirements of the cooperation between Strasbourg and the Ortenaukreis

3.1. The cross-border area of the Upper Rhine

The Upper Rhine region, covering 21,500 square kilometres and home to almost 6 million people, is a dynamic trinational area. It encompasses several major urban centres (Karlsruhe, Freiburg im Breisgau, Strasbourg, Basel and Mulhouse) as well as a wide variety of economic activity. The region is also renowned for its research vitality, hosting the European Confederation of Upper Rhine Universities (EUCOR). In environmental terms, the Upper Rhine shares similar geographical features and challenges, particularly in terms of water resources and biodiversity. In addition, this area plays a crucial role in transport, with the Rhine as a major route for European river transport and a dense motorway network facilitating trade between the east and west of the continent.

The region boasts considerable linguistic diversity, with local dialects such as Alsatian, Alemannic, Swiss German and Badisch being mutually comprehensible. From a tourism perspective, the Upper Rhine is a popular destination, offering Christmas markets, castles, a rich cultural heritage and many attractions for visitors.

The Upper Rhine is therefore a fertile ground for political cooperation and lends itself perfectly as a laboratory for European cooperation.

3.2 The constellation of cooperation entities in the Upper Rhine region

Cooperation in the Upper Rhine brings together a large number of cross-border bodies at national, regional and local level.

3.2.1. Cross-border cooperation at state level

The oldest body is the Franco-German-Swiss Intergovernmental Commission (CIG), which was signed in 1975 with the Bonn Agreement. Under this agreement, a commission was set up to "facilitate the study and solution of neighbourhood problems in the border regions" of the Upper Rhine. The CIG meets once a year and brings together the foreign ministries of the three countries concerned. The agreement lays down the basis for cross-border cooperation in the region: environmental protection, development of cross-border cooperation at all local levels, optimisation of infrastructure and public services, and mutual aid in the event of natural disasters.

The second national-level cross-border body in the Upper Rhine is also the most recent. The Cross-border Cooperation Committee (CCT) was created following the signing of the Treaty of Aachen in 2019. It plans to intensify the number of meetings between the foreign and European affairs ministries of the two countries, as well as the joint drafting of legislative proposals. Once a year, it brings together all the actors (ministries of foreign affairs, local authorities, Eurodistricts, parliaments) of the two countries and enables increased cooperation on specific subjects.

3.2.2. Regional cross-border cooperation in the Upper Rhine area

The Trinational Metropolitan Region (TMR), the Upper Rhine Conference (ORC) and the Rhine Council (RC) constitute the regional level of cross-border cooperation.

The RMT was created on 9 December 2010 following the signing of the Offenbourg intergovernmental agreement. It serves to structure the various cross-border initiatives in a multi-level governance coordination approach. Its ambition is to make the Upper Rhine an economically functional European metropolitan centre that justifies the existence of a homogeneous urban area.

It aims to achieve this by using a horizontal governance process as close as possible to the population, based on the existing cross-border functional political and economic

networks. It coordinates actions and acts as the political spokesperson for the Upper Rhine, but has no real decision-making powers.

The Upper Rhine Conference (CRS) is the operational arm of the IGC, which organises practical cooperation and coordination between the three countries at regional level. It is made up of 12 different representatives who decide together on the action to be taken as a matter of priority. These representatives adopt resolutions and undertake to work within their communities to ensure that they are complied with. These resolutions are prepared by 12 different working groups, which submit various recommendations. These same working groups are based on cross-border expert groups, of which a total of 35 are made up of scientists, professionals and associations.

The Rhine Council represents the legislative bodies in the Upper Rhine thanks to the 71 regional elected representatives. This body monitors the work of the CRS, provides a forum for consultation between the various players and can give new impetus to cross-border initiatives. It acts as the "parliament" of the Upper Rhine. Through the elected representatives, it enables direct contact with governments in order to question their positions or obtain clarification.

The strategy of metropolisation and concrete achievements for civil society is implemented through local cross-border cooperation bodies.

Eurodistricts such as PAMINA, Strasbourg-Ortenau, Region Freiburg - Centre and South Alsace, and Trinational Basel, are at the heart of this approach. They work towards economic and social cohesion within a given area and translate strategies into action. The INFOBEST network, consisting of 4 local information centres along the Franco-German border, supports citizens by responding to their specific cross-border needs and problems. The INTERREG Upper Rhine programme also plays a key role and acts as a link with the European Union, funding projects and promoting European territorial cooperation. Civil society is also involved in cross-border cooperation, as in the case of Regio Basiliensis, which creates a lasting link between associations, businesses and politicians. INTERREG acts as a link between all these structures and the European Union, providing funding for local projects and initiatives.

3.3 Euroregions and "multi-level governance"

Since the 1990s, neo-regionalism has been making its mark on the political science debate. It is based on the idea that this territorial scale, however diverse it may be, is the most relevant basis for better supporting economic development and remaining competitive in a post-industrial society. Through its cohesion and regional development policy, the European Union has also worked towards this goal. A number of measures have been put in place, including the distribution of specific territorial cooperation funds (INTERREG), better representation of regional interests at the European Union, and legal instruments enabling the creation of cross-border regions.

Each Euroregion must create the concept and governance framework best suited to its situation, thanks to multi-level governance. EGTCs are adapted because they are flexible to all local governance structures while meeting specific needs. It allows a variety of definitions of the term region, whether socio-economic, planning, metropolitan, cultural or ecological.

But a multitude of bodies and players also complicates this cooperation and adds layers to the administrative mosaic. The problem of transparency and therefore of accessibility for citizens to familiarise themselves with the mechanisms is complex. The Upper Rhine differs from other Euroregions, which prefer to avoid a multiplicity of cooperation structures.

4. The historical background and existing cooperation in the Strasbourg-Ortenau area

4.1. Historical connections between France and Germany along the Alsatian border

At the time of the Westphalia treaties in 1648, France obtained 4/5 of the Alsatian territory, followed by the annexation of Strasbourg in 1681 by Louis XIV. Despite these changes, cultural and linguistic exchanges continued along the Rhine. The economic appeal of the Rhine stimulated the development of new trades from the kingdom of France, but the bourgeoisie remained predominantly Germanic, which maintained German as the

administrative and judicial language. The Alsatian elite were educated in Germany, especially at the University of Göttingen.

In its early years, the French Revolution favoured regionalism, proposing administrative bilingualism and recognising the region's Germanic character. However, the radicalisation of the Revolution put an end to these cross-border initiatives, and writings that were hostile to Alsace's cultural diversity were presented. Since that time, there has been little rapprochement until the end of second World War.

4.2 The first links between Strasbourg and Kehl

The construction of bridges from 1852 onwards marked the first rapprochement between Strasbourg and Kehl. When Alsace-Lorraine became part of the German Empire in 1871, Alsace was also considered a land to be Germanised. It was not until the end of the Second World War that exchanges between the two cities began. In 1960, a bus service was introduced between Strasbourg and Kehl. The first rapprochements were urbanistic, with an international competition in 1990 to design a Franco-German district in a Strasbourg suburb. Between 1996 and 2002, this consultation led to the adaptation of local urban planning law in both towns.

Another landmark project was the "Landesgartenschau" between 1998 and 2004, which enabled the two towns to develop the Garden of the Two Riverbanks.

The aim of the regional cooperation bodies was to create an area of cooperation with a strong symbolism as an example for the whole of Europe. In this context, the Strasbourg Ortenau area was perfect for this experiment.

4.3. The first attempts of cooperation before the Eurodistrict

In the 1970s, informal contacts between Strasbourg's urban planning agencies and the "Planungsgemeinschaft Mittelbaden" developed close links. These exchanges gave rise to the "Strasbourg-Ortenau White Paper" in 2004, a reference document for urban planning on both sides of the Rhine, the result of years of consultation and an INTERREG project.

In 1987, the European Conference of Local Authorities of the Council of Europe envisaged a European district bringing together Strasbourg, Kehl and other towns. This project never materialised due to insufficient motivation. Following a project to build an

incineration plant in Kehl, the two town councils joined in the protests. As a result, the two towns set up an exchange committee in 1989, leading to the creation of INFOBEST Strasbourg-Kehl in 1993 for example.

In the 1990s, cooperation intensified thanks to the commission, developing working groups for joint projects. The INTERREG Upper Rhine programme supports these initiatives. An air purification plan was introduced in 1995. The Deux-Rives / Zwei-Ufer project emerged in the 1990s, aiming to develop trade and economic exchange opportunities.

However, obstacles arose, notably political changes in France affecting certain projects.

5. The creation of the Eurodistrict, its missions and achievements

5.1. The affirmation of the term "Eurodistrict" and the agreement on the political creation of the Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict

In 1989, the association "Initiative Eurodistrict 1989.e.V" was created to promote the creation of the Eurodistrict. Public discussions addressed a range of issues including transport, culture, urbanisation, the environment, institutions and the strategies needed to put the Eurodistrict on the political agenda. However, a lack of coordination and political support is hampering progress.

In 2002, national-level politicians from Germany and France, including Wolfgang Schlaube and Lionel Jospin, showed an interest in the creation of a Eurodistrict.

In January 2003, during the commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the Élysée treaty, Gerhard Schröder and Jacques Chirac announced the creation of the Strasbourg-Kehl Eurodistrict, referring to a cross-border intermunicipality. The town councils of the two cities were not informed. This political initiative differs from other Eurodistricts, which are generally local initiatives. Problems linked to the size of the towns and complex negotiations have led to the extension of the Eurodistrict perimeter to the Ortenaukreis. Discussion of the Eurodistrict's objectives focuses on the development of infrastructures to meet the economic needs and specific characteristics of the area. The political creation of the Eurodistrict reflects an idealised vision of a Europe that is close to its citizens and transnational, which has yet to be created.

5.2. The creation of the Eurodistrict and its functioning

After 3 years of discussion, the Eurodistrict was created on 17 October 2005. It encompasses 51 German and 28 French municipalities, home to around 870,000 people. 3 major objectives were identified: to be more than just symbolic, to take concrete action in the interests of citizens, and to contribute to sustainable development,

As it did not yet have a legal personality, the Eurodistrict was quite poorly equipped. The organisational evolution continued during these years and showed more and more problems. From 2005 to 2008, there were no concrete projects. In October 2008, the Lahr declaration gave new vitality to the Eurodistrict, which was aiming to become an EGTC. It also changed the decision-making process within the Eurodistrict Council to enable more concrete progress to be made. In 2009 the Vetter/Cottin report presented the objectives and priorities for the EGCT. The EGTC agreement was signed on 4 February 2010, giving the Eurodistrict its own legal personality. The new Eurodistrict organisation speeds up the decision-making process and simplifies project implementation. In 2015, the Eurodistrict was extended to include the Canton of Erstein. The Eurodistrict Council has 30 members, equally divided between the two countries. They meet at least 3 times a year and discuss current affairs such as the payment of grants, the budget and the action plan, and adopt resolutions and strategies. The Council also votes on the presidents and vice-presidents, who change every three years. The Eurodistrict secretariat in Kehl has a staff of 8 and oversees the implementation of projects and coordinates Eurodistrict activities. The Eurodistrict budget amounts to €850,000 each year, corresponding symbolically to €1 per citizen. It is divided equally between German and French stakeholders.

5.3.The objectives and cross-border projects of the Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict

In 2015, the Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict adopted a "360-degree strategy" defining key priority themes: economic development, mobility, the environment and bilingualism. To promote these themes, the Eurodistrict uses its financial, logistical and relational resources, as well as its proximity to the territory. Its own budget enables it to finance grants for cross-border projects of up to €50,000. In addition, in partnership with three other Eurodistricts, it supports citizens' initiatives by helping to meet the appropriate players, apply for grants and manage projects. There are also two additional funds: a school fund for bilingualism and a cultural fund to support innovative cross-border projects.

Among the 13 themes (social affairs, spatial planning, culture, economy and employment, education and bilingualism, environment, youth, mobility, civic participation, prevention and safety, health, sport and tourism) in which the Eurodistrict is developing projects, only a few will be addressed to show the concrete ways in which the Eurodistrict is working to bring populations closer together.

Culture, education and bilingualism:

The Eurodistrict supports the Baal Novo Théâtre Eurodistrict theatre company, a Franco-German theatre group. In addition, the "Allez Hop" theatre festival was organised in 2015.

More recently, the "Spiel et parole" project shows another aspect of the Eurodistrict's missions. The Eurodistrict can play an important role in solving problems of regional or national support for the objectives of bilingualism. In 2018, the Land of Baden-Württemberg is abolishing the teaching of French in the first two years of primary school. On the French side, a structural shortage of French teachers is becoming an increasing problem. The aim of this project is to fill the gap by offering lessons in the foreign language on a voluntary basis, in a fun and entertaining way.

Sport:

Various sporting events have been created in recent years to bring the inhabitants of the Eurodistrict closer together, such as "Vélo Gourmand". The third edition of this cross-border, 60km cycle route enabled participants to discover almost 60 activities along 11 "festive and gourmet" sites. Nearly 7,000 people took part in this year's event, showing that these are the kind of events that attract the most people. According to the interviewee, the major challenge lies in encouraging people with little connection to the border exchange, and sporting events help to remedy this.

The environment:

The Eurodistrict plays a crucial role as a cross-border information relay and a driving force behind projects aimed at solving problems that transcend national borders. The Eurodistrict acts as a bridge between the environmental agencies in its area to create joint projects, as illustrated by the "Franco-German climate guide 2019-2021". This guide informs citizens about concrete actions and good everyday practices to protect the environment. It also lists existing environmental projects in the area and offers discounts for use at 36 businesses, associations and shops in the Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict. The creation of this guide

demonstrates the local collaborative work needed to create projects despite diverging interests, underlining the central role of compromise in achieving cross-border problems.

Mobility and spatial planning:

All these projects are based on prior studies and empirical foundations. Gathering information on the same territory makes it possible to create a geographical identity, even in the absence of a historical or cultural heritage.

Mobility is a crucial theme within the Eurodistrict, illustrated by two major achievements: the first project, which carries a strong European political symbolism, required many years of work and resulted in the construction of a 300-metre bridge over the Rhine and the extension of the Strasbourg tramway to Kehl. The INTERREG programme provided 50% of the funding for this project. The second project, launched in 2017, consists of a bus service to meet local economic demand. This collaboration positions the Eurodistrict as a central player in resolving local problems or specific needs.

6. Development prospects for the Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict

6.1. The territorial and strategic evolution of the Eurodistrict

Since its framework agreement of 2010, the Eurodistrict has considered its development from two angles: territorial and in terms of competences. Its ambition is to evolve towards a new form of cross-border intermunicipality when the legal frameworks will allow it. The recent extension in 2017 was in response to a request from the canton of Erstein and extends the Eurodistrict's influence. All border areas would like to have a Eurodistrict, but do not always have sufficiently developed structures. Although Eurodistricts homogenise development within their territory, they can accentuate the imbalances between rural regions and urban centres. The Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict is a showcase for innovation and symbolism, mainly for the French side.

6.2. Better coordination with the RMT and other Upper Rhine bodies

The Eurodistricts are part of the RMT's metropolisation strategy, although they were subsequently grafted onto this political will. The RMT envisages concrete changes but lacks the tools close to civil society to bring them about, and the operational framework of the

Eurodistricts is not adapted to the large-scale projects desired by the RMT. Strasbourg and Kehl retain the majority of competences, leaving the Eurodistrict mainly with 'soft-policies' issues. The Eurodistrict's projects have an innovative orientation and could be extended to the whole of the Upper Rhine if successful. The interviewee raises the importance of linking the Eurodistrict to other cross-border bodies for real concertation in the metropolisation of the Upper Rhine territory.

6.3. Scalar hierarchical complementarity and the Treaty of Aachen

The involvement of the German State in the Eurodistrict is desired to balance governance, although this is viewed with suspicion by German local elected representatives. Indeed, the French State is represented on the Eurodistrict Council. The Alsace law, creating the Collectivité européenne d'Alsace (CeA), a new administrative body, strengthens cross-border cooperation and bilingualism, and may appear to be aligned with the Aachen treaty, which also strengthens the resources allocated by the states to the proper management of projects such as the Eurodistrict. The CeA, although cross-border leader, must cooperate with other local, regional and national entities and is still not the ideal scale of governance to interact with the Eurodistrict. The integration of the CeA into the Eurodistrict could solve the problems of "scalar complementarity" by facilitating exchanges and having fewer different interlocutors. The interviewee suggests very clearly that the Eurodistrict will change its status and welcome the CeA into its Council. Communications with the other cross-border structures on the Eurodistrict territory could be improved. The interviewee suggests improving these links, in particular via the INFOBEST 4.0 project, aimed at bringing together cross-border cooperation bodies that could create a real center of local cross-border cooperation experts.

Conclusion

In September 2023, as part of the Kehl town festival, the joint anniversaries of Infobest, the Euro-Institute, the European Consumer Centre, the Elysée Treaty (60 years) and the joint declaration of intent creating the Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict (20 years) will be celebrated. The organisation of this celebration highlights the complexity of cross-border cooperation between the two sides of the Rhine, but also between the different cooperation structures.

Despite the varying links between the different entities, they are uniting their efforts for this event, thanks to the coordination of the elected representatives who sit on the administrative committees. But if the elected representatives are not motivated, it's easier not to get involved. This example shows that nothing can be taken for granted and that it is necessary to continually strive for more cross-border cooperation. The Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict, created under political impulse, had to adapt to meet the concrete needs of local cooperation while continually organising itself for greater efficiency.

Mutualisation of services between Kehl and Strasbourg is one of the objectives, but has not been enough developed yet. Mutualise the services of the city of Kehl and Strasbourg could really be a vector for exchange between the inhabitants of the two sides of the Rhine. The lack of mutualisation could be the subject of further research. Citizen participation remains essential in the Eurodistrict, which effectively solves local problems and contributes to regional objectives.

The Eurodistrict plays a key role in EU cohesion policies and also acts as a lobby through its political representatives.

The Eurodistrict Strasbourg-Ortenau continues to innovate in cross-border cooperation and is a laboratory for experimentation in this area.

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